RETHINKING POLITICAL VIOLENCE

The Russia-Ukraine War and its Origins

From the Maidan to the Ukraine War

Ivan Katchanovski

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Ivan Katchanovski
School of Political Studies & Conflict
Studies and Human Rights Program
University of Ottawa
Ottawa, ON, Canada

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To my mother

PREFACE

When I submitted in 2002 my book manuscript on regional political divisions and separatist conflicts in Ukraine and Moldova to Cambridge University Press, I got a response from its editor saying that they could not publish it because few people would be interested is this topic. This book, which was based on my doctoral dissertation, was published by another academic press after Ukraine came close to a Moldova-like violent break-up and a civil war during the "Orange Revolution" in 2004.[1]

My academic publications, which primarily concern conflicts and politics in Ukraine, have reached over 2,000,000 reads and downloads just on my academic websites and the publisher sites. My research-based Twitter and Facebook posts and YouTube videos reached over 125,000,000 views. I am one of the most cited political scientists who specialize primarily in politics and conflicts in Ukraine.[2]

My research-based publications, interviews, and comments appeared in more than 4,000 media reports in more than 80 countries. They include such major Western media as ABC News, BBC Ukrainian, Associated Press, Canadian Press, CBC News, CTV News, France 24, France Télévisions, Daily Beast, Euronews, Global TV, Globe and Mail, Guardian, Hill TV, La Presse, Le Figaro, La Razón, La Stampa, National Post, Reuters, Sky News Australia, Times Higher Education, Vice, and Washington Post. They also include such major media from other countries as Al-Jazeera, China Newsweek, CNN Brazil, Mail & Guardian, Metro World News, Moscow Times, TRT World, and WION TV. My research-based publications, interviews, and comments also appeared in many Ukrainian media, such as 112 Ukraine TV, 24 Channel, Apostrophe, Avers TV, First National Channel, ICTV, Holos Ukrainy, Kommentarii, Kyiv Post, NewsOne, Priamyi Kanal, RBC Ukraine, Strana, STB, Volyn TV, and Ukrainska pravda.

I am the author of *The Maidan Massacre in Ukraine: The Mass Killing that Changed the World* (Palgrave Macmillan) and *Cleft Countries: Regional Political Divisions and Cultures in Post-Soviet Ukraine and Moldova*(Ibidem Verlag), the lead author of *Historical Dictionary of Ukraine*, second edition (Rowman & Littlefield), and co-author of *The Paradox of American Unionism: Why Americans Like Unions More Than Canadians Do, But Join Much Less* (Cornell University Press). My articles were published in such peer-reviewed journals as Canadian Journal of Higher Education, Cogent Social Sciences, Communist and Post-Communist Studies, Econ Journal Watch, Europe-Asia Studies, European Politics and Society, International Journal of Public Administration, Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis, Journal of Labor Research, Journal of Labor and Society, Journal of Public Policy, Journal of Slavic Military Studies, Nationalities Papers, Post-Soviet Affairs, Perspectives on Terrorism, Problems of Post-Communism, Relations industrielles/ Industrial Relations, Russian Politics, and Ukraina moderna.

I am one of a few political scientists in the Western academia, who specialize in researching conflicts in Ukraine and know both Ukrainian and Russian. I also specialize in researching the politics and policy in the US, in particular, the politics of NATO and EU enlargement of Ukraine and other European post-communist countries, the politics of the US and Canadian media coverage of Ukraine, Russia, and other post-communist countries, public opinion concerning Ukraine and Russia in the US, and the politics of the representation of Ukraine in American, Canadian, and British movies and the academia. To the best of my knowledge, there are no other established political scientists in the Western academia, who specialize in researching both Ukraine and the United States or other major Western countries.

I was one of a few scholars who predicted in my scholarly studies and my-research-based popular publications, studies, interviews, and social media posts, the collapse of the Soviet communism and real possibilities of the civil war, a break-up of Ukraine, and the Russia-Ukraine war.[3] Contrary to prevailing views at the time, I predicted in the early 1990s that Russia would likely become undemocratic.[4] Contrary to the dominant narratives, I also predicted that economic sanctions would be ineffective in preventing the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and ending the Russia-Ukraine war.[5] The same concerns my research-based predictions that Ukraine could not defeat Russia and could not win this war.[6] Such evidence-based scholarly research is much more difficult, time-consuming, and challenging than following politically convenient narratives propagated by the governments and the media.

I am a life-long supporter of liberal democracy, human rights, and peace in Ukraine. I attended the Ukrainian opposition demonstrations and rallies in 1988–1991 in Kyiv and my native Lutsk in Western Ukraine, including the first Ukrainian opposition rally in Kyiv since Ukraine became Soviet some 70 years before. I faced expulsion from the Kyiv National Economic University in 1990 and was prevented from pursuing graduate education in the Soviet Union because I wrote my undergraduate thesis based on theories of Max Weber and Western economists. My final thesis, which in contrast to typical practice at the time in Ukraine was written in Ukrainian and not Russian, concluded that the Soviet system was bound to collapse.[7] I was one of the first to publicly call for the European Union accession of Ukraine.[8]

While my book stands on its own in terms of its major findings and evidence, such track-record and background in terms of researching the conflicts in Ukraine is also important. This differentiates my book from nearly all other books concerning the Russia-Ukraine war and preceding conflicts in Ukraine.

Ottawa, ON, Canada
Ivan Katchanovski

Notes

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The University of Ottawa provided a grant supporting open access publication of this book. I am thankful to more than 325 contributors for ongoing GoFundMe and PayPal crowdfunding to make this book open access.[1] These contributions and grants had no impact on its content. Responsibility for the book and all its content remains solely my own.

NOTE

1. See Ivan Katchanovski (2025). Open Access Book: Russia-Ukraine War & Its Origin. GoFundMe, https://www.gofundme.com/f/openaccess-book-russiaukraine-war-its-origin

Competing Interests The author has no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this manuscript.

PRAISE FOR *THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR AND ITS ORIGINS*

"Ivan Katchanovski's book is a thorough and honest exploration of some of the most complex and mythologized issues in Ukraine's recent history, the issues that many are simply afraid to tackle, even though they have had a crucial impact on the ongoing war with Russia and current politics far beyond Ukraine."

—Dr. Volodymyr Ishchenko, *Research Associate at the Institute for East European Studies, Freie Universität Berlin*

"Ivan Katchanovski's book is an absolutely essential contribution to study of the recent history of Ukraine—a subject that has all too often been hopelessly muddied by propaganda and emotion."

—Dr. Anatol Lieven, *Director, Eurasia Program, Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft*

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: From the Maidan to the Russia-Ukraine War

It is often said that truth is the first casualty of war. The Russia-Ukraine war and the preceding conflicts in Ukraine, such as Euromaidan, the Maidan massacre, the Odesa massacre, the Russian annexation of Crimea, and the war in Donbas, produced divergent narratives by governments and the media in Ukraine, Russia, and the West. However, politicians and the media are often unreliable sources. They often disseminate propaganda and disinformation during such armed conflicts. The task of scholarly studies is not to rely on such propaganda and disinformation produced by the governments and frequently repeated by the media but on reliable evidence to examine wars and other conflicts in non-partisan ways.

This applies to this book, which examines the Russia-Ukraine war and its origins. It analyzes the involvement of different conflict parties, such as the Ukrainian, Russian, and Western governments, Donbas separatists, and the far right, in this crucial war and in Euromaidan, the Maidan massacre, the Russian annexation of Crimea, the war in Donbas, and the nature of these conflicts. This book also examines support for pro-nationalist/pro-Western and pro-Russian political parties and presidential candidates and attitudes towards separatism and joining the European Union, NATO, and the union with Russia in regions of Ukraine in parliamentary and presidential elections and surveys since Euromaidan.

This open-access book is one of the first books examining comprehensively the Russia-Ukraine war and its origins in the preceding conflicts in

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Ukraine, namely Euromaidan, the Maidan massacre, the Russian annexation of Crimea, the Odesa massacre, and the civil war and Russian military interventions in Donbas. It traces how these conflicts, which started with Euromaidan, along with NATO accession, the far right, and Russian imperialism contributed to the Russia-Ukraine war.

The Russia-Ukraine war is the most important war in the twenty-first century in the entire world, and it at least matches the Korean War and the Vietnam War as the most important armed conflicts since World War Two. The Russia-Ukraine war is also the most significant armed conflict in Europe since World War Two (Correlates of War Project; Uppsala Conflict Data Program, 2024). Russia and Ukraine, the two largest countries in Europe, are involved in this war directly, while the United States, other NATO countries, and EU members are involved in the war indirectly in various ways. The war is the most significant conflict involving main nuclear powers in the world, specifically Russia, the United States, the United Kingdom, and France, as well as nuclear North Korea possibility of this war escalating into a nuclear war is the highest since at least the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. In addition, the war has major political, economic, and financial impact on Ukraine and Russia, and many other countries of the world, in particular the EU members. The outcome of the Russia-Ukraine war will affect the world order (Hill & Stent, 2022).

Most of the previous studies concerning the Russia-Ukraine war, Euromaidan, and the war in Donbas largely relied on secondary sources, primarily by the Ukrainian and Western media and governments. Such secondary sources include interpretative statements by government officials and politicians, interpretative media reports, articles, books, other publications, and blogs produced by people who were not present or not involved in specific events. They were often uncritically taken at face value without determining their validity and reliability and without corroborating them.

For instance, a book written by a leading historian of Ukraine focuses on history of Ukraine and Russia since 1991, including the initial part of the war (Plokhy, 2023). However, its examination of the war is based on secondary sources, primarily the Ukrainian and Western media, and the author declares that he is openly partisan. Another book on the same subject is written by a fellow from the Atlantic Council, a NATO-linked partisan think tank, who also provided PR service for Serhii Liovochkin, who headed the presidential administration of Viktor Yanukovych at the start of Euromaidan. It also uncritically relies on such secondary sources and often lacks any sources at all for many of its claims (Karatnycky, 2024; Katchanovski, 2025a).

The Western media coverage of conflicts in foreign countries, including Ukraine, often follows or indexes the narratives of their own governments and the political elite (Bennett, 1990; Boyd-Barrett, 2016; Katchanovski & Morley, 2012). The media representation of Ukraine, Russia, and other countries is also often biased for political reasons or factually incorrect. For instance, post-communist countries with pro-US/pro-Western governments generally received relatively much more favorable coverage compared to countries which are adversaries of the United States or the West or are neutral. Ukraine and Georgia received relatively more positive coverage by the US TV networks after respectively the "Orange Revolution" and the "Rose Revolution" then before (Katchanovski & Morley, 2012).

The US media with some exceptions followed the narrative propagated by the US administration and the US Congress that Russia started the war with Georgia over separatist region of South Ossetia in 2008, contrary to primary evidence and an EU-appointed commission report on this war (Bahador & Katchanovski, 2010; European Union, 2009). Conversely, the Russian media generally followed the Russian government's false narrative that Russia stopped the genocide of South Ossetians by Georgia. With limited exceptions, the media and governments in the United States, other Western countries, and post-Maidan Ukraine continued to propagate the fake news or disinformation about the start of this war even after admissions by the EU-appointed commission report in 2009 and by Georgian leaders in 2024 that Saakashvili started the war in South Ossetia in 2008 (see Georgia Today, 2024).

Similarly, the US media with some exceptions falsely reported Russiagate or the non-existent collusion of Donald Trump with the Russian government and the existence of non-existent weapons of mass destruction in Iraq (See Bennett & Livingston, 2007; Sakwa, 2022).

Like the Russian media, the Ukrainian media is largely not independent. It is mostly directly or indirectly controlled either by the government or oligarchs, and generally follows the Ukrainian government or political elite narratives. Nearly 90 percent of the Ukrainian media since the Russian invasion were funded by the USAID, the European Union, and other Western agencies, organizations, and foundations (Oksana, 2025).

Representation of Ukraine and the conflicts in Ukraine was also often biased for political reasons. Many Western and Ukrainian politicians, journalists, and researchers openly expressed their partisan support of the pro-Western Maidan opposition in Ukraine during Euromaidan, and pro-Western Ukrainian governments during the Russian annexation of Crimea, the civil war in Donbas, and the Russia-Ukraine war. Such partisan support of political forces and governments and their policies and actions was presented as support of Ukraine, while any contrary evidence or deviation from such partisan stance was ignored, dismissed, censored, and falsely branded as pro-Russian.

Such partisan approach was politically convenient and equated political forces and governments with Ukraine and Ukrainians and involved witting or unwitting support of the violent overthrow of the Ukrainian government during Euromaidan, civil war in Donbas, and the war in Ukraine to the last Ukrainian, and opposition to prevention and peaceful resolution of these conflicts. As this book shows, these actions and policies in fact had extremely negative consequences to Ukraine and Ukrainians and ultimately resulted in devastating consequences to Ukraine and most of Ukrainians because these conflicts escalated to separatist conflicts in Crimea and Donbas and military interventions by Russia in Crimea and Donbas and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Such devastating consequences included loss of very large number of lives of Ukrainians during Euromaidan, the civil war in Donbas, and the Russia-Ukraine war, de facto break up of Ukraine and annexation of large parts of Eastern and Southern Ukraine by Russia, millions of people permanently leaving Ukraine, and economic decline and destruction in Ukraine. Possibility of such devastating consequences to Ukraine and Ukrainians was dismissed or ignored by such self-proclaimed supporters of Ukraine, even though such consequences and outcomes were predicted by the author and small number of other scholars and experts.

Such partisan approach and uncritical acceptance of narratives propagated by government officials and politicians also violated professional principles of journalism and scientific research. The equivalent was like judges issuing verdicts based on media reports concerning specific crimes and based on claims by either prosecution or defense without examining and evaluating all evidence and its reliability and validity. Another equivalent would be medical doctors issuing diagnoses outside of their specialization based on their political preferences and based on reports of patients and media reports without doing any physical examination or tests.

These examples and studies show that the Western, Russian, and Ukrainian governments and the media are often unreliable sources when it comes to wars and other conflicts and that they often propagate politically convenient fake news or disinformation.

Wikipedia basically reproduces such partisan sources and narratives concerning the conflicts in Ukraine and is also generally unreliable source concerning this issue. Wikipedia editors edit anonymously and typically lack appropriate expertise and knowledge concerning the articles that they edit. They often push political points of view by selectively using and omitting sources. Wikipedia articles can be either edited by anyone or they can be blocked and only be edited by a small number of the most prolific editors.

This fits "the garbage in, garbage out" model. Unreliable, partisan, and biased sources concerning the conflicts in Ukraine produce unreliable, partisan, and biased output. Scholarly research needs to be based on reliable sources, be non-partisan, and avoid biases (See Weber, 2017). This especially concerns the Russia-Ukraine war and preceding conflicts in Ukraine which are highly politically charged issues.

However, Seymour Martin Lipset, who held chair positions at Stanford University and Harvard University and was one of the most cited political scientists and political sociologists in history, stated in a personal conversation that most research in the social sciences is "fraud" because research results are made to fit personal or political views of researchers. He said that if research results fit the researcher's personal views, they need to be thrown in garbage. Research concerning the Russia-Ukraine war and other highly politicized conflicts in Ukraine is even more prone to this when politics trumps evidence and research results are made to fit personal and political views and biases.

There are just few political scientists, who specialize primarily in researching conflicts in Ukraine and are fluent in both Ukrainian and Russian, in the Western academia. For instance, there is only one established male Ukrainian political scientist, who was born in Ukraine, knows both Ukrainian and Russian, and specializes primarily in the politics and conflicts in Ukraine, in permanent faculty positions in the Western universities (See Katchanovski, 2025b). As a native speaker of Ukrainian and fluent speaker of Russian, the author is one of few political scientists in

Western academia conducting scholarly research on conflicts in Ukraine based mostly on primary sources in both these languages.

In contrast to already published and most other books that are likely to be published concerning the Russia-Ukraine war, this book provides comprehensive analysis of the Ukraine-Russia war and its origins based on the analysis of tens of thousands of primary sources in both Ukrainian and Russian and based on political science theories and concepts. Such primary or original sources include videos, photos, audio recordings, interviews, testimonies, surveys, trial broadcasts, and the texts of the verdicts and other court decisions containing original data or evidence. The authenticity, validity, and reliability of these sources are verified and corroborated based on scientific methodology and use of multiple independent sources. While most of the analyzed primary and secondary sources cannot be cited for space reasons in the book, it cites the most important and relevant sources and their examples.

This book also uses a large number of secondary sources, such as previous studies and government, NGO, international organizations, and media reports. However, it does not rely on interpretation provided by these sources concerning specific issues of the conflicts in Ukraine.

Most chapters examine major aspects of the Russia-Ukraine war. The remaining chapters examine the conflict escalation ladder that culminated in this war. The book traces a violent conflict escalation spiral which started with Euromaidan and the Maidan massacre, escalated to the Russian annexation of Crimea and the civil war and Russian military interventions in Donbas, and culminated in the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 and the Russia-Ukraine war which also became the NATO-Russia proxy war.

The current chapter provides an introduction. The second chapter of the book examines Euromaidan in 2013–2014. The next chapter investigates which party of the conflict was involved in the crucial Maidan massacre of the protesters and the police in Ukraine during Euromaidan in February 2014. The Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 is the subject of the following chapter. Chapter 5 analyzes the civil war and the Russian military interventions in Donbas in 2014–2022. The sixth chapter analyzes the far-right involvement in Euromaidan, the Maidan and Odesa massacres, and the Donbas war. The next chapter provides an examination of the regional political divisions in Ukraine in terms of support for pro-Western/pro-nationalist and pro-Russian/pro-communist political parties and presidential candidates in presidential and parliamentary elections and attitudes towards separatism, joining the EU, NATO, and the Russia-led Customs Union in regions of Ukraine. Chapter 8 analyzes the causes and the origins of the Russia-Ukraine war. The next chapter examines the Russia-Ukraine war and its nature. Chapter 10 analyzes whether there have been genocides or war crimes during the Russia-Ukraine war. The following chapter examines the likely outcome of the Russia-Ukraine war and whether this war could have been prevented or could have been resolved peacefully. The far-right involvement in the Russia-Ukraine is the subject of Chapter 12. The concluding chapter 13 summarizes the main findings of the book and discusses their implications and prospects for the conflict resolution in Ukraine. The book also includes online video appendixes which are available on the author's YouTube channel.

The target audience for this open-access book includes scholars, undergraduate and graduate students, professionals, journalists, and the general public interested in the Russia-Ukraine war and its origins, in particular, the Maidan, Crimea, and Donbas conflicts, the far right, elections, and public opinion in Ukraine. The Russia-Ukraine war and the preceding conflicts in Ukraine became one of the top issues of interest in the United States, Canada, the UK, and other Western countries as well as many other countries of the world.

Parts of my articles from the European Politics and Society journal and Econ Journal Watch journal and parts of the "Crimea: People and Territory before and after Annexation" chapter from the open access book, *Ukraine and Russia: People, Politics, Propaganda and Perspectives* are republished with permissions. Republished parts of these publications, the open access book, *The Maidan Massacre in Ukraine: The Mass Killing that Changed the World*, and open-access articles in Cogent Social Sciences, Journal of Labor and Society, Perspectives on Terrorism, and Russian Politics journals were updated, revised, and expanded in this book (Katchanovski & Abrahms, 2024; Katchanovski, 2015, 2016, 2020, 2023a, 2023b, 2024, 2025a).

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CHAPTER 2

Euromaidan

2.1 Conflicting Narratives of Euromaidan

This chapter examines the role of the Yanukovych government, the Maidan opposition, Russia, and the West in Euromaidan (Maidan) in Ukraine in November 2013-February 2014. The analysis focuses on the mass protests and key cases of violence before the Maidan massacre, which is analyzed in the next chapter. This study uses political science theories of mass protest, coups, revolution, and regime change and empirical analysis to examine the nature of Euromaidan and the political transition in Ukraine during the Maidan.

The chapter is based on the analysis of numerous sources, such as online live streams and TV broadcasts during the entire Euromaidan, videos, interviews, court decisions, and media reports in Ukrainian, Russian, and English. The analysis includes thousands of videos, interviews, and statements by key political actors involved in the Maidan; testimonies and reports by hundreds of participants, journalists, and witnesses in the media; and the social media. For space reasons, the absolute majority of such primary and secondary sources cannot be cited in this chapter.

The governments and the mainstream media in Ukraine and the West, with some exceptions, as well as many scholars presented Euromaidan as a popular, peaceful, grassroots, and democratic mass protest movement and a revolution in favor of the EU integration and against the undemocratic, corrupt, pro-Russian government of President Viktor Yanukovych. They

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attributed major cases of violence during Euromaidan to the Yanukovych government, the government forces, government-hired "titushki," or agent's provocateurs working for Yanukovych or the Russian government. Specifically, they almost universally attributed the violent dispersal of Euromaidan protesters on November 30, 2013, to a Yanukovych order and presented it as one-sided violence by the Berkut special police force against peaceful student protesters. Similarly, the killings of 3 Maidan protesters in January 2014 were almost universally attributed to the orders of Yanukovych, his internal affairs and security ministers, government snipers, and/or Berkut special police force.

The same concerns the beating of a female Maidan activist Tetiana Chornovol and disappearance of one of AutoMaidan leaders, Dmytro Bulatov, who was presented as being kidnapped and crucified. Other major cases of violence, such as attacks on the presidential administration on December 1, 2013, the parliament at the end of January 2014, and the parliament and the headquarters of the Party of Regions on February 18, 2014 were blamed on agent's provocateurs or far-right organizations acting as agent's provocateurs for the Yanukovych government or the Russian government.

The governments and the mainstream media in Ukraine and the West, with some exceptions, as well as many scholars attributed the removal of President Yanukovych to the mass protests during Euromaidan or the Maidan. They stated that Yanukovych fled Ukraine because of these protests and because of his responsibility for the violence against the protesters, including the Maidan massacre. They called his removal by a vote of the parliament democratic and legal and referred to the mass Euromaidan protests and the political transition as the "Revolution of Dignity." However, Oleh Tiahnybok, the leader of the far-right Svoboda party, stated that the term "Revolution of Dignity" was invented by a deputy of his party (see Tiagnybok, 2015).

English-language, Russian-language, and Ukrainian-language Wikipedia largely copied Euromaidan narrative presented by the governments and the mainstream media in Ukraine and the West and omitted many scholarly studies whose findings and classification of Euromaidan differed from such narratives (See, for example, Euromaidan (2025) and Revolution of Dignity (2025).

In contrast, Russian and separatist politicians and the media in Crimea and Donbas, former president Yanukovych and members of his government after Euromaidan often labeled Euromaidan as a "fascist coup" and the Maidan government as a “fascist junta.” They stated that the removal of Yanukovych was a coup d’etat with the US government involvement.

Similarly, and in part based on the narratives by the governments and the mainstream media in Ukraine and the West some previous studies presented Euromaidan as a popular, peaceful, grassroot-based, and democratic mass protest movement and a revolution, in particular “the Revolution of Dignity,” in favor of the EU integration and against the undemocratic, corrupt, pro-Russian government of President Viktor Yanukovych which resorted to violence against the protesters (See, for example, Marples & Mills, 2015; Onuch & Sasse, 2016; Wilson, 2014).

Other scholars highlighted the crucial role of the far right and their violence during Euromaidan (See Ishchenko, 2016, 2020; Katchanovski, 2016a, 2020, 2023a, 2023b, 2024; Kudelia, 2018). Many scholarly studies classify the Maidan transition as a violent overthrow of the government (See, for example, Bandeira, 2019; Black & Jones, 2015; Cohen, 2018; Hahn, 2018; Katchanovski, 2016a, 2016b, 2017, 2020, 2023a, 2023b, 2024; Lane, 2016; Mandel, 2016; Sakwa, 2015). Some previous studies classify the Maidan specifically as a coup (See, for example, Black & Jones, 2015; Mearsheimer, 2014).

Coups are defined as violent overthrow of the government by a small group of people, typically by the military or other members of the state (See Chin et al., 2021). In contrast, revolutions involve profound and comprehensive political and social transformation as result of typically violent overthrow of an old regime with mass participation (See Katchanovski, 2008; Skocpol, 1995).

Some previous studies also show escalation of the conflicts in Ukraine during Euromaidan into the Maidan massacre (Katchanovski, 2020; Kudelia, 2018; Myshlovska, 2024; Sakwa, 2015). Some studies also pointed the contribution of Euromaidan to the conflicts in Crimea, Donbas, and ultimately the Russia-Ukraine war (Baysha, 2015; Katchanovski, 2015, 2016b, 2022).

2.2 Euromaidan Protests and Violence

Euromaidan protests started at the end of November 2013 following a decision by the Viktor Yanukovych government to postpone the signing of the association and free trade agreement with the European Union. This agreement did not envision the EU accession of Ukraine since the EU refused then to recognize Ukraine even as a potential member (See

Katchanovski, 2011). However, the pro-Western opposition parties and leaders and much of the Ukrainian media backed these protests and presented this agreement as Ukraine joining the EU. Russia provided the Yanukovych government with $15 billion loan and reduction in gas prices in order to entice him to drop this EU agreement and join the Russia-led Customs Union.

These protests in downtown Kyiv, in particular on the Independence Square which is called the Maidan in Ukrainian, were largely peaceful at first and relatively small. The violence during the protests was also relatively small. For instance, a group of protesters with Svoboda flags and other far-right symbols attacked the police in front of the Cabinet of Ministers building (Shturm, 2013). But they escalated into large-scale protests and violent clashes between the police and the protesters that culminated into the Maidan massacre of the protesters and the police on February 18–20, 2014.

The turning point came with a highly publicized violent dispersal of a few hundred protesters by the anti-riot Berkut special police force on the Maidan on November 30, 2013. Videos, photos, and later admissions by Right Sector leaders and other Maidan protesters showed that the Right Sector activists occupied a part of the Maidan square near a monument to mythical Kyiv founders at the time of the dispersal. This far-right alliance along with its banners appeared on the Maidan on November 29, 2013, i.e., one day before (see Kotsaba, 2013). The Right Sector was organized right before the November 30s dispersal from radical nationalist and neo-Nazi organizations and footballs ultras (See Katchanovski, 2020; Chapter 6). The analysis also showed that during the initial police dispersal of other protesters by force nearby Right Sector area-based protesters threw burning wood chunks and various other things at the Berkut special police force, which then beat other protesters in the Maidan square and surrounding streets (See Vypusk, 2013; Interviu, 2013; Zverskoe, 2014).

Ihor Mazur, a Ukrainian National Assembly—Ukrainian People's Self-Defense (UNA-UNSO) leader, admitted that Right Sector members were present in the Maidan during this dispersal on November 30, 2013 and that they then retreated after a confrontation with the police (Igor, 2014). The website of Tryzub named after Bandera admitted the Right Sector involvement in the clashes with the police on November 30, 2013 on the Maidan, but it was later taken down.

The lists of injured and detained protesters revealed that the absolute majority of them were much older than typical age of students in Ukraine. At the Maidan massacre trial, the Prosecutor General Office (GPU) revealed that 18 policemen were also injured on that day (see Zasidannia, 2018).

There is various evidence that the Maidan opposition leaders, including the far-right ones, had advance information about this dispersal but did not inform the protesters in order to use this violent dispersal to greatly galvanize the mass protests, which were coming to the end on that night. Anatolii Hrytsenko, one of the Maidan politicians, stated that the Maidan leaders knew in advance about this dispersal, because the opposition was able to intercept radio communications of Berkut concerning their deployment for this operation (see Hritsenko, 2014). There are other Maidan protesters who said from the start that Maidan leaders knew in advance about the Berkut dispersal of the Maidan protests on November 30. A leader of neo-Nazi White Hammer made such public warning from the Maidan stage.

The unusual presence of Inter TV crews along with a number of other TV crews at the time of the dispersal around 4:00 am local time and the Inter broadcast of this dispersal also indicate advance knowledge of the police dispersal. A Maidan protester on Facebook reported that she witnessed that an Inter TV operator wanted to leave this square before this dispersal happened at 4:00am, but an Inter TV journalist insisted on staying. A Poroshenko party member of the parliament stated in a live TV program on the Inter TV a few hours before this dispersal that Berkut “was beating students” on the Maidan. Inter TV and other Ukrainian media along with Maidan politicians misrepresented this dispersal of Maidan protesters as an unprovoked and unexpected beating of students and children by the Berkut police on the Yanukovych government order. They generally ignored or omitted the presence of the Right Sector activists and their violence against the police. The Inter television channel was owned by Dmytro Firtash and Serhii Liovochkin. Firtash was an oligarch who supported Yanukovych during the 2010 presidential campaign but then switched to covert backing of Viktor Volodymyr Klitschko, who headed Ukrainian Democratic Alliance for Reform (UDAR) party and became one of Euromaidan leaders. Liovochkin then headed the Yanukovych’s presidential administration, but he belonged to the Firtash oligarchic clan.

After Yanukovych and several members of the Yanukovych government and the Kyiv police chief fled to Russia, they stated or suggested that Liovochkin ordered to disperse the protesters, but they did not provide any specific direct evidence. Avakov, the Minister of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, in all post-Maidan governments made a similar statement concerning the involvement of Liovochkin (see Avakov, 2016). In a leaked telephone conversation, Ihor Kolomoisky said that Liovochkin was aware of the dispersal order because he was the patron of Oleksander Popov, the head of the Kyiv City administration, who was involved in implementing the dispersal order (see Kolomoisky, 2015). The official investigation accused and charged Popov and other members of the Yanukovych government for issuing this order and supervising the dispersal. Liovochkin was the most senior Yanukovych official, who did not flee Ukraine and who was not prosecuted, in contrast to many other Yanukovych associates. The prosecution at the Maidan massacre trial in Ukraine revealed that its investigation has evidence of Liovochkin's "incorrect actions" in "orienting" these Ukrainian officials, who were charged with ordering the dispersal of the Maidan protesters on November 30, concerning this dispersal (Zasidannia vid 17.12.2019 2019).

In a TV interview, an eyewitness reportedly stated that shortly before November 30, 2013 she accidentally overheard a discussion among senior Maidan leaders about the planned police dispersal of the Maidan protesters and possibility that it would lead to violence.

She identified Andrii Ilienko, Andrii Parubiy, and Serhii Pashynsky as the Maidan leaders who were involved in this discussion (Pidsluhala, 2014). They were not well-known names at the time but would be linked to other cases of violence later during Euromaidan. Ilienko was a member of the parliament from Svoboda party. Parubiy was a former leader of the neo-Nazi Patriot of Ukraine, a paramilitary wing of the Social National Party of Ukraine, before this party was rebranded as Svoboda in 2004 and before the Patriot of Ukraine became a paramilitary wing of the SNA, which was formed by the Kharkiv organization of the SNPU. Parubiy and Pashynsky were members of the Ukrainian parliament from the oligarchic Fatherland Party at the time of the Maidan protests.

Mass protests against the Yanukovych government and its decision to suspend the free trade and association agreement with the EU in November 2013-February 2014 were the most visible part of Euromaidan. There were an estimated few hundred thousand protesters in

Kyiv and other regions of Ukraine on December 1, 2013. They assembled largely in response to the violent dispersal of protesters by the Berkut a day before and were spurred as a result of the deliberately one-sided and misleading media coverage of this dispersal.

Videos and photos show that protesters according to Google Earth maps occupied some 40,000 square meters on Kyiv's Independence Square (Maidan) and the main street, Khreshchatyk on December 1. With the approximate average density of more than two people per square meter, the peak number estimate is at least 100,000. While the Ukrainian Interior Ministry under Yanukovych deflated the number of demonstrators in Kyiv, estimating it at 40,000, the Maidan opposition leaders and many leading Ukrainian and Western mass media outlets inflated the number in the several hundred thousand range, and in cases, of the New York Times and Inter TV channel, at more than a million (Katchanovski, 2013).

The footage and live streams and admissions by the Right Sector leaders and activists showed the violent attack on presidential administration on December 1, 2013 during a massive protest rally against the violent police dispersal of the demonstrators on November 30. These videos and footage showed some of the attackers with neo-Nazi symbols of the Patriot of Ukraine (Massovye, 2013). The footage also showed other groups of attackers shouting "Ukraine above all" slogans used by far-right organizations and obscene chants used by Ukrainian ultras. There are recordings of Andrii Dzyndzia hijacking a bulldozer and then trying to ram into the Interior Troops line protecting the presidential administration (see Dzyndzia, 2013).

Although Svoboda publicly distanced itself from violent attacks of the presidential administration and the parliament, the evidence, such as presence of some Svoboda flags and activists, live streams, and social media posts, clearly indicated that at least some Svoboda and C14 members and activists linked to them were involved in these violent attacks. There was similar evidence of Svoboda's participation in seizures of regional administrations, primarily, in Western Ukraine and storming and occupying Kyiv City administration on December 1, 2013. Svoboda and its C14 affiliate also formed some paramilitary self-defense companies during Euromaidan. C14, a Neo-Nazi youth organization affiliated with Svoboda, led a paramilitary Self-Defense unit, which helped Svoboda to forcibly occupy the Kyiv city administration during the mass protests against the Yanukovych government and the police violence.

The tent city on the Independence Square and the stage there became permanent centers of the mass protest which was televised and streamed live over the entire Ukraine. The Berkut police tried to disperse the Maidan protesters in the tent city on December 10, but then stopped as result of the resistance by the protesters and the reported order from the Yanukovych government as a result of the pressure from the United States and the EU during the visit by Viktoria Nuland to Ukraine.

Live Internet video streams showed that the largely peaceful protests turned much more violent following calls by radical Maidan activists to advance towards the Ukrainian parliament in the middle of January 2014 after the adoption by the Yanukovych Party of Regions dominated parliament of the laws aimed at curtailing the Maidan protests. These laws restricted to certain extent the freedoms of assembly and protest and were called "dictatorial laws" by the Maidan opposition and much of the Ukrainian media. But there were many similar laws in Western democracies.

The advance towards the parliament was stopped by the Berkut police and the Internal Troops on Hrushevskyi Street and violent clashes with the activists, including the far-right Right Sector and football ultras, turned into a violent standoff between the law enforcement and the Maidan protesters. Live Internet streams and videos showed that the Maidan activists attacked the Berkut police and Internal Troops with Molotov cocktails, stones, salutes, and burning tires. The Berkut police and the Internal Troops shot at the activists with rubber bullets and beat them with rubber batons. Many police and Internal Troops members and Maidan activists were injured. The protesters who resorted to violence were in a minority, but they were the most active part of Euromaidan. The Maidan opposition leaders, such as Volodymyr Klitschko and Petro Poroshenko, initially publicly condemned the December 1st attack of the presidential administration and the January attack of the Ukrainian parliament as "provocations."

However, videos, testimonies, admissions by some Maidan leaders, and other evidence show that the Maidan opposition leaders mobilized mass protests and promoted their violent radicalization with help of staged violence. The killings of the first three protesters at the end of January 2014 were attributed by the Maidan opposition and the media in Ukraine and the West to the government forces, despite the evidence that these were false-flag killings. These killings greatly escalated the conflict by turning it into conflict with fatalities.

However, unreported Pechersk court decisions suggested that the Prosecutor General Office investigated members and leaders of UNA-UNSO, one of the founding organizations in the Right Sector, for shooting these protesters (Ukhvala, 2015). The official investigation determined that these three protesters were killed from a few meters distance in the Maidan-controlled areas, while the police lines were several dozen meters away from the Maidan positions.

A Kyiv prosecutor said in 2019 that he spoke with the forensic expert who examined the body of Sergey Nigoyan, the Armenian protester, and that “there everything is unambiguous,” “the shot was from behind at a maximum distance of three–five meters and gun wads were found,” and “that is it definitely was not policemen who killed him.” (Gubin, 2019). A popular Ukrainian blogger reported that the Security Service of Ukraine knows who in fact shot dead this Armenian protester on the Maidan in January 2014 because it has a video recording of a group of people in the Maidan-controlled Trade Union building hiding a firearm and discussing his killing right after it happened. The Trade Union building was the headquarters of the Maidan leadership and the Right Sector during the Maidan. He revealed a Security Service of Ukraine report concerning its covert video surveillance of a Right Sector chemical explosions lab in the Trade Union building during the Maidan (See Kak, 2019).

Another evidence that these were false-flag killings is the absence of the moments and exact locations of killings of two of these protesters in livestreams, videos, photos, and confirmed eyewitnesses of these killings in the heavily covered area of a violent confrontation between the protesters and the police. A video published by a Ukrainian media outlet five years after these killings also provided evidence that a Belarusian far-right protester was killed from a Maidan-controlled area and not by the Berkut police. The video shows that he was shot while he was behind a barricade from burned buses that covered him from the Berkut police (Gubin, 2019).

The investigation confirmed that the Armenian protester was shot by pellets used in hunting. The killed Belarusian protester was a member of the UNA-UNSO. The ethnicities of these killed protesters also suggest that they were not random victims but were selected in order to propagate Euromaidan as ethnically inclusive and diverse and to garner support for Euromaidan among people from Armenia and Belarus. A Ukrainian reporter wrote on her Facebook page that a leader of the neo-Nazi White Hammer told her off the record that these two protesters were killed by their own and that this was one of the reasons for the subsequent split of the White Hammer from the Right Sector (Melnikova, 2015).

Like in the case of the Maidan massacre, the prosecution stated that forensic examinations four years after the massacre reversed the previous examination findings without any explanation and claimed that these three protesters were killed from a distance between 7 and 21 meters. But the same investigation stated before that the police was then further from the protesters (4 goda, 2018). The live streams and videos showed the same.

Nobody is charged with the killings of these Armenian, Belarusian, and Western Ukrainian protesters for 10 years since their murders, which were used by the Maidan leaders and the far right to mobilize mass protests and justify their violence. The evidence suggests that they were killed in a false-flag operation with possible involvement of the far right and that the investigation of their killings after the Maidan was stonewalled and fabricated for this reason and the actual killers were covered-up. The Ukrainian and Western media with a few notable exceptions did not report such evidence and continued to propagate fake news about killings of these and other Maidan protesters by the Berkut police or government snipers.

Similarly, the analysis of the evidence and the Ukrainian government investigation show that highly publicized kidnapping of Dmytro Bulatov, the Automaidan leader, was staged. The Ukrainian police closed on March 27, 2020, its investigation of kidnapping, torture, and crucifixion of Dmytro Bulatov during the Maidan because the investigation determined that the crime “was absent” and could have been “staged.” The documents from his investigative criminal case show that associates of Bulatov in the Automaidan testified in 2014 after the Maidan and in 2019 that he staged his own abduction, torture, and crucifixion. One of them testified that Bulatov told him shortly before his disappearance that he planned to stage his own abduction. Another testified that she heard from Bulatov and other Maidan activists about need for some “fiery information” in order to regain popularity of the Automaidan and that his staged abduction accomplished this. Other Automaidan leaders testified that there was no rationale for Bulatov’s kidnapping and torture because he was removed from the Automaidan leadership a couple of days prior, and they regarded his staging his own kidnapping as a real possibility. Two of them also testified that the light wounds and his appearance did not match his statements about being kidnapped and tortured for a week without food.

A government forensic expert determined in his expert report for the investigation after the Maidan that Bulatov's wounds, including a cut off a piece of his ear, could have been inflicted by himself or by someone else with his agreement using sterile materials and disinfecting wounds, because they did not have any signs of infection. The government forensic expert also determined that there was no damage on his hands that would be consistent with Bulatov being handcuffed (Skrepy, 2020). This is consistent with a testimony by Davyd Zhvania, who was a member of the Maidan leadership during Euromaidan and headed the election campaign of the Petro Poroshenko party in 2014 and the parliamentary committee during and after the Maidan. He stated that Maidan leaders, whom he named, staged the abduction and crucifixion of Bulatov and most other high-profile cases of violence, such as the Maidan massacre (Otkrytoe, 2020).

Zhvania stated that her beating was staged by the Maidan leaders, similarly to the abduction of Bulatov. The Ukrainian trial sentence of the men who beat a female Maidan activist Tetiana Chornovol at the end of December 2013 stated that this was a traffic-related conflict. Zhvania also stated that the abduction of two other protesters, one of whom perished, was also staged by the Maidan leaders (See Otkrytoe, 2020).

2.3 Public Opinion Concerning Euromaidan

Polls show that Ukrainians were almost evenly split on the issue of support of the Maidan, in particular, there was strong regional divide between majority support in Western and Central Ukraine and opposition in Eastern and Southern Ukraine. A poll by the Democratic Initiative Foundation (DIF) and the Razumkov Center during Euromaidan in the end of December 2013 found that half (50%) of Ukrainians supported Euromaidan protests, while 42% opposed them. Similarly, 46% of Ukrainians preferred the EU membership path, while 36% favored the Customs Union led by Russia. Yanukovych was favored by 30% of the potential voters in the first round of the presidential elections (Hromadska, 2013).

The poll by the Kiev International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) and Socis on January 24-February 1, 2014 showed that 47% of Ukrainians supported Euromaidan, while almost similar percentage of respondents (46%) did not support it. The difference was within the statistical margin of error. The KIIS poll on February 8–18, 2014 showed that Euromaidan was supported by the absolute majorities of the respondents in the West

(80%) and in the Center (51%) of Ukraine. In contrast, a minority, 20% of residents of the South and 8% of respondents in the East supported Euromaidan (Attitude, 2014).

The Razumkov Center survey in December 2020 showed that 34% of the respondents in Ukraine would have supported the "Euromaidan" if it would happen at the time of the survey. Conversely, 11% would have supported "Antimaidan," while 40% would have backed neither of them (see Ukrayina-2020 2020). The majority of respondents in Western Ukraine (71%) and plurality in the Center (46%) in the Razumkov Center survey in 2015 would have supported the Maidan, while the majorities in the East, the central government-controlled Donbas, and the South stated that they would have backed neither. The difference between the percentage of Maidan supporters and the combined percentage of the Maidan opponents would be significantly higher if the Russian-annexed Crimea and separatist-controlled Donbas were included in the survey sample.

The analysis of polls, videos, and photos shows that protesters were primarily from Western Ukraine and Kyiv City and other parts of Central Ukraine. The DIF/KIIS poll of Euromaidan protesters in Kyiv during large weekend rallies on December 7 and 8 found that about half of them were from Kyiv, while another half arrived from other regions. The reason for participation of the absolute majority (70%) of the respondents was the beating of the protesters on November 30, while 54% were driven by the non-signing of the EU association agreement, while 39% wanted to change the government (Maidan-2013 2013). The DIF/KIIS poll of the protesters stationed on the Maidan in Kyiv on February 3, 2014 showed that they were getting more radical and more dominated by Western Ukrainians. Close to half (48%) of the protesters stationed on the Maidan were from Western Ukraine, compared to 20% from the Center, 18% from the East and the South, and 12% from Kyiv City (Vid, 2014).

The KIIS poll on February 8–18, 2014 showed that 43% of Ukrainian residents named the "outrage with the corrupted regime of Yanukovych" as the main reason for the majority of people to participate in protests. Nearly a third of respondents (30%) selected "the West influence that aims to include Ukraine in its sphere of political interests" as the main reason for Euromaidan protests. The absolute majority in the East (57%) and close to half of the residents of the South (44%) regarded the West influence as the main reason, in contrast to 17% in the Center and 5% in Western Ukraine (Attitude, 2014).

The Razumkov Centre Poll in December 2019 found that 46% of the respondents in Ukraine regarded Euromaidan events as "the Revolution of Dignity," 23% as a coup, and 18% as change of government by not entirely legitimate means. 38% of the residents of Ukraine would have supported the Maidan if it were to happen then, while 10% would have backed the Antimaidan and 39% supported the neither. The poll did not include the most anti Maidan regions of Ukraine, the Russian-annexed Crimea and separatist-controlled Donbas (Stavlennia, 2019).

2.4 Mass Protest, Revolution, Coup, or Regime Change?

The popular violent mass protests during the Maidan would be consistent with definitions of mass protests and political but not social revolution. However, the mass Maidan protests failed to bring down the Yanukovych government. He was overthrown by means of the Maidan massacre of the Maidan protesters and the police and assassination attempts that were perpetrated with covert involvement of small number of the Maidan oligarchic leadership and the far-right members with backing of elements of the state. Such kind of political transition fits the definitions of a coup.

Analyzes of synchronized videos and audio recordings of the massacre, witness testimonies, admissions by Maidan snipers and activists in the media and social media, and Maidan massacre trials and investigations revealed various evidence that four killed and several dozen wounded policemen and at least the absolute majority of 49 killed and 172 wounded Maidan protesters were massacred on February 20, 2014 by snipers in Maidan-controlled buildings and areas in a false-flag operation organized and perpetrated with involvement of the elements of the Maidan oligarchic and far-right opposition alliance. The Maidan massacre trial verdict confirmed that many protesters were shot by snipers in the Hotel Ukraina, and this hotel was "activist controlled." (See Chapter 3; Katchanovski, 2025b).

The commander of the far-right-linked group of the Maidan snipers right after the massacre issued an ultimatum for Yanukovych from the Maidan stage to resign by the next morning and threatened the use of force if he would not resign. Parubiy, the head of the Maidan Self-Defense said that his ultimatum was a decision made by "the institutional bodies of the Maidan," and it was adopted by a military council set up by the Maidan Self-Defense and the far-right Right Sector (see Kalnysh, 2015).

The Yanukovych treason trial revealed various witness testimonies and other evidence that he fled from Kyiv and then Ukraine not because of his responsibility for the Maidan massacre but because of a number of assassination attempts by the Maidan forces, in particular the far right, and after their attempts to capture him and his residence near Kyiv and likely execute him (Katchanovski, 2020, 2023a).

Witnesses testified at the Yanukovych treason trial that right after the Maidan massacre the presidential motorcade was shot at a checkpoint, which was manned by activists with Right Sector and Svoboda flags and that the bullets hit one of the cars and a gun of one of the Yanukovych bodyguards. Helicopter pilots, who flew Yanukovych in Ukraine after the massacre, testified that the air traffic controllers relayed them an order from Maidan leaders to land the helicopter with Yanukovych under threat of its being shot-down by military planes. The witness testimonies also referred to information received by his security personnel about a plan involving Svoboda activists to assassinate him during a congress in Kharkiv where he flew after the Maidan massacre, and then on the road near Melitopol (See Eks-okhoronets', 2018; Katchanovski, 2020, 2023a).

Leonid Kravchuk, the first president of Ukraine, revealed that he received information about a plot to assassinate Yanukovych around the time of the Maidan massacre. He stated that this plan was called "Ceausescu" after the last name of the last communist leader of Romania, who was assassinated by soldiers soon after snipers massacred the anti-government protesters in a false-flag operation (U Kravchuka, 2018). The former Romanian president, prime minister, and a number of other leaders of the "Romanian revolution" were charged by the Romanian prosecutors in 2018 and 2019 with crimes against humanity for using deliberate disinformation and diversion right after they seized power in 1989 to provoke false-flag mass killings (Romanian, 2018).

The parliament vote to oust Yanukovych for "abandoning presidency" was unconstitutional, did not follow impeachment procedures specified in the Ukrainian Constitution, and lacked the required 338 constitutional vote majority. The vote was done under duress, and its 328 "yes" result was fabricated. According to the official parliament record, 248 deputies out of 450 were registered at the opening (Ofitsiinyi, 2014). Many Yanukovych party deputies switched loyalty, but many others voted under threat of violence by the far-right group of Maidan snipers, the

Maidan Self-Defense, and a mob which surrounded the parliament. The commander of the far-right-linked Maidan company of snipers admitted that his group impelled, by force, deputies from the Yanukovych Party of Regions to vote for his removal (see Kovalenko, 2014). The number of present deputies in various videos of this vote was about 262 (See, for example, Al Jazeera, 2014). A member of Maidan leadership, who headed then a parliamentary committee, stated that Maidan opposition leaders seized duplicate cards of absent deputies and used them to fraudulently inflate this vote as well as other votes that put leaders of Fatherland and Svoboda, which were involved in the false-flag Maidan massacre, in top government positions (see Katchanovski, 2024).

There is also various evidence of the US-led regime change during the Maidan in Ukraine. The Ukrainian foreign minister during Euromaidan testified at the Maidan massacre rial in Ukraine in 2019 that a senior US State Department official Victoria Nuland in her meeting with him and Yanukovych at the very start of Euromaidan on December 5, 2013, proposed to sack the Mykola Azarov cabinet, restore the constitution of 2004, and to conduct early parliamentary and presidential elections (see Zasidannia vid 3.12.2019 2019). This de facto meant a peaceful regime change and the same points as were the demands of the Maidan opposition. Yanukovych eventually accepted all these US administration demands and first fired Azarov and his Cabinet of Ministers and then signed the agreement with the Maidan opposition leaders and French, German, and Polish foreign ministers on February 21, 2014 (Katchanovski, 2025a).

An intercepted telephone call between Victoria Nuland and the US ambassador in Ukraine prior to February 20, 2014 shows them discussing which specific Maidan opposition leaders, specifically Arseniy Yatseniuk, can be in the Ukrainian government after Yanukovych offered the positions in his government to the opposition leaders following the sacking of the Azarov and the Cabinet of Ministers (Marionetki, 2014). John McCain, the influential US Senator, stated in his CNN interview during his and other US politicians visit to Kyiv in December 2013 that they were trying to “bring about a peaceful transition” in Ukraine (i.e., the government change) (see McCain, 2013).

Similarly, US Senator Chris Murphy, who also backed the Maidan anti-government protests during his visit to Ukraine, stated shortly after the Maidan:

> I think it was our role, including sanctions and threats of sanctions, that forced, in part, Yanukovych from office… We have not sat on the sidelines. We have been very much involved. Members of the Senate have been there. Members of the State Department have been on the Square. The Obama administration passed sanctions. The Senate was prepared to pass its own set of sanctions, and as I've said, I think that the clear position of the United States has, in part, been what has helped lead to this change in regime… If, ultimately, this is a peaceful transition to a new government in Ukraine, it will be the U.S. on the streets of Ukraine who will be seen as a great friend in helping make that transition happen. (Murphy, 2014)

Nuland and various other senior US and EU officials and politicians also publicly supported Euromaidan by visiting the Maidan. US and EU leaders also publicly condemned use of force by the Yanukovych government against the Maidan protesters and threatened to impose sanctions. Yanukovych ordered to stop such attempts by the police and the Internal Troops to clear the Maidan on December 10, in late January, and on February 18 in part because of such pressure from the Western leaders (Katchanovski, 2025a).

US President Barack Obama stated that "we had brokered a deal to transition power in Ukraine" after the massacre and before Yanukovych fled, but the US president or other American government officials did not release any specific information about the nature of this involvement (PRES, 2015). Yanukovych and Putin stated that right after the Maidan massacre there was an agreement with Obama but that the US president broken it. Mykhailo Dobkin, the former governor of Kharkiv Region, confirmed this. He said that when they met in Kharkiv in February 2014, Yanukovych told him that he had guarantees from Obama and Putin concerning the implementation of the agreement which he signed (Dobkin, 2017). Putin and the Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov suggested that Obama pushed for signing a deal between Yanukovych and the Maidan leaders but that the Maidan opposition broke the deal and seized the power the next day (see Obama, 2019). The deal signed on February 21, 2014 stipulated that the Yanukovych government would not use force against the Maidan and that the Maidan forces would disarm.

Then US Vice President Biden revealed in his memoirs that during the Maidan massacre he called Yanukovych and told him that "it was over; time for him to call off his gunmen and walk away" and "he shouldn't expect his Russian friends to rescue him from this disaster," that "Yanukovych had lost the confidence of the Ukrainian people, I said, and he was going to be judged harshly by history if he kept killing them." Biden wrote that "the disgraced president fled Ukraine the next day—owing to the courage and determination of the demonstrators—and control of the government ended up temporarily in the hands of a young patriot named Arseniy Yatsenyuk." The US vice president also revealed that he "had been warning him for months to exercise restraint in dealing with his citizens." (Biden, 2017).

The far-right Svoboda party leader and the deputy head of the Ukrainian parliament from Svoboda stated in their separate interviews that a Western government representative during their and other Maidan leaders meeting told them a few weeks before the Maidan massacre that the Western governments would turn on Yanukovych after casualties among protesters would reach 100 (Braty, 2017, p. 94). The Maidan opposition right after the massacre called the killed Maidan protesters the "Heavenly Hundred." Some Maidan protesters and other people, who were not on the Maidan and died from illnesses and other causes were included in the "Heavenly Hundred" to bring the number of the victims to 100. The US and other Western governments blamed the Yanukovych government and his forces for the massacre of the Maidan protesters. They also immediately recognized the new Maidan government after the seizure of the presidential administration and the parliament by the Maidan Self-Defense and the parliament vote to remove Yanukovych even though such actions violated the agreement signed on February 21, 2014 by Yanukovych, the Maidan opposition leaders, and representatives of France, Germany, and Poland which stipulated withdrawal of the government forces from downtown Kyiv, disarmament of the Maidan activists, early presidential elections, and the investigation of the Maidan massacre with involvement of the Council of Europe.

There is no publicly available evidence of the direct involvement of the US or other Western governments and forces in the Maidan massacre. But these governments de facto backed the overthrow of the Ukrainian government in spite of evidence that this overthrow was perpetrated by the elements of the Maidan oligarchic and far-right opposition by means of the false-flag mass killing of the Maidan protesters and assassination attempts against Yanukovych.

Ukraine becoming a US client state right after the Maidan is indirect evidence of the US-led regime change. The Ukrainian media, Ukrainian and US officials, and a declassified transcript of a meeting of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine also revealed that the US and other Western governments told the Maidan government leaders not to use military force during the Russian annexation of Crimea in order to avoid a war with Russia (See Chapter 4; Katchanovski, 2015; U.S., 2015). The nearly perfect alignment of the Ukrainian and US government policies after the Maidan is also consistent with Ukraine becoming a US client state and remaining during the Russia-Ukraine war. The US administration was involved in the Maidan government decision to use force in the separatist conflict in Donbas (Chapter 5). The use of Ukraine as a proxy for a proxy war with Russia after the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 and the US and UK blocking of a peace deal to end the war in April 2022 also show that Ukraine was a client state.

Then a member of the Ukrainian parliament from the Poroshenko's ruling party and the current adviser to President of Ukraine Zelenskyy stated in 2015 that "Pyatt and the U.S. administration have more influence than ever in the history of independent Ukraine." A rare report in the US media noted that "Americans are highly visible in the Ukrainian political process. The U.S. embassy in Kiev is a center of power, and Ukrainian politicians openly talk of appointments and dismissals being vetted by U.S. Ambassador Geoffrey Pyatt and even U.S. Vice President Joe Biden." (See Bershidsky, 2015).

Jeffrey Sachs, a world-renowned American economist who was invited to serve as an economic advisor to new prime minister Arsenii Yatseniuk right after the Yanukovych government overthrow, stated that the US government "definitely contributed to the overthrow of Yanukovych… I know this from inside, not just from outside. I know from top people involved in these issues." (Jeffrey, 2023). Renowned American investigative journalist Seymour Hersh said based on his insider sources in the US intelligence and the government: "We certainly did overthrow [of the Ukrainian government] with a lot more American involvement than the press knows about right now." (CN, 2023).

Various evidence shows US administration involvement in appointments and dismissals of top Ukrainian government officials and in key policy decisions in Ukraine since the Maidan. For example, the Ukrainian media reported that then US Vice President Joe Biden requested to put Arsenii Yatseniuk, Valentyn Nalyvaichenko, and foreigners in the Ukrainian government (Mostovaia, 2015). Yatseniuk became the prime minister, Nalyvaichenko the head of the Security Service of Ukraine, and the former president of Georgia and his former Georgian government officials occupied various positions in the Ukrainian state. Ukrainian media reports and tapes of phone calls between then US Vice President Joe Biden and President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko revealed that he had say in Poroshenko's decision to dismiss Yatseniuk as prime minister and in appointing his successor. The tapes, Ukrainian media reports, and public admission by Biden showed that he was involved in dismissal of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine and approval of his successor's appointment (See FLASHBACK, 2019; Listen, 2020; Mostovaia, 2015, 2016).

The declassified transcript of the Trump and Zelenskyy phone call shows the same client-patron relationship between Ukraine and the United States (Read, 2019). The client-patron relationship between Ukraine and the US enabled the use of Ukraine as a US proxy during the Russia-Ukraine war (See Chapter 9).

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CHAPTER 3

The Maidan Massacre

3.1 Maidan Massacre Narratives and Studies

The massacre of Maidan protesters and policemen during the mass "Euromaidan" protests on February 20, 2014, in Ukraine is a crucial case of political violence. This mass killing of the protesters and the police led to the overthrow of the democratically elected and pro-Russian government of Viktor Yanukovych and gave the start of a civil war in Donbas, Russia's military intervention in Crimea and Donbas, the Russian annexation of Crimea, and an interstate conflict between the West and Russia and between Ukraine and Russia. Russia drastically escalated these conflicts by launching its illegal invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. The Russia-Ukraine war also escalated into a proxy war between the West and Russia (See Black & Johns, 2015; Hahn, 2018; Katchanovski, 2015a, 2015b, 2016a, 2016b, 2022, 2023a, 2024; Kudelia, 2016; Sakwa, 2015).

This chapter analyzes a very large amount of various evidence to determine whether the Yanukovych government, the Maidan opposition, or any "third force" was involved in the mass killing of protesters and the police.

The dominant narrative promoted by the governments and with certain exceptions the mainstream media in Ukraine and the West attributed the Maidan massacre of the protesters on February 18–20, 2014, to the Yanukovych government and his security and police forces and generally disregarded killings of the police on the same day and in the same place (See Boyd-Barrett, 2016). For instance, Ursula von der Leyen,

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I. Katchanovski, *The Russia-Ukraine War and its Origins*, Rethinking Political Violence, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-98724-3_3

the EU Commission President, stated in 2023 that “Today, war is back in Europe. But for many Ukrainians, this conflict began already ten years ago. It began when peaceful protesters, just waving the European flags in Maidan Square, were shot dead by snipers” (Von der Leyen, 2023).

The official investigation by the Prosecutor General Office of Ukraine (GPU) charged the Berkut police with the massacre of the Maidan protesters on February 20 on the orders of President Viktor Yanukovych and his heads of the Security Service of Ukraine and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The GPU arrested and charged two Berkut commanders and three members of this police unit with terrorism and the murder of 48 out of 49 killed Maidan protesters and attempted murder of 80 out of 172 wounded protesters on February 20 on Yanukovych’s orders.

The Ukrainian media and with a few exceptions Western media presented at face value the Maidan massacre trial verdict in October 2023 and the conviction in absentia of three Berkut policemen for the murder of 31 out of 49 of the Maidan protesters as a definite proof that they massacred all protesters. Many media misrepresented the Maidan massacre verdict as a definite proof that there were no Maidan snipers and did not report testimonies by the absolute majority of wounded Maidan protesters, videos, and forensic ballistic examinations at the Maidan massacre trial in Ukraine concerning the snipers in the Maidan-controlled buildings. Similarly, they did not report parts of this trial verdict concerning the shooting of many protesters and Western journalists by snipers in the Maidan-controlled buildings and areas and the lack of evidence of the massacre order by the Yanukovych government and Russian involvement.

In contrast to the dominant narrative, Monitor, a German TV program, presented evidence of its investigation, showing that snipers were based in Hotel Ukraina and that the Ukrainian government investigation was manipulated (ARD, 2014). The BBC investigation produced similar findings and reported that snipers located in the Music Conservatory shot the police (Gatehouse, 2015).

Yanukovych along with his heads of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Internal Troops, and the Security Service of Ukraine, and Berkut commanders were charged in absentia for ordering the Maidan massacre of the protesters, but no such orders were revealed. Yanukovych, his ministers, and Berkut commanders denied that they had ordered the massacre and stated that the protesters and the police were shot by

Maidan snipers. However, they did not produce specific evidence in support of their claims (Katchanovski, 2023a, 2023b).

The Russian government and with some exceptions the media made similar claims based primarily on statements of Yanukovych, his government ministers, and self-admitted Georgian snipers. With exceptions of interviews with these Georgians, they in general did not produce specific evidence in support of their claims.

The dominant representation of the Maidan massacre in English-language, Russian-language, and Ukrainian-language Wikipedia is generally based on the dominant narrative by the Western and Ukrainian media and the Ukrainian government investigation that the Berkut police and government snipers massacred the Maidan protesters on the Yanukovych government orders. They generally excluded academic studies of the Maidan massacre (See Euromaidan, 2025; Maidan, 2025). It is revealing that there are no specific articles concerning the Maidan massacre in English-language, Russian-language, and Ukrainian-language Wikipedia.

The same Wikipedia editors, who deliberately misrepresented the Maidan massacre and whitewashed the involvement of the far right in this massacre, also smeared scholars who researched this massacre and whitewashed in various Wikipedia articles the contemporary and historical far right in Ukraine, including open neo-Nazi organizations and the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, their collaboration with Nazi Germany, their ideology and leaders, their "Glory to Ukraine. Glory to the Heroes" greeting, and their involvement in the mass murder of Jews, Poles, and Ukrainians (See Chapter 11).

Such Wikipedia editors included Nangaf, Wise2 (Prohoshka, Slav70), Bobfrombrockley, Lute88, My Very Best Wishes, and Volunteer Marek. The last five were identified in various publications and online sources, respectively, as far-right Svoboda-linked activist Svyatoslav Gut, Ben Gidley, Tsetsilia Cecilia Tsypina, Andrei Lomize, and Radek Szulga. The last two were also identified as involved in the Wikipedia's intentional distortion of the Holocaust in Poland (See Grabowski & Klein, 2023). For example, Wise2 (Prohoshka, Slav70) attributed the Lviv pogrom by the OUN during the Nazi occupation to "Jewish collaboration" and justified antisemitism, in particular, by using "scientific antisemitism."

Despite its intrinsic significance and major consequences, the Maidan massacre has been the central subject of only a few academic studies. Most of them found that the far-right and oligarchic elements of the Maidan opposition, in particular the Right Sector and Svoboda, were involved in the false-flag Maidan massacre of the protesters and the police (See Hahn, 2018; Katchanovski, 2015a, 2015b, 2016a, 2020, 2023a, 2023b, 2024, 2025a, 2025b).

Ishchenko (2016, 2020), based on an analysis of a database of major protest events during Euromaidan, found significant involvement of the far right in violence but did not specifically examine the Maidan massacre. Several other academic studies have suggested that the Maidan massacre was perpetrated with the involvement of the far right (see, for example, Bandeira, 2019, 206–207; Cohen, 2018; Lane, 2016; Mandel, 2016; Sakwa, 2015, 90–92). Another study corroborated the findings of the far-right involvement in the massacre of the police and argued that the violence was initiated by the Maidan protesters, who killed and wounded many policemen and maintained, based on secondary sources, that the Berkut police then in response massacred the protesters (Kudelia, 2018).

In contrast, some studies of the "Euromaidan" attributed the massacre of the protesters to the Berkut anti-riot police or snipers from the Security Service of Ukraine and Internal Troops (See, for example, Marples & Mills, 2015). However, they were not based on a comprehensive analysis of this crucial case of political violence and uncritically accepted claims by the Maidan politicians and the Ukrainian and Western media that the government snipers from SBU Alfa and Internal Troops Omega units and/or the special Berkut company perpetrated the massacre of the protesters on the Yanukovych orders.

Some other studies, which briefly examined the Maidan massacre, relied on a model of killing three Maidan protesters. The SITU model was produced by a New York architecture company for Maidan lawyers, but the Maidan massacre trial refused to admit it as evidence. This model misrepresented the directions of the gunshots by misrepresenting the locations of wounds of these three protesters compared to their wound locations in forensic medical examinations by Ukrainian government experts for the Maidan massacre investigation and the trial (See Katchanovski, 2023a, 2023b, 2024).

This chapter combines content analysis of all publicly available videos, photos, and audio recordings of the Maidan massacre on February 20, 2014 in English, Ukrainian, Russian, Polish, and other languages with an analysis of several hundred testimonies concerning this massacre based on qualitative interview methodology. The manifest and latent content analysis covers over 2000 videos and recordings of live Internet and TV broadcasts of the massacre in nearly 50 countries, news reports, and social media posts by 120 journalists covering the massacre from Kyiv, more than 6000 photos, and close to 30 gigabytes of publicly available radio intercepts of snipers and commanders of the Security Service of Ukraine and Internal Troops.

The analysis is also based on nearly 1000 hours of official video recordings of the Maidan massacre trial and the Yanukovych treason trial, the nearly 1,000,000 word text of the Maidan massacre trial verdict and information concerning investigations of this massacre in over 2500 court decisions in the official online Ukrainian court decisions database.

Several online video appendixes include brief relevant compilations of segments of videos of the February 20 massacre and the Maidan massacre trial. They are available on YouTube. (Video A, 2023), Video B, 2023, Video C, 2023, Video D, 2023, Video E, 2023, Video F, 2023, Video H, 2023). Numerous videos of the massacre were synchronized based on the matching visual and audio content of videos, in particular, speeches from the Maidan stage, and on time-stamped video recordings, such as recordings of live TV broadcasts, Internet streaming, and security cameras. These video appendixes also contain maps that show the locations of the government forces and buildings with snipers, locations, and times of killing and wounding of specific Maidan protesters and policemen. The locations and positions of the snipers are determined based on their videos, photos, and testimonies of wounded protesters and witnesses.

This study analyzed interviews and statements by several hundred witnesses in media and social media. Most of these testimonies are by eyewitnesses, mostly Maidan protesters, and Western and Ukrainian journalists. Since it would be in rational self-interest for Berkut officers and the Yanukovych government officials, who are charged with the Maidan massacre, to deny their responsibility whether they are guilty or not, the analysis does not rely on their testimonies.

The analysis also employs field research and photos by the author at the site of the Maidan massacre in downtown Kyiv in July 2014, and numerous visits before the massacre to the Maidan and most surrounding buildings, such as Hotel Ukraina, the Main Post Office, Zhovtnevyi Palace, Dnipro Hotel, and Kozatsky Hotel. A multimethod methodology combining content analysis of videos, audio recordings, and photos of the massacre with analysis of qualitative interviews with witnesses makes the case study and its findings much more reliable than typical scholarly studies. Specific testimonies concerning specific events, in particular, killings and wounding of specific protesters and locations of the shooters, were corroborated by other evidence, such as other testimonies, video and audio recordings of these events, and results of forensic medical and ballistic examinations by government experts of the same specific events. The same concerns other types of evidence such as videos. In addition, the evidence is evaluated using other standard criteria in scholarly methodology, such as validity, specifically, face validity and replication.

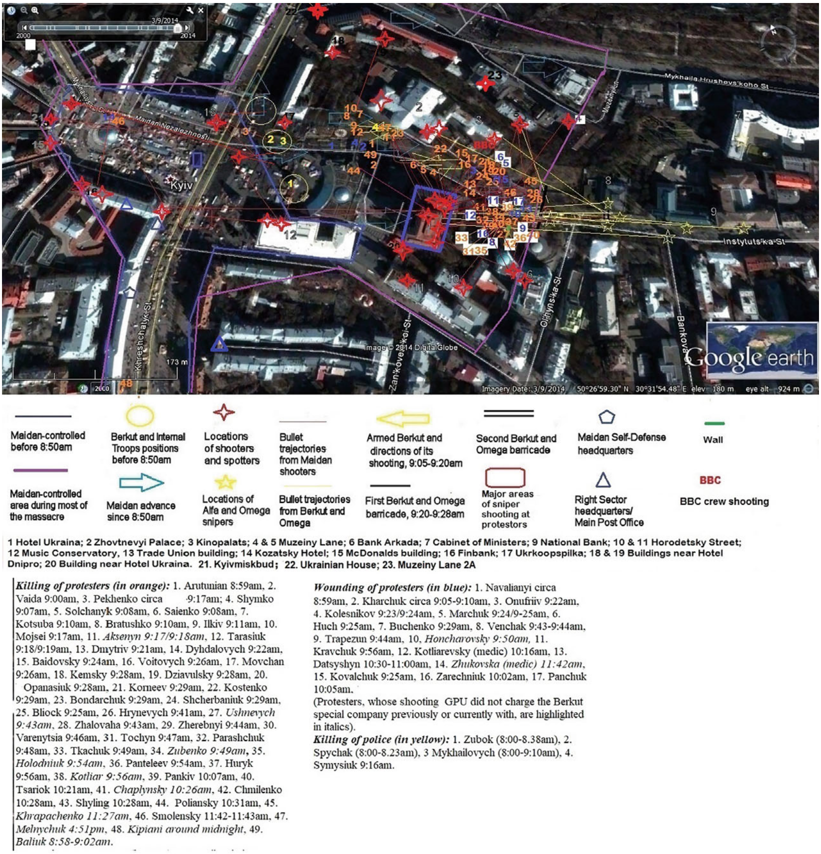
3.2 Video Reconstruction of the Maidan Massacre on February 20, 2014

The content analysis of synchronized videos, photos, audio recordings, and media and social media reports shows that the cease-fire agreement was signed by then President Yanukovych and leaders of the Maidan opposition parties around midnight on February 20, 2014, was broken early in the morning of the day. The Berkut and Internal Troops units were then in standoff with the protesters on the Maidan (the Independence Square) in downtown Kyiv (Video A).

STB and 112 Ukraina TV videos show snipers covertly shooting from the Music Conservatory shortly before 8:00. A BBC investigation included photos by a Ukrainian photographer showing several Maidan snipers armed with hunting rifles and either a Kalashnikov assault rifle or its hunting version inside the Music Conservatory shortly after 8:00am. A recording of a live 112 Ukraina TV broadcast at 8:00am referred to shooters at the conservatory. Another live report at 8:37am states that shooters from the conservatory wounded at least five policemen on the Maidan. A video shows a Berkut policeman facing the conservatory and shouting of pellets hitting the Berkut police on the Maidan, and that the deadly gunfire is from above (See Video A) (Map 3.1 and Fig. 3.1).

A statement from the Fatherland Party on February 20, 2014, said that the Maidan protesters were shot from the roof of the Music Conservatory by government forces and that the shooting stopped after the Maidan activists climbed to the roof ("Batkivshhyna", 2014).

Videos also show that the conservatory was located in Maidan-controlled territory, with many protesters filmed near its entrance and the Maidan-facing parts of the building. A Maidan stage speaker asked about 8:00 am "dear friends" in the conservatory to suppress the fire on its balcony. A special Maidan company commander and three of its members admitted in their Ukrainian media and BBC interviews and during interrogation that their unit was based on the conservatory building at the


Mykhaila Hrushevs'koho St
Maidan Nezalezhnosti
Kyiv
Instytuts'ka St
Khreshchatyk St
Zan'kovets'koi St
Olhyns'ka St
Bankova St
BBC
Image © 2014 DigitalGlobe
Google earth
Imagery Date: 3/9/2014 50°26'59.30" N 30°31'54.48" E elev 180 m eye alt 924 m
Maidan-controlled before 8:50am
Berkut and Internal Troops positions before 8:50am
Locations of shooters and spotters
Bullet trajectories from Maidan shooters
Armed Berkut and directions of its shooting, 9:05-9:20am
Second Berkut and Omega barricade
Maidan Self-Defense headquarters
Wall
Maidan-controlled area during most of the massacre
Maidan advance since 8:50am
Locations of Alfa and Omega snipers
Bullet trajectories from Berkut and Omega
First Berkut and Omega barricade, 9:20-9:28am
Major areas of sniper shooting at protestors
Right Sector headquarters/ Main Post Office
BBC
BBC crew shooting

1 Hotel Ukraina; 2 Zhovtnevyi Palace; 3 Kinopalats; 4 & 5 Muzeiny Lane; 6 Bank Arkada; 7 Cabinet of Ministers; 9 National Bank; 10 & 11 Horodetsky Street; 12 Music Conservatory, 13 Trade Union building; 14 Kozatsky Hotel; 15 McDonalds building; 16 Finbank; 17 Ukrkoopspilka; 18 & 19 Buildings near Hotel Dnipro; 20 Building near Hotel Ukraina. 21. Kyivmiskbud; 22. Ukrainian House; 23. Muzeiny Lane 2A

Killing of protesters (in orange): 1. Arutunian 8:59am, 2. Vaida 9:00am, 3. Pekhenko circa 9:17am; 4. Shymko 9:07am, 5. Solchanyk 9:08am, 6. Saienko 9:08am, 7. Kotsuba 9:10am, 8. Bratushko 9:10am, 9. Ilkiv 9:11am, 10. Mojsei 9:17am, 11. *Aksenyn 9:17/9:18am*, 12. Tarasiuk 9:18/9:19am, 13. Dmytriv 9:21am, 14. Dyhdalovych 9:22am, 15. Baidovsky 9:24am, 16. Voitovych 9:26am, 17. Movchan 9:26am, 18. Kemsky 9:28am, 19. Dziavulsky 9:28am, 20. Opanasiuk 9:28am, 21. Korneev 9:29am, 22. Kostenko 9:29am, 23. Bondarchuk 9:29am, 24. Shcherbaniuk 9:29am, 25. Bliock 9:25am, 26. Hrynevych 9:41am, 27. *Ushnevych 9:43am*, 28. Zhalovaha 9:43am, 29. Zherebnyi 9:44am, 30. Varenytsia 9:46am, 31. Tochyn 9:47am, 32. Parashchuk 9:48am, 33. Tkachuk 9:49am, 34. *Zubenko 9:49am*, 35. *Holodniuk 9:54am*, 36. Panteleev 9:54am, 37. Huryk 9:56am, 38. *Kotliar 9:56am*, 39. Pankiv 10:07am, 40. Tsariok 10:21am, 41. *Chaplynsky 10:26am*, 42. Chmilenko 10:28am, 43. Shyling 10:28am, 44. Poliansky 10:31am, 45. *Khrapachenko 11:27am*, 46. Smolensky 11:42-11:43am, 47. *Melnychuk 4:51pm*, 48. *Kipiani around midnight*, 49. *Baliuk 8:58-9:02am.*

Wounding of protesters (in blue): 1. Navalianyi circa 8:59am, 2. Kharchuk circa 9:05-9:10am, 3. Onufriiv 9:22am, 4. Kolesnikov 9:23/9:24am, 5. Marchuk 9:24/9-25am, 6. Huch 9:25am, 7. Buchenko 9:29am, 8. Venchak 9:43-9:44am, 9. Trapezun 9:44am, 10. *Honcharovsky 9:50am,* 11. Kravchuk 9:56am, 12. Kotliarevsky (medic) 10:16am, 13. Datsyshyn 10:30-11:00am, 14. *Zhukovska (medic) 11:42am*, 15. Kovalchuk 9:25am, 16. Zarechniuk 10:02am, 17. Panchuk 10:05am.
(Protesters, whose shooting GPU did not charge the Berkut special company previously or currently with, are highlighted in italics).
Killing of police (in yellow): 1. Zubok (8:00-8.38am), 2. Spychak (8:00-8.23am), 3 Mykhailovych (8:00-9:10am), 4. Symysiuk 9:16am.

Map 3.1 The Maidan massacre on February 20, 2014

time of the massacre and shot at the police (See, for example, Bird In Flight, 2016; Gatehouse, 2015; Gordon, 2020; Katchanovski, 2015b).

A GPU investigation and the Maidan massacre trial verdict confirmed these public admissions (Katchanovski, 2024; Maidan, 2023; Vyrok, 2023). The commander and many of its members, whose list was leaked from the investigation, were members or had other links to far-right organizations, such as the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists, the Right Sector, and Svoboda, and were primarily from Galicia in Western Ukraine (Strana, 2020).

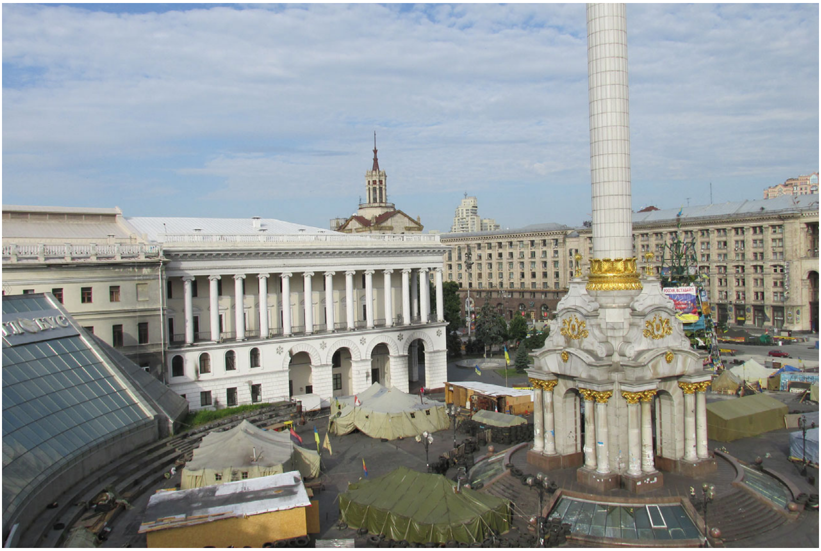


Fig. 3.1 The music conservatory and the main post office on the Maidan. Photo by the author

A not-broadcast CNN video footage shows approximately 8:20 am, the commander and members of the special armed Maidan company moving with their firearms to the Maidan barricade, taking positions behind the Maidan barricade facing the police and the Internal Troops on the Maidan while using unarmed Maidan protesters as human shields. Their appearance was followed by sounds of many gunshots. At the same exact place and around the same time, members of the special armed Maidan company were filmed, then shooting from hunting rifles in the direction of the Berkut police and Internal Troops facing them on the Maidan. A recording of a live broadcast also showed one member of the special armed Maidan company giving then to another on the same barricade a Kalashnikov-type firearm (Video A, 05:03).

Similarly, 24 TV channels reported shortly before 8:00am that there was shooting from Hotel Ukraina, that there were shots by pellets and snipers, and that three shot protesters had been evacuated. A video by a Maidan protester shows one of the casualties among protesters being evacuated from Maidan, and this is followed by a warning from the

Maidan stage about a sniper in Hotel Ukraina. At a similar time, a speaker on the Maidan stage said that someone was shooting from Hotel Ukraina. He asked "our guys, who had been in the hotel until recently," to check this (Video A, 00:01:19). These videos provide evidence that snipers in Hotel Ukraina shot the Maidan protesters and that the Maidan forces controlled the inside of this hotel and had the ability to report or neutralize any snipers there if they were from government forces or any third force.

The synchronized videos show how Internal Troops and the Berkut were shot, fell to the ground, and evacuated in the same area of the Independence Square (Maidan). The Berkut anti-riot police and internal troop units, which were besieging, storming, and blocking the Maidan for almost three months, hastily abandoned their positions on the Maidan and fled between 8:50am and 9:00am. Videos and radio communications by the internal troop units contain urgent retreat orders at 8:49am and 8:50am. Large numbers of Berkut and Internal Troops servicemen fleeing the Maidan area at haste minutes before and after 9:00am. A Berkut officer stated during this retreat that the police came under live ammunition fire from Maidan "snipers" and that then snipers appeared on the third floor from the top of Hotel Ukraina. Several other fleeing Berkut and Internal Troop members and TV correspondents on the ground made similar statements (See Video A).

The content analysis suggests that both the police and the Maidan protesters on the Maidan were shot in the early morning by snipers in the Maidan-controlled buildings and areas, such as Hotel Ukraina and the Music Conservatory, and that the police and Internal Troops then retreated and fled from the Maidan as a result of the casualties among their units. These findings are corroborated by numerous testimonies of wounded Maidan protesters and Berkut policemen, commanders of government sniper units, eyewitnesses among the Maidan protesters and journalists, government investigations, forensic examinations by government experts, and the Maidan massacre trial verdict.

The Prosecutor General Office of Ukraine investigation determined that one Berkut officer was killed on the Maidan from a Music Conservatory direction and two from Maidan barricades direction between 8:00am and 9:10am, two of which were shot from a Kalashnikov-based Saiga hunting carbine by a member of a special Maidan company. He earlier admitted in Ukrainian media interviews shooting the police from the Music Conservatory and Maidan barricades, and killing two policemen from such a firearm (Bird In Flight, 2016; Katchanovski, 2015b). In addition, the government investigation determined that 39 policemen were wounded by firearms on the Maidan from 5:30am until the police retreat, and that 10 Maidan protesters were wounded on the Maidan by live ammunition in the morning of February 20 before 9:00am from sectors other than government-controlled, but nobody was charged for their wounding.

The synchronized video compilation shows that, following the retreat of the police unit crowds of protesters, the absolute majority of whom were unarmed, started around 8:50 a.m. to advance from their positions on the Maidan up Instytutska and Hrushevsky streets. Their advancement was guided by commands announced from the Maidan stage over loudspeakers. They relayed orders by Maidan leaders and company commanders of Maidan Self-Defense. Specifically, a Maidan announcer relayed orders for protesters to advance to Zhovtnevyi Palace heights and stay at these positions (See Video A).

The synchronized and time-stamped videos show that three protesters were killed before about two dozen police officers from the special Berkut company first appeared from a bus and started shooting with Kalashnikovs and pump rifles a few minutes after 9:00am. This means that the special Berkut company policemen, who were charged with killing these three protesters, could not physically shoot them and that they were killed by someone else.

In contrast, the videos suggest that Maidan snipers were shooting protesters there at around the same time. A Polish TVP TV correspondent reported at 9:01am right after these three protesters were killed near him that a sniper shooting both the police and protesters appeared. He pointed to Maidan in the Music Conservatory direction. A warning was made from the Maidan stage at 9:04am for protesters not to shoot other protesters in the back, several minutes after these three protesters were killed (See Video A, 13:05).

The content analysis of synchronized videos shows that about 15–20 members of the special Berkut company appeared on Instytutska Street near Maidan from a bus at 9:02am and started shooting with pump rifles and AKMS (modified Kalashnikov assault rifles). The videos show that many Maidan protesters fall to the ground with bullet wounds in the same area within the same general timeframe. These videos were presented by the media, the prosecution, and the Maidan lawyers as definite proof that these Berkut policemen massacred Maidan protesters.

However, the content analysis shows that the purpose of the Berkut company's brief advance was to enable a retreat of internal troop soldiers remaining in Zhovtnevyi Palace, whose main entrance was seized by the protesters a few minutes after 9:00am. The limited advance of two dozen members of the Berkut special company to Zhovtnevyi Palace and their swift retreat along with a large number of policemen can be seen in various videos. Synchronized videos show that Berkut gunshots from Kalashnikovs and their direction coincide with visible impacts on the ground or pavement before the protesters (See Video A).

The content analysis shows that specific times and directions of shooting by members of a Berkut unit of about 20 policemen, who are charged with their killings and attempted killing, and specific times of killings and wounding of specific Maidan protesters did not coincide in the videos, which filmed both simultaneously, for example, in a long German ARD TV video and in synchronized videos (TyzhdenUA, 2017). This crucial long ARD video, which like synchronized videos demonstrates visually that the Berkut policemen did not shoot at least the absolute majority of killed and wounded protesters, was not shown by this German public TV broadcaster. The Berkut policemen at the exact times of the killings and wounding of the absolute majority of these protesters are filmed standing, moving, and taking cover behind barricades, not aiming their AKMs towards these protesters, and there is no visible gunshot smoke or recoil of their firearms. It was physically impossible to shoot them without aiming at their Kalashnikovs in the specific protesters and making gunshots at the same time when the protesters were seen falling to the ground when there were sounds of specific gunshots (See Video H).

For example, the content analysis of synchronized videos of killings of Ihor Dmytriv and Andrii Dyhdalovych and wounding of Sviatoslav Kolesnikov and Roman Kotliarevsky visually illustrates that the specific times of their shooting did not match the specific times of Berkut shooting in the same and/or other synchronized videos. The synchronized videos in both this study and the SITU model show no policemen or their firearms visible from behind the Berkut-manned barricade at the time of killing Dmytriv. They also show the same concerning the Berkut police and no signs of a gunshot, such as flash and recoil, of an Omega sniper behind the same barricade at the time of killing Dyhdalovych. A time-stamped video showed that Berkut policemen behind a Berkut barricade were not shooting at all during Kolesnikov's wounding (See Video H).

Similarly, there are no Berkut policemen or any signs of a gunshot visible from the Maidan protesters facing the side of the truck barricade at the time of the wounding of Roman Kotrilarevsky, a Maidan medic, in a German ARD TV video at 10:16am. A National Bank security camera video, which is precisely synchronized with the German and CNN videos of his wounding based on the matching content and timestamps of the security camera video, shows that the Berkut police were hiding behind the truck barricade and did not even aim their Kalashnikovs in the direction of Kotliarevsky. The prosecution and Maidan victims lawyers claimed during the trial that this Maidan medic was wounded by a Berkut policeman from this barricade. Kotliarevsky testified during an investigative experiment that he was wounded from the Bank Arkada because of the top to bottom direction of his wound and its location on the back of his right thigh. A wound X-ray showed that the bullet was at a steep angle. A government ballistic expert also determined that the fire sector was from Hotel Ukraina to Bank Arkada (See Video D).

The prosecution, Maidan victims' lawyers, and numerous media reports showed videos of Berkut shooting from the truck barricade as evidence that they killed almost half of the 49 protesters in front of them. However, the content analysis shows that Berkut physically could not shoot protesters from behind a truck barricade because there were blind spots below the Berkut line of fire from over the top of the truck body. Because the height and width of the MAZ truck were approximately three meters, it was physically impossible for Berkut policemen, who were entirely behind this truck or standing on the concrete pieces with only their heads and hands visible from the behind the truck barricade to shoot protesters below in front of this truck The latter could only shoot parallel to the top of the truck or above (See Video A & D). This is consistent with bullet hole locations.

Similarly, the videos visually show that it was physically impossible to kill Roman Ushnevych from the Berkut barricade because he took along with several other protesters behind a concrete wall that shielded them from the Berkut barricade (Video A, 33:06).

Videos and photos show bullet holes that appeared in shields of Dmytriv and a protester right in front of Dyhdalovych, and helmets of

Parashchuk and Roman Huryk match locations and top to bottom directions of wounds. They all point to shooting from the top part of the Bank Arkada and not the Berkut barricade. A protester, who was filmed approaching Dyhdalovych during his killing, said that he saw a sniper on the roof of Bank Arkada and that Dyhdalovych was killed by a sniper from this building. During the massacre, other Maidan protesters also pointed to snipers on Bank Arkada (See Video A and D).

The SITU model of shooting of the first three protesters claimed that they were shot from the Berkut barricade shifted the wound locations from sides and back to front and made their steep directions practically horizontal, contrary to the exact locations of the wounds in the forensic medical examinations and videos. The Berkut lawyer at the Maidan massacre trial stated that the on-site investigative experiment, which was conducted by government forensic experts with the participation of a Maidan victims' lawyer, determined that the gunshot direction was from Bank Arkada. He said that Parashchuk was in a blind zone of the Berkut barricade, and that the on-site investigative experiment did not consider this gunshot direction. The same Maidan victims' lawyer commissioned the SITU architectural company model with the fabricated results (Video H, 05:09).

In contrast, Berkut lawyers and the government investigation determined that the time and direction of killing a Berkut special company member at 9:16am match shooting by a protester from a hunting rifle in photos and in a video that shows him running away to cover behind the protesters (Video A, 18:27). This investigation found that the Berkut policeman was killed by buckshot from a similar Maidan direction.

In some cases, the specific time of a gunshot from the Berkut policemen coincided with the killing or wounding of a specific protester. However, in all these cases, the Berkut Kalashnikovs were aimed above, below, or beside these protesters, and these gunshots coincided with the sounds of other gunshots of different volumes and kinds. This means that while unintentional shooting of some protesters by the Berkut police from ricochets cannot be completely excluded based only on videos, there is also evidence of their shooting by snipers from other locations.

For example, content analysis shows that the killing of Bohdan Solchanyk coincides with a gunshot by a Berkut policeman in the ground direction several meters in front of this protester, but it also coincides with another quieter gunshot. A steep wound direction in the forensic medical examination and various evidences that snipers in the Maidan-controlled

Hotel Ukraina and Zhovtnevyi Palace were shooting and killing protesters near Solchanyk around the same time, such as Sayenko, suggest that he could have been shot by such a sniper (Video A, 15:52).

Various videos and photos show snipers and spotters in Hotel Ukraina and Zhovtnevyi Palace during the massacre of the protesters, and there are more than 80 testimonies about such snipers during the massacre itself. They also showed that these buildings were controlled by Maidan forces at that time. There were protesters, including armed ones from the far-right-linked special Maidan company, inside and outside of these buildings within or around the same time, and on the same floors and the roof that snipers were filmed or reported by several hundreds of protesters and journalists during and after the massacre (See Video A).

For instance, a Ukrainian ICTV video showed at 10:25am a sniper hiding behind the curtains of a window on the 11th floor of Hotel Ukraina and firing in the direction of Maidan protesters. An ICTV reporter stated in this video that snipers from Hotel Ukraina were shooting the advancing protesters on the back. A BBC video showed a sniper firing at 10:28am in the direction of the BBC television crew and the protesters there from an open window on the same 11th floor of the hotel, and the protesters running for cover and shouting "snipers" while pointing towards the hotel. The BBC correspondent in his news report and in his tweet identified the shooter as having a green helmet worn by Maidan protesters. The government investigation revealed that one of the far-right Svoboda leaders lived in a hotel room at the time of the massacre (See Video C, 06:23). A Maidan protester from this BBC video testified at the trial that he was told by other protesters that this was "our sniper." He said that he saw a sniper in another Hotel Ukraina room window, giving visual signs to the protesters to avoid revealing these snipers (Video C; Katchanovski, 2024).

Just a few minutes before this, CNN and Spilno TV videos were recorded on the same 11th floor voices of a group of Maidan protesters talking about searching for positions to shoot (See Video A, 52:14) The Spilno TV reporter said in his online stream that these were armed Maidan protesters, in particular, with Kalashnikovs. He testified that the same armed Maidan group was entering the same hotel room on the same 11th floor around the time when he streamed from this room around 9:35am (Katchanovski, 2024). This is evidence that the Maidan group members either included snipers who shot the Maidan protesters, or that they regarded snipers who shot the protesters, specifically during the same time and from the same Hotel Ukraina floor, as not hostile and therefore did not stop them from massacring the protesters.

At 9:10–9:11am, a few minutes after the killing of several protesters, an announcer on the Maidan stage publicly warned the protesters about two to three snipers on the pendulum floor of Hotel Ukraina. This matches the 11th floor facing the massacre area shortly before, during, and shortly after that time. Similar warnings concerning snipers in this hotel, in particular that they kill protesters, were relayed from the Maidan stage several times during the massacre. Such warnings were also made about snipers in Zhovtnevyi Palace when it was under the control of Maidan protesters (Video A, 26:10).

Unbroadcast segments of the most famous video of the Maidan massacre, which was filmed by the Belgian VRT News TV and revealed at the Maidan massacre trial, show two Maidan protesters luring a group of other protesters to advance towards Berkut shortly before they would be massacred there. There was no other rational reason to lead protesters there after dozen protesters were killed and many more were wounded in the same area minutes before. A protester is heard shouting to the other protesters in this group not to go ahead because snipers from the hotel were shooting [take down] all protesters together and that there were gunshots visible from there. This video then shows a bullet hitting a tree in the direction of this group of Maidan protesters at 9:38. They looked back towards Hotel Ukraina after this shot. One of them pointed his hand towards the hotel and shouted about gunshots from the hotel and that they shot to take down the protesters and asked the shooters there not to shoot. Several minutes later, almost all of the dozen protesters in this group, including Ushnevych, were killed or wounded (See Video C). Six wounded protesters from this group testified to the Maidan massacre trial and the investigation that they were shot from this hotel and other Maidan-controlled buildings, witnessed snipers there, or were told by other protesters about them (See Katchanovski, 2023a).

Protesters were filmed wondering whether the shots were fired from this hotel during a shooting spree that left 10 protesters killed there shortly before 9:30am. One protester said that it was necessary to go with a Kalashnikov assault rifle to check the hotel. Several wounded protesters, who identified themselves in the Maidan massacre trial in the videos in this area during this shooting spree, testified that they and other protesters were shot by snipers in Hotel Ukraina and/or witnessed them there (Video A, 26:10).

Videos show that the Maidan forces not only controlled the entrances and exits to Hotel Ukraina before, during, and after the massacre of the protesters, but also that armed Maidan groups were on the same floors that protesters and journalists identified as locations of snipers around the same time. In particular, they were filmed by BBC, CNN, and Spilne TV on the 11th floor, particularly in the room by one of the Svoboda party leaders. Snipers were reported in the room of another Svoboda leader and in another room on the same hotel floor. Many other Svoboda deputies lived on this floor, and videos showed that they stayed in the hotel during the massacre. The far-right Svoboda party, a Maidan Self-Defense commander in the hotel, and the hotel staff stated that Hotel Ukraina was seized and guarded by the Maidan forces since the end of January 2014 (Video B). In its official statement, Svoboda stated that its activists took Hotel Ukraina under their control and guard on January 25, 2014 (VO Svoboda, 2014). A similar statement was made by the Svoboda leader on the Maidan stage (Maidan, 2014). A BBC video showed a leading Svoboda activist along with a few Maidan protesters guarding the entrance to the stairways and elevators in the hotel shortly after 9:51am (Video A, 36:50).

Video A (37:52) shows a group of Maidan protesters with at least one handgun, an axe, and a long tennis bag, which is a convenient way to hide and carry weapons, breaking into a hotel room on the 14th floor of the hotel around 10:12am. French Itele, AFP, and Ukraina TV videos showed the commander and members of the far right of the special Maidan company a group of Maidan protesters who were armed with a Kalashnikov-type firearm and hunting rifles running into the hotel at 10:18am and then taking an elevator to the 10th floor. Among them, running was the same protester in a gas mask, who shortly before was filmed luring the group of protesters, and then returning to the hotel unharmed after they were massacred (Video A, 44:27).

The commander and a few members of this group were filmed in Ruptly and German TV videos when one of them was shooting from a hunting rifle from the 14th floor of Hotel Ukraina at 10:20–10:22am. Ruptly and ZDF videos showed the commander and members of the special Maidan company accompanied by one of the Svoboda leaders when at least one of them was shooting in the direction of the protesters from the same 14th floor of Hotel Ukraina and then moved to a lower floor because of the presence of journalists (Video A, 45:33). A time-stamped Facebook post by a Spilno.tv reporter at 12:40 pm stated that there were snipers on the 14th floor who were shooting protesters on the Maidan. Protesters also testified that there were “snipers” on the 14th floor of the hotel (See Katchanovski, 2024).

Video A, media and witness reports, and statements from the Maidan stage show that there were several searches for snipers in Hotel Ukraina by groups of Maidan protesters during the massacre from around noon until the evening of February 20. They reported that no snipers were found, but the positions of snipers were found, and witness reports about snipers in the hotel continued despite these comprehensive searches. Video compilation A shows only members of the armed group of snipers from the special armed Maidan company not only entering the hotel at 10:16am, but also exiting it without any interference at around 11:00am and in the late afternoon. It was rational for protesters who searched the hotel to assume that snipers were not from the Maidan units.

Similarly, Video A and photos showed Maidan protesters inside, near entrances, on the roof, and in the roof window of Zhovtnevyi Palace during the same time as announcers on the Maidan stage relayed warnings about snipers there, particularly massacring protesters. Three “snipers” on the roof of Zhovtnevyi Palace were filmed and identified as such from the Maidan stage during a wave of killing protesters at 9:59–10:00am. The ICTV showed and called the same two people on the roof “snipers.”

A Polish journalist’s video showed snipers on the roofs of the Main Post Office, which was then the Right Sector Headquarters, and the directly adjacent Finbank building shortly after Smolensky was killed, and a female Maidan medic was photographed and filmed as wounded in the same area of the Maidan. A protester stated that he witnessed both of them being shot from the Main Post Office building (See Video A, 01:11:16).

Similarly, the Kozatsky Hotel was the headquarters of the Neo-Nazi Patriot of Ukraine, which joined the Right Sector during the Maidan. The Patriot of Ukraine organized and led the Azov battalion during the war in Donbas. Maidan protesters reported that there were snipers in this hotel, which was located on Maidan, for almost the entire duration of the massacre. Videos and photos show Maidan protesters inside the hotel searching for snipers (See Video A).

Videos and photos also showed that Maidan protesters were near the Bank Arkada, Horodetskt Street, and Muzeinyi Lane buildings when protesters pointed to the snipers there (See Video A). This means that it was possible for protesters, in particular armed ones, to enter these buildings and neutralize these snipers, and that it was not possible for snipers to exit the buildings without being noticed by the protesters.

Video A shows more than 80 testimonies during the massacre itself, primarily by the Maidan protesters and journalists from Ukraine and many other countries, about snipers in the Maidan-controlled buildings and areas. For instance, French TV and Belgian TV showed one protester near the hotel entrance and other protesters in the hotel lobby shouting to protesters, Svoboda deputies, journalists, and Maidan medics there about snipers in Hotel Ukraina circa 9:46–9:50am when the lured group of the protesters was massacred nearby. Oleksii Butorin said in a 1 + 1 interview during the massacre that eight protesters were killed from Hotel Ukraina in half an hour. He witnessed one shot from the hotel. Another protester said that he witnessed a protester next to him being killed at 10:31am from Hotel Ukraina. Protesters at 10:25 a.m. pointed to shooting by snipers from the pendulum floor of Hotel Ukraina. This indicates either the 11th floor in the hotel wings or the 13th floor in its central part (Fig. 3.2).

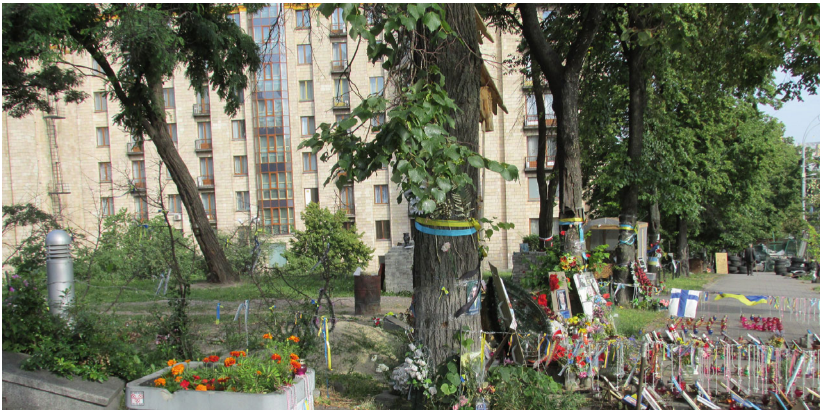


Fig. 3.2 The main Maidan massacre spot in front of the Hotel Ukraina. Photo by the author

A female Maidan medic in a BBC video and a protester in a French photographer video pointed out the roof of the Bank Arkada as the location of snipers within 30 minutes of the killings of Dmytriv, Dyhdalovych, Huryk, and Parashchuk (Video H).

A video operator from the 5 Kanal said that there was a sniper in Hotel Ukraina window. A protester at 10:30 a.m. pointed to a "sniper" shooting from the 9th floor of the hotel. One protester said that another protester was killed from Hotel Ukraina when he stood near him. Two protesters stated that "snipers" on Hotel Ukraina shot protesters in the back and also pointed out snipers in the buildings on Horodetsky Street or the Bank Arkada. The news report of the 1 + 1 TV channel stated that Maidan Self-Defense reported that snipers were shooting protesters from Kostelna Street and Hotel Ukraina roof. An announcement from the Maidan stage reported "confirmed information" from the Maidan Self-Defense about three snipers on the Bank Arkada (See Video A).

When Serhiy Melnychuk was killed at 4:51 pm, several protesters and a Bildt journalist near him all stated that he was shot from Hotel Ukraina. A female Maidan medic on the Maidan and Spilno TV journalists inside the hotel stated the same: (Video A. 01:16:55). His wife, who was near Melnychuk during his death, testified at the trial and BBC and Hromadkse TV interviews that the gunshot was from this hotel. A forensic expert, based on the position of Melnychuk and his wound locations and directions in forensic medical examinations, made the same determination (Katchanovski, 2023b).

In their intercepted radio communications, the SBU Alfa commanders reported that hostile snipers were moving to Hotel Ukraina (Video A, 46:24). Their intercepted radio communications show that SBU Alfa snipers were deployed in the Cabmin building only after 10:30am, attempted to locate snipers in Hotel Ukraina and other Maidan-controlled buildings and did not massacre the protesters. SBU Alfa snipers radio communications reported suspected snipers or spotters on the roofs of Kinopalats and Horodetsky seven buildings.

A government sniper was only filmed on the Cabmin building around noon after all but one protester were already killed. The synchronized videos show that the Omega unit of snipers arrived at the Berkut barricade area and received permission to use live ammunition against snipers in Maidan-controlled buildings circa 10:37am after all but three protesters were already killed. Omega snipers then aimed their rifles not at the protesters but at Hotel Ukraina windows far above the protesters (Video A, 58:56).

The killings and wounding of protesters in the Instytutska Street area facing the Berkut, Alfa, and Omega positions practically stopped after the arrival of government snipers. The only exception was the killing of Oleksander Khrapachenko at 11:27 (See Video A, 01:08:17). The prosecution initially found that he was killed from Hotel Ukraina, but then charged special Berkut company members on their barricade and, in 2020, an Omega sniper in the Cabmin Club with his killing. Video A shows that it was physically impossible because forensic medical and ballistic examinations revealed that he was shot by a rusted expanding hunting bullet in the back at a steep top to bottom direction when he faced Berkut and Omega in front of him. Black smoke covered him from the Cabmin Club and Berkut barricade. Two protesters testified that he was shot from Hotel Ukraina and other Maidan-controlled buildings (Katchanovski, 2024).

A salvo of gunshots at 11:32–11:33am matched sounds of coordinated shooting by a group of snipers in their intercepted radiocommunication that was recorded by a Maidan protester on the Maidan. One of these snipers talked about an apparent Transcaucasian accent (Video A, 01:09:19). Their open communication about shooting, in contrast to the use of code terms by the SBU Alfa snipers in their radio communication, and the Maidan Self-Defense and GPU refusals to locate and identify these snipers suggests that they were from the Maidan side.

Videos show that during the massacre, several Maidan leaders, particularly leaders of the Fatherland and Svoboda parties, spoke from the Maidan stage, which faced Hotel Ukraina and other buildings from which snipers shot Maidan protesters, in particular, killing two protesters within dozens of meters from the stages before and after speeches by the Maidan leaders from the stage (See Video A).

Similarly, many members of parliament from Svoboda were inside and near the hotel during the entire massacre. In particular, a video by a Maidan activist and their own statements revealed that the Svoboda deputies were on the 11th floor, including in their own rooms at the very time when snipers were located on this floor, including in the room of one of the Svoboda deputies, shot Maidan protesters (Kogda, 2014). For example, the GPU investigation revealed in 2015 that two Svoboda deputies lived in hotel rooms located next to another Svoboda deputy room, from which, as the BBC and ICTV videos and testimonies of the BBC journalist and Maidan protesters show, snipers shot at the BBC television crew and Maidan protesters. One of the Svoboda leaders was admitted in 2015 that he was filming the massacre from a room located next to the Svoboda deputy room with the snipers (Daily, 2015). Svoboda deputies did not warn Maidan protesters and foreign journalists, in particular, those who were shot by snipers located in this hotel, including on their floor and their neighboring rooms, or were in the lobby of the hotel at that time. Such actions by these Maidan leaders and Svoboda deputies suggest that they did not fear snipers and that they knew that these snipers were not from a government or any other hostile force but from the Maidan or other friendly covert force and would not shoot the Maidan leaders on the stage and Svoboda deputies in Hotel Ukraina.

The analysis of videos, photos, forensic examinations by government investigators, and reports by journalists in the media and social media concerning the locations of these Hotel Ukraina rooms and timing of the shooting by journalists from ABC News (US), ABC (Australia), ARD (Germany) twice, the Associated Press (US), BBC, TVP (Poland), RT (Russia), and Sky News (UK) shows that they were also shot at by snipers from Maidan-controlled buildings and areas, in particular, the Right Sector headquarters, the Music Conservatory, and the Bank Arkada. In contrast, such evidence suggests that a ricochet that hit a Ruptly reporter on the top floor of Hotel Ukraina was from Berkut police shooting that targeted snipers in Hotel Ukraina (See Video E).

The Maidan massacre was immediately attributed to government snipers and the Berkut police by the Maidan opposition, Western leaders, and the media in Ukraine and the West. The far-right commander of the same special Maidan company, whose snipers shot at the police from the Music Conservatory building and then at both the police and the protesters from Hotel Ukraina, called from the Maidan stage on the evening of February 21, 2014, to reject a signed agreement, which was mediated by foreign ministers of France, Germany, and Poland and a representative of the Russian president. A video of his speech shows that he issued a public ultimatum for President Yanukovych to resign at 10:00am the next day, justified it by blaming Yanukovych and his forces for the massacre, stated that his Maidan company was responsible for the turning point of Euromaidan, and threatened an armed assault if Yanukovych would not resign (Yakshho, 2014). The commander of the Maidan Self-Defense said that this ultimatum was a decision by "institutional bodies of the Maidan" and that it was adopted by a military council set up by the Maidan Self-Defense and the Right Sector on February 21, 2014 (Kalnysh, 2015).

The Maidan massacre undermined the legitimacy of Yanukovych as president of Ukraine and the legitimacy of the incumbent government, police, and security forces and their monopoly on the use of force. The massacre prompted a part of the Party of Regions deputies to leave their faction and support the Maidan opposition and the parliament vote on February 20 to withdraw government forces from downtown Kyiv and subsequent votes to dismiss then President Yanukovych and his government, even though this was unconstitutional.

3.3 Testimonies by Witnesses, Wounded Protesters, and Self-Admitted Maidan Snipers

The videos of snipers in the Maidan-controlled buildings shooting the police and protesters are generally consistent with testimonies in the media and social media about such snipers by over 300 witnesses, including over 100 video testimonies in Video B.

Two leaders of the far-right Svoboda party stated in their separate interviews that a Western government representative told them and other Maidan leaders a few weeks before the massacre that Western governments would turn on the Yanukovych government after casualties among protesters would reach 100 (Braty, 2017, 94). Such specific conditionality created rational incentives to “sacrifice” 100 protesters and attributed their killing to the government forces. The protesters killed were called Heavenly Hundred immediately after the massacre. Protesters and people who were not even on the Maidan and died from illnesses or other causes were included to bring the number of victims to 100.

Moreover, 14 self-admitted members of Maidan sniper groups testified that the massacre of the police or protesters was perpetrated by the Maidan snipers. They include testimonies by seven self-admitted Georgian members of Maidan sniper groups for the Maidan massacre trial and investigation, and their interviews in American, Italian, and Israeli TV documentaries and Macedonian and Russian media. These Georgians stated that they, along with others from Georgia, the Baltic States, and Ukraine, were members of the Maidan sniper groups. They testified that specific Maidan leaders, in particular, from the Fatherland Party and the Maidan Self-Defense, and former Georgian government leaders and commanders gave them orders and firearms to massacre both protesters and the police to stop a peace deal agreed upon by Yanukovych and the Maidan leaders. They said that they then saw on February 20, 2024, Maidan snipers from Georgia, the Baltic States, and the far-right Sector-linked Ukrainian group shooting from the Music Conservatory and Hotel Ukraina. One of them stated in a US documentary that he shot protesters from Hotel Ukraina (The hidden, 2016a, 2016n; Anna, 2018; MichaelRCaputo, 2023; Ukrainski, 2019).

Various self-styled "fact-checking" websites, the Prosecutor General Office of Ukraine, Maidan victim lawyers, and with some exceptions, the Ukrainian media claimed that these Georgians were fake or actors. They did not produce any evidence in support of such claims, apart from the absence of Ukrainian border-crossing records by these Georgians during the Maidan, or certain inconsistencies, such as a spelling error in a document. Most of these Georgians provided their names, passport numbers, Ukrainian border stamps, copies of their plane tickets to Ukraine, their photos in Ukraine or the Georgian military, and other specific evidence in support of their testimonies. They said that they had entered Ukraine before the massacre with forged passports using false names and without border control (Katchanovski, 2023a, 2023b). The head of the Georgian Legion admitted that the Georgian, with a spelling error in his Ministry of Defense, served as an adviser in this ministry (Myth, 2018).

The Maidan massacre trial in November 2021 admitted and showed evidence of a testimony of one of these Georgians who confessed to being a member of a group of Maidan snipers (Zasidannia, 2021). Ukrainian border guards confirmed his identity and crossed the border into Ukraine and back shortly before the start of Euromaidan. This disproves claims by the prosecution, Maidan lawyers, BBC Monitoring, and German TV fact-checking that he was fake and never in Ukraine. He and two other Georgians testified before the Russian invasion of Ukraine at the Prosecutor General Office of Belarus upon the request of the Prosecutor General Office of Ukraine following the appeal of Berkut lawyers in the case of the killings and wounding of the police during the Maidan massacre. Three self-admitted Georgian snipers also gave written depositions to Berkut lawyers for the Maidan massacre trial, two provided notarized letters to Ukrainian courts, and offered to testify via a video link. The Armenian, Belarusian, and Ukrainian authorities confirmed the identities of four of these Georgians for trial and investigation in Ukraine (Katchanovski, 2024).

One of these Georgians was filmed on May 2, 2014, during the Odesa massacre in the Trade Union building, along with far-right-led pro-Maidan activists (Anna, 2018). The ex-commander of the special armed Maidan Self-Defense Company, who was named along with his father as snipers by these Georgian ex-military, and two members of his company admitted in Ukrainian media interviews, and one in a BBC interview that they shot the police from the Music Conservatory and the Maidan barricades on the morning of February 20.

Another Georgian confessed in a protocol of his interrogation by some of the Right Sector leaders that he was hired and deployed in an abandoned building near Maidan to shoot during the massacre. He was captured after the massacre, interrogated by the Right Sector, and released by one of the Maidan leaders (Zavorotnyi, 2016). This is consistent with testimonies by several Maidan activists that some snipers were captured during and immediately after the massacre, particularly in Hotel Ukraina, but then released by Maidan leaders (See Video B).

There are a few hundred testimonies by witnesses, primarily Maidan protesters, in the media, social media, and the Maidan massacre trial and investigation concerning snipers in Maidan-controlled buildings and areas during the Maidan massacre. The majority of testimonies are by direct eyewitnesses. They testified that Maidan leaders knew in advance about the massacre that snipers were located in the Music Conservatory, Hotel Ukraina, and at least 18 other buildings in the Maidan-controlled areas and that they shot protesters and police from there. Several Maidan protesters testified that some of the snipers were captured by Maidan protesters, but then released by Maidan leaders (Video B).

Video B contains the testimonies of over 100 witnesses concerning Maidan snipers. At least 12 Maidan politicians and activists publicly testified that they witnessed the involvement of specific top Maidan leaders from oligarchic parties and far-right organizations in the massacre, such as their advance knowledge of the massacre, deployment of snipers, and evacuation of snipers who were captured by Maidan protesters. They include members of the Maidan and Right Sector leadership, Maidan Self-Defense and Right Sector activists, and many Maidan protesters and Ukrainian and foreign journalists.

For example, David Zhvania, who headed a parliamentary committee at the time of the massacre and was a member of the Maidan leadership, stated that the Maidan leaders, whom he names in his video, "arranged" the Maidan massacre that they wanted to seize power in Ukraine. He said that the Maidan opposition leaders knew in advance about the Maidan massacre and called their members of the parliament before the massacre not to go to the Maidan so that they won't be killed (Video B, 01:07).

Nadia Savchenko, a member of the parliament from one of the Maidan parties, stated that she witnessed in the morning of February 20th an arrival of a group of Maidan protesters armed with hunting rifles near the Maidan stage and that they became members of the Ukrainian parliament after the Maidan. She also said that she witnessed as one of the Maidan leaders brought the snipers to Hotel Ukraina and that she saw gunshots from Hotel Ukraina. A right-sector sponsor and a leader during the Maidan massacre stated that he and other right-sector activists found and photographed three positions of "snipers" found that they were released by Maidan leaders. He said that these positions of the snipers were located in a building in the rear of the Music Conservatory, in an abandoned building between the Dnipro Hotel and Ukrkoopspilka buildings, and on the roof of the Ukrainian House (Video B, 11:04, 48:09).

Many Maidan protesters, medics, and journalists who were filmed in the massacre areas during this mass killing also testified about witnessing snipers in Hotel Ukraina and other Maidan-controlled buildings and areas. For example, a wounded protester stated that he and other protesters in his group did not expect that they would be shot back. He said that he saw flashes in a hotel window on the fourth floor when he fell on the ground and pointed towards a Hotel Ukraina room there. Another wounded protester said that when he was wounded, he heard a gunshot behind, and that shots came not from the front but from the back. A different Maidan protester testified that he and other protesters came under fire from Hotel Ukraina when they were evacuating the wounded protesters. He showed that the snipers shot at them from the top-left part of the hotel. Another Maidan protester showed the locations of sharpshooters in the Bank Arkada, Hotel Ukraina, and Muzeinyi Lane buildings. Another protester showed that a sniper in Hotel Ukraina shot at his group of protesters and stated that there was also a gunfire from Zhovtnevyi Palace. A Maidan medic stated that "snipers" on the roof of Hotel Ukraina shot at the protesters in front of Zhovtnevyi Palace (See Video A and B).

A Maidan protester stated that he, along with other protesters, captured five snipers in room 211 on the second floor of Hotel Ukraina. He says that they were paid money, ordered to kill protesters, and shot from that room. He tells in the video that these snipers surrendered and laid their weapons when his group of Maidan protesters came and that they were transferred to a Maidan leader, but since then, the Maidan leaders have refused to disclose any information about them. A Maidan protester and Afghanistan war veteran said that one sniper was captured in Hotel Ukraina, but another continued to shoot afterward. He also said that another sniper was captured in the Zhovtnevyi Palace, along with his rifle and ammunition (Video B).

A Maidan Self-Defense Commander stated that 15 “snipers” were captured on the roofs of buildings by the Maidan Self-Defense and other protesters during the entire Maidan. He said that he helped to carry one of the captured snipers to the Trade Union building for medical help. He stated that he, along with other protesters, tried to block a bus with the remaining snipers, who were evacuated along with internal troop members captured by Maidan leaders. The former district leader of the Right Sector in Kyiv suggested that the leadership of this far-right organization and one of its paramilitary units helped to remove snipers along with captured internal troop members from the Maidan in a bus. Their testimonies were corroborated by videos that showed such events (See Video B, 1:00:27 and Video A, 01:22:38).

The commanders and snipers of the Alfa SBU and the Omega Internal Troops units of snipers confirmed that they were ordered to locate snipers who shot the police and protesters and that they were deployed to their positions in the government quarter near the Maidan after the massacre was long underway. They also stated that the snipers, who shot the police and the protesters and also shot at them were located in Hotel Ukraina, the Music Conservatory, and Zhovtnevyi Palace, and other Maidan-controlled buildings and areas (See Video B).

In contrast, there were no such testimonies by the Berkut policemen, ex-police, and SBU commanders, and ex-Yanukovych government officials admitting their own involvement or other government and government sources involved in the massacre of the protesters, witnessing such involvement, or getting such specific information from others. This includes both those charged with the massacre in Ukraine or in absentia and those who were not charged and continued to serve under the new Maidan government. Berkut policemen, Omega servicemen, and Kyiv SBU head, who were arrested and charged with the massacre, denied that they had massacred the Maidan protesters.

The absolute majority of the testimonies of wounded Maidan protesters about being shot by the Berkut police or snipers in government-controlled buildings or snipers in these buildings are not corroborated by videos, forensic medical examinations, or other evidence.

In a small minority of the remaining cases, such evidence is either absent or contradictory.

In a leaked intercepted telephone call with the EU foreign affairs head, the Estonian Minister of Foreign Affairs referred to one of the Maidan doctors, in particular Olha Bohomolets, pointing to the similarity of the wounds among the protesters and police, which served as an indication that the massacre was organized by some elements of the Maidan opposition (Video B).

Several dozens of journalists from more than dozen countries reported in the media or the social media about witnessing snipers in Hotel Ukraina and other Maidan-controlled buildings and areas, including shooting of Maidan protesters by these snipers, cited eyewitnesses among Maidan protesters about such snipers, or based their reports on such testimonies. For example, journalists from such major Western and Ukrainian media as ABC, CNN, New York Times, BBC, Guardian, ARD, Bild, Spiegel, La7, TT News Agency, TVP, 1 + 1, 5 Kanal, ICTV, Novyi Kanal, and Kyiv Post reported about witnessing snipers in Hotel Ukraina, cited Maidan protesters about snipers there, or based their reports on such testimonies. Journalists from ITV, TVP, Spiegel, 1 + 1, ICTV, and other Western and Ukrainian media similarly reported witnessing themselves or cited Maidan protesters about witnessing snipers in other Maidan-controlled buildings and areas, such as the Bank Arkada, Zhovtnevyi Palace, the Main Post Office, and Muzeinyi Lane and Horodetsky Street buildings (See, for example, ARD, 2014; Chivers, 2014; Traynor & Salem, 2014; Video A, B, C, F). With just some exceptions, these reports presented these snipers in the Maidan-controlled buildings or areas as Ukrainian government snipers or implied that they were the government snipers. But soon after the massacre, with some partial exceptions, these and other major media outlets referred to snipers in these Maidan-controlled locations as “a conspiracy theory,” denied their existence, or omitted this and other evidence of such snipers.

At least 51 out of 72 wounded Maidan protesters, with whose shooting on February 20 Berkut policemen are charged and whose testimonies were revealed, testified at the trial that they had been shot by snipers from Maidan-controlled buildings or areas, had themselves witnessed snipers there, or had been told by other Maidan protesters about such snipers. 31 of these wounded protesters testified at the trial and/or the investigation that they had been shot from Hotel Ukraina, the Bank Arkada, and Zhovtnevyi Palace; the buildings on Muzeinyi Lane and Horodetskyi Street; or other Maidan-controlled buildings or areas. At least 33 wounded protesters testified that they had either witnessed snipers there and/or were told about snipers in these Maidan-controlled locations, mostly in Hotel Ukraina, by other protesters (Video D).

The absolute majority of the wounded protesters stated at the trial and investigation that they were shot from Hotel Ukraina or witnessed snipers there. Other protesters testified at the trial that the snipers in Hotel Ukraina who massacred the protesters were Maidan snipers. One protester, who was filmed by BBC running for cover along with other protesters and the BBC journalists after they saw a sniper from the hotel shooting at them, revealed that he was told then by other protesters that this was "our sniper." He saw that after this shooting a sniper on another floor of Hotel Ukraina made visual signs to protesters not to reveal the snipers in the hotel. The GPU investigation revealed that one of far-right Svoboda leaders lived in that hotel room at the time of the massacre. Another protester testified that other protesters during the massacre told him about snipers in Hotel Ukraina and were wondering why "our own were shooting our own." (See Video E). He was featured in the "Winter on Fire" documentary, but this revelation was not shown in that Oscar-nominated documentary.

A female Maidan medic, who was reported in the numerous Western media as wounded on the Maidan, testified at the trial not as a wounded but as a witness. She admitted in an interview with a Ukrainian journalist that she had not been wounded. This journalist reported that the wounding of this Maidan medic had been staged by the Maidan Self-Defense leadership and that surgery she had undergone shortly before the massacre was misrepresented as fresh wounds (*tk.media* 2020).

Another protester testified that he saw a sniper shooting from the Main Post Office roof and killing a person matching the description of Viktor Smolensky, who was shot next to this female medic. This building was then the headquarters of the Right Sector (Video E).

The testimonies by the absolute majority of wounded protesters generally agree with the videos of snipers in these buildings, and the findings of forensic medical examinations that protesters were shot from steep directions from the sides or the back. They are also consistent with several hundred witness testimonies in social media about such snipers. A video compilation of over 80 such witness testimonies was shown at the trial (Katchanovski, 2019; Zasidannia, 2021).

These testimonies concerning snipers in Maidan-controlled locations are consistent with the testimony of several dozen prosecution witnesses and relatives of those killed. These witnesses for the prosecution were supposed to provide supporting testimony for the prosecution, but they testified instead to the existence of snipers in the Maidan-controlled buildings and areas massacring protesters and the police (Video E).

The commanders of Alfa, Omega, and UDO sniper units testified that government snipers were deployed only after the massacre was underway and that they had orders to locate the snipers who were shooting at the police and protesters. They too confirmed that snipers were located in the Maidan-controlled buildings and that those snipers shot not only at the protesters but also at the police and snipers from their units (Video E). Dozens of defense witnesses also testified about Maidan snipers or snipers in the Maidan-controlled buildings and areas, in particular, shooting the police and the protesters.

By contrast, the Berkut policemen and two Omega servicemen, who were arrested and charged with the massacre, denied that they had shot at the protesters. The absolute majority of testimonies of wounded Maidan protesters about being shot by the Berkut on the ground, or by snipers in government-controlled buildings are not corroborated by videos, forensic medical examinations, or other evidence. In the remaining cases, the evidence of their involvement is either absent or contradictory.

Nor did the government investigations and subsequent trials reveal any evidence of an order to shoot at the Maidan protesters by then President Yanukovych, or the commanders of Internal Affairs troops, police, or the Ukrainian Security Forces. The same concerns “titushki” hired by the Yanukovych government or any “third force.” The Prosecutor General of Ukraine and the head of its department in charge of the Maidan massacre investigation stated that they did not have evidence about involvement of the Russian government and Russian snipers in the Maidan massacre (112 Ukraina, 2015).

3.4 Forensic Examinations

The findings of forensic medical examinations done by government experts for the prosecution were first made public during the Maidan massacre trial and revealed that the absolute majority of protesters were shot from the side or back and from top to bottom. Most videos and photos, however, show that the absolute majority of those killed and wounded had the Berkut police in front of them and at ground level, whereas that the Maidan-controlled buildings were generally behind them and on the left and right side.

Forensic medical examinations indicate that 40 out of the 48 protesters killed were shot from a high angle. At least 36 of them were killed at a time when the Berkut policemen were filmed on the ground. Just one protester was killed from a bullet that entered and exited his body horizontally, but he was shot from the side. Of 7 protesters killed who had no forensic information about their wounds, four were shot by hunting pellets before the Berkut appeared on the Maidan. 48 out of 51 wounded protesters had steep entry wounds, consistent with the theory that they were shot by snipers in Maidan-controlled buildings, or on the roofs of these buildings.

The forensic ballistic examinations presented at the trial found that 19 protesters were killed on February 20 by bullets which match the calibers not only of AKM Kalashnikov assault rifles, but also of hunting versions of Kalashnikovs, and other weapons. They found that Ivan Bliok was killed from a hunting version of Kalashnikov machine gun. Videos showed protesters with hunting firearms in Hotel Ukraina during the massacre. Four protesters were killed by pellets that are used in hunting; two were killed by expanding hunting bullets whose calibers differed from those used by Berkut (Zasidannia, 2016a, 2016b).

A forensic ballistic examination conducted by government with the use of an automatic computer-based IBIS-TAIS system, found that the bullets extracted from killed protesters, trees, and Hotel Ukraina rooms did not match police database for Kalashnikov assault rifles of members of either the e Kyiv Berkut regiment, or the special Berkut unit deployed (Zasidannia, 2016c).

Instead, government ballistic experts found that six Maidan protesters had been killed and at least ten wounded from the Hotel Ukraina and other Maidan-controlled buildings or areas. The prosecution did not use forensic ballistic experts to determine trajectories of bullets and locations of shooters of the absolute majority of the Maidan protesters. The investigation also determined based on their testimonies, investigative experiments, and forensic examinations that most of the 172 protesters were wounded from sectors where no Berkut police were located, and did not charge anyone with these shooting (GPU, 2016; Katchanovski, 2024). This evidence confirming that the protesters were wounded by snipers in the Maidan-controlled areas was not made public.

The bullet holes identified in the government's forensic reports showed that the Berkut police generally shot above protesters at the second floor and above floors of Hotel Ukraina, and into electric poles, and trees. Forensic examinations by government investigators did not report a single bullet hole in the hotel's ground floor, which is located at the height of the protesters.

3.5 Cover-Up, Stonewalling, and Evidence Tampering

It is striking that, more than 11 years after one of the best documented cases of the mass murder in history, there is not a single person imprisoned for the Maidan massacre of the protesters and the police. The prosecution did not charge anyone for wounding of more than half of 172 wounded protesters on February 20, after the investigation determined that they had not been shot from Berkut positions but from elsewhere, i.e., from Maidan-controlled areas. Similarly, nobody was charged with killing of a Georgian Maidan activist from the party of the former Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili. Circumstances of his death were not revealed. His body was reportedly found in the Maidan-controlled area shortly after the massacre.

A likely reason for this is that the Prosecutor General's Office has been headed by either politicians from the Svoboda and Peoples Front parties, or close allies of presidents Poroshenko and Zelensky. The fact that leading members of Svoboda and Peoples Front parties were selected to head the Prosecutor General Office, even though these parties were accused by other Maidan activists and self-admitted Georgian members of the Maidan sniper groups of having been directly involved in the massacre suggests a cover-up and stonewalling. Maidan victims lawyers, who were themselves Maidan activists, supported the government investigation and the prosecution after initial criticism.

One Ukrainian journalist who headed the civic council of the Prosecutor General Office of Ukraine after the Maidan stated that the heads of the GPU investigation of the Maidan massacre had been selected by one of the Maidan leaders (Naspravdi.Today, 2020). Self-admitted Georgian snipers, as well as members of the Yanukovych government alleged that this member of the Maidan leadership was one of the organizers of the Maidan massacre. He was filmed by a Ukrainian TV evacuating a Maidan protester with a rifle and a scope on February 18, when mass shooting of the police and the protesters started. The person who helped him became an aide to the Minister of Internal Affairs very soon after the "Euromaidan." (Zubritsky, 2015).

Similarly, the main pro-Maidan parties blocked the creation of a parliamentary commission concerning Maidan massacre during Petro Poroshenko's presidency (112 Ukraina, 2017). An amnesty law adopted by the Ukrainian parliament on February 21, 2014, granted blanket immunity from prosecution for Maidan participants for a variety of serious crimes, including murder, terrorism, and seizure of power. The law also prohibited the investigation of any Maidan participant for such crimes and specified that any evidence that had already been collected had to be destroyed.

The release from a prison to house arrest and escape from Ukraine of the Berkut company commander charged with the massacre is consistent with the cover-up theory. A Ukrainian journalist who headed in 2014 the Civic Council of the GPU, stated that the Minister of Internal Affairs of Ukraine was involved in transferring this Berkut special company commander from Ukraine to Russia (Vilna, 2020). By order of President Zelensky, all five Berkut policemen, who were tried for the Maidan massacre, were released in exchange for Donbas separatists within months of the expected verdict in 2019. This decision stopped the Maidan massacre trial, which resumed only after two of these Berkut members returned voluntarily from separatist-controlled Donbas in order to prove their innocence.

The GPU investigators simply denied apriori that there were any snipers in Maidan-controlled buildings and did not investigate them. Likewise, public statements by eight different Maidan politicians and activists and several self-admitted Georgian snipers about the involvement of Maidan snipers and Maidan leaders in the massacre were never investigated. Statements by two Svoboda members that a Western government representative had told them before the massacre that the

Western governments would turn on Yanukovych if casualties among the protesters reached 100 were also not investigated, although the victims were quickly dubbed the "Heavenly hundred."

The GPU initially stated, in March 2014, that it had identified the snipers, their locations, and even seized their weapons (Glavred, 2014). In April 2014, the GPU issued a statement saying that the protesters had been shot with a Simonov "sniper rifle" from Hotel Ukraina (UNIAN, 2014).[1] Very soon afterward, however, the heads of the Prosecutor General Office, the Security Service of Ukraine, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs all reversed their finding about Hotel Ukraina, and instead insisted that a special Berkut unit had massacred the Maidan protesters.

An International Advisory Panel of the Council of Europe reported in 2015 that, contrary to public statements, the official investigation in Ukraine had evidence of the killing of at least three Maidan protesters from Hotel Ukraina or the Music Conservatory, and that at least 10 other protesters had been killed by snipers from nearby rooftops. The report also asserted that the investigation was being stalled, in particular, by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the GPU (Council of Europe, 2015). The Prosecutor General Office reversed without any explanations their own previous investigation findings that at least three protesters were killed from Hotel Ukraina and 10 others were also killed from significant heights and charged the Berkut policemen with killings of all these protesters, The GPU did not initially charge the Berkut police company members with killings of 10 of the protesters.

Its investigation also failed to conduct a ballistic determination of the bullet trajectories by forensic ballistic experts, even after the Maidan massacre trial judge ordered such examinations, specifically to determine if these trajectories were from the Maidan-controlled buildings. A Berkut lawyer stated that these trial-ordered investigative experiments ceased after government forensic experts determined that the first few Maidan protesters were shot from the Maidan-controlled Hotel Ukraina and Music Conservatory (Zasidannia, 2022a).

Many unexplained reversals of testimonies by wounded protesters at the trial, compared to their statements during the investigation, also suggest either a cover-up or evidence tampering. The same concerns the unexplained reversal of the forensic examinations of bullets just a few weeks before the prosecution submitted its the case to court and then again in 2019. These new findings that bullets fired from Berkut Kalashnikovs had killed the protesters, reversed, without explanation, the findings of nearly 40 previous forensic ballistic examinations, including those conducted by the same experts using the same methods and conducted by the automatic computer-based IBIS-TAIS system.

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[1] The Simonov rifle is not a sniper rifle but a semi-automatic carbine of the same caliber bullets as the AKM; the Simonov was generally removed from military and police service in Ukraine and was available as a hunting rifle.

The Maidan massacre trial also revealed examples of evidence tampering. Bullets, allegedly of those killed and wounded protesters, appeared without any chain of custody documentation or disappeared, changed size, shape and packaging. For example, the Maxym Shymko autopsy report listed three gray and one yellow bullet fragment, but in the forensic ballistic examinations, a new yellow bullet piece of much larger size replaced one of gray pieces. This new bullet piece was then matched to a Berkut Kalashnikov, reversing multiple previous forensic examinations, without any explanation. This newfound bullet was the only piece of evidence linking a Berkut policeman, who was exchanged to Donbas separatists and has been tried in absentia, to the shootings (Zasidannia, 2022b). The forensic medical examination, meanwhile, showed that the protester involved had been shot from a steep angle.

A lengthy video by German state television (ARD), was introduced at the trial by the Maidan victims' lawyers, but it had no soundtrack during the most important part of the massacre (see TyzhdenUA, 2017). A Ukrainian journalist, writing on social media, said that he had filmed this video for ARD, and that the video shown at the trial had been cut. The video content and his statements both indicate that the video was filmed from the same Hotel Ukraina room rented by German television channel ZDF, and in which snipers from the far-right-linked Maidan company were filmed shooting at the Maidan protesters. Since this video simultaneously captured the killing and wounding of the protesters and the position of the Berkut police, had the missing audio of the gunshots been available, it could have demonstrated that the specific times of the shooting of specific protesters coincided with loud sound of gunshots from this Maidan-controlled hotel and not with more distant sound of Berkut gunshots from their barricade.

In addition, key pieces of evidence of the massacre on February 20, 2014 have simply disappeared while they were under the Maidan opposition or Maidan government control or in the possession of the GPU. This includes almost all shields and helmets of killed and wounded protesters (bullet holes in them could have helped to identify the locations of shooters), several bullets extracted from the bodies of protesters and police, and bullets from the trees, soil, and flower box at the Maidan buildings that have disappeared. Some trees with bullets and/or bullet holes in the area were cut down, including at the request of the prosecution. Many online streams and web camera recordings of the Maidan from the early morning of February 20 also disappeared immediately after the massacre, along with security camera recordings from Hotel Ukraina, the Bank Arkada, and other Maidan-controlled buildings.

The evidence of sniper positions, as reported by the head of the Maidan Self-Defense Andrii Parubii, found in Hotel Ukraina are also missing, as are the Kalashnikov bullet boxes, shown by Svoboda activists to Guardian journalists during their investigation of Hotel Ukraina (Traynor & Salem, 2014). The first Prosecutor General of Ukraine appointed by President Zelensky, Ruslan Ryaboshapka, admitted that the investigation of the Maidan massacre and other Maidan crimes had been sabotaged, and that a significant part of the evidence had disappeared during prior investigations (*24* kanal, 2020).

Investigations of the massacres of the police and the protesters were separated even though they happened on the same days and in the same places. There were no forensic examinations or comparisons of bullets extracted from bodies of the police and the protesters in spite of various evidence that they were shot by same groups of snipers. Nobody is convicted or arrested for killing and wounding the police despite confessions in the media and social media by several snipers and forensic ballistic examinations confirming them.

The Maidan massacre memorial proposed by the Government would completely change the landscape and the street. The site of the massacre is to become a park with a new Maidan massacre museum. The construction of this memorial will erase any remaining evidence and make it physically impossible to conduct any more on-site investigative experiments to determine bullet trajectories. Arkhitekturnyi (ND).

The government investigation, the Maidan massacre trial, the Yanukovych state treason trial, and the media did not reveal any evidence of an order to massacre the Maidan protesters by then President Yanukovych and his Internal Affairs, police, and SBU heads and commanders. The same concerns “titushki” hired by the Yanukovych government or any “third force.” A former adviser to the Prosecutor General of Ukraine after Maidan stated that he saw in the Maidan investigative case no real evidence of the Yanukovych involvement in the massacre of the protesters. He said that the government-provided bodyguards testified for the investigation that they were with Yanukovych in his car motorcade during the massacre and that he was "not understanding this whole situation at all." (Video B, 58:23).

3.6 The Maidan Massacre Trial Verdict

The nearly 1,000,000 word Maidan massacre trial verdict in Ukraine confirms that many Maidan activists were killed and wounded and BBC and ARD TV journalists were shot at not by Berkut or other law enforcement but by snipers in the Hotel Ukraina and other Maidan-controlled locations (See Katchanovski, 2025b; Vyrok, 2023; Maidan, 2023). It also confirms that this hotel was "activists-controlled" and that there was a far-right-linked special armed Maidan company in this hotel and the Music Conservatory. The verdict states there were no Russian snipers involved in the massacre and that there were no massacre orders by the Yanukovych government. The trial verdict stated that Maidan then was not a peaceful protest but "a rebellion" which involved the massacre of the Berkut and other police members (See Katchanovski, 2024, 2025b).

The verdict stated that "based, even only on the testimony of the victims themselves, there was enough data to make a categorical conclusion that on the morning of February 20, 2014, persons with weapons, from which the shots were fired, were in the premises of Hotel Ukraina." The trial decision specified that 9 Maidan protesters were killed and 23 wounded by "unknown persons," who were not "law enforcement officers" or that there is lack of evidence of the involvement of the Berkut police, whose 5 members were charged for their massacre, in their killing or wounding (See Maidan, 2023).

The trial decision explicitly stated that at least 6 specific protesters were killed, and many others wounded from the side of the Hotel Ukraina, the Music Conservatory, and from other Maidan-controlled locations and that this was "the territory that was not controlled by law enforcement agencies at that time." This means that they were shot by the Maidan snipers shooting from these Maidan-controlled buildings since there were no evidence whatsoever that any snipers were located in between these buildings and the protesters, who were shot. And the verdict specified that Russian agents "did not have any participation" in the Maidan massacre. The judges and the jury explicitly stated in the trial verdict that during the massacre of the protesters the building of Hotel Ukraina was "controlled by the activists," that these Maidan activists in the hotel were armed with hunting rifles and a Kalashnikov-like assault rifle, and that the Maidan activists shot from the hotel in targeted shooting, in particular, at the BBC TV crew, and that at least 3 Maidan activists were deliberately killed from Hotel Ukraina (See Katchanovski, 2025b; Maidan, 2023; Vyrok, 2023).

The verdict confirms that a former member of the Ukrainian parliament and far-right activist was filmed by a French TV in Hotel Ukraina as he "provides passage for activists" who are holding firearms that look like "a Kalashnikov assault rifle and a hunting rifle."

The verdict stated that a BBC video "captures the shelling from the side of the Ukraina Hotel building of the camera crew of BBC journalists (a single shot is heard)… and in the premises of the Ukraina Hotel, an activist is recorded with an apparent 'pistol-type firearm.'" The decision by the judges and the jury evaluated this BBC video "as documented data from the activist-controlled building of the Ukraina Hotel in Kyiv about the targeted use by the activists of objects that, by their external features, are clearly similar to firearms, weapons of the type of hunting weapons." (Vyrok, 2023; Maidan, 2023).

The verdict stated that a gunshot from this hotel hit a tree behind a group of Maidan activists and that two of them were killed and one wounded from Hotel Ukraina. An edited video of their massacre and luring by two Maidan activists to the site where they would be massacred was presented by major TV networks in the Western countries and Ukraine as their massacre by the government snipers or the Berkut police.

The verdict also stated that the victim, "who was also in the mentioned group of activists" "was wounded in the back from the hotel," as he testified himself, and that another victim from the same group was fatally wounded "from the upper floors of the 'Ukraine' hotel." It specified that "within the scope of this court proceeding, data on the involvement of law enforcement officers in such an injury to the victim, and even more so the accused, have not been established" and that "the gunshot wound was inflicted on PERSON_1852 [Volodymyr Zherebnyi] from the direction of the 'Ukraine' hotel, that is, from the territory that was not controlled by law enforcement agencies at that time." It stated that "this shot was aimed at a crowd of people." The verdict also said "fatal gunshot wounds to the body (chest and abdomen) were received by PERSON_1770 [Roman Ushnevych] from the side of the hotel 'INFORMATION_

161'[Ukraina] and the area in front of it, which were not under the control of law enforcement agencies, and hence the involvement of the accused and RSP [Berkut company] fighters in them, and as a result, the victim's death, is excluded." (See Maidan, 2023; Vyrok, 2023).

The verdict also confirmed that the Maidan massacre on February 20 started from the killing of three and wounding of 39 Berkut and Internal troops officers, who were not armed. The judges and the jury noted that the presence of the armed Maidan activists and the killings of the police represented evidence of the armed rebellion.

The verdict specified that there is evidence of killing of at least three other Maidan activists from the Maidan-controlled locations, while the involvement of Berkut and other law enforcement is excluded or has not been proven. It cited evidence of killing of one activist from the Music Conservatory, which was the headquarters of the far-right Right Sector-linked Maidan group of snipers, who included Svoboda activists. The trial decision confirmed that the Music Conservatory was then occupied by Maidan "activists" led by the far-right commander of this group who became the member of the Ukrainian parliament after the Maidan.

The verdict also stated that two rooms in Hotel Ukraina were shot at from "the territory controlled by 'Maidan,'" specifically, the Conservatory and the neighboring Main Post Office. But it omitted that these rooms were occupied by German ARD TV journalists and that the Main Post Office was then the headquarters of the Right Sector (See (Katchanovski, 2025b; Maidan, 2023; Vyrok, 2023; Video F).

The trial decision also specified evidence that Ihor Kostenko was killed not by Berkut or other law enforcement but from a Maidan-controlled location. It notes that he "a few seconds before his fatal wound, together with other bystanders, watched the windows of Hotel Ukraina.., and this attention, united by joint observation of the source of possible danger, did not stop on the part of all observers even after the injury of PERSON_1708, when he was already lying on the asphalt." (See Katchanovski, 2025b; Maidan, 2023; Vyrok, 2023).

The verdict confirmed that the first three activists were shot by buckshot used in hunting before the Berkut company, whose 5 members were falsely charged with their killings, was even deployed there. It explicitly states that at least one of these activists was shot from the Maidan-controlled area by one of the Maidan shooters from a hunting rifle.

The trial verdict also confirmed that there is no evidence of an order by Yanukovych or his government to massacre the Maidan protesters. This is crucial official acknowledgment since Yanukovych and his government were overthrown based on false blame for ordering the massacre. In addition to acquitting two Berkut policemen for killing and wounding the Maidan activists, it states that all 5 accused Berkut members were baselessly blamed for killing 13 and wounding 29 Maidan protesters. This is another evidence of trumped up and politically motivated charges.

The decision to convict in absentia three Berkut officers, who were exchanged by Zelensky to Donbas separatists in 2019, was political. The Ukrainian courts lack independence, especially in high-profile and highly politicized cases, and often issue their decisions in such cases on directives from the presidential administration. Impartiality was especially difficult for the three Berkut policemen, who were convicted in absentia for the Maidan massacre, because they were in Russian-annexed Donbas during the Russia-Ukraine war.

The verdict decision that these 3 Berkut officers were responsible for murder of 31 Maidan protesters out of 48 and attempted murder of 44 out of 80 protesters with whose killing and wounding the Berkut members are charged was based on a single fabricated forensic examination. As noted, this forensic examination of bullets 5 years after the massacre reversed results of some 40 previous forensic bullets examinations, including a computer-based examination which showed that bullets of Berkut Kalashnikovs did not match bullets from bodies of killed Maidan protesters. The verdict dismissed a single bullet match of the convicted Berkut to the killed protester in this forensic examination because it was based on a bullet piece that appeared without any trace in place of another bullet piece in a sign of evidence tampering. But it nevertheless based its decision to convict Berkut on such forensic examination.

These 3 Berkut policemen were convicted in absentia not only based on this single fabricated forensic examination but also based on collective responsibility for murder of 31 and attempted murder of 44 protesters. On the same basis and contrary to all other evidence, a Berkut commander is also convicted of manslaughter of 4 first protesters and wounding 8 others for giving a supposed order to fire indiscriminately during the evacuation of Internal Troops by the Berkut company and its subsequent retreat after one Berkut was killed and another wounded. The decision attributed killing and wounding of most of these protesters, even in cases without any allegedly matching bullets, to Berkut or unidentified police members simply because these protesters were killed in the group in about the same time and place. This was done even though the trial verdict admitted that protesters in the same groups were killed and wounded at about the same time and place not by law enforcement but by “unknown persons,” who were located in Hotel Ukraina and other Maidan-controlled buildings and areas.

This forensic bullet examination also contradicts synchronized videos showing that Berkut members were not shooting at specific times when almost all Maidan activists were killed and on-site investigative experiments by government ballistic experts pointing to bullet trajectories from Maidan-controlled areas. It contradicts results of forensic medical examinations showing wounds directions from top, back, and side, and testimonies of the absolute majority of wounded Maidan protesters and several hundreds of prosecution and defense witnesses and other witnesses concerning snipers in Hotel Ukraina and other Maidan-controlled locations. This demonstrates that the Berkut policemen could not physically shoot these protesters. As noted, these Berkut policemen were filmed not shooting at the specific time and at the specific direction that these protesters were killed. Bullet holes locations and wound directions show that protesters were shot not from the front and ground directions of the Berkut barricade positions in front of them but from steep directions from sides or the back that match Maidan-controlled buildings or buildings in Maidan-controlled areas.

Synchronized videos show that single match in this forensic examination of a bullet from a wounded Maidan activist to a Kalashnikov of a convicted Berkut member is clearly fabricated since this policeman (Abroskin) was filmed not shooting during wounding of this protester (Kolesnikov), who testified himself that he was shot from Hotel Ukraina. A government ballistic expert determined that this protester was shot from the top of this hotel based on bullet holes in chair that this protester was shielding himself from Hotel Ukraina snipers and his steep wound. Synchronized video shows that at the very time of his wounding on bridge, protesters hiding beneath bridge pointed to snipers in Hotel Ukraina shooting protesters on this bridge (See Video H).

The verdict also revealed that the Maidan lawyers did not present the SITU 3D model during the trial after, as it noted, wasting court and jury time by introducing it. This is another confirmation that this model misrepresented wound locations, which match gunshot directions from Maidan-controlled buildings, to fit them to Berkut positions on the ground. This model, which was produced by a New York architecture company on the Maidan lawyers order for the trial for nearly $100,000 dollars, was used instead to propagate disinformation in the New York Times and other Western and Ukrainian media. This model, like Maidan lawyers salaries themselves and even prosecutors visits, was paid for by the Soros foundation in Ukraine.

Since the government investigation admitted that 77 out of 157 wounded Maidan activists were shot not from Berkut-controlled sectors and did not charge anyone with the attempted murder, this also means that they were shot by the Maidan snipers. The verdict along with this Prosecutor General Office investigation findings means the de facto official admissions that at least 10 out of 49 killed and 115 out of 172 wounded Maidan activists were shot on February 20, 2014, not by Berkut or other law enforcement agencies from the government forces-controlled territory but by Maidan snipers from the Maidan-controlled locations. The official admission that the absolute majority of Maidan activists were wounded not by the government forces is another evidence suggesting that at least the absolute majority of the protesters were also killed by Maidan snipers since they were shot at the same time and place. But it is easy to falsely blame the Berkut for their killings because murdered people cannot testify, in contrast to the wounded, the overwhelming majority of whom testified about being shot by snipers in the Maidan-controlled buildings and areas and/or about witnessing snipers there (See Katchanovski, 2024, 2025b). Academic studies, declassified text of the verdict, which was issued by the Khmelnytsky court in March 2025 following a several-year long closed trial, and SBU and Military Prosecutor Office investigations de facto also confirmed, based on such evidence as videos, forensic ballistic and medical examinations, on-site investigative experiments, and witness testimonies, that an elderly female Maidan protester was killed and three others wounded not by the SBU officers but by Maidan activists with far-right involvement from the Maidan-controlled entrance to the SBU building in Khmelnytsky on February 19, 2014 (Katchanovski, 2024; Vyrok, 2025).

The false-flag Maidan massacre led to the overthrow of the Yanukovych government. He and his forces were falsely blamed for the mass killing of the Maidan protesters. He fled Kyiv and then Ukraine because he was falsely blamed for this massacre and because of assassination attempts against him (See Chapter 2). This massacre also triggered subsequent conflicts in Ukraine and between Russia and Ukraine that are examined in the following chapters.

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CHAPTER 4

The Russian Annexation of Crimea

4.1 RUSSIAN, UKRAINIAN, AND WESTERN NARRATIVES OF THE 2014 CRIMEAN CONFLICT

Like in the case of the Russia-Ukraine war, the war in Donbas, Euromaidan, and the Maidan massacre in Ukraine, there are conflicting narratives concerning the conflict in Crimea in 2014. The Western and Ukrainian governments and the media present it as an illegal Russian annexation of the Ukrainian territory by means of the military force. These countries, like the absolute majority of members of the United Nations condemned this annexation as a violation of the international law by Russia. They stated that the Crimean referendum, which backed the annexation, was illegal and conducted under the barrel of the gun, and that its results were falsified and did not represent the public opinion of the Crimea residents.

The Ukrainian government and the media and to a large extent their Western counterparts characterized separatism in Crimea as having a

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This is an updated and expanded version of Katchanovski (2015) chapter, entitled "Crimea: People and Territory before and after Annexation," In *Ukraine and Russia: People, Politics, Propaganda and Perspectives*, Agnieszka Pikulicka-Wilczewska and Richard Sakwa (Eds.), E-International Relations, Bristol, 2015, pp. 80–89, https://www.e-ir.info/2015/03/24/crimea-people-and-territory-before-and-after-annexation/

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I. Katchanovski, *The Russia-Ukraine War and its Origins*, Rethinking Political Violence, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-98724-3_4

minority support. They also often claimed that the Russian annexation of Crimea was result of the Russian imperialism and was planned by the Russian government before the overthrow of the pro-Russian Yanukovych government.

They often used the February 20, 2014, start date of "reunification" of Crimea on a Russian medal as key evidence in support of such claims that the Russian annexation of Crimea was planned before the overthrow of Yanukovych. However, this date is used in Russia and in Crimea to designate the start of the Crimea conflict because the Sevastopol Berkut and the Internal Troops from Crimea were shot at by snipers in Maidan-controlled buildings in Kyiv during the Maidan massacre of the protesters and the police on February 20, 2014, and returning anti-Maidan protesters from Crimea were intercepted and assaulted at a checkpoint of Maidan activists near Korsun during their return to Crimea on the same day. There are videos, photos, and testimonies of the Korsun attack and Ukrainian police admission that two buses were burned there, but no such corroboration of claims that several Crimea residents were killed there.

The English, Ukrainian, and Russian-language Wikipedia generally follow the same narrative and the Western and Ukrainian governments and the mainstream media. But Wikipedia also claims that the Russian annexation of Crimea in spring 2014 was the start of the Russia-Ukraine war (see Annexation, 2025).

In contrast, the Russian government and the media present the conflict in Crimea in spring 2014 as a peaceful and legal "return" or "reunification" of Crimea with Russia with the overwhelming popular support of the Crimean residents as a result of a legal and democratic referendum in this region, which they state was illegally given to Soviet Ukraine by the Soviet Union communist leader in 1954. The Russian government and with few exceptions the Russian media initially denied any Russian military involvement in the conflict in Crimea and claimed that "green men" who seized the Crimean parliament, airports, military bases, the Ukrainian Navy ships, and other key civilian and military infrastructure were local pro-Russian paramilitary units.

There are debates among scholars concerning the conflict in Crimea, in particular the issue of popular support for the secession and the annexation before and during the referendum and the future of Crimea as result of the Russia-Ukraine war. Some, such as (Sasse, 2007) argued before 2014 that the pro-Russian secessionist movement in Crimea failed, that a potential conflict in Crimea was successfully prevented, and that this autonomous region became integrated into the Ukrainian polity. In contrast, other studies showed strong pro-Russian separatist orientations in this region and a possibility of a violent conflict and secession of Crimea (Katchanovski, 2005, 2006, 2010).

4.2 Crimea Before the Secession and the Russian Annexation

Crimea became a major flashpoint of a domestic conflict in Ukraine and an international conflict between Russia and Ukraine with involvement of the West after Euromaidan ended with a violent overthrow of the Viktor Yanukovych government on February 21, 2014 (see Chapters 2 and 3; Katchanovski, 2020, 2023a, 2023b, 2024; Sakwa, 2015). The Crimean Peninsula was historically populated by different people, and it was a place of many wars and conflicts. Its early inhabitants included the Cimmerians, the Scythians, and ancient Greeks, whose colonies were located on the Black Sea. The Goths, the Huns, Kievan Rus, Genoese and Venetian merchants, and the Mongol-led Golden Horde controlled various parts of the Crimean Peninsula over different historical periods in the end of the first millennium and the beginning of the second millennium. The Crimean Khanate emerged from the Golden Horde in the fifteenth century, and it later became a vassal state of the Ottoman Turkey. The Crimean Tatars often raided the Ukrainian, Polish, and Russian territories as a part of military campaigns and to capture large numbers of slaves. As a result of Russian-Turkish wars, Crimea was seized by the Russian Empire in 1783, and a significant part of the Crimean Tatar population resettled or was forced to move to the Ottoman Empire. The Crimean War in 1853–1856 brought a military defeat of Russia from an alliance led by Great Britain, France, and the Ottoman Empire, but the peninsula remained in the Russian Empire (Magocsi, 2014).

During and in the aftermath of World War I, the Bolshevik Revolution, the Civil War, and Ukraine' brief independence from the Russian Empire, control over Crimea was seized by the Ukrainian government, German military, the Russian White Armies, and then by the Bolshevik Red Army in 1920. In 1921, the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was established as a Crimean Tatar autonomy in Soviet Russia and then as part of the Russian republic in the Soviet Union. However, the Soviet policy of Tartarization was ended by Joseph Stalin. The artificial famine of 1932–1933 affected Crimea much less than neighboring agricultural regions in Soviet Ukraine and Kuban in Russia. But mass political terror in the mid-1930s claimed large numbers of Crimea residents arrested and executed or exiled to Gulag. Crimea became a major battlefield and a killing field during World War II and the German occupation in 1941–1944. In 1944, Stalin imposed a collective punishment on the Crimean Tatars, charging the entire ethnic group with collaboration with Nazi Germany. The Soviet government deported all Crimean Tatar population and other smaller ethnic minorities to Central Asia in 1944, and the formal Crimean autonomy was eliminated. A significant proportion of the Crimean Tatars perished during this ethnic cleansing and in its aftermath, primarily as a result of lack of food and medical care. A large number of migrants from Russia and Ukraine were settled in the region. In 1954, Nikita Khrushchev, the new Communist leader of the Soviet Union, transferred Crimea from Russia to the Ukrainian republic (Katchanovski et al., 2013, 115–116; Magocsi, 2014).

Crimea had a history of separatism in Ukraine preceding the conflict in spring 2014. But this region avoided a violent conflict during the break-up of the Soviet Union, in contrast to Transnistria in Moldova, Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, Nagorno Karabakh in Azerbaijan, and Chechnya in Russia. Separatism in Crimea started to manifest itself during the political liberalization of *perestroika* and *glasnost* initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev, a reformist Communist leader of the Soviet Union. In January 1991, 93% of the Crimean voters supported granting their region the status of the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic within the Soviet Union (Sasse, 2007, 138). At the same time, in the Ukrainian referendum on 1 December 1991, 54 percent of the voters in Crimea backed the independence of Ukraine, much less than the national average of 91%. However, the pro-Russian separatist movement grew popular during the first several years of independent Ukraine. The Russia Bloc, which favored an independent Crimea or the region's reunification with Russia, received 67% of the votes in the 1994 parliamentary election. Yury Meshkov, its candidate, won 73% of the votes in the second round of the 1994 presidential election in Crimea.

Major differences along ethnic lines concerning support for separatism in Crimea became evident in the 1990s. Crimea was the only region of Ukraine with a majority ethnic Russian population. The 2001 census recorded 58% of the population of Crimea, including Sevastopol, as ethnic Russian and 24% as ethnic Ukrainians. The Crimean Tatars constituted 10% of the population (calculated from Vseukrainskyi, 2014). The 1996 USIA/SOCIS-Gallup survey showed that 59% of ethnic Russians in Crimea supported their region joining Russia. A significant percentage of ethnic Ukrainians (41%) and a much lower percentage of the Crimean Tatars (8%) expressed the same preference. Conversely, 13% of Russians and 29% of Ukrainians in Crimea, and more than half of the Crimean Tatars (54%) favored their region remaining a part of Ukraine (USIA, 1996).

The absolute majority of the Crimean Tatars returned to Crimea in the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s (Allworth, 1998). They established and overwhelmingly supported their own ethnically based political organizations, such as the Mejlis. Crimean Tatar leaders and organizations opposed pro-Russian separatism, and they allied with nationalist Ukrainian parties and politicians (Drohobycky, 1995; Katchanovski, 2005; Sasse, 2007).

Internal divisions and policies of the Ukrainian government led to the disintegration of the Russia Bloc in the middle of the 1990s. In 1995, the Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma temporarily suspended the Crimean constitution and abolished its presidency. While Crimea retained its status as an autonomous republic in Ukraine, influence of the central Ukrainian government in the region increased significantly both *de jure* and de facto. The Communist Party of Crimea and then the Party of Regions, which formed an electoral alliance with the Russian Bloc, became the most popular political forces in the region. However, overtly separatist pro-Russian organizations did not receive strong support in the regional elections since the mid-1990s (Sasse, 2007).

However, some other studies argued that separatism retained a significant popularity in Crimea and that its potential secession remained a possibility (Katchanovski, 2006, 2010). For example, the 2001 Razumkov Center survey showed that 50% of the respondents in Crimea favored their region becoming a part of Russia, and additional 9% preferred to see their region as an independent state (calculated from Krym, 2001). The separatist preferences in Crimea increased significantly after the "Orange Revolution" in 2004 brought a pro-Western and nationalist president, Viktor Yushchenko, to power. Viktor Yanukovych, a relatively pro-Russian presidential candidate, failed to gain power in Ukraine through the falsification of the election results, but he received overwhelming backing in the region.

In the 2008 Razumkov Center survey, conducted soon after the Russian-Georgian war following an attempt by the Georgian government to seize the de facto independent secessionist region of South Ossetia, 73% of the Crimeans, who made up their minds on this issue, backed the secession of Crimea from Ukraine with a goal of joining Russia (calculated from AR Krym, 2008). In this survey, 85% of ethnic Russians, 65% of ethnic Ukrainians, and 17% of the Crimean Tatars wanted their region to secede from Ukraine (calculated from AR Krym, 2008). When asked separately in the same survey, 47% of the respondents in Crimea, including 49% of ethnic Russians, 45% of ethnic Ukrainians, and 39% of the Crimean Tatars, favored the independence of Crimea. The 2008 Razumkov Center survey showed that 59% of the Crimean Tatars supported Crimea becoming a Crimean Tatar national autonomy in Ukraine. Separately, 33% of the Crimean Tatars backed the unification of Crimea with Turkey.

However, the outright secessionist preferences in Crimea declined afterward, and they were expressed by 38% of the respondents in the 2009 Razumkov Center poll. Thirty percent voiced such views in the 2011 Razumkov Center poll after Yanukovych won the 2010 presidential election with promises of closer political and economic cooperation with Russia and making Russian the second state language in Ukraine. The 2011 Razumkov Center survey showed that combined support for joining Russia and independence of Crimea decreased among ethnic Ukrainians to 25% from 35% in 2009. Attitudes of ethnic Russians demonstrated a similar decline of separatist preferences to 35% from 43%. Such separatist attitudes among the Crimean Tatars remained the same in 2011 (28%), compared to 2009 (27%), but their support for joining Turkey increased from 4% in 2009 to 21% in 2011 (Iakist 2011, 27).

Polls indicated that pro-Russian separatism in Crimea had a significant but minority support during Euromaidan. The absolute majority of Crimeans backed the Yanukovych government and opposed Euromaidan, which started as a mass protest against backtracking by the Yanukovych government on the association and free trade agreement with the European Union, and then turned into the anti-government protest and a rebellion in western and a number of central regions.

Yanukovych during his presidency and his semi-oligarchic Party of Regions opposed separatism in Crimea, while receiving the support of the majority of voters in this region in various parliamentary and presidential elections. Yanukovych regarded Crimea as another source of enrichment for his personal network of family, politicians, and oligarchs, and he appointed a number of his associates from Donbas to senior positions in Crimea.

Top Russian leaders, such as President Boris Yeltsin in the 1990s and President Vladimir Putin prior to the overthrow of the Yanukovych government in February 2014, did not openly support separatism in Crimea. However, the Russian government declared that the NATO membership of Ukraine was an unacceptable threat to security of Russia. Putin stated during the NATO summit in Romania in April 2008 that such a move could result in a break-up of Ukraine along regional lines, and he reportedly claimed that Ukraine was an artificial country, which included historically Russian regions along with other regions (To shcho, 2008).

Some other Russian leaders, such as Yury Luzhkov, the mayor of Moscow, and various nationalist and communist opposition politicians, publicly refused to recognize Crimea or Sevastopol City as parts of Ukraine, and they expressed their backing for reunification of entire Crimea or Sevastopol with Russia. A VTSIOM-Valdai Club poll in September 2013 showed that the majority, 56% of Russians, viewed Crimea as "essentially Russian" (Contemporary, 2014).

In spite of differences and tensions, the Russian and Ukrainian governments managed in the 1990s to peacefully divide the Black Sea Fleet after the collapse of the Soviet Union, but Russia was able to maintain its navy presence in Sevastopol. In 1997, the two countries signed an agreement granting the Russian Black Sea Fleet a 20-year lease of the Sevastopol navy base. In 2010, President Yanukovych signed another agreement with Russia that extended the lease of the Sevastopol navy base by the Russian Black Sea Fleet for 25 years after the original lease was supposed to expire in 2017 in return for a discount for natural gas imported by Ukraine from Russia.

4.3 The Secession and the Russian Annexation of Crimea in 2014

The violent overthrow of the pro-Russian Yanukovych government in February 2014 gave a significant boost to separatism in Crimea. The Russian government used this overthrow to reverse its previous policy and start to back both separatists and the annexation of Crimea. Yanukovych fled from eastern Ukraine to Crimea on February 22, 2014, and the

Russian military there on instructions from the Russian government helped him to escape to Russia.

The new government and the media in Ukraine and their counterparts in Western countries presented the change of the government as a result of peaceful mass protests during Euromaidan. They maintained that Yanukovych abandoned his presidential position and fled from Ukraine because of his responsibility for the massacre of the Maidan protesters on 20 February 2014. However, analysis of various evidence indicates that elements of the far right and oligarchic organizations were involved in the mass killing of both Maidan protesters and the police and that this massacre, assassination attempts, and the US-led regime change played the decisive role in the overthrow of the Yanukovych government (see Chapters 2 and 3; Katchanovski, 2020, 2023a, 2023b, 2024; 2025).

The Russian leaders and the media often characterized the overthrow of Yanukovych as a fascist coup, and they justified support of separatism and annexation of Crimea by protection of ethnic Russians from the Ukrainian "fascists" and by the Russian national security interests to prevent it from losing control of the main Black Sea naval base and its falling under control of NATO.

Not only Russian President Putin but also then US President Barak Obama stated that the Russian annexation of Crimea was a reaction to the violent overthrow of the Yanukovych government with the US involvement. Obama said that "Mr. Putin made this decision around Crimea and Ukraine, not because of some grand strategy, but essentially because he was caught off balance by the protests in the Maidan, and Yanukovych then fleeing after we'd brokered a deal to transition power in Ukraine" (CNN, 2015). Putin admitted in his 2015 documentary interview that he proposed his plan to "return" Crimea and authorized the covert Russian military intervention on February 23, 2014, following the overthrow of Yanukovych.

Videos, eyewitness accounts, and various reports show a violent attack against Crimean anti-Maidan activists, who were returning from Kyiv on February 20, 2014 and were stopped and attacked by pro-Maidan activists near the town of Korsun. This attack, which was presented by the Russian and much of the Crimean media as a pogrom or even inflated as a massacre, fueled separatism in the region. Similarly, the Crimean Berkut unit that returned from the Maidan and suffered casualties during the Maidan massacre rebelled and blocked the narrow strip connecting the peninsula with the rest of Ukraine.

However, the Russian government's annexation with the covert use of its military force had more decisive role than Crimean separatism. The Russian special forces without insignia seized control over the Crimean parliament building on February 27, 2014. They with support of separatist "self-defense" formations and Russian nationalist volunteer formations also seized other government buildings, and Ukrainian military installations, and the Ukrainian Navy ships in the peninsula. However, the Russian government initially denied its direct military intervention in Crimea, in spite of evidence that Russian military units ("little green men") were operating along with separatist armed units in Crimea beyond the Russian naval base in Sevastopol and that they were seizing Ukrainian military units and the government headquarters.

Vladimir Konstantinov, the head of the Crimean parliament from the Party of Regions, refused to recognize the Maidan government of Ukraine after the overthrow of Yanukovych. After the parliament seizure by the Russian special forces on February 27, 2014, the Crimean parliament elected Serhii Aksyonov, a pro-separatist leader of the Russian Unity party, as the new prime minister of the Crimean autonomy (Aksyonov was reportedly involved in organized crime in the past). The parliament of the Crimean autonomy and the Sevastopol city council unilaterally declared their independence from Ukraine and set up a referendum on this issue.

The official results of the referendum held on 16 March 2014 reported that 97% of the voters in Crimea supported joining Russia. Major Crimean Tatar organizations, in particular the Mejlis, were the most vocal opponents of the secession and annexation of Crimea, and they boycotted the 16 March referendum.

Such referendum result was inflated compared to public opinion polls, and the referendum itself was illegal under the Ukrainian constitution. However, the analysis of various survey data indicates that support for separatism in Crimea increased significantly after Euromaidan and violent and illegal overthrow of the relatively pro-Russian government of Ukraine. There is no directly comparable and publicly available reliable survey data concerning popular support for separatism and joining Russia in Crimea during the referendum. However, in a Pew Center survey in April 2014, 91% of the respondents in Crimea stated that the referendum was free and fair (Pew, 2014).

The Levada Center survey commissioned in Crimea by a research team of Western scholars confirms that, contrary to opinions expressed by the governments and the media in Ukraine and the West and many scholars, the absolute majority of Crimeans supported secession of their region and joining Russia. The Crimean Tatars are the exception, with about half of them supporting this option. "These responses indicate that had a legal referendum that met international standards been permitted in Crimea (as Scotland held in September 2014), there would likely have been a majority in favor of leaving Ukraine and joining Russia" (Toal & O'Loughlin, 2015).

In contrast to Donbas, a separatist region in eastern Ukraine, Crimea avoided a violent conflict. Large sections of Ukrainian military, security service, and police forces on the peninsula switched their allegiance to the separatists and then to Russia, while others were blockaded and disarmed without fight by the Russian military and the Crimean self-defense and returned to Ukraine. Wars involve armed fighting between conflict parties, and 1,000 casualty threshold is often used in political science and conflict studies to classify armed conflicts as wars. A few people were killed in Crimea during the annexation and the Russian military intervention in Crimea. Therefore, contrary to Wikipedia, the Crimea conflict cannot be classified as the start of the Russia-Ukraine war.

There was a real possibility that the Russian annexation and military intervention in Crimea could have escalated then into the war between Russia and Ukraine if the Ukrainian government had ordered the use of military force. However, senior Ukrainian and US officials, such as Oleksander Turchynov, who was "acting" president of Ukraine during this conflict, a declassified transcript of a meeting of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine, and the Ukrainian and Western media reports revealed that the US and other Western governments told the Maidan government leaders in Ukraine not to use military force during the Russian annexation of Crimea in order to avoid a war with Russia (Bloomberg, 2015; Stenohrama, 2016).

Over several days following this referendum, the former Crimean autonomous republic and the city of Sevastopol were formally incorporated into the Russian Federation. Contrary to the Russian government's claims, the secession and the annexation of Crimea were illegal. It violated the norms not only of the Ukrainian but also international law. The international law generally does not recognize rights of regions to secede unilaterally and considers annexation illegal. The new Ukrainian government, the US and other Western governments and most members of the United Nations rejected the unilateral secession and annexation of Crimea as illegal under the international law.

The unilateral independence of Kosovo from Serbia with Western governments backing and recognition following the NATO-Serbia war in 1999 created the precedent which was used to certain extent by the Russian government. However, Russia did not recognize the Kosovo independence and waged two wars in Chechnya to stop a unilateral session of this Russian region. Russia justified its annexation of Crimea by humanitarian intervention to save Crimeans from the violence by the Ukrainian far right.

However, the analysis of various evidence shows that such far-right threat in Crimea was inflated by Russia in terms of scope and immediacy. Contrary to the Russian government and media claims, the Ukrainian government in Ukraine after the Maidan was not fascist or neo-Nazi (See Katchanovski, 2020; Chapters 6 and 11). While there was a possibility of a civil war in this region with far-right involvement, similarly to Donbas, there was extremely marginal presence of the Ukrainian ultranationalist and neo-Nazi organizations in Crimea in spring 2014. Threats by the far-right organizations to deploy to Crimea after Euromaidan were not realized. Violent attacks by the Right Sector and other far-right organizations and their local supporters, such as Oleh Sentsov, in Crimea to prevent its Russian annexation were extremely limited in terms of their quantity and scale.

By the end of 2014, the Ukrainian government moved to impose a limited blockade of Crimea by suspending train and bus links, and then electricity and water supply were also blocked. The Ukrainian government's official stance, expressed, for example, by Presidents Petro Poroshenko and Volodymyr Zelensky, is to reunite Crimea with Ukraine. The use of military force to take back control over Crimea was raised as a possibility initially by some Ukrainian officials, and it became the official government policy and military goal during the Russia-Ukraine war in 2022. But this is very unlikely to happen because Russia has a military advantage of Ukraine and threatened a possibility of use of nuclear weapons when in such a case.

The Western governments rejected the possibility of using their military forces in Crimea. The US government and governments of the European Union members and other Western countries imposed economic and travel sanctions against separatist leaders of Crimea and Russian government officials for the annexation of the region. The sanctions also prohibited or severely restricted work of US and other Western businesses in Crimea. For example, following a new round of the US sanctions, Visa and MasterCard blocked the use of their credit cards in this region in December 2014.

However, the Russian government refused before the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 to reverse its annexation of Crimea and to negotiate any deal that would change the status of this region. In the September 2014 elections, the United Russia party of President Putin won 71% of the votes in Crimea. Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar parties and organizations were generally limited or curtailed in their ability to continue functioning; and some of their local leaders and activists were subjected to violence, threats of violence, detention, or expulsion from Crimea.

The Crimea separation and annexation contributed to the escalation of conflicts in Donbas and conflicts between Russia and Ukraine that culminated in the Russia-Ukraine war (see Chapter 5; Katchanovski, 2016). Crimea became affected by the Russia-Ukraine war. The Ukrainian forces attacked with missiles and drone the Russian Black Sea fleet, the Crimean Bridge, Russian military airfields, and various other critical military and civilian infrastructure in this region. The peace deal framework which was negotiated in Istanbul between Ukraine and Russia in spring 2022 involved a provisional status of Crimea, which meant preservation of its de facto annexation by Russia (see Chapter 12).

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CHAPTER 5

The Civil War and the Russian Military Interventions in Donbas

5.1 Disparate Narratives Regarding the War in Donbas

Since its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine has experienced significant regional divisions concerning major domestic politics and foreign orientation issues. These include electoral support for major presidential candidates and political parties, the status of the Russian language, Ukraine's membership in the European Union and NATO, and its relations with Russia (see Katchanovski, 2006a, 2006b, 2014a, 2014b). In terms of political values, the Donetsk and Luhansk Regions, along with Crimea, were the most pro-Russian and pro-Communist regions in Ukraine since its independence in 1991, as measured by vote for political parties and presidential candidates, foreign policy orientations, and support for Russian as the second state language in Ukraine (Katchanovski, 2006a, 2006b, 2014a, 2014b).

Many previous academic studies have shown the existence of strong regional divisions concerning such political issues and historical conflicts in Ukraine. However, most of the previous studies examined such divisions before the "Orange Revolution" and Euromaidan and did not analyze the war in Donbas and separatism in Ukraine (see Barrington & Herron, 2004; Katchanovski, 2006a, 2006b, 2014a, 2014b).

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the violent conflict in Donbas, along with Euromaidan and the secession and the Russian annexation of Crimea in March 2014, have brought new attention to

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the issue of regional divisions and separatism in Ukraine. Following the violent overthrow of the Yanukovych government during Euromaidan in February 2014, and the secessions and Russia's annexations of the Crimean autonomy and Sevastopol city in March 2014 with help of Russian military intervention, a conflict emerged in Donbas. Pro-Russian separatists—with the direct involvement of groups of armed Russian nationalist volunteers—seized power in most of Donbas (the Donetsk and Luhansk Regions) and proclaimed the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) and the Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) in early April 2014. The conflict in Donbas quickly turned into a war in this region.

The Donbas war is not only a major political development that affects the future of Ukraine. It has significance beyond Ukraine. The conflict became a major international conflict and the biggest conflict between the Russia and the West since the end of the Cold War and before the Russia-Ukraine war in 2022 turned into a proxy war between Russia and the West. The war in Donbas involved a direct and indirect Russian military intervention. The Donbas war escalated into the Russia-Ukraine war in February 2022 as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The war in Donbas is also very relevant to the EU because Ukraine is one of the largest European countries, borders several EU member states, and is a major transit country for Russian natural gas to many EU members. The direct participation of German chancellor Angela Merkel, French president Francois Hollande, as well as Russian president Vladimir Putin in the Minsk negotiations concerning this conflict highlights the international significance of this war. The direct involvement of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in negotiating the Minsk agreements and in monitoring their implementation also shows the significance of the war to European countries beyond Ukraine.

The chapter seeks to determine why Ukraine has experienced a violent conflict in Donbas. This study analyzes the role of different actors and factors in this situation in the emergence of this conflict and its escalation into a war. The analysis relies primarily on careful examination of Ukrainian, separatist, Russian, and Western media and government reports, as well as social media, live broadcasts, videos, and other sources concerning the conflict in Ukrainian, Russian, and English. The analysis is based mainly on primary sources. This study also uses a brief survey, commissioned by the author and conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) at the end of April and the beginning of May 2014, which analyzes support for separatism in Donbas compared to other regions of Ukraine and the major factors that affect pro-separatist attitudes.

There are conflicting narratives about the conflict in Donbas. The Ukrainian government, the national media, and, to a large extent, their counterparts in the West present the violent conflict in Donbas as led, from its beginning in the Spring of 2014, by regular armed Russian military units and Russian military intelligence agents who therefore lack popular backing in this region. They presented the war in Donbas as a conventional or a hybrid war between Ukraine and Russia and attributed its start to a Russian invasion (or Russian "green men") operating in Donbas without insignia, along with their local assistants. The governments of Ukraine and the United States, top NATO officials, and the mainstream Western media typically claim that Russian military and intelligence units were leading the separatist fight in Donbas from the beginning, similar to Russian military units without insignia in Crimea. For example, they present Igor Strelkov (Girkin) as a Russian military intelligence (GRU) officer and his unit, which seized control over Sloviansk town, as a GRU unit (US Department of State, 2014). Both NATO and Petro Poroshenko, after he became president of Ukraine, stated that there were some 9,000 Russian regular troops fighting in Donbas.

However, some of the leading Western media outlets, like the BBC and The New York Times, have referred later in 2015 to the war in Donbas as a civil war. Such references are nearly absent in the major media in Ukraine, which is mostly controlled by the oligarchs or the government, and in one noted incident, Ruslan Kotsaba, a Western Ukrainian journalist, was arrested and charged with treason for opposing the draft and calling the war in Donbas a civil war. Public opinion concerning the war has thus been affected to a significant extent by the government propaganda and media coverage which generally follows the respective government positions on the conflict lines of the conflict.

For instance, the Ministry of Information Policy was created in Ukraine specifically to disseminate the government propaganda and shape coverage of the war in Donbas in the media and social media. The 2015 Razumkov Center poll shows that 32% of Ukrainians believe that the war in Donbas is a separatist rebellion supported by Russia, 28% that this is a war between Russia and Ukraine, 16% that this is a civil war, 8% that this is a war between Russia and the United States, and 7% that this is a fight for independence of DNR and LNR. This suggests that while a significant minority of Ukrainians share the Ukrainian government and media propagated view that the war in Donbas is a war between Ukraine and Russia, the majority of the respondents viewed the war in Donbas as an intrastate conflict, mostly with Russian involvement (Pochti, 2015). The difference would be much more significant if the separatist-controlled part of Donbas and annexed Crimea had been included in the poll.

In contrast, polls by the Levada Center show that in Russia minorities of the respondents (less than 30% in 2014–2015) believed that this is a war between Russia and Ukraine or that regular Russian troops were in Donbas. The majority of Russians back pro-Russian separatism in Donbas, mainly in the form of independence from Ukraine or the incorporation of these regions into Russia. A 2015 TNS/Institute of World Policy poll of 16- to 54-year-olds showed that the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine was perceived as a civil war and a war with Russia, respectively, by 61% and 50% of Germans, 59% and 58% of Italians, 58% and 59% of Dutch, 56% and 59% of Spanish, 55% and 64% of Poles, 47% and 58% of Swedes, 42% and 38% of British, and 42% and 38% of French respondents (Institute, 2015).

The Ukrainian and Western governments and the mainstream media generally characterize separatism in Donbas as having a minor support and present the results of a referendum held by separatists after they seized power there as not reflecting public preferences. They maintain that the Ukrainian government came to power as a result of peaceful mass protests after then President Yanukovych and many members of his government fled Ukraine to avoid responsibility for ordering the massacre of protesters on 20 February 2014. They also emphasize that the Ukrainian government has the legal power to suppress separatism by force.

The post-Yanukovych governments of Ukraine characterize the separatists as "terrorists" and the military operation in Donbas as "the anti-terrorist operation" (ATO). Two-thirds (64%) of the respondents in a 2015 Razumkov Center poll agreed with the classification of the DNR and the LNR as terrorist organizations (Interfax-Ukraine, 2015). The central government denies responsibility for civilian casualties during a war there, claiming that the separatists themselves are killing residents of the cities and villages in which they were based. The United States and other Western governments generally ignore civilian casualty figures, claim a lack of evidence to determine responsibility for deadly attacks on civilians (while attributing them largely to Russian military actions), and argue that the Ukrainian forces are showing restraint in their use of force.

For its part, the Russian government and the media present the war in Donbas as a civil war that followed an attempt by the Ukrainian government forces and far-right paramilitary formations to suppress, by military force, a popular uprising of the Donbas residents against the Maidan-led government which was installed and controlled by the United States. Russian and separatist politicians and the pro-separatist and Russian media claim that a "fascist junta" seized power in Ukraine as a result of a US-led coup d'état and that separatists, including Russian volunteers, defended the people of Donbas from Ukrainian "fascists."

They argue that separatism has widespread popular support in all of Eastern and Southern Ukraine. Russian President Vladimir Putin referred to this part of Ukraine as "Novorossiya" (New Russia), the region's historical name when it belonged to the Russian Empire. Some separatist leaders and commanders stated that they intended to expand their control to other regions of "Novorossiya" and even to overthrow the central government of Ukraine. The Russian government has consistently denied that its regular military forces were involved in the Donbas conflict. The Russian government and media and separatist leaders have attributed civilian casualties in Donbas, including a shot-down of a Malaysian passenger plane, to the Ukrainian forces. A Russian government investigative agency has launched an investigation into the "genocide of the Russian-speaking population" in Donbas. Putin claimed that there was a genocide in Donbas and used this claim to justify the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022.

Academic studies show similar differences in defining the nature of the Donbas conflict and its main factors. Some Western scholars characterize the war in Donbas as a Russian invasion, first by special units of "green men" and then by regular Russian troops (see, for example, Hauter, 2021; Wilson, 2014). They generally relied uncritically on Ukrainian and Western media and government and other secondary sources, and their claims that mostly the Russian regular forces were fighting in Donbas before the Russian invasion in February 2022, that Igor Girkin was active Russian GRU or DSB officer, and that there was no significant support for separatism in Donbas. They also argued that dependence of the Donbas separatists on Russian weapons, military advisers, economic aid, and client-patron relationship with Russia meant that this was the Russia-Ukraine war and not a civil war (see, for example, Hauter, 2021).

In contrast, some scholars emphasize the expansion of NATO towards Russian borders and Western support for the regime change in Ukraine, as triggering the Russian annexation of Crimea and its support for separatists in Donbas (Mearsheimer, 2014; Sakwa, 2015).

Katchanovski (2014a) was one of the first scholarly studies to classify the war in Donbas as a civil war with Russian military intervention (see also Katchanovski, 2014b). The Uppsala Conflict Data Program (2015) also classified the conflict in Donbas as intrastate.

Previous studies conclude that the conflict in Donbas started primarily because of domestic factors, such as ethnicity, language, economic links to Russia, and the vacuum of power in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions following the overthrow of the Yanukovych government and seizures of local administrations by separatists and Russian paramilitary units who copied similar seizures by the Maidan opposition activists in Western and Central Ukraine during Euromaidan. Differences persist, however, on which of these factors were of primary importance in the start of the war and support for separatism (see Arel & Driscoll, 2023; Giuliano, 2015; Katchanovski, 2014a, 2016a; Katchanovski & Abrahms, 2024; Kudelia, 2014, 2016, 2022, 2025; Robinson, 2016; Zhukov, 2016).

By the time of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the majority of scholars, who published or presented their studies of the conflict in Donbas in academic venues in the West classified it as a civil war or intrastate conflict while also referring in various terms to Russian military intervention in Donbas. In addition to the author, they include the following scholars: Dominique Arel, Oliver Boyd-Barrett, Jessica Trisko Darden, Keith Trisko Darden, Jesse Driscoll, Volodymyr Ishchenko, Gordon Hahn, Alexis Henshaw, Serhiy Kudelia, David Lane, Anatol Lieven, Kimitaka Matsuzato, David Mandel, Anna Matveeva, John Mearsheimer, Paul Finlay Robinson, Gerard Toal, Richard Sakwa, Matt Sienkiewicz, Ora Szekely, Richard Wade, Ilaria Zavoli, Yuri Zhukov, the Correlates of War Project, and the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (see, for example, Arel & Driscoll, 2023; Hahn, 2018; Katchanovski, 2014a, 2016a, 2016b; Kudelia, 2016, 2022; Petro, 2023; Sakwa, 2015).

In contrast to his previous studies, Kudelia (2025) classified the war in Donbas not as a civil war but as a foreign-led insurgency. Many other scholars referred to this conflict as simply “war” or “conflict.” A minority denied the civil war and called the armed conflict in Donbas a war between Ukraine and Russia or used similar terms (see, for example, Hauter, 2021).

However, English-, Russian-, and Ukrainian-language Wikipedia all call the war in Donbas a part of the "Russo-Ukrainian War." The Wikipedia editors selectively and in politically biased ways relied on narratives promoted by the Western and Ukrainian governments and the media and a view of the minority of scholars, who denied the civil war in Donbas and called it the Russia-Ukraine war (see War, 2025).

Separatism in various forms in independent Ukraine has persistently manifested itself in Crimea, in Donbas, and to a lesser extent in some neighboring regions (Katchanovski, 2005, 2006a, 2015). Pro-Russian separatist leaders and parties were in power in Crimea in the first half of the 1990s. There was a real possibility of secession in Crimea at that time. Separatism also emerged in Donbas during the same time period, but it always had weaker support there than in Crimea. In the end of 2004, the Party of Regions attempted to proclaim an autonomous republic in the East and the South during the Orange Revolution, when Yanukovych's fraudulent victory in the presidential elections was overturned as a result of mass protests. At the time, Ukraine also came close to a violent conflict and a possible break-up (Katchanovski, 2006a).

In spite of such manifestations of separatism and persistent regional divisions, however, just a few scholars considered a break-up and a violent regional conflict in Ukraine as significant possibilities (Colton, 2010; Darden, 2010; Katchanovski, 2006a). Most either ignored such issues as insignificant or argued that even though Ukraine was divided along regional lines, it was unlikely to experience a violent regional conflict leading to secession. For instance, the attempt to proclaim an autonomous republic in the East and the South during the "Orange Revolution" was seen as thoroughly contrived.

With a few exceptions, separatism in Donbas received no scholarly treatment before the start of the conflict in this region (Katchanovski, 2006a, 99–100). A comprehensive study of regional political divisions and cultures in Ukraine, including separatism in Crimea and Donbas, predicted a possibility of a violent break-up of Ukraine and a civil war similarly to the de facto break-up of neighboring Moldova following a civil war there and secession of pro-Russian Transdniestria region with Russian military backing (Katchanovski, 2006a). However, until the beginning of 2014 and in contrast to other post-communist countries, such as Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, and the former Yugoslavia, Ukraine was able to avoid a violent conflict and break-up.

5.2 Major Actors in the Conflict in Donbas

The conflict in Donbas emerged following Euromaidan, which both preceded and affected this conflict by producing a spiral of escalating violence and overthrowing Viktor Yanukovych and his Party of Regions-led government. Mass anti-government protests started in Ukraine at the end of November 2013 after the Yanukovych government abruptly changed its decision to sign an association and free trade agreement with the European Union. The conflict escalated and turned violent on November 30 after special police units (Berkut) violently dispersed a relatively small group of protesters on the Maidan. The evidence shows that this police violence was provoked and exploited because Maidan leaders and the Inter TV channel, which broadcast it live, knew in advance about the planned police assault, and the far-right Right Sector attacked the police during the dispersal (see Katchanovski, 2020, 2024; Chapter 2).

The publicly available evidence suggests that the government of Viktor Yanukovych was overthrown as a result of mass killings of the police and protesters on 18–20 February and that elements of Euromaidan oppositional far-right and oligarchic parties, specifically the Right Sector, Svoboda, and Fatherland, were involved in this violence in order to gain power after the mostly peaceful mass protests had failed to achieve such an outcome. Such evidence includes publicly available videos and photos of Maidan snipers, live statements by the Maidan announcers, radio intercepts of the Maidan snipers, and snipers and commanders from the special Alfa unit of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), testimonies by the absolute majority of wounded Maidan activists and some 500 witnesses, public statements by the government officials, similar ammunition and weapons used against the police and the protesters, and similar types of wounds among both protesters and the police, and partially the Maidan massacre trial verdict (Hahn, 2018; Katchanovski, 2016c, 2020, 2023a, 2023b, 2024, 2025; Chapter 3).

If Yanukovych had implemented initial plans to use force, including live ammunition and military units to suppress Euromaidan, this would likely have resulted in a large number of casualties among the protesters, and a full-fledged uprising in the opposition stronghold in Western Ukraine, and likely civil war. But in order to preserve his power after the "snipers' massacre" had severely undermined his legitimacy among his supporters—even in his party's strongholds in Eastern and Southern Ukraine—he agreed to a compromise deal with the opposition, negotiated with the participation of the foreign ministers of France, Germany, Poland, and a Russian government representative on 21 February 2014. However, the far right and the oligarchic Euromaidan opposition organizations and parties reneged on the compromise agreement and threatened violence if he did not resign. Yanukovych fled from Kyiv and then from Ukraine after several assassination attempts against him by the Maidan opposition, including the far right (see Katchanovski, 2024; Chapter 2).

The US government and major EU countries de facto backed this violent overthrow of the relatively pro-Russian government by reneging on 21 February deal and immediately recognizing the new government of Ukraine. There is evidence that the US administration engaged in regime change in Ukraine during Euromaidan (see Katchanovski, 2025; Chapter 2).

The violent overthrow of the relatively pro-Russian government, specifically by means of mass killings of the police and protesters, was a tipping point in the conflicts in Ukraine and between the West and Russia over Ukraine. President Putin used this overthrow and its backing by the governments of the United States and EU countries to radically change his policy towards Ukraine. The Russian government started to pursue secession of Crimea with the help of direct military intervention since the end of February 2014 and the annexation of Crimea by Russia in March 2014 in a violation of international law (see Katchanovski, 2015; Chapter 4). Such direct Russian backing of separatism in Crimea and the annexation of this region by Russia also encouraged separatists in other regions with significant ethnic Russian populations, such as Donbas, Kharkiv, and Odesa.

The false-flag mass killing of the protesters and the police that resulted in the overthrow of the Yanukovych government was also a critical juncture in the separatist rebellion in Donbas in Eastern Ukraine. The overthrow of the government led to a power vacuum in the Donetsk and Luhansk Regions, which were—until then—strongholds of Yanukovych and his Party of Regions. Starting in March 2014, unarmed and armed separatists seized and occupied regional administrations, security service (SBU), and police headquarters in Donetsk, Luhansk, and other cities and towns in the regions. Igor Girkin (Strelkov) and other members of his armed group of Russian nationalists arrived from Russia via Crimea and seized police headquarters in the towns of Sloviansk and Kramatorsk in the Donetsk Region on 12 April 2014. The local police and security services either refused to offer armed resistance to the separatists and the

Girkin unit of Russian nationalist volunteers or sided with them to various degrees.

A careful review suggests that much of the evidence regarding direct Russian military intervention during this initial period was misrepresented or even fabricated. This concerns Ukrainian and Western governments' claims that Russian military and intelligence units or "green men" were leading the separatist fight in Donbas since it started in Spring 2014. For example, Girkin and members of his armed group in Sloviansk and Kramatorsk were identified by the Ukrainian and US governments as a Russian military intelligence (GRU) unit. However, the publicly available evidence indicates that Girkin was a retired officer of the Federal Security Service. There is no evidence of his active service in FSB or GRU at the time of the war in Donbas. Moreover, he publicly criticized Putin and the Russian military leadership, and he was convicted for such criticism during the Russia-Ukraine war in 2024. A "bearded man" from the Strelkov group had been falsely identified as a commander of a Chechen GRU battalion solely on the basis of superficial similarities of their facial features, while he was a Russian Cossack (Shuster, 2014).

Various evidence, such as Glaziev tapes and the Surkov-linked hacked emails, also suggests that after the Yanukovych overthrow some Russian nationalist and communist organizations and networks directly and the Russian government at least indirectly initially and then directly started to back separatists in Donbas and other Southern and Eastern regions. These regions were called by separatists, Vladimir Putin, and Russian nationalists as "Novorossiya." For example, intercepted telephone calls segments made public by the Prosecutor General Office of Ukraine in 2016 indicate that Sergey Glaziev told some leaders of pro-Russian separatist organizations and activists to seize regional councils in such regions beyond Donbas and Crimea as Kharkiv, Odesa, and Zaporizhzhia and to request Russian military intervention. Glaziev was an adviser to Russia's President Putin concerning the Customs Union since 2012. But he was also linked via the Katehon Think Tank to Konstantin Malofeev, a Russian oligarch who backed separatism in Crimea and Donbas after Euromaidan. Igor Girkin (Strelkov), who led an armed Russian nationalist group to seize Sloviansk in Donbas, worked in the Malofeev's security.

There is various evidence of the direct participation of the Russian Wagner mercenary company in the war in Donbas. This mercenary company was headed by Evgeni Prigozhin, a Russian businessman. However, it was de facto organized with Russian military intelligence involvement for the war in Donbas, and it was armed and financed primarily by the Russian government.

The Russian government initially denied direct military involvement in Crimea in March 2014, despite evidence that Russian military units without insignia ("green men") were operating there along with separatist self-defense units, which included many Berkut members, and were seizing Ukrainian military units and government headquarters there (see Chapter 4; Katchanovski, 2015).

Evidence indicates that, in contrast to its direct military intervention in Crimea, Russia initially supported separatists in Donbas by allowing volunteers and weapons to cross the border from Russia and by providing weapons, recruitment, training, and safe haven to separatists. The Russian government also threatened to use military force in Ukraine and deployed large numbers of its military personnel near the border with the Donetsk and Luhansk Regions and other regions of Ukraine in Spring and Summer 2014. There was a real possibility of a direct Russian military intervention in spring 2014 in Donbas and other regions of Eastern and Southern Ukraine besides Crimea and a real possibility of a war between Russia and Ukraine.

The new Maidan-led government refused to consider a peaceful resolution of the Donbas separatist conflict and launched the "ATO" (anti-terrorist operation) on 13 April 2014. It attempted to neutralize the separatists through the use of military force and special police and security units.

An SBU officer was killed during an attempt by an SBU special Alfa unit to seize the separatist leaders in Sloviansk, which was then controlled by the Girkin-led armed group of Russians and local separatists. The Girkin-led Russian nationalist unit and the local Donbas separatists also tried to seize control over local airport and telecommunication infrastructure and nearby towns. These attacks lead to counterattacks by the government forces.

However, many of the central government forces were initially reluctant to follow the orders to use force against the separatists in Donbas. As a result, paramilitary units and special police battalions, organized by the radical nationalist and neo-Nazi organizations with help of the government and oligarchs, were much more ideologically motivated and willing to use force. Various evidence indicates that the Right Sector was involved in a deadly attack of a separatist checkpoint in Sloviansk on 20 April 2014. The evidence includes his business card found there, a later admission by Dmytro Yarosh, the Right Sector leader, that this was his first battle, and a court ruling revealing that the same exact weapon was used by the attackers and killers of the Internal Troops servicemen on the Maidan (Dmytro 2015; Ukhvala 2015). This attack by the paramilitary alliance of radical nationalist and neo-Nazi organizations constituted a major escalation of the conflict in Donbas because it broke the Geneva agreement, which was signed on 17 April 2014 by Ukraine, Russia, the EU, and the United States concerning a peaceful resolution of the conflict, and the Orthodox Easter ceasefire between the Ukrainian government and separatists.

Similarly, the special police battalion Azov, organized by the neo-Nazi Social-National Assembly with help of the Radical Party, was involved in an attack of a district police headquarters in Mariupol on 9 May 2014, which resulted in casualties among the police and civilians. The special police battalion Dnipro, organized with the participation of the Right Sector and the oligarch-governor of the Dnipropetrovsk Region, Ihor Kolomoisky, was involved in this attack and in another deadly assault in Krasnoarmiisk in the Donetsk Region in early May 2014. An analysis of live broadcasts, videos, and media reports indicates that the Right Sector, which was dominated in Odessa and Kharkiv by the Social-National Assembly, football ultras from these cities, and Maidan Self-Defense units, massacred 42 pro-Russian separatists and employees there on 2 May 2014 by setting fire to the Trade Union building in Odessa in the south of Ukraine after deadly clashes with local separatists (see Katchanovski, 2016b; Chapter 6).

Special police battalions, the Azov battalion/regiment, and paramilitary formations, such as the Volunteer Ukrainian Corps, organized and led since Spring and Summer 2014 by far-right organizations, such as the Right Sector, the Social-National Assembly, and Svoboda, have constituted a minority of the Ukrainian forces during the war in Donbas, but these far-right formations were disproportionally involved in the violent conflict, specifically violence against civilians and prisoners of war. Small numbers of volunteers and mercenaries, citizens of Belarus, Canada, France, Italy, Russia, Sweden, and the United States, including neo-Nazis, served in Ukrainian far-right-led units. They mainly joined the Azov battalion, which was later transformed into a regiment (see Katchanovski 2015; Katchanovski & Abrahms, 2024; Chapter 6).

The violence by separatists and the central government also had major roles in escalation of the conflict into a full-scale war. A separatist attack on 22 May 2014 resulted in the death of 16 Ukrainian army soldiers near Volnovakha. On 1 July 2014, the Poroshenko government broke a brief truce and launched a large-scale military operation against separatists.

A daily examination of various live broadcasts, videos, and media reports shows that the separatist leaders, commanders, and members of their armed units were mostly residents of Donbas and, to a lesser extent, other regions of Ukraine. They included ethnic Russian nationalists, anti-Maidan activists, splinter Communist Party and Party of Regions activists, and former members of Berkut and SBU. But a significant number of volunteers and mercenaries also came to Donbas directly from or via Russia or Crimea. The analysis of the same numerous sources indicates that these included mostly Russian nationalists, Russian Cossacks, Chechens, Ingushes, and Ossetians and relatively small numbers of Communists and neo-Nazis and citizens of other post-Soviet states, Serbia, and Western countries.

A list of 1572 people who joined armed formations of the Donetsk Peoples Republic (DNR) in summer of 2014, included 78% Ukrainian citizens, 19% Russian citizens, and 3% citizens of other countries. This DNR list was hacked and published by the Ukrainian government linked Myrotvorets website. The Ukrainian government's list of 188 sanctioned DNR, LNR, and Crimea leaders, officials, commanders, and combatants includes 64% Ukrainian citizens, 8% Russian citizens, 4% citizens of other countries, and 24% people with no citizenship information (see Katchanovski, 2017).

Analysis of numerous Ukrainian, Russian, and separatist governments and media reports concerning about 1.2 thousand people, who were exchanged or listed for the exchange by the central government of Ukraine with separatist republics and Russia in 2014–2021, shows that 1% of them were identified as regular Russian military members and about 4% were identified as other Russian citizens, some of whom also had Ukrainian citizenship. The absolute majority of them were prisoners of war (POWs), while a minority were arrested on various political charges after the Maidan, including Odesa separatists. This suggests that the overwhelming majority of about one thousand POWs, who were exchanged to Donbas separatists and Russia before the Ukraine-Russia war in 2022, or about 95% were Ukrainian citizens, 1.5% were regular Russian military members, and 3.5% were Russian volunteers and mercenaries.

Various sources show that, in spite of continuing denial by the Russian government, direct Russian military intervention in Donbas began at the end of August 2014. It took the form of incursions by several battalion-size units in order to prevent a defeat of separatist forces and taking Donetsk and Luhansk cities by the Ukrainian forces. These include a report by the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine in 2015, as well as reports by separatists, videos of Russian military convoys, videos of captured Russian soldiers and equipment, first-hand reports by Western media and eyewitnesses, and released satellite images of Russian military vehicles on the Ukrainian side of the border.

They all suggest that the Russian forces, along with the separatist units, took part in combat with the Ukrainian forces and far-right-led battalions in the Illovaisk area, encircled many of the Ukrainian units, and killed around 400 of them during their attempt to leave the encirclement. Similar evidence shows that some regular Russian units also took part in the Debaltseve battle in February 2015. The Russian forces were usually involved in the combat from a distance, such as shelling the Ukrainian positions from artillery, multiple rockets, and tanks. There are videos and other evidence that they started shelling of the Ukrainian positions from the Russian territory near the border in July 2014 (Sky, 2014). There were also reports from different sources about incursions of regular Russian units in Donbas in Fall 2014 and August 2015 (see Ministry, 2015).

In addition, such evidence indicates that since the end of summer 2014 and until the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, regular Russian troops in Donbas included, military advisers, operators of advanced weapon systems, and military reconnaissance and intelligence personnel. There was no evidence of permanent presence of Russian regular military units in Donbas during the civil war there. OSCE monitoring mission reports and a British Ministry of Defense map of the Russian forces' deployment before the invasion of Ukraine on February 23, 2022 showed no Russian troops in Donbas (Ministry, 2022).

Indirect evidence of direct Russian military interventions in August 2014 and January–February 2015 includes a relatively rapid change in the military situation in Donbas in August 2014 and January–February 2015. Before the end of August 2014, separatists were under attack by Ukrainian forces and had been retreating from Sloviansk and Kramatorsk to the more densely populated parts of Donbas, particularly the cities of Donetsk and Luhansk. However, following direct Russian military interventions in Donbas during battles at the end of August 2014 and in

February 2015, the Ukrainian regular units and special police and far-right-led volunteer battalions suffered encirclements, retreats, and losses in the Illovaisk and Debaltseve areas, respectively.

In addition, changes in the top leadership of DNR and LNR in mid-August 2014 preceded the Russian military intervention in Donbas. These include the replacements of Alexander Borodai, the prime minister of DNR, and Girkin (Strelkov), the defense minister of DNR, with local separatist leaders. In contrast, a similar direct military intervention by regular Russian forces before August 2014 and permanent presence and continuing direct involvement in combat of significant regular Russian military forces have not been corroborated directly and indirectly by the analysis of the various sources.

In contrast to their condemnation of the use of the government forces during Euromaidan, the United States administration and governments of other Western countries supported the Ukrainian government's policy of using force against the Donbas separatists. A former Ukrainian official stated that he witnessed that the CIA director during his secret visit to Ukraine in April 2014 pressed the Ukrainian government leaders to use force in Donbas (Maté, 2024). Oleksander Turchynov, who became the leader of Ukraine after Euromaidan, ordered the use of force in Donbas in April 2014 and declared "the anti-terrorist operation" there right after the visit of the CIA director.

There was nearly perfect alignment of Ukrainian and US government positions concerning major foreign policy issues, including the war in Donbas. Specifically, top US government officials generally expressed unconditional backing of the Ukrainian government policies concerning the conflict in Donbas, and the United States provided free of charge military training and military equipment to the Ukrainian forces. But the US government and other Western countries have excluded the possibility of direct military intervention in the war in Donbas. They also ignored the Ukrainian far-right involvement in the conflict in Donbas and their human rights violations. The United States and other Western governments denied that separatists in Donbas had any agency and misrepresented the conflict in Donbas as a war between Ukraine and Russia or a "hybrid war."

The evidence suggests a US-led regime change in Ukraine during Euromaidan. Analysis of various sources, in particular statements by then the US President Barak Obama and the US Vice President Joe Biden, leaked recordings of phone calls between then President Poroshenko and

Biden, and Ukrainian media reports, shows that Ukraine became a US "client state" after Euromaidan and during the conflict in Donbas. The US government had obtained influence over appointments of top officials, for instance, Prime Minister Arseniy Yatseniuk, and over policies of the Ukrainian government, in particular, concerning the conflicts in Crimea and Donbas (see Chapter 2; Mostovaia, 2015).

Similarly, there is evidence, including separatist sources, that shows that the separatist republics in Donbas became de facto client states of Russia at the end of summer 2014. Soon after the direct Russian military intervention in August 2014, almost all separatist units in Donbas were brought under the de facto overall command of Russian military "curators" or advisers. Most of the original separatist commanders in charge of such units, including Girkin, were forced to leave Donbas for Russia. The remaining commanders were partly incorporated into the new military-style units, which were equipped and trained by the Russian military. Some of the original separatist commanders were arrested or killed, like Oleksii Mozhovoi, for resisting such incorporation (Colonel 2015). The Ukrainian military intelligence and SBU claimed responsibility for killings of other separatist leaders and commanders, such as Aleksandr Zakharchenko, "Givi," and "Motorola."

As result of both direct Russian military intervention, President Poroshenko rapidly reversed his reliance on military force against separatists and he negotiated the Minsk ceasefire agreements. This means that the Ukrainian government was forced to negotiate with Russia and sign the Minsk agreements by means of the direct Russian military interventions and in order to avoid a war with Russia.

After the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Poroshenko and German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Francois Hollande, who mediated the Minsk agreements, stated that respectively the Ukrainian and Western governments used the Minsk agreements to postpone the Russia-Ukraine war (Angela, 2022; Pandey, 2022; Prouvost, 2022).

Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who was elected as president of Ukraine in 2019 promising to end the war in Donbas by negotiating a peace deal, stated after the Russian invasion in 2022 that he treated Minsk agreements only as the official avenue for negotiations where it was possible to "solve at least some problems, so he started using it for prisoners of war swaps." At the 2019 Normandy summit that included Vladimir Putin, Zelenskyy stated that "the agreement, as it stands, cannot be fulfilled" (Esch et al., 2023).

Shortly before the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Zelensky and other top government officials in Ukraine proclaimed a strategy of taking back Donbas by means of military force. There was increased shelling by the Ukrainian forces. However, there is no direct evidence that such military operation was imminent before the Russia-Ukraine war.

The violent conflict in Donbas before the start of the Russia-Ukraine war in 2022 can thus be defined as a civil war with both direct and indirect military intervention of a foreign state, i.e., Russia. The predominant involvement of local separatists at the start of the conflict, along with the prevalence of local residents along with residents of other Ukrainian regions among the leadership and in the armed formations points to these origins of this conflict as a civil war. Currently available evidence indicates that the Russian government's indirect support for separatists, and subsequent direct military intervention, came after the start of the conflict in Donbas. However, this intervention also proved decisive in enabling the separatists to turn the tide of the war, prevent the Ukrainian forces from recapturing all of Donbas, and force the Poroshenko government to sign the Minsk agreements.

The separatist conflict in Donbas is thus in many ways similar to violent conflicts and secessions in other post-Soviet states, such as Transdniestria in Moldova, Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, and Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan. Like in Donbas, separatist movements in these countries emerged in regions populated by ethnic minorities. The central governments of these countries also refused to offer autonomy to these regions and relied on military or police forces and paramilitary units to suppress separatism. These attempts failed largely because of military interventions by Russia in the form of the Russian 14th army in Transdniestria, and Russian military intervention in Abkhazia and South Ossetia following an attack by Georgia in 2008. Similarly, Armenia intervened militarily and directly in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

The estimate of the total direct military and civilian casualties of the war in Donbas is approximately 15,000 people killed. This estimate is based on the UN report of 14,200–14,400 killed in Donbas from 14 April 2014 to 31 December 2021 (OHCHR, 2022). The UN casualty figure is adjusted by an estimate of presumed casualties among the missing, presumed undercounting of casualties among Russian volunteers and mercenaries, and Russian regular troops, and casualties reported by the UN for 2022 before the Russian invasion on February 24.

The estimated number of killed members of the Ukrainian military, National Guard, police, Security Service, border guards, and paramilitary units is around 5000. This estimate is based on the UN report of 4400 killed Ukrainian forces members and identification of 4,850 killed Ukrainian forces members by name (OHCHR 2022; Ukraine's 2024). They are adjusted for casualties in 2022 before the Russian invasion on February 24 and missing in action who are presumed to be killed (OHCHR, 2022). The majority of the officially reported 283–800 missing soldiers are presumed killed.

The casualties among armed separatist units, including Russian volunteers, are estimated by the UN to be 6500 (OHCHR, 2022). A rough estimate of killed Russian regular troops, primarily involved in fighting in August 2014 and February 2015, is close to 100. This estimate is derived from reported and corroborated cases of individual casualties, and it is consistent with a compilation of about 80 cases of the Russian military personnel killed in undisclosed circumstances and locations in 2014 and 2015 (Voennaia, 2016). The number of civilian casualties is estimated by the UN at around 3500 (OHCHR, 2022). They include 298 passengers and crew of the Malaysian Boeing airliner.

In addition, thousands or tens of thousands of people in this region, and in the government-controlled part of Ukraine are likely to be indirect casualties of the war as a result of higher mortality rates e.g., due to inadequate medical care, heating, and food linked to the war, but their numbers are difficult to estimate more precisely because of lack of data.

The analysis of various sources, such as the UN and OSCE mission reports, videos of the attacks, and Western journalists on-site reports, suggests that the majority of civilian casualties during the Ukrainian attack stage and positional stages of the war resulted from shelling by the Ukrainian forces of cities, towns, and villages used by armed separatists as their bases (see, for example, OHCHR 2015a, 2015b). Attacks on Luhansk, Stanytsia Luhanska, Horlivka, and Donetsk involved multiple civilian casualties stemming from both collateral casualties from shelling by the Ukrainian regular forces and volunteer far-right battalions of both rebels and civilians. However, the separatists or Russian forces were responsible for most of the major deadly attacks during their advance in January and February 2015, such as shelling of Volnovakha and Mariupol that resulted in multiple civilian casualties.

The evidence shows that a separatist or Russian Buk crew shot-down in July 2014 the Malaysian Boeing passenger plane (the MH17 flight on a route from the Netherlands to Malaysia), likely by mistaking it for a Ukrainian military plane. Such evidence includes the investigation and the trial in the Netherlands, intercepted cell phone calls of separatist commanders, eyewitness testimonies, videos and photos of the Buk on the separatist-controlled territory and its apparent launch site. Such evidence, like the intercepted phone call by a top separatist commander in Donbas, suggests that the Buk was brought from Russia and that its crew shot-down the Malaysian MH17 passenger Boeing plane unintentionally by mistaking it for a Ukrainian military aircraft.

The total number of refugees chiefly as a result of the conflict in Donbas is estimated on the basis of official statistics of respective countries at about 3 million, including 1.7 million internally displaced people registered in Ukraine and more than one million refugees from Donbas in neighboring countries, primarily Russia.

5.3 Support for Separatism

A national survey, excepting Crimea, commissioned by the author and conducted by the KIIS in April/May 2014, indicates much higher levels of popular support for separatism in Donbas compared to other regions of Ukraine. It shows that the majority of Donbas residents backed various forms of separatism (54% overall or 61%, excluding undecideds) in April/May 2014. Support for separatism in Donbas far exceeded separatist support in the three Eastern regions neighboring Donbas and in the South (Table 5.1). But it was significantly lower than indicated by other surveys in Crimea (Katchanovski, 2015).

The KIIS survey asked about attitudes towards different forms of separatism, which includes not only outright secessionism but also unilateral demands of greater autonomy or federalism (Cabestan & Pavković 2013; Katchanovski, 2006a). Statements by top leaders, including President Poroshenko, and actions by the Security Service of Ukraine show that the Ukrainian government after Euromaidan has de facto made illegal public support not only for secession but also for a regional autonomy and federalism (Poroshenko, 2016). Prior to April 2014, many separatist leaders, specifically in Donbas, called for federalism and regional autonomy in Ukraine. The Russian government also pressed for federalism and de facto

Table 5.1 Support for separatism in different regions of Ukraine, the 2014 KIIS Survey, %

	Donbas	*Other East*	*South*[a]	*Center*	*Bukovyna*	*Galicia*	*Transcarpathia*	*Volhynia*
Secession from Ukraine and joining another state	23	3	2	1	0	0	0	0
Secession from Ukraine and formation of independent state	8	2	1	0	0	0	0	0
Autonomy as a part of federal Ukraine	23	10	7	2	0	0	0	0
Preserving current status within unitary Ukraine with expanded powers	26	55	59	54	69	68	84	59
Preserving current status within unitary Ukraine with current powers	9	18	23	31	13	22	11	40
Don't know/not sure	11	12	8	12	18	10	5	1
Total, %	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
N	311	377	214	704	39	224	55	94

Note Excludes Crimea

confederation, which would have given Donbas the power to block decisions of the central government, including those regarding matters of foreign policy.

In the 2014 KIIS survey, 23% of the respondents in Donbas favored autonomy as a part of federal Ukraine, compared to 8% supporting independence of their region, while 23% favored the region joining Russia. Conversely, preserving the pre-war status of their regions within a unitary Ukraine, but with expanded powers, had support of 9%. These survey results also show that views expressed by the Russian government and the media concerning widespread popular support for separatism in all of Eastern and Southern Ukraine were unfounded (see Table 5.1).

A 2015 KIIS survey produced similar results in separatist-controlled Donbas. The option of joining Russia was favored by 16% of the respondents, independence from Ukraine by 26%, autonomy within a federal Ukraine by 18%, extended powers in a unitary Ukraine by 20%, and a return to the pre-war status of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions was supported by 12% (Iakym, 2015).

The 2019 telephone survey by the German ZOiS showed that 77% percent of residents of separatist-controlled Donbas expressed support for various forms of separatism, while 24% of the respondents favor the regional status that was before the civil war in 2014. Some 46% of the respondents preferred Donbas incorporation into Russia, while 31% supported its special autonomous status in Ukraine (Sasse & Lackner, 2019).

The 2014 KIIS Survey also shows that ethnic Russians in Ukraine, with the exception of Crimea, were split on the issue of separatism. Similar percentages of ethnic Russians supported preservation of the existing unitary system (43%), mostly with expanded powers, and different separatist options (42%), including 16% who preferred their region to join Russia. Interestingly, people of mixed Russian and Ukrainian descent showed stronger support for separatism, not only compared to ethnic Ukrainians but also to ethnic Russians (Table 5.2). By contrast, only 24% of Russian speakers, including many ethnic Ukrainians, favored secession from Ukraine or regional autonomy in a federal Ukraine (see Table 5.3).

No major national political party in Ukraine openly supported the separatists in Donbas. The Ukrainian government not only prohibits separatist parties and organizations in Ukraine, but it also has disbanded the Communist Party on separatism charges and launched criminal cases against some leaders of the Party of Regions on similar charges. Indeed,

Table 5.2 Support for separatism by major ethnic groups in Ukraine, the 2014 KIIS Survey, %

	Ukrainians	*Russians*	*Both Russian and Ukrainian*	*Other*
Secession from Ukraine and joining another state	2	16	25	14
Secession from Ukraine and formation of independent state	1	6	9	3
Autonomy as a part of federal Ukraine	5	20	18	14
Preserving current status within unitary Ukraine with expanded powers	57	35	23	29
Preserving current status within unitary Ukraine with current powers	25	8	9	23
Don't know/not sure	10	16	18	17
Total, %	100	100	100	100
N	1693	229	57	35

Note Excludes Crimea

Table 5.3 Support for separatism by major languages in Ukraine, the 2014 KIIS Survey, %

	Ukrainian	*Russian*	*Mixture of Russian and Ukrainian*
Secession from Ukraine and joining another state	1	9	3
Secession from Ukraine and formation of independent state	1	3	2
Autonomy as a part of federal Ukraine	1	12	5
Preserving current status within unitary Ukraine with expanded powers	61	45	57
Preserving current status within unitary Ukraine with current powers	28	18	24
Don't know/not sure	8	13	10
Total, %	100	100	100
N	802	934	284

Note Excludes Crimea

significant numbers of supporters of the Party of Regions and the Communist Party back the separatists contrary to official positions of these parties. The 2014 KIIS Survey shows that 20% of those who intend to vote for the Party of Regions and 15% of those who intend to vote for the Communist Party favored regional secession from Ukraine and joining another state, which means in almost all cases Russia, or forming an independent state.

Autonomy for their regions as a part of federal Ukraine was preferred by 18% of likely Party of Regions voters and 19% of likely Communist voters. But 22% of the respondents, who did not intend to vote, also expressed secessionist views, while 12% supported regional autonomy as a part of a federal state in Ukraine.

Multiple regression analysis of the 2014 KIIS Survey data shows that, when other factors are held constant, the residents of Donbas expressed much stronger support for separatism than other regions. Pro-separatist views there were also stronger than in the neighboring regions of Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv, and Zaporizhzhia. Ethnic Russians, other ethnic minorities, Communist Party likely voters, younger people, adherents to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (the Moscow Patriarchate), and men all expressed stronger, statistically significant support for separatism. Standardized regression coefficients show that the residence in Donbas was the biggest determinant of pro-separatist views, while self-identification as an ethnic Russian has the second strongest effect. Residence in other major historic and geographic regions, other political party affiliation, other religious confession, being a Russian speaker, education level, and settlement type did not have any significant positive impact on support for separatism.

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CHAPTER 6

The Far-Right Involvement in Euromaidan, the Maidan and Odesa Massacres, and the Donbas War

6.1 Conflicting Narratives Concerning the Far Right in Ukraine

There are contrasting narratives concerning the involvement of the far right in in Euromaidan, the Maidan and Odesa massacres, and the war in Donbas. These conflicts were the most significant and the most contested and politicized cases of political violence in Ukraine since its independence in 1991 and until the Russia-Ukraine war in 2022.

Russian and Donbas separatist leaders and the media often labeled Euromaidan as a “fascist coup” and the Maidan government as a “fascist junta” organized by the US government. Russian and separatist politicians and the media often represented the war in Donbas as fight against “fascists “or “Nazis” and compared the Odesa massacre to the Nazi-led mass killing of residents of Khatyn village in Belarus during World War Two. Russian President Vladimir Putin, other Russian government leaders, and the Russian media justified the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 by claiming that the Ukrainian state after the Maidan is Nazi or neo-Nazi.

In contrast, the government and the media in Ukraine and the governments and much of the mainstream media in Western countries generally presented the involvement of radical nationalists and neo-Nazis in Euromaidan and the war in Donbas as marginal, denied, or omitted such involvement (see Ishchenko, 2018a, 2018b; Katchanovski, 2020). The Ukrainian media and politicians, and also to a significant extent the

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Western governments and the mainstream media before the Russian invasion denied that the extremist radical nationalist and neo-Nazi ideology of the far right and their involvement in the Maidan and Odesa massacres. For example, the Foreign Ministry of Ukraine blamed, contrary to overwhelming evidence, the Odesa massacre on May 2, 2014 on provocateurs "paid generously by the Russian special services." The *New York Times* immediately adopted the same line that pro-Russia groups may have been responsible for torching the building (Smale & Kramer, 2014).

The Western governments, which covertly used the far-right OUN and UPA during the Cold War with the Soviet Union, were largely silent concerning the Ukrainian far right in Ukraine and their violence during Euromaidan and the war in Donbas. There were a few exceptions. A defense appropriations bill amendment, which was adopted by the US Congress in 2015 and 2018 and banned US government funding and training of the neo-Nazi-led Azov regiment, was one of the few exceptions (H.Amdt., 2016). In its 2018 Human Rights report, the US State Department called the political wing of the Azov Regiment "a hate group" (Ukraine, 2019). In 2019, ambassadors from G7 countries warned in their joint letter against "extreme political movements in Ukraine, whose violent actions are worrying in themselves." The warnings referred specifically to the Azov movement and its violence during the 2019 presidential elections (Miller, 2019). Some major Western media, such as the New York Times and the Guardian, before the Russian invasion called the Azov Battalion neo-Nazi.

The representation of the far right in Ukraine in English-language Wikipedia largely reflected the dominant narratives of the Western media. There was systematic whitewashing of the Ukrainian contemporary and historical far right in the Ukrainian-language Wikipedia. This concerned in particular contemporary neo-Nazi and other far-right parties, organizations, and their leaders, such as Patriot of Ukraine, the National Corps, the Azov Battalion and the Azov Regiment, Svoboda, and the far-right involvement in the Maidan and Odesa massacres. There was similar whitewashing of the historical predecessors of the contemporary far right in Ukraine, in particular, the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), the OUN leader Stepan Bandera, the UPA commander Roman Shukhevych, and the fascist origins of the "Glory to Ukraine. Glory to the Heroes" greeting, Nazi collaboration of the OUN and the UPA, and their involvement of the Nazi genocide of Jews, Ukrainians, Poles, Byelorussians, and Russians, and the ethnic cleansing of the Poles in Volhynia by the OUN and the UPA (see Katchanovski, 2015a).

In contrast to their historical antecedents, the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, the far right in contemporary Ukraine has not been well researched. The number of academic studies examining the contemporary Ukrainian far right, especially their involvements in the Maidan and the Odesa massacres, and the Donbas war is limited (see Ishchenko, 2018a, 2018b; Katchanovski & Abrahms, 2024; Katchanovski, 2020).

The politicization of the issue of the far right in Ukraine during the "Euromaidan" and the war in Donbas affected researchers of the far right. Many academic and especially non-academic researchers of the far right instead of being neutral observers propagated partisan narratives and even endorsed the far-right violence. For example, Anton Shekhovtsov compared the mass killing of people by a fire in the Trade Union building in Odesa to his killing of Colorado potato beetles by collecting them in a box and then burning them" (Anton, 2014). He was earlier a leader of the Crimean branch of the pro-Russian far-right Eurasian Youth Union led by Aleksandr Dugin (AntiNATOvskii, 2006).

Most studies of the far right in Ukraine have been produced by researchers outside academe in partisan think tanks or non-government organizations as well as by journalists who did not subject their work to peer-review. Such assessments are more likely to be politically driven and less likely to exhibit methodological rigor or even professionalism. Such analyzes have tended to uncritically rely on Ukrainian and Western government narratives, accepting their claims at face value.

Some researchers, especially from partisan think tanks, regarded the role of the far-right organizations and formations in Ukraine in Euromaidan, and the war in Donbas as insignificant or marginal. They focused on numerical strength of far-right organizations and electoral support for the far-right parties and ignored or denied the far-right involvement in political violence, such as the Odesa massacre and the civil war in Donbas. They claimed that the presence of Russian-speakers in the Azov regiment and other neo-Nazi-led armed formations is evidence of their relative tolerance and asserted that the Azov regiment moderated by abandoning its far-right roots (see, for example, Umland, 2019, 2020).

Previous studies generally ignored or denied the far-right involvement in the Odesa massacre. Only two academic studies specifically examined the Odesa massacre (Katchanovski, 2016c; Katchanovski & Abrahms, 2024). Another study examined its public perceptions, did not analyze the massacre per se, and referred to the massacre as a “tragedy” (Hale et al., 2018). A poll commissioned for that study found that 44% of Ukrainians believed that this mass killing was committed by provocateurs from Russia, while 11% blamed pro-Russian residents of Odesa. Ten percent of the respondents said that the Odesa massacre was perpetrated by “Ukrainian nationalists from Odessa” and 3% by “pro-Ukrainian” residents of Odesa (Hale et al., 2018).

Other scholarly studies of the far right in Ukraine reached different conclusions. Comprehensive studies found that the far-right organizations, such as the Right Sector and Svoboda, were involved in the Maidan massacre of the protesters and the police (Hahn, 2018; Katchanovski, 2015b, 2016b, 2020, 2023a, 2023b, 2024). Quantitative analysis found that such far-right organizations as Svoboda party, the Right Sector, and Azov were the most active organizations in mass protests, in particular, violent ones, during and after Euromaidan (Ishchenko, 2016, 2018a).

This chapter relies on political science theories and definitions of the far-right organizations. The term “far right” denotes ultranationalists and both racial and ethnic supremacists. The far-right ideology includes various forms, such as radical nationalism and neo-Nazism. The term “neo-Nazi” refers to far-right organizations that revamp elements of Nazi ideology, particularly its racial and ethnic supremacism, and use symbols associated with Nazi Germany or their stylized versions. As with Nazis, neo-Nazi organizations represent a form of fascism (see Griffin & Feldman, 2003; Lipset & Raab, 1970).

The analysis is based on thousands of primary and secondary sources of data, such as online recordings of live broadcasts and videos, the Maidan massacre trial and its verdict, websites and social media groups of far-right organizations and their armed units, and media reports in Ukrainian, Russian, and English languages. Since all used sources could not be cited for space reasons, it cites the most relevant sources.

6.2 The Far-Right Involvement in Euromaidan

The analysis shows that all major far-right organizations in Ukraine, participated in Euromaidan. Their common goal was a national revolution which would overthrow the pro-Russian Yanukovych government and forge the Ukrainian nation. Svoboda party was the most significant and popular of such organizations. Svoboda was founded as the

Social National Party of Ukraine (SNPU) around the time when Ukraine became independent in 1991. It combined radical nationalist and neo-Nazi features, which were exemplified by its name and its use of modified Wolfsangel resembling swastika as the party symbol. However, the party changed its name in 2004 to Svoboda, which means Freedom in Ukrainian. It tried to moderate publicly its ideology in order to increase its popularity beyond the far-right supporters and beyond its base in Galicia (Bustikova, 2015; Katchanovski, 2012; Rudling, 2013). Svoboda reported that between 2 to 5 thousand out of some 15 thousand party members during this time were permanently present on the Maidan (Svoboda, 2016). While this number of Svoboda protesters is likely to be exaggerated, videos and livestreams of protests often showed that there are large numbers of Svoboda flags representing a significant proportion of the flags in many protest actions.

The Right Sector was formed by smaller far-right political organizations and groups of football (soccer) ultras in the early stages of the Maidan protests. It was an alliance of radical nationalist Organizations, such as Tryzub (Trident) named after Bandera and the UNA-UNSO, and neo-Nazi organizations, such as the Social National Assembly (SNA), Patriot of Ukraine (the paramilitary wing of the SNA), and the White Hammer, and groups of ultras who mostly had similar ultranationalist and neo-Nazi orientation. The Right Sector can therefore be classified as a partially radical nationalist and partially fascist or semi-fascist organization based on the definition of political science.

The Right Sector reached several hundred members by the end of Euromaidan. Members of Svoboda and the Right Sector combined with members of other relatively small far-right organizations, such as the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists, the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, Bratstvo, and ultras constituted a minority of the Maidan protesters during Euromaidan in Kyiv.

However, the analysis of various evidence shows that the role of the far right in violent attacks and other cases of political violence during Euromaidan was outsize. Videos, interviews of Right Sector leaders, eyewitnesses, and websites and social media pages of Tryzub, revealed that the Right Sector attacked the Berkut police during the highly publicized violent dispersal of a few hundred protesters on the Maidan on November 30, 2013. There is various evidence that the far-right leaders had advance information about this dispersal and used it to galvanize

Euromaidan protests, which were coming to an end on that night (see Katchanovski, 2020; Chapter 2).

The live streams, video recordings, and statements of the Right Sector leaders and activists showed that the Right Sector and football ultras had a key role in violent clashes with the Berkut police and the Internal Troops and in the violent attacks on presidential administration on December 1, 2013, and the Ukrainian parliament at the end of January 2014 and on February 18, 2014. Various evidence, such as court decisions and admissions by the neo-Nazi White Hammer leader, suggesting the far-right involvement in the false-flag murders of the first three Maidan protesters on January 22, 2014 (see Katchanovski, 2020; Chapter 2).

For example, live video streams, symbols of certain groups of neo-Nazi attackers, and later admissions of their involvement by the Right Sector leaders and activists, in particular Dmytro Yarosh, showed that the far-right organizations played a key role in the attack attempt on the parliament in January 2014 (Nayem & Kovalenko, 2014). Although Svoboda publicly distanced itself from violent attacks of the presidential administration and the parliament, the evidence, such as presence of some Svoboda flags and activists, live streams, and social media posts, clearly indicated that at least some Svoboda and C14 members and activists linked to them were involved in these violent attacks. There was similar evidence of Svoboda's participation in seizures of regional administrations, primarily, in Western Ukraine and storming and occupying Kyiv City administration on December 1, 2013. Svoboda and its C14 affiliate also formed some paramilitary self-defense companies during Euromaidan. C14, a Neo-Nazi youth organization affiliated with Svoboda, led a paramilitary Self-Defense unit, which helped Svoboda to forcibly occupy the Kyiv city administration during the mass protests against the Yanukovych government and the police violence. Yevhen Karas, the C14 leader, was photographed with a fascist salute, and the group used neo-Nazi symbols (Ukraine, 2014).

Displays by a part of Maidan protesters of neo-Nazi symbols, such as swastika, SS signs, the Celtic cross, and 14/88 sign, referring to a White supremacist statement and "Heil Hitler," in different Maidan-controlled areas also indicated presence and toleration of members of neo-Nazi organizations, groups, or their sympathizers among the protesters. Field research and photos taken by the author in the Maidan soon after Euromaidan showed many such far-right symbols in the area (see, for example, Figs. 6.1 and 6.2).

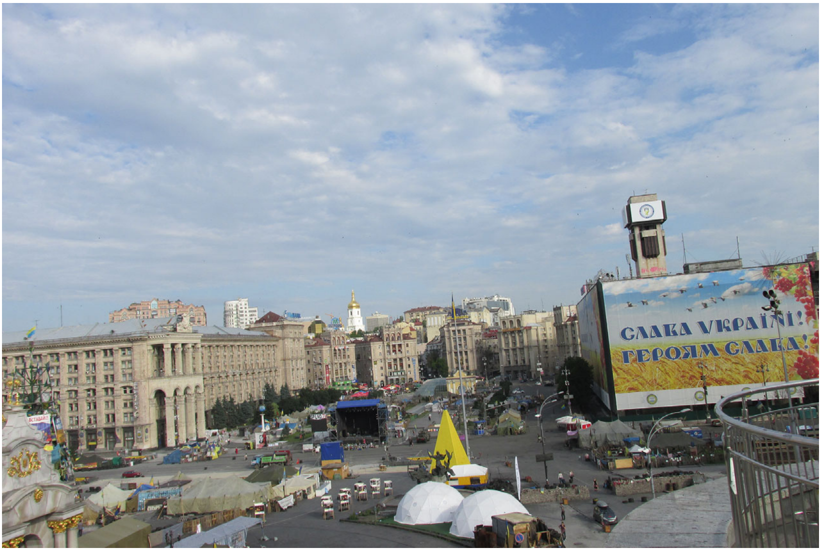

Fig. 6.1 The "Glory to Ukraine. The Glory to Heroes" sign on the Trade Union building burned by the far right during the Maidan massacre. Photo by the author

Many far-right organizations in the Maidan regarded themselves to various extent as the ideological heirs of the OUN and the UPA and used symbols adopted from the OUN and the UPA, their historical predecessors, such as a red and black flag, and salutes and chants of "Glory to Ukraine - Glory to Heroes," "Glory to the Nation," and "Ukraine above all." For instance, Tryzub was named after Bandera, the OUN leader, and it was created shortly after the independence of Ukraine as a paramilitary branch of the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists, which was organized in Ukraine by the Bandera faction of the OUN active in the Ukrainian diaspora in North America. The Right Sector used the red and black flag of the Bandera faction of the OUN (OUN-B) and along with other far-right organizations, such as Svoboda, the OUN-B "Glory to Ukraine" greetings. The Bandera faction of the OUN adopted this flag and the greeting at the time of its collaboration with Nazi Germany at the beginning of 1941. They were modeled after symbols and greetings of other fascist or semi-fascist parties, including the Nazi party. Red and black colors of the

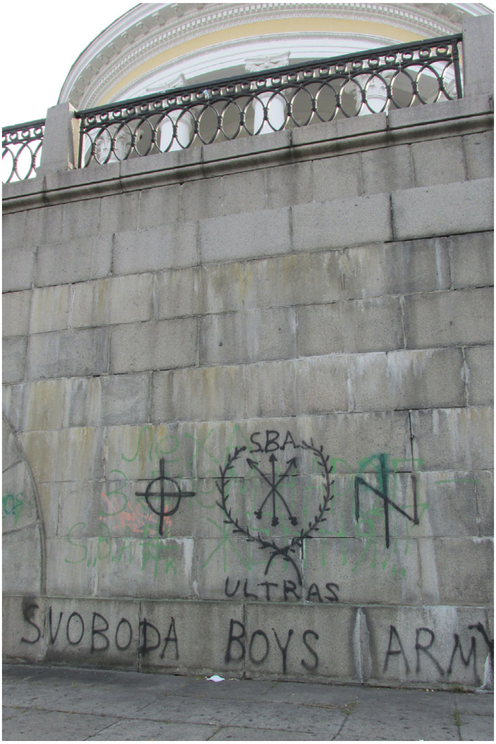

Fig. 6.2 Far-right symbols on the Maidan. Photo by the author

OUN-B flag symbolized Blood and Soil that resembled Blut und Boden concepts in Nazi ideology and symbols.

"Glory to Ukraine. Glory to the heroes!" greeting was adopted by a 1941 OUN-B congress and accompanied by a fascist-style hand salute. In this form it resembled greetings and the hand salutes used by the Nazi Party in Germany, the National Fascist Party in Italy, and Ustasha in Croatia (see Katchanovski, 2014, 214; 2015a). "Ukraine above all" resembled "Germany above all," a German anthem reference emphasized during the Nazi rule. The non-far-right Maidan leaders, parties, and protesters also started to use the "Glory to Ukraine. Glory to the heroes" greeting during Euromaidan by borrowing it from the far-right parties, but they ignored or denied the fascist origins of this greeting.

Oleh Tiahnybok, the far-right Svoboda party leader, stated that the term "Revolution of Dignity" was coined by a deputy of his party (Tiagnybok, 2015). Like the far right "Glory to Ukraine" (Slava Ukraini) greeting, this term was adopted by the entire Maidan opposition during Euromaidan and by the Ukrainian governments after Euromaidan.

The influence of such far-right organizations, as the Right Sector, and its members, such as Tryzub, UNA-UNSO, and Patriot of Ukraine, far exceeded their relatively small membership during Euromaidan because they were paramilitary organizations and relied on violence. Many of their leaders and members had training in use of violence, including weapons, and experience of participation in violence in Ukraine and other post-Soviet states. The UNA-UNSO, for example, participated in the war in Chechnya on the side of the Chechen separatists and Islamists and in the civil war in Moldova on the side of the pro-Russian separatists in Transdniestria.

Tiahnybok, the leader of the far-right Svoboda party, became one of three members of the Maidan leadership. Andrii Parubiy, a former leader of the Social National Party of Ukraine and neo-Nazi Patriot of Ukraine, its paramilitary wing, became the commander of the Maidan Self-Defense. The Maidan Self-Defense was a paramilitary organization, which was organized during Euromaidan and consisted of more than dozen paramilitary companies, including the Right Sector company, and it was involved in violent clashes with the Berkut police and the Internal Troops. In an article published in a SNPU publication in 1999, Parubiy referred to both the United States and Russia as barbarians fighting against the "white race spirit" and approvingly quoted a French National Front representative statement that France and Ukraine were stopping the "Asian hordes," Western Europe and the East, respectively (Parubiy, 1999). After leaving Patriot of Ukraine and the SNPU in 2004, He projected a more moderate image, but he never publicly renounced his neo-Nazi background. In an interview with a Ukrainian newspaper published in 2008, Parubiy publicly stated that his political orientation and ideological foundations have not changed since he left the Social National Party of Ukraine, which became Svoboda party (Chat, 2008).

6.3 The Far-Right Involvement in the Maidan Massacre

The violent clashes of protesters with the police and "titushki" and the mass killing started when the protesters tried to break police barricade and tried to attack the parliament on February 18, 2014. These clashes and mass killing happened during a "peaceful march," organized by the Maidan opposition leaders, including the far right. They included Oleksander Turchynov, a leader of the oligarchic Fatherland party, Andrii Parubiy, the commander of the Maidan Self-Defense and the former leader of neo-Nazi Patriot of Ukraine, and Dmytro Yarosh, the leader of the Right Sector (Personal observation of live online streams). Personal observations via live online streams of this march and violence that followed showed that the protesters included the Maidan Self-Defense companies, in particular the Right Sector company. At the Maidan massacre investigation, some Maidan Self-Defense company commanders testified that Parubiy had ordered to start "a bloodshed" during this "peaceful march" towards the parliament around noon on February 18, 2014 (Dopros, 2018).

The live streams recordings of the rally showed that the protesters led by Svoboda deputies tried to break through and attacked police barricades near the parliament. Footage disclosed that another group of the Maidan protesters attacked and set the Party of Regions headquarters on fire nearby (Shturm, 2014). The head of the Kyiv branch of the SNA later stated that they burned this building (Chimiris & Bratkova, 2014). Footage from the scene also revealed that Tetiana Chornovol, a former activist of the far-right UNA-UNSO, was among the attackers. During this attack and during the burning of the headquarters of the Party of Regions, a Party of Regions computer specialist was killed, becoming the first casualty of the Maidan massacre.

Various evidence, such as videos, eyewitnesses, the Maidan massacre trial and its verdict, and admissions of the far-right activists and Maidan snipers shows involvement of the far-right Svoboda, the Right Sector, and the far-right-linked special Maidan armed company of snipers in the Maidan massacre of the police and Maidan protesters (see Katchanovski, 2020, 2024; Chapter 3).

In addition to such evidence, court rulings revealed that GPU investigated use of weapons, which were seized by the Right Sector during an attack on the SBU regional headquarters in Ivano-Frankivsk, in shooting the police on the Maidan (Pechersk, 2016a). A Maidan activist said that the Right Sector had its own armed group among several covert Maidan groups of shooters, who were armed primarily with hunting rifles. He also said that on February 18–20, 2014, two such covert armed groups, in particular, from the Trade Union building and from the Music Conservatory, shot 20 Berkut special police force officers and Internal Troops servicemen (Herasymchuk, 2014).

Tiahnybok and Ruslan Koshulynsky, the deputy head of the parliament from the far-right Svoboda party, stated that a Western government representative during their meeting told them that the Western governments would turn on Yanukovych after casualties among protesters would reach 100 (Braty, 2017, 94).

Dmytro Yarosh, the leader of the Right Sector, issued a statement shortly after the midnight on February 20 announcing that the Right Sector did not accept the truce agreement and would undertake decisive actions against the government forces to “force them into peace” («Pravyi sektor» 2014). The analysis of numerous footage, recordings of live streams, intercepts of radio communications of the Internal Troops and SBU Alfa unit commanders, and testimonies by the Maidan protesters and the police officers show that four Berkut special police force members were killed and nearly 40 Berkut special police force officers and Internal Troops were wounded by concealed shooters when they were besieging the Maidan, specifically from the Music Conservatory building in the early morning of February 20. Berkut officers said that they noticed protesters with the Right Sector insignia in this building on February 19 and that the armed protesters took positions there (Maidan, 2015). It is unlikely that the presence of such an armed unit in the Maidan square building, which was located next to the Maidan stage, could have been possible without the knowledge of the Maidan Self-Defense commanders and the Maidan leadership.

Volodymyr Parasiuk stated that he organized his special armed Maidan company, which included armed protesters with experience fighting in armed conflicts, following negotiations with the Right Sector and that this company was based in the Music Conservatory building at the time of the massacre Parasiuk admitted that he had been a member of the far-right Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists in the past and trained to shoot in its camps (Kovalenko, 2014). He and three members of his company admitted in Ukrainian media and BBC interviews that they or their company members shot the police (Kovalenko, 2014; Schuller, 2015).. Berkut policemen testified that they saw Maidan protesters with Right Sector symbols in the Music Conservatory after it was seized by the Parasiuk company (Maidan, 2015).

Videos showed that he and members of his company armed with Kalashnikov-type firearms and hunting rifles arrived to the Hotel Ukraina and were shooting and changing positions there during the massacre of the Maidan protesters by snipers from this hotel. There is various evidence that Svoboda controlled the Hotel Ukraine before and during the Maidan massacre, specifically at the time when snipers there massacred the Maidan protesters and the police. In an official statement, Svoboda stated that its activists took the Hotel Ukraine under their control and guard on January 25, 2014 (VO "Svoboda", 2014). Similar statement was made by the Svoboda leader from the Maidan stage. The BBC and other videos and testimony of a Maidan commander show that the hotel's main entrance was guarded by Svoboda deputies and activists during the massacre of protesters by snipers in this hotel (see Katchanovski, 2024; Chapter 3).

On February 21, 2014, Parasiuk gave an ultimatum for Yanukovych from the Maidan stage to resign by the next morning and threatened the use of force if he would not resign. Parubiy said this ultimatum was a decision made by "the institutional bodies of the Maidan" and it was adopted by a military council set up by the Maidan Self-Defense and the Right Sector on February 21 (Kalnysh, 2015). After playing a key role in the violent overthrow of the Yanukovych government, Parasiuk served as a company commander in the Dnipro battalion, which was organized with the direct involvement of the Right Sector. Dmytro Yarosh issued a similar ultimatum from the Maidan stage and a threat of use arms by the Right Sector.

Ivan Bubenchyk also admitted in his Lviv TV interview in 2014 and then in other Ukrainian media interviews in 2016 that he opened fire from the Music Conservatory building, acknowledging that he killed two policemen with his AK assault rifle (see Katchanovski, 2016c; Siiak, 2016). His shooting from this building and his joint photos and interviews with Parasiuk in the Conservatory building suggest that Bubenchyk was a member of the Parasiuk led special company based there. Another link of this company to the far right is Bubenchyk's statement that the Right Sector promised him more ammunition during the Maidan massacre of the protesters after he spent his ammunition shooting into the police from the Conservatory building. He also said that Yanukovych was supposed to be killed on February 20 (Brantsi, 2016). The GPU charged him with felony of killing two police officers but then after intervention of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine, who was one of the Maidan leaders, his charges were changed to a lesser crime, and he was released. The new charges were covered by a law that gave amnesty to the Maidan protesters.

This Maidan "sniper" also joined the Dnipro battalion and became the commander of Zakhid-2 battalion, which was formed by a part of the Right Sector activists and Voluntary Ukrainian Corps (DUK) commanders during a split in these far-right organization and its paramilitary wing in fall 2016. Bubenchyk became one of the leaders of Radical Right Forces—the UPA, formed in February 2016 by a part of the Right Sector activists and DUK commanders, attempting to launch a new Maidan protest (14.02.16., 2016). Another Maidan protester initially said in his Vesti newspaper interview and then in his BBC interview that he also shot at the police from the Conservatory building (Chimiris, 2014). He noted that their guns came from the main post office building. This building was then used as the Right Sector headquarters.

The testimonies of five Georgian ex-military members in Italian and Israeli TV documentaries, Macedonian TV, and Russian media interviews, and their depositions to Berkut lawyers for the trial revealed that their groups of snipers allegedly received weapons, payments, and orders from specific Maidan and Georgian politicians, in particular, Parubiy, to massacre both police and protesters. They stated that they received instructions from an ex-US Army sniper, who was linked to the Right Sector. They reported that they saw snipers from Georgia and the Baltic States and specific far-right Right Sector-linked special Maidan armed company shooting from the Music Conservatory and the Hotel Ukraine after receiving such an order (Anna, 2018; The hidden, 2016a, b).

An SBU Alfa officer, who led one of the SBU groups during storming of the Trade Union Building in the Maidan on February 18, stated that their task was to seize the 5th floor, which contained a lot of weapons (Okrema, 2014). The Right Sector then occupied this entire floor which served as both the headquarter and a base of the Right Sector company of the Maidan Self-Defense before the burning of this building by the Maidan protesters later on February 18 to stop its seizure by the SBU Alfa.

Various footage and photos also proved that the Maidan protesters controlled the Kozatsky Hotel area on February 20, when protesters pointed out that there were snipers there. A police report noted that this hotel was used as one of the bases by the Right Sector, specifically by the White Hammer and the Patriot of Ukraine (Nayem, 2014).

Moreover, there is evidence that the Maidan "snipers" were shooting, specifically at the protesters and a BBC crew or taking cover in at least three or four Hotel Ukraine rooms on the 11th floor, which were occupied by the Svoboda deputies of parliament or their aids. More than 30 Svoboda deputies of parliament stayed on this floor at the time of the Maidan massacre. The footage proved that many of the MPs were in the Hotel Ukraine soon after the start of the massacre of the protesters (Persha, 2014). The Prosecutor General Office investigation disclosed that at least three Svoboda deputies stayed on the 11th floor in this hotel, and one of them occupied the same hotel room from which the BBC and ICTV filmed "snipers" firing at the BBC television crew and at the protesters (Chernyi, 2014; Under, 2014).

A Ukrainian publication, based on its own investigation and a reported BBC correspondent statement, suggested that there was a sniper in a different Hotel Ukraine suite, in which another Svoboda deputy stayed at that time. The BBC correspondent reportedly said that after his crew was shot from the 11th floor of the hotel he went to this floor and saw a warning note to not enter the suite number 1109 because of a request from the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU). This was the same suite searched by the Maidan activists. One of the Svoboda leaders admitted that a female member of the Ukrainian parliament from this far-right party stayed at the time of the Maidan massacre in this suite (Istoriia, 2016). An English-speaking foreign reporter said in the same Spilne TV broadcast that he saw a shooter hiding in the Hotel Ukraine and firing shots from an open and moving window. The open and moving window that is visible in this video matches a room on the 7th floor which was used to record a widely publicized video of the Maidan massacre. This video was recorded by a former press-secretary of the Lviv Regional Council, which was then headed by a Svoboda deputy who occupied one of the hotel rooms on the 11th floor at the time of the massacre. A break in this video, which was used as evidence of the massacre of the protesters by the Berkut, matches the time when the sniper was spotted there (Instytutska, 2014).

A leader of the Patriot of Ukraine branch in Kyiv stated that he personally witnessed that "a sniper" was located in one of the hotel rooms booked by some Svoboda deputies, and this room was on one of the top floors of the hotel. Recordings of Spilne TV livestream referred to two other rooms on the same 11th floor from which snipers were shooting during the massacre of the protesters (see Chapter 4).

The analysis and synchronization of videos filmed by French, German, Russian, and Ukrainian television journalists showed an armed group of the Maidan protesters under the command of Parasiuk arriving to the hotel, shooting from a 14th floor room, and then moving to other floors during the massacre of the protesters. Videos also showed Svoboda deputies, in particular the deputy speaker of the Ukrainian parliament, armed with handgun, accompanying armed members of this special Maidan company in the Hotel Ukraine or guarding entrances to the hotel elevators. Svoboda deputies also went to negotiate with snipers, whom the Maidan protesters spotted shooting at them from the roof of this hotel. Bubenchyk stated that he was in Hotel Ukraine and Zhovtnevyi Palace during the massacre, but denied that there were any snipers there in spite of the testimonies of the Maidan protesters, public announcements from the Maidan stage, videos and photos pointing to snipers in both these locations at the time when they were under the Maidan control (Brantsi, 2016).

A defense lawyer revealed at the Maidan massacre trial that a Maidan protester, in his testimony to the investigation, said that he saw a sniper shooting from the roof of the Main Post Office, killing a person on the Maidan behind the Maidan stage (Zasidannia, 2018). His testimony matched the killing of a protester, who was shot along with a female medic in the same area of the Maidan. This building was then used as the headquarters of the Right Sector. Berkut lawyers referred to testimonies of protesters to the government investigation about armed people in the Right Sector headquarters building during the Maidan massacre. Government forensic experts determined that a Hotel Ukraine room of a female producer working for German ARD was shot at from the Main Post Office direction, and shooter narrowly missed her (see Katchanovski, 2024).

A former Berkut officer said that a sniper accompanying the Berkut special police force had a task to look for a Right Sector sniper in the Hotel Ukraine (Serhienko, 2014). Footage showed the Right Sector members evacuating the Hotel Dnipro several weeks after the massacre with weapons in such cases, and Yarosh, the leader of the Right Sector, later admitted this (Tak, 2014). Their evacuation was supervised by Parubiy, and their weapons were not examined by the police to check whether they were used during the massacre of the protesters and the police. A Berkut officer reported during the Maidan trial that a Mosin rifle was found by his group in the Hotel Dnipro around that time and that the investigation was not interested in checking whether this rifle was used during the massacre even though forensic ballistic examinations determined that at least two protesters were shot with a 7.62 × 51 caliber bullet designed for this 1908 model rifle. Government units were not equipped with the Mosin rifles. In contrast, the Spilne TV recording, which was later removed from the web, referred to protesters, who were in the Hotel Ukraine at the time of the massacre, claiming that they were not only armed with hunting rifles and AKMS but also with Mosin rifles.

Videos, testimonies by several hundred witnesses, confessions by 14 self-admitted members of Maidan sniper groups, and bullet hole locations, testimonies by the absolute majority of wounded protesters and some 100 witnesses, and forensic examinations by ballistic and medical experts for the Maidan massacre trial and investigation show that both the police and protesters were massacred from the far-right-controlled Hotel Ukraina, Music Conservatory, the Main Post Office, and Kozatsky Hotel (Chapter 3; Katchanovski, 2023a, 2023b, 2024). The Maidan massacre trial verdict in Ukraine confirmed that many Maidan activists and BBC journalists were shot not by Berkut or other law enforcement but by snipers in the Hotel Ukraina and other Maidan-controlled locations. It specifically stated that this hotel was controlled by Maidan activists that a far-right-linked armed Maidan group led by Parasiuk was in the hotel and in the Music Conservatory and shot from there (see Katchanovski, 2025).

A court ruling revealed that a Maidan protester was killed by slashing his throat with a knife on February 18 soon after he took a knife from a UNA-UNSO tent in the Maidan. The decision cited witnesses who provided evidence that the knife owner was involved in this killing, and that he used a pseudo, like UNA-UNSO members, and that the body of this killed protester was found in the same tent soon afterward (Pechersk, 2016b). The description of the killed protester as a former policeman and the mode and the date of his killing matched Viktor Prokhorchuk, one of the victims who was found with his throat cut. But his killing was attributed to the police by the Ukrainian media, and President Poroshenko posthumously awarded him the Hero of Ukraine title along with other killed Ukrainian protesters included in the "Heavenly Hundred."

Academic studies, the declassified text of the Khmelnytsky court verdict in March 2025, and SBU and Military Prosecutor Office investigations also de facto confirmed a false-flag killing of an elderly female Maidan protester and wounding of three other Maidan protesters in Khmelnytsky on February 19, 2014, with involvement of far-right Maidan activists (Katchanovski, 2024; Vyrok, 2025). Investigation by the Military Prosecutor Office in Lviv in Western Ukraine determined that the Maidan protesters in Khmelnytskyi were killed and wounded in a false-flag shooting by an unidentified Maidan shooter from the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) regional headquarter porch that was occupied by the Maidan protesters. This is consistent with content analysis of the videos of this massacre (see Chapter 4; Katchanovski, 2023a, 2023b). The SBU there received information that "radicals," i.e., far-right activists, arrived there prior to this to seize their building, which contained a lot of weapons, after similar seizures of the SBU and Berkut headquarters and their weapons in neighboring regions of Western Ukraine. After this result was revealed, the investigation was transferred to special department of Prosecutor General Office in charge of Maidan massacre investigation which again charged the SBU head and also a SBU alfa officer (Khmel'nyts'kyi, 2017). However, a Ukrainian court after several years of closed hearings acquitted in 2025 the ex-head of the Khmelnytskyi SBU and an SBU Alfa officer for this killing of the elderly female Maidan protester and wounding 4 other Maidan protesters because of lack of evidence that they shot them and because of the evidence that these Maidan protesters were shot by a Maidan activist from the Maidan-controlled area (The court, 2024; Vyrok, 2025).

There was also "dog that didn't bark" evidence indicating either involvement of the Right Sector and C14 in this mass killing of the Maidan protesters or their prior knowledge about the massacre. In contrast to its leading role in previous violent attacks during Euromaidan, the Right Sector did not appear during the massacre on February 20, and none of members of this far-right organization was reported among killed or wounded protesters on that day. A Maidan protester said that he learned that the Right Sector members were absent during the massacre because they received advance warning from their leadership (Novyk, 2014). The former leader of the Right Sector in the Sviatoshyn District in Kyiv also suggested that there was such a Right Sector order.

The leader of the Svoboda-affiliated C14 admitted that his C14-based Maidan Self-Defense company took refuge in the Canadian embassy in

Kyiv on February 18 and stayed there during the Maidan massacre (Vse, 2014). A leading member of C14 stated that the C14 leader told his company that he received advance information about the impending Maidan massacre, and therefore he and his company took refuge at the Canadian Embassy and stayed there during the Maidan massacre (Lidera, 2017). Similarly, no single member of C14 or its company was killed or wounded by "snipers" during the massacre on February 20. But the killed and wounded Maidan protesters included Svoboda members or sympathizers.

A prominent Ukrainian pro-Maidan journalist publicly requested the Prosecutor General of Ukraine to meet with him because he wanted to reveal who hid weapons and from where Maidan protesters and policemen were massacred. He identified them on a Ukrainian TV program in 2019 and said that a witness testified that they took weapons from the Kyiv City Administration. They were Svoboda activists during Euromaidan and commandants of the Kyiv City Administration when it was occupied by Svoboda. They became aides of a Svoboda deputy and were detained by the SBU on May 2014 with a large stash of Kalashnikov rifles (AK47) and other weapons in their apartment in Kyiv. Both continued to be publicly supported by the far right after the Maidan and were not investigated by the SBU under the Maidan governments for their involvement in the Maidan massacre (Novi, 2019).

There is also evidence of cover-up of the captured Maidan snipers by the far right and other Maidan leaders. The former leader of the Right Sector in Sviatoshyn District in Kyiv publicly stated that Yarosh along with Petro Poroshenko evacuated captured snipers following the Maidan massacre. He said that his Zahrava unit of the Right Sector was given an order to protect the evacuated snipers from the protesters (Yarosh, 2015). One of the leaders of the neo-Nazi White Hammer, which was in the Right Sector during Euromaidan, stated in media interviews and on social media that he knew about three groups of the Maidan snipers. He said that he was involved in the seizure of the Ukrainian House in order to enable establishing sniper positions there for them and that such groups of Maidan snipers in the Kozatsky Hotel and the Ukrainian House shot at the police. A Right Sector sponsor during the Maidan massacre stated in the Ukrainian media that he and other Right Sector activists found and photographed three positions of snipers and their exit routes, and one of the "snipers" found there was released by the Maidan leaders. He said that these snipers' positions were located in a building behind the Music Conservatory, on the sixth floor of an abandoned building between the Dnipro Hotel and Ukrkoopspilka building, and on the roof of the Ukrainian House (see Chapter 4).

The head of the Kyiv branch of the Patriot of Ukraine stated that snipers captured by the protesters, in particular the one captured with his involvement in a Svoboda-booked room in the Hotel Ukraine, were evacuated by Poroshenko along with the captured Internal Troops (Katchanovski, 2016c). A Maidan Self-Defense activist separately stated that he tried to stop this evacuation of snipers who were captured in the Hotel Ukraine and other locations along with other protesters (Poroshenko, 2015).

Videos showed a confrontation between the protesters and the Maidan leaders, such as Yarosh, Parubiy, Svoboda deputies, Poroshenko, and Pashynsky, who protected and tried to evacuate a few dozen of men around 2:00 am on February 21, 2014. All of them, including captured Internal Troops soldiers and officers, were all dressed in civilian clothing, and some of them had different haircuts than military-style short haircuts of captured Internal Troops soldiers and officers (Aktyvisty, 2014). While specific Maidan leaders might have been unaware that there were purported snipers in this group, the lack of any investigations of these claims independently made by three Maidan activists fits the pattern of the cover-up and falsification of the Maidan massacre investigation from the top of the Ukrainian government.

The Yanukovych treason trial revealed various testimonies and other evidence confirming that he fled from Kyiv and then Ukraine not because of his assumed responsibility for the Maidan massacre but because of a number of assassination attempts by the Maidan forces, in particular, the far-right Right Sector and Svoboda activists, and after their attempts to capture him and his residence near Kyiv and execute him.

Parasiuk stated that members of his special Maidan company, organized with the Right Sector involvement, forced certain members of the parliament to participate in the votes to dismiss Yanukovych and his government from power and to elect the former Maidan leaders in their place (see Kovalenko, 2014). The far-right force factor also prompted a part of members of the Party of Regions faction in the parliament to support his dismissal and approval of the new Maidan-led government.

The far-right organizations activists did not have significant positions in the national governments and the law enforcement agencies of

Ukraine prior to Euromaidan. Several of them after Euromaidan occupied senior government positions. This is another indirect evidence of the involvement of the far-right organizations in the violent overthrow of the Yanukovnych government in alliance with elements of oligarchic parties. Svoboda had four ministers in the first post-Yanukovych government, including the Minister of Defense, and a member of Svoboda was appointed as the Prosecutor General, and his office investigated the Maidan massacre.

Right after Euromaidan, Parubiy offered Yarosh and Parasiuk the positions of the first deputy head and the deputy head of the National Security and Defense Council, respectively (Mne, 2016). Yarosh was later appointed as an advisor to the Chief of General Staff of Ukraine. Vadym Troian, who was a member of the neo-Nazi Patriot of Ukraine and one of the commanders of the Azov battalion, became the first deputy head of the National Police. Yuri Mykhalchyshyn, a Svoboda deputy, who expressed his neo-Nazi views, stated that he held a senior position in an SBU department in charge of information. Parubiy became the head of the National Security and Defense Council after Euromaidan. He was elected as the speaker of the parliament of Ukraine in 2016.

6.4 The Far-Right Involvement in the War in Donbas

Paramilitary formations, special police and National Guard units, organized and led by far-right organizations, such as the Right Sector, the Social National Assembly, Patriot of Ukraine, Svoboda, C14, and Bratstvo, constituted a small minority of the Ukrainian forces during the war in Donbas. The combined number of members of radical nationalist and neo-Nazi organizations who served in various far-right-led, regular, and other armed formations and participated in the war in Donbas is estimated at around five thousand. This equals about 1% of approximately 400,000 people, who participated in this war on the central government side by the beginning of 2020 (Estimated from V Ukraini, 2019). This rough estimate is derived by the author from reported numbers of members of individual far-right organizations and their armed units.

However, the daily analysis of numerous Ukrainian and other media reports, internet streams, videos, and posts on the far-right social media groups and websites shows that the radical nationalist and neo-Nazi organizations and their armed formations had much greater role in the start and the initial stages of this armed conflict in Donbas before the first direct Russian military intervention in August 2014. The Right Sector played a key role along with Ihor Kolomoisky, an oligarch who became the head of the Dnipropetrovsk regional administration after Euromaidan, in the formation of Dnipro battalion in spring of 2014 (see Katchanovski, 2015c).

The Azov battalion was organized in spring 2014 and led by the SNA and the Patriot of Ukraine with involvement of the Radical Party. Arsen Avakov, the Minister of Internal Affairs, also was involved in the Azov battalion formation and its later expansion to a regiment. The Azov battalion used neo-Nazi symbols as its official insignia. Andrii Biletsky, a Patriot of Ukraine leader, who was called the "White Leader," was the first commander of Azov (see, for example, Dorell, 2015). He called the ideology of Patriot of Ukraine and SNA "Social Nationalism." In a collection of his articles published in 2013, he described that social nationalism, as the name suggests, combines elements of ultranationalism of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists with elements of National Socialism and called both such radical nationalism and national socialism "great ideas." Biletsky wrote that social nationalism is based on "Sociality, Racism, Great Power" (Biletsky, 2013). Specifically, it is based on the ideas that the "White race" is "superior" to other races and is the foundation of the Aryan Ukrainian nation; the Ukrainian nation is a "blood-racial community"; and that "the historical mission of our Nation… is to head and lead the White Peoples of the world in the last crusade for their existence, a march against the Semitic-led subhumans" (Biletsky, 2013, 2018). He made openly anti-Semitic and racist statements, such as his claim that the Jew is "an economic and political parasite." He saw "a serious clash of native European peoples with foreign colonizers, mainly of African and Muslim origin" and believed that "an ethnic civil war can be won by the native Europeans only under the banner of the New Right National revolutions" (Biletsky, 2008, 2013).

Svoboda and C14, a neo-Nazi group affiliated with Svoboda until the summer 2014, organized and led the battalion Sich (see, for example, Partiia, 2014). The St. Mary's battalion was organized and led by the far-right Bratstvo party headed by Dmytro Korchynsky (Khalel & Vickery, 2015). The UNA-UNSO formed a special intelligence company. There were far-right members or sympathizers in other special police units and other such formations created during the conflict in Donbas. For instance, the Aidar battalion, nominally subordinated to the Ministry of Defense of

Ukraine, was formed by the Maidan Self-Defense. But one of its platoons was led by the White Hammer, a neo-Nazi organization which belonged to the Right Sector during Euromaidan. A previously convicted criminal with a swastika tattoo became the commander of the Tornado company, a special police unit. He along with 7 other members of his company were arrested and convicted for various crimes in the warzone, such as torturing detainees. A Nazi-style flag with swastika was found in their prison cell (V kamere, 2018). Ilia Kiva, a Right Sector member, was a commander of another volunteer police battalion.

All these units were under formal jurisdiction of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the National Guard, or the Ministry of Defense. But from the start of their formation they remained under de facto command of radical nationalist or neo-Nazi organizations. All these armed formations were organized after the start of the conflict in Donbas and stationed there in an attempt to suppress pro-Russian separatism in this region by force.

The Right Sector and the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists organized militia or paramilitary units but without such formal subordination to the central government of Ukraine. The Volunteer Ukrainian Corps, the largest paramilitary formation, was formed and led by the Right Sector specifically for the war in Donbas, but it also included battalions in other regions of Ukraine, in particular, in Western Ukraine (Dobrovolchyi ND).

The violent overthrow of the Yanukovych government by means of the Maidan massacre with the involvement of the far right was a trigger for the resurgence of separatism in Donbas and for a significant rise of support for various forms of separatism in this region. These far-right-led armed units were disproportionally involved in the violence, specifically violence against civilians and prisoners of war, in particular, killings of civilians in Mariupol and Krasnoarmiisk that are examined in this study. The radical nationalist and neo-Nazi-led armed formations were much more ideologically motivated and willing to fight and to use force, compared to the regular Ukrainian forces, which suffered from low morale and significant desertion rates in the beginning of the conflict.

Various evidence shows that the far-right organizations and the far-right-linked battalions had a crucial role in the escalation of the conflict in Donbas into a war. The Right Sector carried out a deadly attack on a separatist checkpoint in Sloviansk on 20 April 2014. Such evidence as the Yarosh business card found after the attack was corroborated by Ukrainian court decisions, which authorized investigations of unidentified Right

Sector members and leaders because the same weapons were found to be used by the checkpoint attackers and the snipers who killed and wounded the police during the Maidan massacre. Two years after this attack of the separatist checkpoint, Dmytro Yarosh admitted the Right Sector and his personal involvement in this attack. Turchynov, then acting president of Ukraine, and a Kolomoisky's deputy in the Dnipropetrovsk regional administration, authorized this Right Sector operation, which was aimed at seizing and destroying a TV transmitter near Sloviansk several days after this area was seized by the Strelkov-led armed group of Russian nationalists and Ukrainian separatists (Dmytro, 2016). This attack by the Right Sector constituted a major escalation of the conflict in Donbas because it broke the Geneva agreement, signed on 17 April 2014 by Ukraine, Russia, the EU, and the United States concerning a peaceful resolution of the conflict, and the Orthodox Easter truce between the Ukrainian government and separatists in Donbas.

Similarly, the far-right-led armed formations were involved in two other violent attacks which escalated the conflict and helped to turn it into a civil war. Videos, media reports, and their commanders and members' admissions indicate that the Azov and Dnipro battalions along with other units took part in storming of the district police headquarters in Mariupol on May 9, 2014. About 10 persons, including at least one protester, were killed and many wounded when local pro-separatist protesters tried to prevent deployment of these units and during a storming of the police building (Batalion, 2014). The analysis of online video streams, videos, media reports, and Ukrainian government reports shows that the number of casualties in the Mariupol massacre was much higher than casualties on both sides during clashes of Azov and other formations with separatists in June 2014 in Mariupol which were presented by this neo-Nazi-led armed formation and the Ukrainian media as a liberation of the city. In fact, these clashes were relatively minor since there were no large armed separatist formations in this city, which was separated from main separatist strongholds in Donbas.

The Dnipro battalion along with other units seized civilians in the Donetsk Region to prevent the separatist referendum there on May 11, 2014. Videos show them shooting unarmed pro-separatist protesters with Kalashnikovs. Two local people were killed during this confrontation. The Dnipro battalion presence there was denied by the Ukrainian government, but it was confirmed by other sources including admissions by battalion members in videos and Volodymyr Parasiuk's statement on social media (Krasnoarmeisk, 2014).

The role of the far-right-led armed formations in the escalation of the conflict in Donbas was crucial also because the regular Ukrainian Armed forces, the Security Service of Ukraine, and police and National Guard units, with relatively limited exceptions, refused or were reluctant to use force against the separatists in Donbas in the first few months of this conflict. This was because their commanders and members were publicly blamed by the new government for the Maidan massacre and attempts to suppress by force the Maidan protests, including violent ones.

The new Maidan government, which seized power by means of the Maidan massacre of the police and Maidan protesters, also lacked legitimacy in Donbas, including among many military, police, and SBU members in the region. They mostly abandoned their duties or, like the Donetsk SBU Alfa commander and Luhansk Berkut members, joined the separatist armed formations. The relative role of the far right in the violence in Donbas and casualties among civilians declined after the Ukrainian military, SBU, police, and the National Guard started to use armed force and lethal weapons systematically following the election of Petro Poroshenko as the new president of Ukraine in the early presidential elections on May 25, 2014 and his order in June 2014 to end the ceasefire and attack the separatists. For example, the first significant air strikes with significant casualties took place on May 26 and June 2, 2014 when, respectively, the separatist-controlled part of the Donetsk airport and the Luhansk regional administration building were targeted.

The various far-right armed units also participated in numerous combat operations against separatists during the war, for instance, during the Donetsk airport battle. But their role was much less significant than the role of the regular forces. The Ukrainian government justified the creation and use of far-right-led volunteer battalions and other such armed formations during the conflict in Donbas by claiming that Ukraine has been fighting from the start of this conflict a defensive war against Russia and that there was no civil war. However, the government did not officially declare a war with Russia but justified the use of force by declaring the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO).

The far-right formations were also involved in fighting with regular Russian military forces in Donbas in August 2014 and January–February 2015 during direct Russian military interventions in support of separatists. Some of them along with regular Ukrainian forces suffered encirclements and defeats from combined regular Russian military units and separatist units in the Illovaisk area in August of 2014 and in the Debaltsevo area in February 2015, when the Russian military directly and covertly intervened in the conflict in support of separatists.

However, the power and influence of the far-right-led armed formations and radical nationalist and neo-Nazi organizations far exceed their relatively small membership and electoral support. Because of their reliance on violence, de facto control over armed formations, integration in the Ukrainian police, military, and the Security Service, and de facto alliances with oligarchic parties and politicians, the far right has attained power to overthrow the Ukrainian government by force or threat of force (see Katchanovski & Abrahms, 2024).

Dmytro Yarosh, the Tryzub and Right Sector founder and the commander of the Ukrainian Volunteer Army, which was organized by the Right Sector during the war in Donbas, publicly threatened in 2019 that President Zelenskyy would hang on a tree if he would fulfill his election promise of the peaceful resolution of the war in Donbas (Ragutskaia, 2019). In 2021, Yarosh was appointed Adviser to the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, Valerii Zaluzhnyi (Henshtab, 2021).

Zelenskyy went to a frontline in Donbas in October 2019 to personally convince members of the civilian wing of the Azov regiment to stop blocking implementation of the Minsk agreement to withdraw along with separatist troops further from the frontline. But video of the encounter shows that Zelensky was taunted by activists of this neo-Nazi organization who flouted his appeal (Zelenskyy, 2019). Videos, photos, and Ukrainian media reports show police standing down while neo-Nazi and other far-right protesters attacked in 2021 the Office of President of Ukraine and painted swastikas on its walls (see, for example, Strana, 2021).

Zelenskyy and his presidential administration and the government treated the far right, including neo-Nazis, as mainstream and met with representatives of the Azov's civilian wing and C14 in the presidential administration. He signed a law, which gave status of war participants to members of volunteer units, which included the paramilitary armed formations of the far-right organizations, such as the Right Sector, C14, and Bratstvo, which are illegal according to the Ukrainian Constitution.

Another law signed by Zelenskyy gave Ukrainian citizenship right to foreign citizens who participated in the war in Donbas, including neo-Nazis from Russia and Belarus. This suggested that President Zelensky was concerned of the possibility of his overthrow by the far right and that the Ukrainian state had lost the monopoly on violence. In spite of winning the presidential elections with 73% of the popular vote, he had to placate or negotiate with such relatively small and relatively unpopular radical nationalist and neo-Nazi organizations instead of resorting to force and punishing them for their illegal actions (see also Ishchenko, 2018a; Katchanovski, 2020).

Zelenskyy's Prime Minister Oleksii Honcharuk spoke at a "veterans party" organized by a front organization of the neo-Nazi C14 with a stylized swastika of a neo-Nazi rock band behind him (Premier, 2019). The ministry in charge of the veteran affairs under Zelensky included activists of this neo-Nazi group, including those who were charged with an assassination of a prominent opposition writer and a journalist Oles Buzyna, in its advisory council.

Similar policies of integration of the far right and acceptance as mainstream were promoted by Poroshenko and Turchynov during their presidencies. For example, an activist of the neo-Nazi Patriot of Ukraine and one of commanders of the Azov regiment was appointed the acting head of the National Police of Ukraine during the Poroshenko presidency, and he became a deputy minister of Internal Affairs during the Zelensky presidency. An adviser of then President Poroshenko and the defense minister of Ukraine posted on his Facebook page "1.4.8.8," which is a code for the "14 words" of a White supremacist statement and the "Heil Hitler greeting" (1.4.8.8, 2018).

Then President Poroshenko made "Glory to Ukraine" greeting of the OUN-B and UPA, which was also used by the far-right organizations, into the official greeting of the Ukrainian military and the National Guard. He also made the OUN anthem into the official song of the Ukrainian Army. Zelenskyy during his presidency did not reverse these decisions. Radical nationalist and neo-Nazi activists and/or veterans of far-right-led formations in the Donbas war were charged or named as suspects in Ukraine and the United States in at least 16 high-profile assassinations and other murders after the Maidan, excluding the war in Donbas and the Odesa and Maidan massacres. In addition to the Buzyna assassination, these killings include assassinations by a car bomb in Kyiv of Pavlo Sheremet, a prominent Belarusian exile journalist; an assassination of an exile ex-member of the Russian parliament in Kyiv; assassination of radical nationalist Svoboda politician and professor Iryna Farion; a deadly acid attack against a local female activist Kateryna Handzyuk in the Kherson

Region; and shooting of a child during a contact assassination attempt of a businessman in Kyiv. A grenade thrown during a violent protest led by the Right Sector, Svoboda, and the Radical Party in front of the Ukrainian parliament killed several and wounded dozens of policemen and National Guard troops. The Internal Affairs minister stated that a grenade thrower was a Svoboda member from its Sich battalion, which was formally subordinated to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The far-right activists and war veterans were likely involved in many more political assassinations and contract killings that remained unsolved, or their involvement was not disclosed publicly.

The US media reported in 2021 that the Department of Justice and the FBI were investigating seven American citizens for war crimes committed against residents of Donbas while fighting with far-right extremists from the Right Sector and the Neo-Nazi-led Azov Regiment during the war in Donbas in Eastern Ukraine (The DOJ, 2021). The Ukrainian courts under pressure from the far-right denied extradition of one of these Americans, who was also charged with murder of two people in Florida, to the United States (Army, 2022).

The involvement of the Ukrainian far right in the war in Donbas and other cases of political violence, the integration of the far right by the Poroshenko and Zelenskyy governments, and the failure of the Ukrainian governments to use force and law against them for their involvement in the Mariupol massacre, other war crimes, political assassinations, and other illegal actions show the significant power of the far right, compared to their relative numerical strength and popular support.

There was also involvement of the far right on the separatist side of the conflict in Donbas, but their numbers and the role were much less significant. Pavlo Gubarev, who became the “People’s Governor” of the Donetsk Region for a relatively short time soon after the start of the conflict, admitted that he was a member of the neo-Nazi Russian National Unity organization in Russia 12 years earlier and obtained a military training from them (Gubarev, 2014).

Some relatively small units of separatist armed formations were comprised of radical nationalist and neo-Nazi volunteers from Russia. For instance, they included neo-Nazi Rusichi armed group. Members of the Eurasian Youth Union, which was founded by Aleksandr Dugin, and other Russian far-right organizations also fought in the Donbas war in the separatist formations (Delo, 2014). Russian neo-Nazis in Donbas used such neo-Nazi symbols as variations of swastika (see Laruelle, 2016).

Like in the case of the government-controlled part of Ukraine, the far right had relatively more significant role in the war and the relative size in the separatist formations in Donbas in the initial stage of the conflict, in particular, before the Russian direct military intervention in August 2014. However, the number of the far-right members who fought for the Donbas separatist and the size of their armed formations were much smaller compared to their counterparts in Ukraine. In contrast to the government-controlled Ukraine, the far-right formations and most members of far-right organizations, such as the Rusichi group, were forced to leave Donbas by summer 2015 because of the policy by the new separatist leaders and commanders. They replaced the original ones as a result of the direct Russian military interventions and campaign by the separatist leadership and their Russian military, security, and political "curators" to integrate and purge separatist formations under the central command.

Many Russian neo-Nazis joined the Ukrainian far-right-led formations, such as the Azov battalion and then Azov regiment (Delo, 2014). There were also the neo-Nazi volunteers from other countries, such as Belarus, France, Serbia, Sweden, and the United States, on both sides of the war in Donbas. But their numbers in both separatist and Ukrainian armed formations were much smaller than the numbers of the Ukrainian and Russian far-right members.

The influence of the far right in Ukraine after the Maidan far exceeded its electoral support and membership. Svoboda and Right Sector leaders each won only 1% of the vote in the snap presidential elections in May 2014. In the October 2014 parliamentary elections, Svoboda narrowly failed to clear the 5% threshold, receiving 4.7%. The Right Sector fared even worse, receiving only 2% of the votes in 2014. Ruslan Koshulynsky, one of Svoboda leaders, who was backed by the Right Sector, OUN, and C14, received only 1.7% of the votes in the 2019 presidential elections, while Svoboda won 2.2% of the votes in the 2019 parliamentary elections.

6.5 THE FAR-RIGHT INVOLVEMENT IN THE ODESA MASSACRE

The Odesa massacre of separatist protesters on May 2, 2014, was the most significant and deadly case of political violence after the Maidan massacre not only in Odesa but also in Ukraine, with the exception of the Donbas war and the Russia-Ukraine war (see Katchanovski & Abrahms, 2024).

There were various violent incidents in Odesa, in particular, involving the far right before and after this mass killing, but they were not comparable in terms of their casualties and political consequences to this massacre.

The analysis of various videos and recordings of live broadcasts of the Odesa massacre, special parliamentary commission and May 2 group reports, media and social media in Ukrainian, Russian, and English, and interviews by participants and eyewitnesses from both sides and by the police commanders shows the unfolding and key elements of this case of the political violence. A special parliamentary commission report suggested that the Ukrainian and regional government officials planned to use far-right activists and the Maidan Self-Defense to suppress the separatist movement in the Odesa Region and to disperse a separatist tent camp near the Trade Union building before the May 9 Victory Day in 2014 (Zvit, 2014).

Testimonies, which were reported by the parliamentary commission and the media, concerning arrivals of Andriy Parubiy and 500 Maidan Self-Defense members from Kyiv to Odesa on the eve of the massacre suggested that the violent dispersal of the separatist camp was planned with involvement of the top government leaders, the far right, and the Maidan Self-Defense (Zvit, 2014). One of the Georgian ex-military members stated in the Israeli documentary that he participated in “provocations” in Odesa that resulted in the massacre there and that Andriy Parubiy commanded this operation and issued orders to disperse the separatists and destroy their tent camp and “burn everything.” This Georgian was filmed along with Maidan activists inside of the left wing of the Trade Union building in Odesa shortly after the start of the deadly fire in the central entrance (Anna, 2018).· He and four other Georgian ex-military members testified in Italian and Israeli TV documentaries, Macedonian TV, and Russian media interviews, and their depositions to Berkut lawyers for the Maidan massacre trial and testimonies at the Prosecutor General Office of Belarus for the Prosecutor General Office of Ukraine investigation that their groups of Georgian, Baltic, and far-right-linked Ukrainian snipers received weapons, payments, and orders from specific Maidan and Georgian politicians, in particular, Parubiy, to massacre both police and protesters and that they witnessed this mass killing. The Maidan massacre trial in November 2021 confirmed their identities and admitted and showed as evidence a testimony of one of these Georgians who confessed of being a member of a group of Maidan snipers (see Katchanovski, 2024).

As noted, Parubiy was a founder and a leader of the neo-Nazi Patriot of Ukraine, a paramilitary wing of the Social National Party of Ukraine in the 1990s. He was the head of the Maidan Self-Defense during Euromaidan and headed the National Security and Defense Council at the time of the Odesa massacre. The State Bureau of Investigations of Ukraine launched a criminal investigation of Parubiy for the Odesa massacre soon after he was replaced as the ex-head of the Ukrainian parliament following the early parliamentary elections in 2019 (Ukraine's, 2019).

A march, led by the Right Sector and football ultras on May 2, 2014, was used to implement this plan to destroy and burn the separatist tent camp, but it is not certain if the mass killing was planned in advance. The SBU in the Odesa Region received advanced information about planned "provocations" and violent clashes between football ultras and pro-Russian separatists on the day of a game between the Odesa and Kharkiv teams on May 2. A special train brought several hundred football ultras from Kharkiv to Odesa (Zvit, 2014). Football ultras in Ukraine generally openly displayed neo-Nazi views and symbols during football games and during the Maidan protests and violent attacks, and they joined the Right Sector and other far-right organizations.

Analysis of internet streams, videos, testimonies of participants and eyewitnesses, and the May 2 Group and the special parliamentary commission reports shows that Odeska druzhyna, a small separatist organization in Odesa, tried to counter and attack this march (15.26, 2015). They used red tape labels and were not Right Sector agent provocateurs, as the Russian media and separatists often claimed. Use of the same red tape by some of policemen in a police cordon took place later during the clashes, and it was not an organized collusion with the separatists, as the Ukrainian government and the media claimed. The groups of numerically superior activists of the Right Sector from Odesa and Kharkiv, where this far-right organization was led by the neo-Nazi Social National Assembly/Patriot of Ukraine, far-right football ultras, and Maidan Self-Defense units from Odesa and other regions attacked Odeska druzhyna activists. The pro-separatist activists took cover behind the police cordon, and some of them started to shoot at the direction of attackers (Khronologiya, 2015; 1523 Napadenie, 2015).

The analysis of the same sources shows that a small mobile group of separatists arrived at that time in the area of the clashes to provide reinforcement. One of its members was filmed shooting at the direction of the far-right-led protesters with an AK-74 type assault rifle (Khronologiya, 2015). The first casualty was a Right Sector activist. The official investigation and the May 2 Group maintained that he was killed by this separatist mobile group member by a 5.45 mm caliber bullet (Tkachov, 2017). However, leaked forensic medical expert reports referred to a 5.65 mm caliber bullet extracted from the body of this Right Sector activist ("SOROK (ND)"). This bullet reportedly disappeared and reappeared during the investigation. The fact that it did not match bullet samples of all legally registered firearms and weak sound of the gunshots and the lack of a recoil from shooting in the video of the shooting also suggest that this far-right protester apparently was not killed by this separatist (Odessa, 2014a). Since the killed Right Sector activist was not identified in various videos of clashes and the shooting from the AK-type weapon on the same street, this suggests the same. The investigation and various videos did not reveal the exact time and the location of his killing and the direction of a gunshot. An Odesa deputy police chief, who was filmed there around the time of this killing before he himself was wounded, stated that he saw snipers in camouflage shooting from the second floor of a hotel there. He believed that they killed this Right Sector activist and the second protester in order to blame the separatists for their killing and provoke a violent response against the separatists (2 Maia 2016).

Videos filmed before and after his shooting suggest that the second pro-Maidan activist was killed around the same time in the same area during the violent clashes with separatists and shooting from a Kalashnikov-type weapon by one of the separatists (2 Maia 2016). But the government forensic examination determined that he was killed by a bullet from a pneumatic sport-type weapon ("SOROK (ND)"). Nobody was charged with his killing, and the moment and other circumstances of his killing are not publicly known. Like in the case of the killing of the Right Sector activist, this suggests a possibility of his killing not only by separatists but also as a false-flag shooting similar to the Maidan massacre of the Maidan protesters by snipers in Maidan-controlled buildings and to similar killings of the first three Maidan protesters in January 2014.

In the clashes that followed the killings of these two pro-government protesters, four separatist protesters were killed, and many other separatist protesters and policemen and at least one local journalist were wounded. A pro-government protester was filmed shooting with a hunting rifle at the direction of the separatists around the time (Svidetelstvo, 2014). The forensic examination determined that three of these separatists were killed with hunting ammunition ("SOROK (ND)"). This pro-government protester was later identified by the Minister of Internal Affairs as a Right Sector activist (Avakov, 2015). The government investigation charged him with killing of at least one of the separatists. But he was released from the arrest, and his trial was delayed because of threats by the Right Sector and other far-right activists against judges during his trial (Deputat, 2015).

His recorded phone call and the various other evidence show that after the Odesa regional administration official in charge of law enforcement agencies communicated such a directive to a Maidan Self-Defense commander and after public calls from local Maidan leaders, Right Sector activists, football ultras, and the Maidan Self-Defense units moved to the Trade Union area (Igor, 2014). They attacked and burned the tent camp of various separatist organizations, whose activists and supporters then escaped to the Trade Union building right next to this camp and tried to barricade the main entrance doors.

Videos, internet streams, and testimonies of eyewitnesses show that some groups of the attackers threw Molotov cocktails and burning tires into the main entrance and set the entrance doors and the make-shift barricade there on fire, while other groups blocked other exits. Videos, recorded calls to the firefighters, and eyewitness reports show that the fire and thick smoke started and rapidly spread after Molotov cocktails and car tires were thrown by attackers at the main entrance doors (Odessa, 2014b; 19 49., 2015; 19 50., 2015; Ukraine, 2016). After previous denials, the official investigation and May 2 Group admitted that the deadly fire started at the main entrance. But this group still claimed that it was impossible to determine who started the fire because both sides were throwing Molotov cocktails. However, no evidence of the Molotov cocktails been thrown there by separatists at the time of the start of the fire has been made public, in contrast to such evidence concerning the far-right dominated protesters.

Similar tactics of using tires or Molotov cocktails to burn or threaten to burn various public buildings with people inside was used by far-right activists, in particular from the Right Sector and the SNA. Forensic examinations for the government investigation and an academic study determined that the Trade Union building was burned by Maidan activists, including far right, in order to stop its takeover by the Security Service of Ukraine Alfa unit (Katchanovski, 2015a). Far-right protesters also started fires with help of burning tires in the Inter TV channel building and threatened to burn down the parliament of Ukraine, the Lutsk city council, the Sviatoshyn District Court that heard the Maidan massacre case, and the 112 Ukraina TV channel buildings by putting tires next to their entrances.

The analysis of online video streams, government investigation findings, May 2d Group reports, forensic medical examinations, eyewitness testimonies, and various other evidence shows that 42 people perished as a result of fire, smoke and trying to jump from the upper floors of the Trade Union building in Odesa. The victims were unarmed and included mainly separatists, their supporters, and several employees who were at the building at the time. Six women and one minor were also killed at the Trade Union building ("SOROK (ND)").

Statements posted by the Right Sector, the SNA, and the neo-Nazi Misanthropic Division on their websites and social media sites admitted in various forms involvement of their organizations or the far-right-led attackers in the massacre of the separatists (Biitsi, 2014; Siohodni, 2014). However, with the exception of the arrested but released Right Sector shooter, only separatists were among those arrested and tried for the Odesa massacre. The Odesa massacre trial of separatists resulted in their acquittal by a local court. The Ukrainian court based its decision on the failure of the investigation and the lack of evidence in support of prosecution charges. The verdict also noted lack of investigation of perpetrators of the Odesa massacre and the role of Parubiy and other government officials (Sud, 2017).

There is various evidence that the police and firefighters were ordered by their superiors to stand by and not interfere during this fire attack and earlier deadly clashes. For instance, a special plan to deal with mass disturbances launched by the Odesa regional police was not authorized, most likely because of decisions at the Ministry of Internal Affairs level (Chto, 2014). Similarly, top regional officials of the police and other law enforcement agencies were ordered to attend a meeting with their national counterpart before and during the start of the clashes (Zvit, 2014).

The Council of Europe and the UN special commission reports noted the failures of the investigation and destruction of evidence. A report by the special commission of the Council of Europe found that the Ukrainian government investigation of the Odesa massacre was ineffective, politically selective, and involved falsification of the evidence. It noted that "as to the fire in the Trade Union Building, no-one has been notified of suspicion of causing the fire, including the throwing of Molotov cocktails towards or into the building. Although the faces of some of those who prepared and threw Molotov cocktails are visible on video footage, the authorities claim not to have established their identities" (Report, 2015).

The Ukrainian media reported citing SBU sources that a far-right activist, who headed the Right Sector in Odesa during the Odesa massacre, was a secret agent of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) and that he and his far-right associates were paid by SBU to attack opposition politicians, threaten judges, and conduct other illegal actions ("Strana", 2019). This would be consistent with the fact that he was not investigated for the involvement in the Odesa massacre even though the Right Sector publicly admitted such involvement. His secret collaboration with SBU would also be consistent with the fact that SBU and the Prosecutor General Office refused to charge him for killing another person in Odesa in 2018. Moreover, this far-right activist was given by SBU in 2020 a status of a victim in this case even though he streamed this killing on his social media account, de facto admitted himself in his video stream that he stabbed to death this person with his own knife, and the police investigation determined that he was the killer (Natsionalista, 2020). However, the murder case against him in 2023 was closed by a court without examining evidence.

Such evidence suggests that the official investigation of the massacre of the separatists in the Trade Union building in Odesa was falsified and stonewalled in order to cover-up perpetrators of this mass killing. Such falsification, stonewalling, and cover-up would be consistent with other evidence indicating an involvement in this violence of not only the far-right organizations and ultras but also the Maidan Self-Defense and top government officials (SEE Katchanovski & Abrahms, 2024).

The European Court of Human Rights decision in 2025 in the case of the Odesa massacre corroborated to a large extent these research findings. It ruled that the Ukrainian authorities failed "to do everything that could reasonably be expected of them to prevent the violence in Odessa," "to stop that violence after its outbreak, to ensure timely rescue measures for people trapped in the fire, and to institute and conduct an effective investigation into the events," including killings of both separatists and two Maidan activists (see European, 2025).

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CHAPTER 7

Regional Political Divisions in Ukraine Since Euromaidan

7.1 Conflicting Narratives and Previous Studies

This chapter analyzes changes in regional electoral behavior and attitudes towards separatism and foreign policy orientation in Ukraine after the “Orange Revolution” and Euromaidan, which turned into a violent internal conflict and one of the biggest international conflicts involving Western countries and Russia. It examines changes in regional support for pro-nationalist/pro-Western and pro-Russian/pro-communist political parties and presidential candidates, separatism, and attitudes towards membership in the EU, NATO, and the Customs Union of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, and preferred relations with Russia before and after Euromaidan in 2014.

While many previous academic studies have shown existence of strong regional political divisions in independent Ukraine, most of them focused on such divisions before the “Orange Revolution” and Euromaidan. They identified significant regional divisions concerning support for nationalist and pro-Western parties and politicians vs. pro-Russian and pro-communist parties and politicians in parliamentary and presidential elections held since the independence of Ukraine in 1991. Surveys of public opinion conducted since 1991 also demonstrated regional divides between on many major domestic politics and foreign orientation issues, such as status of Russian language, Ukraine’s membership in NATO, and its relations with Russia (see, for example, Barrington & Herron, 2004; Colton, 2011; Katchanovski, 2006a, 2006b, 2007, 2014; Petro, 2023).

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However, the majority of previous studies focused on analysis of a single election or survey, and most of them did not examine changes in regional divisions, in particular, in support for political parties, presidential candidates, separatism, and attitudes towards foreign policy orientations of Ukraine after Euromaidan in 2014.

However, in spite of such significant and persistent regional divisions, only a few scholars before Euromaidan considered a territorial break-up or violent regional conflict in Ukraine as significant possibilities (Colton, 2011; Darden, 2010; Katchanovski, 2006a, 2007). For instance, a book-length study of regional cleavages and conflicts in Ukraine and Moldova argued that Ukraine came close to a violent break-up during the "Orange Revolution," and that a possibility of such a violent break-up of Ukraine similar to Moldova remained and that it dependent on political leaders in Ukraine and Russia (Katchanovski, 2006a).

The Ukrainian government and the media and to a large extent their Western counterparts characterized separatism in Ukraine as having a marginal support, including in Crimea and Donbas. They presented the results of referendums in these regions by separatists after they seized power there as not reflecting public preferences. The rise of separatism in both regions was attributed mostly to direct military intervention by Russia. The Ukrainian and Western governments and the media presented the separatist rebellion in Donbas as started and led from its beginning in Spring of 2014 by armed Russian military units and Russian military intelligence agents, who lacked popular backing. In contrast, the Russian government and media presented separatism in all of Eastern and Southern Ukraine as having widespread popular support. Russian President Putin called this part of Ukraine Novorossiya (New Russia), a name of a historical region when it belonged to the Russian Empire.

Effects of Euromaidan on changes in regionalism were expected to be more significant compared to the "Orange Revolution." In contrast to peaceful and relatively gradual and evolutionary changes after the "Orange Revolution," Euromaidan produced more radical changes in the government, the political system, political parties, and foreign relations. The pro-Western government came to power after Euromaidan as a result of a violent overthrow of the relatively pro-Russian government.

Similarly, in contrast to a move towards a comparatively more democratic but still semi-democratic political system and relatively free and fair elections after the "Orange RevolutionE "Revolution"," Euromaidan produced the change of the government not through democratic elections but with help of a violent overthrow of democratically elected government which was moving into a more authoritarian direction.

The political system after Euromaidan shifted significantly towards a more authoritarian spectrum. For example, the leaders and many leading members of the main opposition parties, such as the Party of Regions and the Communist Party were targets of politically motivated selective prosecutions, both on founded to a various degree charges, such as corruption, but also on trumped-up charges of the mass killing of the Maidan protesters and separatism. The scale of such prosecutions far exceeded similar politically motivated selective prosecutions of the opposition leaders and activists, such as Yulia Tymoshenko, on various criminal charges during the Yanukovych government. In addition, many Party of Regions and Communist leaders and activists and their and their parties' offices and houses were subjected to violent attacks and assaults by the far-right organizations and groups, such as the Right Sector, Svoboda, its C14 neo-Nazi affiliate, and the Maidan Self-Defense. Such violence and threat of violence were also directed at many members of the parliament from these opposition parties. For the first time since *perestroika* in Soviet Ukraine in the end of the 1980s, the absolute majority of parliamentary votes involved no votes cast against approved legislation. The first round of the 2014 presidential elections was the least free and fair in post-Soviet Ukraine in terms of the opposition participation. For instance, all three pro-Russian and Communist Party candidates were publicly assaulted by the far right and other Maidan activists during the election campaign, and two of them dropped from the race. All major television channels, including those controlled by formerly pro-Yanukovych oligarchs, presented pro-government positions after Euromaidan and during the civil war in Donbas. Russian Television channels were officially prohibited in Ukraine, and formerly pro-Yanukovych TV channels and pro-Russian, pro-communist, or pro-separatist media were often targeted by the far right or the central authorities to force them to change or stop their coverage.

Euromaidan government prohibited separatist parties and organizations in Ukraine, initiated a prohibition of the Communist Party on mostly spurious separatism charges, attempted to suppress the separatist rebellion in Donbas with help of military force, the National Guard and paramilitary formations, many of which were led or involved participation of far-right parties and organizations. Armed separatists were branded as terrorists. Many separatist leaders and activists were arrested. Some 40 pro-Russian separatist protesters and employees in a trade union building were killed in a fire in Odesa in Southern Ukraine on May 2, 2014 as a result of an attack led by far-right activists and protesters from the Right Sector, in particular, the Social-National Assembly, football ultras, and members of the Maidan Self-Defense with the police ordered not to intervene during this massacre (see Chapter 6).

Similarly, pro-Russian separatists seized power with help of violence or threat of violence in Crimea and the Donetsk and Luhansk Region after Euromaidan. They offered an armed resistance to the Ukrainian forces. A significant number of separatist leaders and activists were members of or associated with pro-Russian or Russian radical nationalist organizations based in Eastern and Southern Ukraine and in Russia. In separatist-held areas of Crimea and Donbas, pro-government Ukrainian parties and organizations were generally limited or prevented in their ability to continue functioning, and many of their local leaders and activists were subjected to violence, threats of violence, or detention. Broadcasts of most major Ukrainian television channels were stopped by separatists in Crimea and areas of Donbas that they controlled.

This study follows previous studies in defining separatism as including both an outright secession and a greater regional autonomy, which are not supported by the central government (see, for example, Cabestan & Pavković 2013; Katchanovski, 2005, 2006a). In Ukraine, separatism includes not only unilateral secession but also a unilateral regional autonomy, specifically, a move from an existing unitary state towards federalism (see Chapter 5; Katchanovski, 2006a, 2014).

Previous surveys and studies showed that Western Ukrainians were significantly overrepresented in mass anti-government protests during both the “Orange Revolution” and Euromaidan. Such overrepresentation involved more widespread and more numerous protests in regions of Western Ukraine, compared to the East and the South, and to lesser extent, the Center. Western Ukrainians were also significantly overrepresented among protesters in Kyiv City, which is located in the Center of Ukraine. Conversely, residents of Eastern and Southern regions were significantly underrepresented in the pro-Maidan protests in Kyiv, and such mass protest actions against the Yanukovych government were much less numerous and less attended in these regions (see Chapter 2; Katchanovski, 2006a).

Previous studies show that Crimea and Donbas were two main regions with history of significant pro-Russian separatism in independent Ukraine. Separatist attitudes in these regions rapidly grew during or in the aftermath of major political crises, which resulted in victory of pro-Western and nationalist forces, and thus were perceived as negatively affecting these regions (Katchanovski, 2006a, 2010). Such crises included the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the "Orange Revolution" in 2004. Since Euromaidan represented another such major political crisis, separatist preferences were likely to rise in both these regions.

Political culture or values theories attribute regional divisions in Ukraine to different political values that are unlikely to change radically over short period of time. Distinct regional political cultures emerged as a result of different historical experiences before World War I and World War II. Seven Western Ukrainian regions experienced Polish, Czechoslovak, and Romanian rule between the World Wars. The political culture in most of these regions was also influenced by the legacy of Austro-Hungarian rule before World War I and by the Greek Catholic Church. Nationalist and pro-Western values developed in the regions of historical Western Ukraine, i.e., regions that became part of Soviet Ukraine as a result of World War II. In contrast, a pro-Russian and pro-communist political culture evolved in Eastern and Southern regions as a result of long periods of first Russian and then Soviet rule. However, there were also significant differences among regions of Western Ukraine, such as Galicia, Bukovyna, Transcarpathia, and Volhynia, and among regions of the Center, the East, and the South (see Katchanovski, 2006a, 2006b, 2007).

Shared regional historical experiences before World War I and World War II shaped political values and norms of Ukrainians living in the same region in similar directions. These historical periods represented crucial junctures in the evolution of distinct regional political cultures. They coincided with the formation of national identities and mass education of the population. These political values were transferred from one generation to another, including the post-Soviet generation in independent Ukraine.

Political values change gradually over a long period of time, in contrast to political attitudes which are much more volatile. Changes in voting behavior and attitudes over a significant period of time can indicate a trend in political values. For this reason, frequently analyzed results of a single election or a poll, for example, the 2004 or 2014 presidential elections, cannot be regarded as a reliable indicator of the political culture of Ukrainians.

Previous studies also identified other factors that can affect electoral behavior, foreign policy orientation, and support for separatism including ethnicity, language, religion, age, and economic well-being. Many previous studies attributed political regionalism in Ukraine to the role of ethnic, linguistic, economic, or geographic factors. For example, geographically western regions have much higher proportions of ethnic Ukrainians and Ukrainian speakers and much lower proportions of ethnic Russians and Russian speakers compared to the South and the East.Specifically, ethnic Russian form the majority of the population in Crimea and close to half of the population in the Donetsk and Luhansk Region (Donbas). Eastern regions are generally more economically developed, industrialized, and urbanized compared to the West.

This study classifies regional support for political parties and presidential candidates according to their ideological and foreign policy orientations. It groups parties or presidential candidates into two broad categories: pro-Western/pro-nationalist and pro-Russian/pro-communist. The pro-nationalist/pro-Western category includes political parties, electoral blocs, and presidential candidates publicly emphasizing pro-Western foreign policy orientation, in particular, both EU and NATO memberships or advocating nationalist ideas, such as Ukrainization of all levels of government, secondary and higher education, and mass media. For example, in the 2014 presidential elections this group included the following presidential candidates: Yulia Tymoshenko, Oleh Liashko, Anatolii Hrytsenko, Oleh Tiahnybok, and Dmytro Yarosh.

The pro-Russian/pro-Communist category is comprised of parties, blocs, and presidential candidates who publicly advocated granting Russian language a status of an official language, joining the Russian-led Customs Union, and/or are regarded as successors of the Ukrainian republican branch of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The inclusion of pro-Russian and pro-communist parties or candidates in the single category reflects the fact that the pro-communist parties and presidential candidates tended to support official status of Russian language and pro-Russian foreign policy orientation. In the 2014 presidential elections, the pro-Russian/pro-communist candidates included the following candidates: Mykhailo Dobkin, Petro Symonenko, and Oleh Tsariov. Yuri

Boiko is classified as the sole such candidate in the 2019 presidential elections.

The pro-Russian/pro-Communist position of parties and presidential candidates is a relative position on the continuous political spectrum and does not imply the extreme position on this spectrum. No major party or presidential candidate in Ukraine publicly supported during their election campaigns secession of regions of Ukraine or joining Russia. All major pro-Russian parties in Ukraine publicly opposed the Donbas separatists, the Russian annexation of Crimea, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Such classification is intended mainly to represent perceptions of the ideological and foreign policy orientations of parties and presidential candidates by voters. Many political leaders and political parties in Ukraine serve their own business interests or interests of oligarchs, and they often change their ideological positions on key issues. For instance, Volodymyr Zelensky won the 2019 presidential elections on a centrist and populist platform, promising peaceful resolution of the armed conflict in Donbas. He ran against incumbent president and oligarch Petro Poroshenko, who after winning the 2014 presidential elections, turned towards nationalism and ran on a platform of the army, faith, and language and emphasized the NATO and EU memberships goals, by making them parts of the Constitution. Poroshenko even labeled Zelensky, who was a Russian-speaker, as pro-Russian during his election campaign. However, Zelensky also abandoned since 2020 his main election promises following pressure from the far right and the West and turned towards similar pro-Western and pro-nationalistic policy as Poroshenko.

A brief national survey conducted for the author by the KIIS in April/ May 2014 provides data concerning support for separatism in Ukraine. This survey did not include Crimea, because it was annexed by Russia by then.

7.2 Regional Support for Presidential Candidates and Political Parties

Vote for pro-Western/pro-nationalist candidates jumped significantly in all regions of Ukraine, with the exceptions of Lviv and Ivano-Frankivsk, in the 2014 and 2019 presidential elections compared to the 2010 elections. In contrast, the combined level of support for Viktor Yushchenko and other pro-nationalist/pro-Western candidates in the first round of the 2010 presidential elections declined significantly compared to 2004. Conversely, the vote for pro-Russian/pro-communist presidential candidates dropped across all regions in 2014, and the vote also declined in the first round of the 2010 elections compared to 2004. However, the vote for the sole pro-Russian candidate increased significantly in most regions, most notably in the East. There were similar regional changes in the vote for pro-Russian and pro-communist parties (see Table 7.1).

Table 7.1 shows that significant regional differences in the vote for both groups of presidential candidates remained in 2004, 2010, 2014, and 2019 elections. Pro-Western/pro-nationalist candidates received much more support in Western Ukraine and to a lesser extent in the Center than in the East and the South. However, the magnitude of the regional differences significantly declined since Euromaidan.

Similarly, support for pro-Western/pro-nationalist/parties in Western Ukraine and to a lesser extent the Center remained in all parliamentary elections in 2002–2019 much higher than in the South and the East. The vote for the pro-Russian/pro-communist parties was much higher in all elections in Southern and Eastern regions than in Western and to a lesser extent Central Ukraine. There were changes similar to the changes in the presidential elections in terms of regional differences (see Table 7.2).

These significant changes in regional popularity of nationalist/pro-Western and pro-Russian/pro-communist candidates and parties after Euromaidan reflected a number of factors. They included the violent overthrow of President Yanukovych, who was blamed for the massacre of the Maidan protesters and fled from Ukraine to Russia, and the conflict with Russia over the Russian annexation of Crimea and Russian support, including direct military interventions, for separatists in Donbas. There was also a move to the pro-Western/pro-nationalist position by Yulia Tymoshenko, whose position shifted to publicly advocating not only EU but also NATO membership, and many other politicians and parties. Furthermore, the 2014 and 2019 presidential and parliamentary elections were not held in Crimea and most of the Donetsk and Luhansk Regions, which in the presidential and parliamentary elections showed the strongest support for pro-Russian/pro-communist candidates (see Tables 7.1 and 7.2). In addition, the 2014 and 2019 elections were considerably less free and fair than the previous elections.

A small minority of voters in Donbas participated in the 2014 presidential elections, where separatists seized de facto power and boycotted

Table 7.1 Regional vote for presidential candidates in the first rounds of the presidential elections in 2004–2019, %

Region	*Pro-Western/pro-nationalist*				*Pro-Russian/pro-communist*			
	2004	*2010*	*2014*	*2019*	*2004*	*2010*	*2014*	*2019*
West								
Chernivtsi	67	10	34	53	25	21	1	9
Ivano-Frankivsk	89	31	31	74	7	6	0	1
Lviv	87	38	26	82	9	6	0	1
Rivne	69	11	37	65	25	15	1	4
Ternopil	88	33	35	79	9	11	0	2
Transcarpathia	47	8	26	44	44	32	3	7
Volyn	77	9	40	68	17	12	1	4
East								
Dnipropetrovsk	19	3	24	28	70	46	8	12
Donetsk	3	1	16	23	93	80	11	37
Kharkiv	15	3	17	26	74	55	29	27
Luhansk	5	1	20	19	90	76	13	44
Zaporizhzhia	17	2	22	29	74	56	10	19
South								
Crimea	12	2	-	-	81	66	-	-
Kherson	32	4	25	38	58	48	6	16
Mykolaiv	18	3	20	32	71	57	8	17
Odesa	17	3	18	27	72	54	8	22
Center								
Cherkassy	58	8	37	59	36	22	1	6
Chernihiv	43	5	44	60	49	25	2	7
Khmelnytsky	58	6	36	64	35	18	1	5
Kyiv City	62	9	25	60	24	19	1	6
Kyiv Region	60	6	30	58	32	18	1	5
Kirovohrad	39	3	35	50	53	32	3	9
Poltava	44	5	32	48	49	31	3	9
Sumy	53	7	31	50	39	25	4	11
Vinnytsia	60	5	26	65	34	19	1	5
Zhytomyr	44	5	31	58	48	28	2	7

Source Calculated from Central Electoral Commission election results, http://www.cvk.gov.ua

these elections. The April/May 2014 KIIS survey shows that that the lack of central government legitimacy in Donbas was a key reason for a single digit voter turnout in the presidential elections on May 25, 2014. Some 70% of the respondents in the Donetsk and Luhansk Regions said that they either would not vote or did not know which candidate to support.

Table 7.2 Vote for pro-nationalist/pro-Western and pro-Russian/pro-communist political parties and blocs in the parliamentary elections in 2002–2019, %

Region	*Pro-Western/pro-nationalist*						*Pro-Russian/pro-communist*					
	2002	*2006*	*2007*	*2012*	*2014*	*2019*	*2002*	*2006*	*2007*	*2012*	*2014*	*2019*
West												
Chernivtsi	46	31	21	50	66	36	20	21	23	26	4	11
Ivano-Frankivsk	75	55	40	75	77	61	6	5	5	7	1	2
Lviv	64	49	39	76	76	73	9	6	6	7	1	2
Rivne	55	36	22	56	66	51	21	17	15	22	3	6
Ternopil	69	49	39	74	75	67	5	7	5	8	1	3
Transcarpathia	37	30	32	38	55	33	21	25	26	36	4	13
Volyn	58	30	21	59	73	50	17	11	12	20	3	5
East												
Dnipro (Dnipropetrovsk)	6	7	7	24	41	19	56	58	59	55	30	19
Donetsk	3	2	2	7	19	12	76	88	89	84	49	53
Kharkiv	6	7	8	20	32	17	59	64	63	62	41	36
Luhansk	4	2	2	7	22	12	67	85	86	83	48	51
Zaporizhzhia	8	7	5	19	36	19	54	66	68	62	32	28
South												
Crimea	9	8	7	13	-	-	55	71	77	74	-	-
Kherson	12	11	9	27	46	27	55	54	57	53	19	19
Mykolaiv	6	7	6	22	41	22	57	64	66	60	25	20
Odesa	7	8	7	19	33	19	56	61	67	60	27	30
Center												
Cherkassy	27	16	16	49	65	40	42	29	25	28	5	7
Chernihiv	25	14	15	38	59	49	46	36	32	33	7	8
Khmelnytsky	35	23	19	51	63	43	35	23	20	28	4	7

Region	*Pro-Western/pro-nationalist*						*Pro-Russian/pro-communist*					
	2002	*2006*	*2007*	*2012*	*2014*	*2019*	*2002*	*2006*	*2007*	*2012*	*2014*	*2019*
Kropyvnytsky (Kirovohrad)	10	11	12	39	60	39	56	37	37	40	10	12
Kyiv	28	20	17	49	64	50	23	22	22	20	6	8
Kyiv Region	26	16	16	48	65	48	38	23	19	27	4	7
Poltava	21	16	15	39	59	33	51	40	35	36	9	13
Sumy	19	22	21	44	57	31	56	29	25	33	9	14
Vinnytsia	29	23	19	55	51	55	43	28	21	26	4	9
Zhytomyr	22	20	16	45	61	40	48	33	31	35	6	11

Source Calculated from Central Electoral Commission election results, http://www.cvk.gov.ua

7.3 SUPPORT FOR SEPARATISM IN REGIONS OF UKRAINE

Surveys revealed a significant rise in separatist attitudes in many Southern and Eastern regions after the “Orange Revolution.” These attitudes mostly manifested themselves in the form of support for federalism, specifically in the wake of a Party of Regions-led move to declare an autonomous republic in the South and the East during the “Orange Revolution” (Katchanovski, 2006a). For example, in the joint KIIS and the Razumkov Center survey in May 2005, 61% of the respondents in the East (Donetsk, Luhansk, and Kharkiv Regions) and 42% in the South, compared to 31% in the Center and 26% in the West supported the federalization of Ukraine. This data excludes undecided (see Otsinka, 2005).

The 2013 Razumkov Center survey conducted during Euromaidan in December showed significant decline in regional differences concerning support for federal Ukraine, even when disparities in regional classification with the 2005 survey are taken into account. Twenty-nine percent of the respondents in the East, which was defined in this survey as including Donetsk, Luhansk, Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk, and Zaporizzhia Regions, and 23% in the South, compared to 15% in both the Center and the West, favored the federalization of Ukraine (Stavlennia, 2014). In the December 2013 Razumkov Center poll, 10% of the residents in the East and 16% in the South, compared to 5% in Western Ukraine and 2% in the Center, backed secession of their region from Ukraine and joining another state. Independence of their regions was supported by 5% of the respondents in the East, 13% in the South, 3% in the West, and 1% in the Center.[1]

The KIIS survey, which was commissioned by the author and conducted from April 29 to May 11, 2014, in all regions of Ukraine with exception of Crimea, showed that the regional differences in terms of the levels and the forms of separatist preferences, including federalism, significantly increased compared to December 2013. Support for different forms of separatism, in particular federalism, dropped to zero in all but one region of Western Ukraine and to 3% in the Center (see Table 7.3).

However, this survey shows that the majority of residents of Donbas in April/May 2014 backed different forms of separatism (51% in Donetsk Region and 63% in Luhansk Region, or respectively, 60% and 66% excluding undecided). There were also significant but varying levels of

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[1] Undecided are excluded.

Table 7.3 Support for separatism in regions of Ukraine, the April–May 2014 KIIS Survey, %

	Preserving current status within unitary Ukraine with current powers	*Preserving current status within unitary Ukraine with expanded powers*	*Autonomy as a part of federal Ukraine*	*Secession from Ukraine and formation of independent state*	*Secession from Ukraine and joining another state*	*Don't know/ not sure*	*Total, %*	*N*
West								
Chernivtsi	13	69	0	0	0	18	100	39
Ivano-Frankivsk	28	52	0	0	2	18	100	60
Lviv	16	76	0	0	0	9	100	115
Rivne	50	50	0	0	0	0	100	52
Volyn	26	71	0	0	0	2	100	42
Ternopil	28	68	0	0	0	4	100	50
Transcarpathia	11	84	0	0	0	6	100	55
East								
Dnipro (Dnipropetrovsk)	16	65	3	0	1	15	100	160
Donetsk	14	22	23	12	16	15	100	198
Kharkiv	20	47	14	5	7	8	100	131
Luhansk	2	33	25	4	34	4	100	114
Zaporizhzhia	17	50	16	2	1	13	100	86
South								
Kherson	10	79	8	0	0	2	100	48
Mykolaiv	5	75	2	0	7	11	100	56
Odesa	38	42	9	1	1	9	100	109
Center								
Cherkassy	27	55	0	2	0	17	100	64

(continued)

Table 7.3 (continued)

	Preserving current status within unitary Ukraine with current powers	*Preserving current status within unitary Ukraine with expanded powers*	*Autonomy as a part of federal Ukraine*	*Secession from Ukraine and formation of independent state*	*Secession from Ukraine and joining another state*	*Don't know/ not sure*	*Total, %*	*N*
Khmelnytsky	35	41	6	4	2	12	100	68
Kropyvnytsky (Kirovohrad)	2	83	4	0	0	11	100	47
Kyiv	13	67	3	0	0	17	100	119
Kyiv Region	44	55	0	0	0	1	100	80
Poltava	32	63	3	0	3	0	100	73
Sumy	40	32	0	0	3	25	100	60
Vinnytsia	29	57	4	0	0	10	100	79
Zhytomyr	37	48	2	0	0	13	100	62

Note Excludes Crimea
Source KIIS survey commissioned by the author

separatist support in three Eastern regions neighboring Donbas (26% in Kharkiv Region and 19% in Zaporizhzhia Region) and in the South (11% in Odesa Region). However, minorities in all these regions favored independence of their region or their region joining Russia. In Donbas, 23% of the respondents favored autonomy as a part of federal Ukraine, compared to 8% supporting independence of their region and 23% favoring their region joining Russia (see Table 7.3).

There was marginal support for independence or joining Russia in Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhia, Odesa, and Kherson Regions (Table 7.3). The 2014 KISS survey suggests that the results of the referendums, which were conducted by Russia during the annexation of the occupied parts of the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia Regions in October 2022 and showed overwhelming support for joining Russia, were falsified.

With the exceptions of Crimea, many separatist leaders in Donbas and other Eastern and Southern regions, such as Kharkiv and Odesa, at the time of the 2014 KIIS survey called for federalism and regional autonomy in Ukraine. The Russian government also then pressed for a similar form of separatism, while the central government of Ukraine rejected federalism by associating it with separatism and persecuting separatism as a criminal offense. Conversely, the KIIS survey shows that preserving current status of their regions within a unitary Ukraine but with expanded powers had a majority support in all regions except Donbas (Katchanovski, 2014b).

The 2001 Razumkov Center survey in Crimea showed that 50% of the respondents favored this region of Ukraine becoming a part of Russia, and 9% preferred to see their region as an independent state (Krym, 2001). In the 2008 Razumkov Center poll taken soon after the Russian-Georgian war following an attempt by the Georgian government to seize the de facto independent secessionist region of South Ossetia, 73% of the Crimeans, who made up their minds on this issue, backed a secession of Crimea from Ukraine with a goal of joining Russia (AR, 2008). However, the outright secessionist preferences in Crimea declined to 38% in the 2009 Razumkov Center poll and to 30% in the 2011 poll after the Yanukovych victory in the 2010 presidential election (Yakist, 2011).

The 97% level of support for joining Russia in a March 2014 referendum in Crimea was likely inflated to a certain extent. However, in a Pew Center survey in April 2014, 91% of the respondents in Crimea stated that the referendum was free and fair (Ukrainians, 2014). This poll result indicates that support for the separatism in Crimea increased significantly after Euromaidan in 2014 (see Chapter 4).

7.4 Attitudes Towards Joining NATO, the EU, and the Russia-Led Customs Union

A comparative analysis of Razumkov Center polls show that regional differences concerning the European Union membership of Ukraine decreased after the "Euromaidan," in contrast to increase after the "Orange Revolution" in 2004. The level of support for joining the EU in 2002–2021 remained overwhelming in Western Ukraine (80–95%, excluding undecided) and the Center (59–82%). However, public backing for Ukraine joining the EU declined significantly in the East and the South since the "Orange Revolution." While the majority of the respondents in these two regions (around 60–80%) backed the EU membership prior to the 2004 presidential elections, the level of support, generally, dropped below 50% after the "Orange Revolution." Right after the "Euromaidan," the EU membership backing declined further in April 2014 in the South and the East. Regional support for joining the EU increased to 53% in the South and 43% in the East in November–December 2021, but it remained much smaller than in Western Ukraine and to a lesser extent the Center. The poll results since the 2014 poll excluded the annexed Crimea from the South and separatist-controlled Donbas since the 2020 poll (see Fig. 7.1).

Razumkov Center polls show that regional disparities concerning support for Ukraine joining NATO increased somewhat after the "Orange Revolution." The differences between Western Ukraine, Center, and the East and the South on this issue decreased after the "Euromaidan" but remained significant. Regional backing for joining NATO in November–December 2021, excluding undecided, ranged from the overwhelming 90% support in the West and 64% in the Center to minority support in the South (39%) and in the East (36%) (see Fig. 7.2).

KIIS polls show the opposite reginal pattern for joining the Customs Union of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. They also show decline of such support in all regions of Ukraine after the "Euromaidan." The majorities in the East (86%) and the South (68%) in November 2013 right before the start of Euromaidan backed Ukraine joining the Russia-led Customs Union. In comparison, minorities of the respondents, 23% in the West and 43% in the Center, favored such option then. In November–December 2021 right before the Russian invasion, the smaller majorities in the East (62%) and the South (51%), compared to smaller minorities

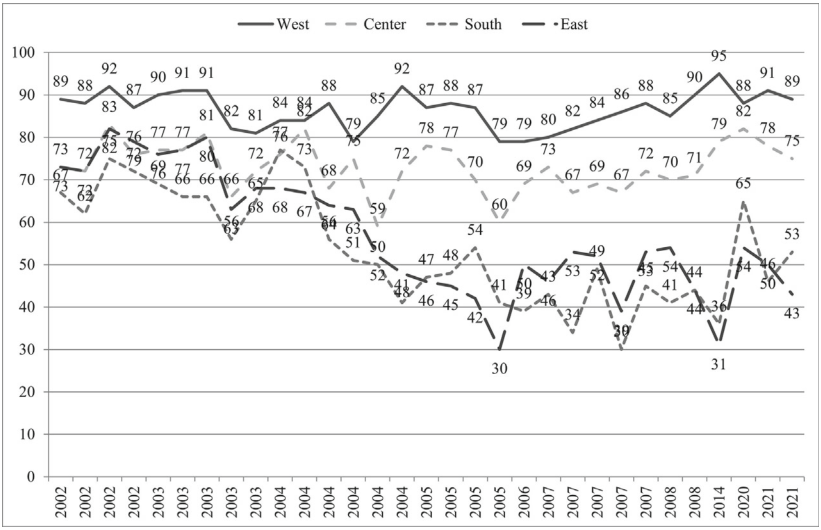

Fig. 7.1 Regional support for Ukraine's membership in the European Union, Razumkov Center polls, % (*Note* "Don't know" and "not sure" are excluded. Excludes Crimea since April 2014 and separatist-controlled Donbas since summer 2014. *Source* Calculated from Informatsiina (2008) and Razumkov Center polls, http://www.uceps.org and https://razumkov.org.ua)

in the West (12%) and the Center (26%), supported joining the Russia-led Customs Union. However, the 2021 poll results excluded Crimea and separatist-controlled Donbas, the two most pro-Russian regions, respectively, in the South and East of Ukraine (Fig. 7.3).

KIIS polls show significant regional changes in preferred relations of Ukraine with Russia after the "Euromaidan," in contrast to relatively modest changes after the "Orange Revolution." In particular, support for Ukraine and Russia uniting into one state declined in all four regions in all polls since April 2014. However, the regional differences concerning relations with Russia remained significant in many instances. For example, 11% of the respondents in the East and 8% in the South, compared to 1% in the West and 3% in the Center preferred unification of Ukraine with Russia in the first half of February 2022. Such support in 1996 ranged from 6% in the West to half (49%) of the respondents in the East (Table 7.4). It is noteworthy that the Razumkov Center poll in April 2014

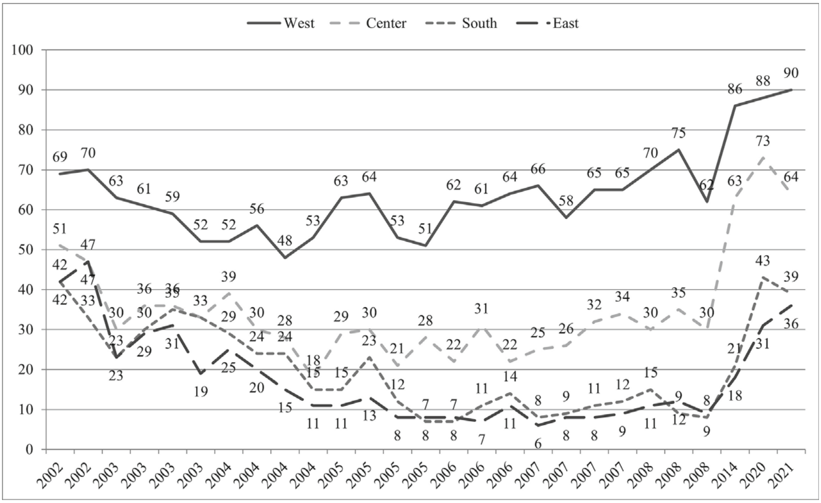

Fig. 7.2 Regional vote for Ukraine's membership in NATO if a referendum was held at the time of the poll, Razumkov Center polls, % (*Note* "Don't know" and non-voters are excluded. Excludes Crimea since April 2014 and separatist-controlled Donbas since summer 2014. *Source* Calculated from Informatsiina (2008) and Razumkov Center polls, http://www.uceps.org and https://razumkov.org.ua)

showed that 70% of the respondents in the West, 66% in the Center, 53% in the South, and 40% in the East believed that there was a war between Ukraine and Russia.

The Eastern and Southern regions also had higher levels of support for friendly but independent relations between Ukraine and Russia with open borders, without visas or customs in different KIIS polls. For example, in February 2022 right before the Russian invasion, the majorities, 65% of the respondents in the East and 56% in the South, compared with 42% in the West and 47% in the Center, favored such relations with Russia. Conversely, a much higher proportion of the respondents in the West and the Center than in other regions continued to embrace a view that Ukraine and Russia should be like other independent countries with closed borders and with visas (see Table 7.4).

The analysis of different polls and other evidence since the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, suggests that there was a

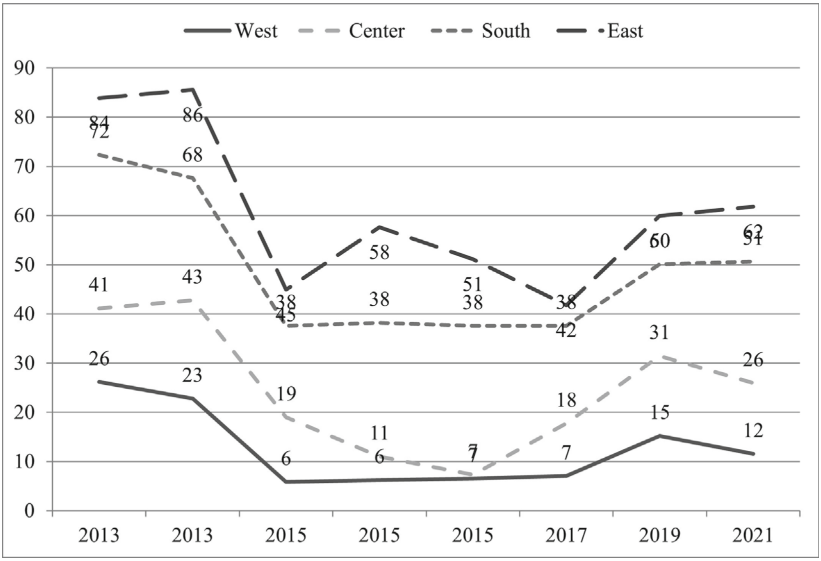

Fig. 7.3 Regional vote for Ukraine joining the Customs Union with Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan if a referendum was held at the time of the poll, KIIS polls, % (*Note* "Don't know" and non-voters are excluded. Excludes Crimea and separatist-controlled Donbas since 2015. *Source* Calculated from KIIS polls, http://kiis.com.ua)

dramatic decline in pro-Russian attitudes and significant increase in pro-Western orientation, such as joining NATO and the EU in all regions of Ukraine, with the exceptions of the Russian-annexed Crimea and separatist-controlled and then Russian-annexed part of Donbas. However, specific poll results since the Russian invasion are unreliable to a significant extent and therefore directly incomparable to the polls prior to the invasion. Significant population changes as result of the Russian annexations of parts of the East and the South and the move of about one quarter of the pre-war population to other countries during the war, social desirability bias, and fear to express opinions critical of the current Ukrainian government policies significantly affected validity and reliability of the polls during the war.

Table 7.4 Regional differences in views of preferred relations between Ukraine and Russia in Ukraine in 1996–2022 (KIIS Surveys), %

	1996				*2008*				*April 2014*			
	West	*Center*	*South*	*East*	*West*	*Center*	*South*	*East*	*West*	*Center*	*South**	*East*
Like other independent countries with closed borders, visas and customs	50	10	5	6	33	11	7	4	55	44	21	11
Independent but friendly countries with open borders (no visas and customs)	43	75	55	45	62	69	60	49	45	53	72	62
Unification into one state	6	15	40	49	5	20	33	47	0	3	7	27
Total (percent)	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
	September 2014				2021				February 5–13, 2022			
	West	Center	South*	East**	West	Center	South	East	West	Center	South*	East**
Like other independent countries with closed borders, visas and customs	75	62	41	8	54	44	30	27	57	51	36	24
Independent but friendly countries with open borders (no visas and customs)	24	36	54	78	40	47	63	64	42	47	56	65
Unification into one state	0	2	6	13	4	7	7	7	1	3	8	11
Total (percent)	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Note Excludes "Not sure." *Does not include Crimea. **Does not include separatist-controlled Donbas
Source Calculated from KIIS surveys, http://kiis.com.ua

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CHAPTER 8

The Origins of the Russia-Ukraine War

8.1 Clashing Narratives and Previous Studies of the Russia-Ukraine War Origins

The Ukrainian and Western governments and the media, with some exceptions, presented the war as an unprovoked illegal Russian invasion and aggression against democratic and sovereign state by the authoritarian Russian government aiming to restore a key part of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union by occupying and annexing Ukraine. For example, US President Joe Biden stated that “Hamas and Putin represent different threats, but they share this in common: They both want to completely annihilate a neighboring democracy—completely annihilate it” (The White House, 2023). Both Biden and Zelenskyy also stated that Russia could also invade other countries (VOA News, 2022).

The Russian government and the media justified the Russian invasion by security threats from Ukraine, such as possibility of joining NATO and possibility of deployment of US/NATO missiles and or the weapons or military in Ukraine which borders Russia. They also justified the invasion by claiming that the Ukrainian government is Nazi or partially-Nazi, that there was a Western-backed fascist coup in 2014, and that one of main goals of the invasion was to “denazify” Ukraine. The Russian government and the media presented Ukraine as a US colony after the Maidan. They called the Russia-Ukraine war a war with the United States and NATO and called the United States and NATO direct participants of the war.

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Some previous studies argued that the West was mainly responsible for the war, specifically by provoking it with NATO enlargement that was going to include Ukraine (see, for example, Abelow, 2022; Götz & Staun, 2022; Haslam, 2025; Horton, 2024; Mearsheimer, 2014; Roberts, 2022). For instance, Mearsheimer (2014) argued that the NATO expansion and integration of Ukraine could trigger a war with Russia and that the Western governments use Ukraine as a bulwark against Russia, which can "wreck" Ukraine. Haslam (2025) and Horton (2024) traced origins of the Russia-Ukraine war to the US policy towards Russia in the aftermath of the Cold War.

Roberts (2022) maintained that the Russian invasion of Ukraine was a preventive war aimed at preventing the anti-Russian government in Ukraine from making Ukraine a NATO bridgehead on the Russian border, taking back Crimea and separatist-controlled Donbas, and acquiring nuclear weapons. Götz and Staun (2022) stated that Russia attacked Ukraine because it perceived the Western drift of Ukraine as a security threat.

Most previous studies state that the Russian invasion of Ukraine was unprovoked aggression against a democratic Ukrainian state and was driven by Russian imperialism (see Baysha & Chukasheva, 2024). Many studies claim that the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, was continuation of the Russia-Ukraine war and turned this war which was started by Russia in 2014, into a full-scale war. They often uncritically rely on the dominant narratives by the Western and Ukrainian governments and the media concerning the war (See, for example, Kimmage, 2024; Magyar, 2023; Plokhy, 2023).

Previous studies show that conflicts between Russia and Ukraine and Russia and the West started with the violent overthrow of the relatively pro-Russian government in Ukraine by means of the Maidan massacre and assassination attempts against then President Viktor Yanukovych (see Bandeira, 2019; Black & Jones, 2015; Boyd-Barrett, 2016; Hahn, 2018; Ishchenko, 2016, 2020; Katchanovski, 2016b, 2020, 2023a, 2023b, 2024, 2025; Lane, 2016; Mandel, 2016; Sakwa, 2015). The United States and other Western governments de facto backed the violent undemocratic and illegal overthrow of the Yanukovych government for geopolitical reasons, in particular, to contain Russia, and blamed him and his forces for the massacre of the Maidan protesters. They immediately recognized the new Maidan government after the seizure of the presidential administration and the parliament by the Maidan forces and the parliament vote to remove Yanukovych even though such actions violated the agreement signed on February 21, 2014, by Yanukovych, the Maidan opposition leaders, and representatives of France, Germany, and Poland as well as the Constitution of Ukraine.

The violent overthrow of the Yanukovych government escalated into the civil war in Donbas with pro-Russian separatists and an international conflict between Russia and Ukraine and the West and Russia. Russia escalated the conflict by conducting military interventions in Crimea and Donbas and annexing in the violation of the international law Crimea, which was populated by ethnic Russians (see Hahn, 2018; Katchanovski, 2015, 2016a; Kudelia, 2016; Sakwa, 2015).

Political systems are generally classified as democracies, semi-democracies, and autocracies. Scholarly definitions of democracy generally refer to a political system with free and fair elections, multiparty system, and free media. Autocracies lack all this, while semi-democracies are partially democratic (see Lipset & Lakin, 2004). Ukraine before and after Euromaidan and during the Zelenskyy presidency was classified in most studies and democracy indexes, such as the Polity index, as semi-democracy or hybrid regime combining elements of democracy and autocracy. Some scholars argued that Ukraine was democracy after the Euromaidan However, they presented the violent overthrow of the government during EuroMaidan as a transition towards democracy and openly declared that their studies as partisan (Plokhy, 2023; Popova & Shevel, 2023). However, under common definitions of democracy and considering the undemocratic overthrow of the democratically elected government during Euromaidan, Ukraine, like Russia, has largely had an undemocratic system since (see Katchanovski, 2017a, 2017b).

8.2 UKRAINE'S NATO ACCESSION AND THE WEST

The NATO summit in Bucharest in 2018 declared that “NATO welcomes Ukraine’s and Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO. We agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO.” (Bucharest, 2008). After the Western-backed violent overthrow of the pro-Russian government during Euromaidan in Ukraine, the Ukrainian government declared joining NATO its priority. The goal of the NATO and EU membership was included on the initiative of then President Poroshenko into the Ukrainian Constitution, which since its adoption by the Ukrainian parliament in 1996 declared non-bloc, neutral status of Ukraine.

The NATO enlargement to include post-communist countries after the collapse of the Soviet Union violated promises given by the United States and other Western leaders and senior officials to their Soviet counterparts (see, for example, Sakwa, 2023, 47–50). Declassified documents "show security assurances against NATO expansion to Soviet leaders from Baker, Bush, Genscher, Kohl, Gates, Mitterrand, Thatcher, Hurd, Major, and Woerner." (NATO, 2017). However, they were not formal written agreements. The US leaders opposed giving such formal guarantees (see Sarotte, 2021).

Putin publicly opposed the NATO accession of Ukraine, stated that the United States can deploy missiles in Ukraine which can threaten Russian nuclear deterrence, and declared that this was one of the principal reasons for the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. The Russian government before the Russian invasion demanded that the United States and Ukraine formally renounced the NATO accession of Ukraine and warned that Russia would use military force to prevent it.

There was increasing United States and other NATO countries military involvement in Ukraine after the Western-backed violent overthrow of the Yanukovych government and during the civil war and Russian military intervention in Donbas. Ukraine became a US client state and was increasingly used as US/NATO bulwark to contain Russia without Ukraine formally joining NATO and without NATO having obligation to defend Ukraine in case of a Russian invasion under Article 5 of the NATO treaty. The United States and NATO countries trained Ukrainian military forces during the war in Donbas, put Ukrainian military intelligence and SBU under the US and British tutelage, supplied primarily defensive weapons and other military aid, and conducted military exercises in Ukraine.

Various evidence shows that the NATO accession of Ukraine and military involvement by the United States and other NATO countries in Ukraine after the Western-backed violent overthrow of the pro-Russian government of Ukraine during Euromaidan was a major factor for the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 but that the Russian government inflated the security risk and its immediacy.

For example, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg stated that Putin "went to war to prevent NATO, more NATO, close to his borders…." "and it demonstrates that when President Putin invaded a

European country to prevent more NATO, he's getting the exact opposite." (Remarks, 2023). Arakhamia, the head of the Ukrainian delegation at the peace talks stated that that Ukrainian neutrality was main Russian condition for the peace deal and that the war could have ended in spring of 2022 if Ukraine had agreed to neutrality:

> Russia's goal was to put pressure on us so that we would accept neutrality. This was the main thing for them: they were ready to end the war if we accepted neutrality, like Finland once did. And we would give an obligation that we would not join NATO. This is the main thing… (Moseichuk, 2023).

Donald Trump during his election campaign in 2024 and after the inauguration as a US president in 2025 publicly stated that the NATO accession of Ukraine provoked the Russia-Ukraine war. For example, he said in the All-In Podcast during his new presidential campaign in 2024 the following:

> So for twenty years, I heard that if Ukraine goes into NATO, it's a real problem for Russia. I've heard that for a long time. And I think that's really why this war started. I'm not sure that this war would have started. Biden was saying all of the wrong things. And one of the wrong things he was saying, "no, Ukraine will go into NATO." … It's always been understood. And that's even before Putin. It's always been understood that that was a no-no. And now you can go against their wishes, and it doesn't mean they're right when they say that. But that was very provocative, and now it's even more provocative (David Sacks, 2024).

Neutrality of Ukraine, which included not joining any military coalitions, including NATO, not hosting foreign military bases or troops, and not developing nuclear weapons, was a key point of the Istanbul communique agreed by Ukraine and the Ukraine-Russia peace deal draft in spring 2022 (see Chapter 12).

However, while NATO refused Russian demands and continued to publicly affirm that Ukraine would become a NATO member in the future, there was no real prospect of Ukraine joining NATO before the Russian invasion in 2022 (see Katchanovski, 2011). In addition to the Russian opposition, there was also opposition from various NATO members, such as France, Germany, and Hungary to the accession of Ukraine into this US-led military alliance. Possibility of Ukraine joining

NATO during the war or even after the war is into real because Ukraine has no real chance of defeating Russia and because concern by the United States and some other NATO members that Ukraine's accession can lead to a war between NATO and Russia. Zelenskyy stated that he was told privately by Biden and other NATO leaders before the Russian invasion that "you're not going to be a NATO member, but publicly, the doors will remain open" (Zelensky, 2022).

Similarly, the NATO summit in Vilnius in 2023 stated that Ukraine would join NATO in the future but refused Zelenskyy's demand to specify speedy accession of Ukraine because of the opposition by US and Germany:

> Ukraine's future is in NATO. We reaffirm the commitment we made at the 2008 Summit in Bucharest that Ukraine will become a member of NATO, and today we recognise that Ukraine's path to full Euro-Atlantic integration has moved beyond the need for the Membership Action Plan. Ukraine has become increasingly interoperable and politically integrated with the Alliance, and has made substantial progress on its reform path… The Alliance will support Ukraine in making these reforms on its path towards future membership. We will be in a position to extend an invitation to Ukraine to join the Alliance when Allies agree and conditions are met (Vilnius, 2023).

The Biden's White House stated in 2023 that "Ukraine joining NATO in the immediate future isn't likely… NATO membership in the immediate future isn't likely because that would put NATO at war with Russia." (2023—Russia-Ukraine News, 2023). Trump made similar statements after his election as the US president in 2024. For example, he stated in March 2025 that Zelensky "wants to be a member of NATO, but he's never going to be a member of NATO. He understands that." (see Trump, 2025). Similarly, the NATO Secretary General emphasized that "because unless Ukraine wins this war, there's no membership issue to be discussed at all." (Pre-Summit, 2023).

Russia inflated the prospects of NATO membership of Ukraine and NATO countries military involvement in Ukraine, such as deployment of US missiles, and the imminent nature of such security threats to justify the illegal invasion of Ukraine. Contrary to the Russian government claim, this war cannot be classified as a preventive war under the international law because there were no such imminent security threats. While the Ukrainian government proclaimed plans to join NATO and

NATO publicly stated during the Bucharest summit and before and during the war that Ukraine would become NATO member in the future, there was no immediate likelihood of NATO membership of Ukraine or deployment of long-range missiles or nuclear weapons by NATO there.

Zelenskyy could have prevented the Russian invasion of Ukraine and devastating consequences of the Russia-Ukraine war to Ukraine if he agreed before the war to renounce the NATO membership goal, return to neutral status of Ukraine, and agreed to implement the Minsk agreements.

Ukraine became a US client state sui generis after the Maidan and was used by the United States to contain and weaken Russia. There is various evidence of the US-led regime change policy during the Maidan in Ukraine. Various evidence shows US administration involvement in appointments and dismissals of top Ukrainian government officials and in key policy and military decisions in Ukraine since the Maidan. The Ukrainian media, Ukrainian and US officials, and a declassified transcript of a meeting of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine also revealed that the United States and other Western governments told the Maidan government leaders not to use military force during the Russian annexation of Crimea in order to avoid a war with Russia (see Chapter 4). Similarly, the Maidan leader of Ukraine Oleksander Turchynov declared in April 2014 "anti-terrorist operation" in Donbas and ordered the use of force against separatists and the Igor Girkin-led unit right after a secret visit of the CIA director. A former Ukrainian official stated that he witnessed that the CIA director during his secret visit to Ukraine in April 2014 pressed the Maidan-led Ukrainian government leaders to use force in Donbas (Maté, 2024).

The Western governments and foundations, such as Soros foundation, funded all but one of about two dozen Ukrainian NGOs, which initially issued in 2019 a collective statement that any talks with Donbas separatists were impermissible after the head of the Zelenskyy's presidential administration supported creation of a consulting group with representatives of the separatist-controlled Donbas during the Minsk negotiations (Priamyi, 2020). The nearly perfect alignment of the Ukrainian and US government policies after the Maidan is also consistent with Ukraine becoming a US client state and remaining during the Ukraine-Russia war.

The US and British patronage over the Ukrainian security service (SBU), military intelligence (GUR), and the special forces after Euromaidan also shows that Ukraine is US client state sui generis and is used as a proxy in the war with Russia. US and Ukrainian officials revealed the following:

> Since 2015, the CIA has spent tens of millions of dollars to transform Ukraine's Soviet-formed services into potent allies against Moscow… The agency has provided Ukraine with advanced surveillance systems, trained recruits at sites in Ukraine as well as the United States, built new headquarters for departments in Ukraine's military intelligence agency, and shared intelligence on a scale that would have been unimaginable before... The CIA worked with the SBU to create an entirely new directorate, officials said, one that would focus on so-called "active measures" operations against Russia and be insulated from other SBU departments. A sixth directorate has since been added, officials said, to work with Britain's MI6 spy agency… "From 2015 on, the CIA embarked on such an extensive transformation of the GUR that within several years we had kind of rebuilt it from scratch," the former U.S. intelligence official said The CIA helped the GUR acquire state-of-the-art surveillance and electronic eavesdropping systems... (Miller & Khurshudyan, 2023).

CIA-provided surveillance equipment and software collected for Ukrainian and US intelligence information from phone calls in Ukraine, separatist-controlled Donbas, and cellphones of Russian officials. The CIA had "direct contact with agents recruited and run by Ukrainian intelligence."

8.3 Russian Imperialism

As noted, Russian imperialism is presented by the Ukrainian and Western governments and the media as the main reason for the Russian invasion of Ukraine. They regarded occupation and annexation of entire Ukraine as the goal of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Russian President Vladimir Putin often in various statements and interviews called Ukrainians and Russians as one people. He published an entire article in 2021, entitled "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians," elaborating such views (Article, 2021). In his speech prior to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Putin stated "that modern Ukraine was entirely created by Russia or, to be more precise, by Bolshevik, Communist Russia" and that "Lenin and his associates did it in a way that was extremely harsh on Russia – by separating, severing what is historically Russian land."(Address, 2022). However, a VTSIOM-Valdai Club poll in September 2013 showed that while the majority, 56% of Russians, viewed Crimea as "essentially Russian," a minority, 29% of the Russian respondents, considered Ukraine as "essentially Russian." (Contemporary, 2014).

Putin also stated just prior to the invasion that "in 1954, Khrushchev took Crimea away from Russia for some reason and also gave it to Ukraine." (Address, 2022).As noted, many Russian politicians and the absolute majority of Russians regarded Crimea as historically Russian and supported pro-Russian separatism and the Russian annexation of Crimea in spring 2014. Russian imperialism was a significant factor in the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia, but this annexation was mainly a disproportionate escalation of the conflict as a reaction to the Western-backed violent overthrow of the pro-Russian government in Ukraine during Euromaidan (see Chapter 4).

Similarly, Putin called South and East of Ukraine Novorossia (New Russia). Russia supported separatists in Donbas. But such support also started after the Yanukovych government overthrow. Direct Russian military interventions in support of separatists in Donbas in August 2014 and January–February 2015 followed after the start of civil war there (see Katchanovski, 2016a; Chapter 5).

Russian newspaper Kommersant citing a source in the delegation of one of the NATO countries reported that the Russian president in his speech at the meeting of the Russia-NATO Council in 2008 stated addressing US President George Bush that "Ukraine is not even a state!" and "part of its territories is Eastern Europe, and part, and a significant one, was donated by us!" Putin "very transparently hinted that if Ukraine was nevertheless accepted into NATO, this state would simply cease to exist" and "that is, in fact, he threatened that Russia could start the annexation of Crimea and Eastern Ukraine." This statement also shows that Russian imperialism was a significant factor in Putin's policy towards Ukraine, but it was secondary to the NATO membership of Ukraine (Blok, 2008).

While various military and political commentators argued that the Russia planned from the start of the invasion to occupy and annex Ukraine, in particular Kyiv, the South, and the East, and to create the land bridge between Crimea and Donbas, there is no primary evidence in support of such inferences which are contradicted by the evidence. The analysis of various evidence suggests that the initial goal of the Russian invasion of Ukraine did not include occupation and annexation of entire Ukraine. The size of the initial invasion force was insufficient for such purposes.

Similarly, the size of the original invasion force was insufficient to seize Kyiv unless there was no significant resistance, like in the case of Kherson. There are no signs that the Russian forces deployed near Kyiv tried to seize it by force. Such seizure of Kyiv was possible only in case of absence of a significant military resistance by the Ukrainian forces or in case of the Russia-led regime change in Ukraine. The analysis of the evidence suggests that the apparent initial goal of the Russian invasion was such regime change or forcing the Zelenskyy government to accept a peace deal on Russian terms (see Chapter 12).

Similarly, there was no Russian military or civilian administration organized in occupied regions of Ukraine in the first month of the war, with exceptions of separatist administrations in captured parts of Donbas. Ukrainian local governments and Ukrainian flags remained in occupied cities and other settlements in Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions for several weeks after their Russian occupation. While these regions provided the land bridge and reopening of the water channel to Crimea, the peace agreement draft in spring 2022 included withdrawal of the Russian forces from Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions (see Chapter 12). The invasion from Crimea via Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions also provided a way to advance from less defended side and encircle and capture of Mariupol and other parts of Donbas as part of the major Russian goal to seize entire Donbas.

As noted, Russia agreed in spring 2022 to a peace deal framework which envisioned withdrawal of the Russian forces from the occupied parts of Ukraine, with exceptions of Donbas and the annexed Crimea. Russia withdrew its forces from Kyiv area and the entire Northern Ukraine primarily as result of the peace deal talks. Contrary to statements by Biden, other NATO countries leaders, and Zelenskyy and in contrast to evidence of the planned Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, there is no evidence of Russian plans to invade other post-Soviet countries or NATO members.

However, Russia moved to annex the occupied territories following Zelenskyy's reversal of his course and ending the peace deal talks after the United States along with other Western countries blocked such peace deal in April 2022. Putin's "Victory Day" speech on May 9, 2022 suggested that Russia planned to annex occupied parts of Ukraine in the East and the South because he stated that the Russian and Donbas separatist forces were fighting on the territory which he claimed was their own territory (Putin's, 2022). The Russian government declared such annexation of the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions and the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Donbas in September 2022 after its organized referendums on joining Russia. The analysis of public opinion polls indicates that nearly universal vote in favor of joining Russia in these regions was falsified in the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions and inflated in Donbas. For example, a KMIS survey in Spring 2014 showed marginal support for joining Russia in Southern and Eastern Ukraine, with the exceptions of Crimea and Donbas (see Katchanovski, 2016a).

Putin's statement in 2023 suggested that Russia might intend to annex more South and East Ukraine:

> The whole southeast of Ukraine has always been pro-Russian, because these are historically Russian territories... What does Ukraine have to do with this? It has nothing to do with it. Neither Crimea, nor the entire Black Sea coast in general, Odessa is a Russian city. We know this. Everyone knows this. (Putin, 2023)

Deputy Chairman of the Russian Security Council Dmitry Medvedev also threatened in 2013 to seize more Ukrainian territories. He claimed that "Odesa, Mykolaiv, Kyiv, and almost everything else are not Ukraine at all," that "Ukraine is not a country but artificially collected territories" and that "Ukrainian is not a language but surzhyk." (Medvedev, 2023). Medvedev called Odesa, Dnipro (Dnipropetrovsk), Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, and Kyiv "Russian cities" and suggested that they might be annexed by Russia (Dmitry Medvedev, 2023a). He called Ukraine an "artificial country" and also suggested that Russia would not accept independent Ukraine and might incorporate it into a "common state." (Dmitry Medvedev, 2023b).

8.4 NEO-NAZIS IN UKRAINE

Contrary to the Russian government and media claims used to justify the Russian invasion, the Ukrainian government and the military are not Nazi or neo-Nazi. The Ukrainian government and the Ukrainian parliament do not include any neo-Nazis. The author's estimate based on the membership of neo-Nazi organizations and neo-Nazi-led units, such as the Azov regiment, shows that members of neo-Nazi organizations constituted approximately 1% of the Ukrainian forces during the war (see Chapters 7 and 11).

However, contrary to the Ukrainian and Western governments and media claims, the far right, including neo-Nazis, in particular in the neo-Nazi-led Azov regiment and other neo-Nazi-led formations and members of neo-Nazi organizations, are integrated in the National Guard, the police, the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and the Security Service of Ukraine. They have outsize power relative to their numbers, in particular power to overthrow Zelenskyy if he were to agree to a peace deal to stop the civil war in Donbas or the Russia-Ukraine war (Katchanovski & Abrahms, 2024). In particular, the Chief of Staff of the Azov brigade and the leader of the neo-Nazi Azov movement, which included the Azov units and the National Corps party, threatened Zelenskyy against making a peace deal at the beginning of the war and in June 2024, after he expressed willingness to negotiate the war end (Kuzmenko, 2022; Taran, 2024).

The Azov regiment played a leading role in the Mariupol battle in Spring 2022, but its members surrendered to the Russian and Donbas separatist forces in May 2022 after the siege of Azovstal steel plant. The far right, which included neo-Nazi organizations, such as C14 and Patriot of Ukraine, was involved in the violent overthrow of the Yanukovych government by means of the false-flag Maidan massacre of the police and the protesters and assassination attempts (see Chapter 7; Katchanovski, 2020, 2023a, 2023b, 2024).

8.5 DEMOCRACY

Contrary to the Western and Ukrainian governments and media narratives, Ukraine at the time of the Russian invasion in 2022 and during the Russia-Ukraine war was not a democracy. While Ukraine was a semi-democracy or largely democratic since its independence in 1991, it became largely undemocratic since the violent overthrow of the government during Euromaidan in 2014. Under the common scholarly definitions of democracy as a political system based on free and fair elections, multiparty system, and media freedom, Ukraine, like Russia, had largely undemocratic system since the violent, illegal, and undemocratic overthrow of the democratically elected government during Euromaidan. The Polity index of democracy, a widely used comparative scholarly measure of democracy in the world, classified Ukraine since 2014 as the least democratic since the Ukrainian independence in 1991, including under Presidents Leonid Kuchma and Viktor Yanukovych, and similar to Russia (see Katchanovski, 2017a, 2017b).

After a brief period of relative democratization and semi-democracy following a victory of Zelenskyy in the presidential elections in 2019, he moved to institute a largely authoritarian rule, for instance by blocking the Constitutional Court of Ukraine and by imposing sanctions against some opposition leaders on state treason charges that appeared trumped-up. Zelenskyy used the Russian invasion and the war as a pretext to eliminate most of the political opposition and potential rivals for power and to consolidate his largely undemocratic rule in Ukraine. Seventeen opposition parties were banned by a court in Lviv in Western Ukraine after hasty proceedings and without any lawyers present. They were banned even though these parties condemned the Russian invasion or did not endorse it. Six leaders of major Ukrainian political parties, including ex-president Petro Poroshenko and Kyiv mayor Vitali Klitschko, were charged with state treason or were reportedly investigated on state treason charges that appear to be trumped-up. Opinion polls show that half of voters in Ukraine before the Russia-Ukraine war expressed intention to vote for the political parties, whose leaders are charged with or are reportedly investigated for state treason. This was three times more than for the Zelenskyy's ruling party (KIIS, 2022).

For example, the Party of Sharij was banned after the Russian invasion, and Anatolii Sharij was charged with state treason on trumped-up charges before the invasion. However, this Ukrainian journalist and popular blogger was previously granted political asylum in the EU. A court in Spain, where he lives, refused to extradite him on the request of the Zelenskyy government after the start of the Russia-Ukraine war.

The remaining opposition parties and politicians in Ukraine after the Russian invasion generally supported the Zelenskyy's war-centric policies. This concerns not only the Poroshenko, Tymoshenko, and their parties, but also most leaders and parliament members from the banned Opposition Platform party. The head of the Security and Defense Council of Ukraine stated that "we do not have any opposition." (Romanenko, 2024).

There were many Ukrainians imprisoned, killed, or "disappeared" because of their political views. For example, grandmother received 5 years in prison for 3 likes on the banned "Odnoklassniki" social media network. The elderly woman was convicted by a court in the Chernihiv region for “glorification of armed aggression of the Russian Federation.” (“Nadyvylasya”, 2023). There were many other similar cases.

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church and many of its priests were subjected to political persecution or trumped-up charges of state treason because of its religious links to Russia. Zelenskyy and the parliament under control of his party and with support of the Poroshenko party, moved towards banning this largest church in Ukraine. This was done even though the Ukrainian Orthodox Church did not support Russia during the war and declared its separation from the Russian Orthodox Church following the Russian invasion. The Ukrainian parliament on August 20, 2024, passed a law banning Ukrainian churches with ties to Russia. This law would de facto ban the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. This law was adopted specifically to ban this church even though the Ukrainian Orthodox Church publicly condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, and declared its separation from the Russian Orthodox Church following the Russian invasion (Violating, 2024).

According to the Security Service of Ukraine, it opened since the Russian invasion criminal cases against more than 100 members of clergy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, 50 of them were notified of suspicion, and 26 received court sentences (SBU, 2024). They were charged, arrested, or convicted in the absolute majority of cases for collaboration, state treason, or promoting religious enmity (2023 Report, 2024). The analysis of the statements of the Security Service of Ukraine and reports by the Ukrainian media as well as other sources, such as the UN report, suggests that these charges in most cases were trumped-up and politically motivated. The Security Service of Ukraine typically presented Russian religious books, newspapers, passports, and insignia found during its searchers of churches, monasteries, and priests of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church as evidence of collaboration, state treason, etc. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) stated that in the absolute majority of cases that it monitored involving Ukrainian Orthodox Church clergy members, OHCHR identified “concerns regarding the fairness of the criminal proceedings.” (Freedom, 2023).

The Zelenskyy government also closed five opposition TV news channels, and after the start of the Russian invasion, it required all remaining TV news channels to broadcast the single television news marathon program. The closure of the four opposition TV channels, which were owned by the pro-Russian leader of the Opposition Platform Viktor Medvedchuk, before the war and the arrest of Medvedchuk before the Russian invasion was also contributed to the start of the war. It signaled to Putin that pro-Russian parties or presidential candidates won't be able to win the elections in Ukraine. There are reports that Putin deployed the Russian military near the borders of Ukraine for the first time in 2021 as a reaction to the Medvedchuk's TV channels ban and state treason charges in Ukraine (Shuster, 2022).

Zelenskyy stated that rights and freedoms specified in the Constitution are put on pause and that Ukraine is de facto presidential-parliamentary system, while the Constitution specifies the parliamentary-presidential system (Shhodnya, 2022). He canceled the presidential elections in 2024 even though the Constitution only prohibits the parliamentary elections during martial law. The parliament is controlled by the Office of President. Andrii Yermak, the head of the presidential office under Zelenskyy, became at least the second most powerful official in Ukraine even though the existence of the presidential office and such power of its head are not specified in the Ukrainian Constitution.

Such actions as canceling the presidential elections, suppression of media and religious freedom, banning of opposition parties, and politically motivated prosecution of the opposition leaders signify a move towards undemocratic rule. Kyiv mayor Vitali Klitschko, former president Poroshenko, and ex-Zelenskyy adviser Oleksiy Arestovych, accused Zelensky of authoritarianism during the Russia-Ukraine war (Segura, 2023). Many Ukrainian journalists and other intellectuals admitted the media censorship, political persecution, and suppression of freedom of expression after the Russian invasion (Kramer et al., 2024; Vlahos, 2023).

The Ukrainian and Western governments and the media justified the ban of the opposition parties, TV channels, and the media, and prosecution of opposition politicians, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, and many other Ukrainians by the Russia-Ukraine war and maintained that they worked for Russia or were linked to Russia. However, such claims and charges in most cases lacked evidence and were trumped-up and politically motivated. Undemocratic measures of the Zelenskyy government were supported by the leading NGOs which were presented as vibrant civil society in Ukraine. However, civil society is shallow and clientelist. The absolute majority of the leading Ukrainian NGOs depend on Western governments and Western foundations funding (See Katchanovski, 2017a; Ishchenko, 2024).

8.6 The Escalation Spiral of the Maidan, Donbas, and Crimea Conflicts

The Russian invasion was illegal and extreme escalation of conflicts of Russia with Ukraine and the West and the civil war in Donbas that followed the Western-backed violent and illegal overthrow with involvement of the oligarchic and far-right elements of the Maidan opposition of the pro-Russian government in Ukraine by means of the Maidan massacre and assassination attempts against Viktor Yanukovych in 2014 (See Katchanovski, 2020, 2023a, 2023b, 2024, 2025). As result, Ukraine became a US client state, made the NATO membership the principal policy goal and a part of the Constitution, and was increasingly used by the United States and other NATO members as a bulwark to contain Russia. As previous chapters show, the Maidan massacre and the violent government overthrow during Euromaidan had a key role of in launching the conflict spiral that escalated into the Russian annexation of Crimea, the civil war and Russian military interventions in Donbas, and ultimately the Russia-Ukraine war.

Volodymyr Zelenskyy reversed his election promises of peaceful resolution of the Donbas conflict, did not fulfill the Minsk agreements concerning the peaceful resolution of the conflict in Donbas, and proclaimed his intention to return separatist-controlled Donbas and the Russian-annexed Crimea under the control of the central government before the Russian invasion. However, there was no confirmed evidence of imminent attack of the Ukrainian forces to take back separatist-controlled Donbas and Russian-annexed Crimea. Similarly, contrary to the Russian government and media claim that the Russian invasion of Ukraine aimed at stopping genocide of ethnic Russians or Russian speakers, there was no evidence of such genocide in Ukraine, including Donbas. While Zelenskyy suggested during the Munich conference shortly before the Russian invasion that Ukraine might seek to become a nuclear power, there was no immediate prospect of Ukraine building nuclear or biological weapons.

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CHAPTER 9

The Russia-Ukraine War and Its Nature

9.1 CONFLICTING NARRATIVES, PREVIOUS STUDIES, AND SOURCES

As noted in Chapter 1, truth is the first casualty of the war, but the task of scholarly studies is not to rely on propaganda disseminated by the governments and often repeated by the media but on reliable evidence, academic concepts, and theories to research wars in professional, honest, and non-partisan manner.

This applies to the Russia-Ukraine war. For example, the head of the military intelligence of Ukraine (HUR) Kyrylo Budanov stated in 2025 that Ukrainians do not need to know the harsh truth about the war during the war and that people will learn it later (Anna, 2025).

This chapter examines the war in Ukraine since the Russian invasion on February 24, 2022. It analyzes the nature and classification of this most important armed conflict of the twenty-first century and military casualties. These are crucial issues of the war. The chapter starts with the section examining conflicting narratives, previous studies, and sources and then analyzes whether the war is an interstate, proxy, or civil war and its military casualties.

This chapter uses political science theories of conflicts, wars, and empirical analysis to examine the nature of war in Ukraine. The evidence-based and theory-based academic analysis of the Ukraine-Russia war is needed to determine the nature of this highly politicized political conflict which

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affected not only Ukraine and Russia but the entire world. This would also be helpful in conflict resolution.

This study examines large amounts of primary and secondary sources in Ukrainian, Russian, Polish, and English. The chapter is based on analysis of videos, interviews, and statements by key political actors involved in this war; testimonies and reports of participants, journalists, and eyewitnesses in these languages in the media and social media. On average, the data analysis included over 100 videos and other primary sources in the social media and media concerning the war in Ukraine daily for over three and half years of the war since its start on February 24, 2022. The absolute majority of such primary sources cannot be cited for space reasons, and the most relevant sources are cited.

The analyzed sources include reports, statements, interviews, and statistical data by the American, British, Canadian, Polish, Russian, Ukrainian, and other countries governments and government officials and by international organizations, such as NATO, the EU, and the United Nations. The study uses American, British, Canadian, Polish, Russian, Ukrainian, and other countries media reports, videos, statements, and interviews along with videos and other information concerning the war from various Telegram channels and other social media in Ukrainian, English, and Russian.

The research includes determination of reliability, validity, and authenticity of the information and its corroboration by other independent sources. This study does not accept at face value any claims by any governments, the media, social media, or any other sources, unless they are corroborated by independent and reliable sources or if they go against their own interest.

The Ukraine war produced conflicting narratives by the governments and the media in Ukraine, Russia, and the West. The Ukrainian government and media presented the war in 2022 as a full-scale Russian invasion and aggressive illegal war that was started by Russia in 2014 with the annexation of Crimea and the interstate war in Donbas.

The Western governments and the media also presented the war as a full-scale illegal Russian aggression and invasion of Ukraine and as continuation of the Russia-Ukraine war or a hybrid Russia-led war in Donbas and the Russian annexation of Crimea. The Ukrainian and Western governments and the media called Ukraine and the West allies during the Russia-Ukraine war. They presented the Western military and economic support of Ukraine during the Russia-Ukraine war as support for a fellow liberal democracy against the unprovoked Russian invasion.

Ukrainian-language Wikipedia and to large extent the English- and Russian-language Wikipedia followed the dominant narratives of the Western and Ukrainian media concerning the Russia-Ukraine war, its classification, and casualties. The Wikipedia editors pushed their political points of view on this conflict and omitted, censored, and attacked scholars and other experts who deviated from these narratives (see, for example, Russo-Ukrainian War, 2025).

In contrast, the Russian government and the media called the war "special military operation" in Ukraine and not a "war." The Russian government and the media presented the Ukraine-Russia war as a war with the United States and NATO and called the United States and NATO direct participants of the war.

However, governments and the media are often unreliable sources. Governments often resort to full-scale propaganda and disinformation campaigns and censorship during wars in which they are involved. They vilify their adversaries and inflate their military casualties, while minimizing their own military casualties and inflating their civilian casualties. They censor information that is damaging to them. The Ukrainian and Russian media during the war are largely not independent, subjected to censorship, and have to follow the government propaganda. Studies show that the Western media coverage, in particular of conflicts in foreign countries, such as Ukraine, often indexes the narratives of their own governments and the political elite (Boyd-Barrett, 2016; Katchanovski & Morley, 2012).

With a few exceptions, Western journalists, who covered the war in Ukraine, had none or little prior knowledge of conflicts and politics in Ukraine and lacked knowledge of Ukrainian and Russian languages. They were restricted by the Ukrainian government in their coverage of military matters and often reported its claims at face value without verification.

Similarly, military and political commentators, who dominated the United States and much of the other Western media coverage of the war in Ukraine, with some exceptions did not specialize in Ukraine prior to the Russian invasion and also became overnight experts on conflicts and politics in Ukraine. In addition, overwhelming majority of them worked in partisan think tanks, which were funded by defense companies, or were retired military commanders and government officials (Freeman, 2024). Such partisan think tanks, which were funded by the defense companies and included retires the United States and other Western military commanders and government officials, included the Institute for the Study of the War and the Atlantic Council.

They had incentives to provide commentary biased towards interests of the United States and other Western countries defense industry, the military, and governments. Commentators from such think tanks reinforced propaganda narratives about the Russia-Ukraine war, its nature, and outcome, and opposed peaceful resolution of this conflict (Freeman, 2024).

For this reason, scholarly research cannot accept any claims by the governments, the media, and military and political commentators at face value, unless they are corroborated by independent and reliable sources or if they go against their own interest.

There is rapidly growing number of books, scholarly articles, and other studies concerning the Russia-Ukraine war (see, for example, Asada & Tamada, 2024; Cox, 2023; Diesen, 2024; Edele, 2023; Fedorchak, 2024; Forsberg & Patomäki, 2022; Haslam, 2025; Jakupec, 2024; Kasińska-Metryka & Pałka-Suchojad, 2023; Katchanovski, 2022a, 2025; Kimmage, 2024; Leist & Zimmermann, 2024; Magyar, 2023; Plokhy, 2023; Rothman et al., 2024; Sasse, 2023; Shevtsova, 2024; Vicente et al., 2023; Wanner, 2023). They generally examined specific aspects of the Russia-Ukraine war and related issues.

Previous studies mostly uncritically relied on secondary sources and the Western and Ukrainian media and government narratives and were mainly produced by scholars who did not specialize in researching in conflicts in Ukraine. There is a lack of comprehensive academic studies of the Ukraine war because it started relatively recently and is still ongoing.

A few studies predicted the real possibility of the war between Russia and Ukraine (see, for example, Katchanovski, 2016; Mearsheimer, 2014). There were denials that Russia would invade Ukraine and the failure to predict the war by many scholars even before the invasion despite concentration of large numbers of Russian troops near the Ukrainian borders and other evidence showing a real possibility of the conflict escalating into a war between Russia and Ukraine (CTV, 2022; Katchanovski, 2022b, 2022c).

War is commonly defined in political science and conflict studies as an armed conflict with at least 1000 battle-related casualties. For example, such definition is used by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP, 2024). Wars can be classified as interstate, civil, and proxy wars depending on the nature of involvement of conflict parties. As the term suggests, intrastate wars are wars between two or more states or countries. World War One, World War Two, the Iraq-Iran war, and the China-Vietnam war are examples of interstate wars.

In contrast, civil or intrastate wars are wars between armed conflict parties within a single state or a country. However, many civil wars also include direct or indirect involvement of foreign states in various forms, such as military interventions, weapons supplies, and economic and political support or patronage. Such civil wars are called internationalized civil wars. Their examples included the civil wars in the United States, Russia, Spain, Syria, and Bosnia (see, for example, Cederman & Vogt, 2017; Kalyvas, 2006; Newman, 2014; Newman & DeRouen, Jr. 2014).

Like civil war, proxy war is a term and concept used in political science and conflict studies. Proxy wars are wars in which one or more of the parties of the armed conflict is used as a proxy or proxies by other parties which are not involved directly in the warfare. Both intrastate and civil wars can also be proxy wars in such a case. Various wars in many countries are classified as proxy wars by previous studies. The wars in Vietnam and Angola are examples of proxy wars, primarily, between the United States and the Soviet Union (see Groh, 2019; Moghadam et al., 2024; Mumford, 2013). Many wars, such as the wars in Vietnam, Angola, Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, combine elements of intrastate, civil, and/or proxy wars (see, for example, Kaussler et al., 2022).

Proxy wars often involve client-patron relationships with a patron using a conflict party as a proxy against another conflict party. The definitions of client state emphasize its military, political, and economic dependence on the patron; asymmetric relationship between a client state and a patron; and various degrees of autonomy of client states in their actions. Client state is a political science concept, and it is applied by scholars to many different countries. Examples of US client states included Southern Vietnam during the Vietnam War and in Iran during the Shah rule after the CIA and MI6-directed coup. Declassified CIA documents confirmed this, in particular, use of false-flag violence to stage the coup in Iran (see Gasiorowski, 1991; Ladwig, 2017; Sylvan & Majeski, 2009).

9.2 The Russian Invasion of Ukraine and the Interstate Russia-Ukraine War

The war in Ukraine is an interstate war between Russia and Ukraine since the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. The Russian forces invaded on the Putin's order from Belarus, Crimea and bordering Russian regions directions and captured large parts of Eastern, Southern, and Northern Ukraine. Russia started this war against Ukraine and attacked the Ukrainian forces first.

The Putin government justified it as a preventive war to defend the separatist DNR and LRN republics which the Russia recognized a few days before the invasion. After Zelenskyy abandoned his election promises of peaceful resolution of the war in Donbas, he emphasized policy of returning Crimea and Donbas under the Ukrainian control, in particular, by military force. However, there is no reliable evidence that that taking back these regions by means of the Ukrainian military force was imminent before the Russian invasion on February 24, 2022. OSCE reports, videos, and the media showed that there was increased shelling by the Ukrainian forces in Donbas shortly before the Russian invasion. However, they show that this shelling was much less intensive than during the civil war and Russian military interventions in 2014–15.

Therefore, the Russian government claims of the right of self-defense and preventive war under the UN Charter are not supported by evidence. This makes the Russian invasion of Ukraine illegal under the international law.

Russia invaded Eastern, Southern, and Northern Ukraine on February 24, 2022, after Russian president Vladimir Putin declared what he called a "special military operation" in Ukraine. A new law made it illegal in Russia to refer to the Russian military actions in Ukraine as a war. Contrary to the Russian government and media, the Russia-Ukraine armed conflict is clearly classified as a war since the number of battle-related casualties far exceeds the 1000-casualty threshold, which is typically used by scholars to define a war.

Ukrainian forces casualties for three and half years of the war since February 24, 2022 are estimated at around 180,000 killed and about 7200,000 wounded. These numbers include casualties in all branches of the Ukrainian military, the police, border guards, the National Guard, Security Service of Ukraine, and foreign volunteers. The estimate of the killed is based on about 160,000 killed and missing Ukrainian forces members identified by name by the Ukrainian losses site and adjusted for undercounting from certain regions and lack of data from cemeteries, and excluding nearly 4500 POWs identified by name (Ukrainian, 2025). Ukrainian media report in December 2024 cited General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine source that the confirmed number of killed Ukrainian soldiers was 70 thousand, and 35 thousand were missing. The estimate isclose to the admission by US officials in the middle of August 2023 of close to 70,000 killed Ukrainian forces members and to reported “confidential Ukrainian estimate earlier in 2024 of 80,000 Ukrainian troops killed and 400,000 wounded.” (Cooper et al., 2023; Pancevski, 2024). These numbers are adjusted by estimates of the killed since those time based on a rough monthly rate of casualties and by adding rough estimates of casualties among the National Guard, the police, border guards, the Security Service of Ukraine, and foreign mercenaries and volunteers and missing in action, who were killed. Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs of Ukraine reported in the end of September 2024 that military personnel comprised most of the 55,000 missing persons in the Unified Register of Missing Persons under Special Circumstances (U Reiestri, 2024). Since the Ukrainian and Russian governments reported that there were remaining about 6500 Ukrainian POWs in 2024, and since the identity of most of them was reported to the Ukrainian authorities via the Red Cross, this suggests overwhelming majority of the Ukrainian forces members, who are recorded as missing in action, were killed in action (Ponad, 2024; Korzhova, 2024). Numerous videos on different Telegram channels showed large numbers of bodies of killed Ukrainian soldiers on territories captured by the Russian and separatist forces.

The number of wounded Ukrainian forces members is estimated based on the ratio of about 4 wounded for 1 killed in a typical ratio of killed to wounded during the modern wars. For, example, such ratio is also used by experts and BBC Russian to estimate Russian casualties (Ivshina, 2024).

Oleksiy Arestovych, the Zelenskyy presidential office adviser, stated on June 11, 2022 that circa 10 thousand military members killed. Another adviser of Zelenskyy stated that about 100–200 killed per day in June 2022 and about 30–50 in August 2022. The Minister of Defense of Ukraine stated that 50–60 killed per day in mid-January 2023 (De-fakto, 2023; Khomenko, 2022; U vijni, 2022; Za vremja, 2022).

A statement by Zelenskyy that 31,000 Ukrainian troops were killed during the first two years of the war was a fake news or disinformation since the number of killed Ukrainian forces members identified by name was then at about 42,000 and reached almost 56,000 by the end of September 2024 and almost 83,000 by September 2025. However, the identification significantly undercounted the Ukrainian casualties compared to the identification of the Russian casualties by BBC because it was based only on obituaries and other public data available online and limited data from many cities and regions of Ukraine and did not include data from cemeteries. (Armstrong, 2024; Ukrainian, 2025).

Similarly, claims of 1.7 million, 500,000 or similar numbers of Ukrainian forces members killed lack any reliable sources and such casualties are physically impossible because they imply that all members Ukrainian forces were killed or wounded during the war. The same concerns claims of similar magnitude of the Russian forces casualties. Various official casualties of the adversaries and supposedly leaked or unsourced military casualty numbers have all features of fakes because they lack validity and reliability. The Russian, Ukrainian, and Western governments inflate the military casualties of their respective adversary for propaganda and disinformation purposes.

The minimal Russian forces casualties during three and half years of the war are estimated to be at least 130,000 killed and 520,000 wounded based on the ratio of about 4 wounded for 1 killed. The estimate is based on identification by name by BBC Russian and Mediazona of over 128,000 killed Russian military, National Guard, FSB, police, border guard members, and Wagner mercenaries by September 5, 2025 (BBC, 2025). The number is adjusted by a rough estimate of missing in action who were killed and prorated. The identified casualties include over 18,000 recruited Russian prisoners who were killed during the war in Ukraine. The BBC Russian reported that much larger numbers of Russian forces members could have been killed as identified by name. But this estimate lacks specific evidence and corroboration (BBC, 2025).

The casualties of Donbas separatist formations, which were since the Russian annexation formally incorporated into the Russian forces, are estimated at about 25,000 killed and 100,000 wounded. The casualties are derived from the BBC Russian estimate based on obituaries and messages about search for missing, of 21,000–23,500 killed members of Donbas separatist forces and the 4 to 1 wounded to killed ratio (BBC, 2025). The ombudsperson of the separatist DNR admitted 4133 killed and over 17,379 wounded members of all DNR forces during 2022 until December 16, 2022 (Upolnomochennyi, 2022).

This book estimates the combined Russian and separatist forces casualties of at least 155,000 killed and 400,000 wounded during the first three and half years of the war. A US official stated at the end of September 2024 that "100,000 Russians have been killed and 430,000 injured since the start of the war." (Ukraine, 2024). The United States and other Western officials included casualties among the Donbas separatist forces in casualties of the Russian forces, which formally incorporated the separatist formations since fall of 2022.

The highly inflated reports of the Russian forces casualties and omission or deflation of the Ukrainian forces casualties were used by the Ukrainian and Western governments and the media and partisan commentators to claim that Ukraine was winning the war of attrition with Russia. They were backed by numerous reports of human wave attacks by the Russian forces. However, such reports were not corroborated by any of the videos and therefore appear to be fake news or disinformation. There is also no such evidence of human wave attacks by the Ukrainian forces. However, the analysis of thousands of videos from various Telegram channels, Twitter/X and other social media showed many Russian and Ukrainian attacks ending with large casualties.

The Ukrainian forces were mostly on defensive and the Russian and separatist forces were on the offensive for most of the war. And offense is generally associated with significantly greater casualties than defense in peer or near peer conflicts. However, Zelenskyy for political and propaganda reasons ordered the Ukrainian forces to continue defending Mariupol, Lysychansk, Sieverodonetsk, Bakhmut, Avdiivka, Vuhledar, Kurakhove , and other cities and towns in spite of heavy casualties and danger of encirclement by the Russian forces.

The same concerns his decision to launch the invasion of the Kursk Region of Russia in August 2024 and delay with retreat order when the Ukrainian forces faced encirclement there in March 2025 after the Russian forces advanced and put all supply roads under fire control. Both Ukrainian and Russian videos and reports showed large numbers of Ukrainian military vehicles hit and destroyed by Russian drones on these roads, and resupply of the Ukrainian troops had become significantly limited.

The Ukrainian forces had to pull out from the Kursk Region because they otherwise would have been completely encircled by the Russian forces. Zelensky wanted to use the Ukrainian-controlled part of the Kursk region as his trump card during peace deal negotiations. The Kursk offensive was a PR or propaganda-driven move by Zelensky with predictable and avoidable outcome.

Except for the size of its military force in Ukraine until 2023, Russia maintained significant military advantage over Ukraine in terms of artillery, missiles, aviation, and electronic warfare. The Russian forces had between severalfold and more than tenfold advantage in the numbers of artillery shells fired (NATO, 2024). The analysis of Ukrainian and Russian official and media and social media reports shows that the Russian forces also had more than 100-fold advantage in the number of the missiles launched. In addition, they had air dominance and air defense dominance over the Ukrainian forces even after the supply of small numbers of F-16 military jets and Patriot and other air-defense systems by the Western governments to Ukraine. Russian military planes launched from safe distances large numbers of large glide bombs.

The Ukraine war already resulted in the largest military casualties of a war in Europe since World War Two. It significantly exceeded military casualties of the civil war and Russian military interventions in Donbas and other wars in Europe, such as the Kosovo war, the civil war in Bosnia, the wars in Slovenia and Croatia during the break-up of Yugoslavia, the Russia-Georgia war, and two wars in Chechnya.

Contrary to claims by the Russian leaders and the media, the Ukraine war cannot be classified as a conventional war of Russia with the United States and other NATO countries. The US and British media reports revealed deployments of their special forces and intelligence personnel in Ukraine numbering in hundreds. However, the regular military forces of the United States, the UK, and other NATO members do not participate directly in the war with Russia in Ukraine, with some relatively limited exceptions. A British general reported that British Royal Marine commandos took part in covert operations in Ukraine and supported "discreet operations" in a "hugely sensitive environment." (Grylls, 2022).

A secret online communication of German air force commanders, which was intercepted and made public by Russia and admitted as genuine by the German officials, suggested that the British military was "on the ground" in Ukraine to help the Ukrainian forces fire Storm Shadow missiles, which were supplied by the UK (Connolly & Sabbagh, 2024). Olaf Scholz, the German Chancellor, suggested that British and French military personnel in Ukraine help to program and target such long-range missiles and said that he opposed the supply of similar Taurus missiles to Ukraine by Germany because this would mean a direct involvement in the war with Russia (Barnes & Rothwell, 2024). The Biden administration refused in 2024 to authorize the use by the Ukrainian forces of the US-supplied ATACMS long-range missiles and British-supplied Storm Shadow missiles to strike targets in internationally-recognized territory of Russia after Putin stated that “this will mean that NATO countries – the United States and European countries – are at war with Russia.” (Holmes, 2024). However, both these American and British long-range missiles were used by the Ukrainian forces to strike Russian military targets in Russian-annexed territory of Ukraine, in particular, in Crimea and Donbas.

Various evidence suggests involvement of North Korean army soldiers in the Russia-Ukraine war on the Russian side. Videos showed deployment of North Korean soldiers in the Russian military training facility in the Russian Far East. Videos and Ukrainian government and media reports showed two POWs, who spoke Korean and did not speak Russian but had Russian military documents. They were reportedly captured in the Kursk Region of Russia during combat there with the Ukrainian forces, which seized a part of this region in 2024 (Video, 2025). There is no evidence of the involvement of the North Korean soldiers in the war on the territory of Ukraine. There is also no corroborated evidence of the scale of the North Korean direct involvement in the war and the North Korean casualties. Both Russian and North Korean governments admitted direct participation of North Korean troops in combat in the Kursk Region after this territory was recaptured from the Ukrainian forces in spring 2025. North Korea also supplied large amounts of artillery shells and other weapons to the Russian forces during the war. Iran was another country which supplied Russia with strike drones “Shakhed.” Russia copied and modified these Iranian drones and produced such drones under the name of “Geran” in large quantities and used them to strike military targets and critical infrastructure in Ukraine.

9.3 The Proxy Russia-NATO War in Ukraine

The war in Ukraine is also a proxy war between NATO and Russia. The United States and NATO use Ukraine, in particular, the Ukrainian government and the forces, as a proxy. Various senior US and UK officials and politicians admitted the proxy war. For example, Secretary of Defense

Lloyd Austin stated that “we want to see Russia weakened to the degree that it can’t do the kinds of things that it has done in invading Ukraine.” (Baker & Sanger, 2022). Former US Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta said in March 2022 that the United States is in a proxy war with Russia in Ukraine (U.S., 2022).

Similarly, Philip Breedlove, the former commander of the US European Command and the ex-Supreme Allied Commander of NATO’s armed forces stated: “I think we are in a proxy war with Russia. We are using the Ukrainians as our proxy forces.” (Argument, 2022). The former British Prime Minister Boris Johnson also admitted that the West/NATO is waging a proxy war in Ukraine & that the Ukrainian military and leadership is a proxy: “We’re waging a proxy war! We’re waging a proxy war but we’re not giving our proxies the ability to do the job.” (Boris, 2024). Similarly, Marco Rubio, the US State Department head, said explicitly that “frankly, it’s a proxy war between nuclear powers – the United States, helping Ukraine, and Russia – and it needs to come to an end” (Secretary, 2025).

Zelenskyy also de facto admitted the proxy war. He stated that “the U.S. Army now does not have to fight protecting NATO countries. Ukrainians are doing that.” (Marquez, 2024). Minister of Defense of Ukraine Oleksiy Reznikov in an interview with the 1 + 1 TV channel said that “we are fulfilling NATO’s mission today without them shedding their blood but with shedding our blood.” (Velyke, 2023). Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine Dmytro Kuleba also de facto admitted the proxy war and its benefits to the United States, while omitting the costs to Ukraine, in particular, the loss of Ukrainian lives. He stated that the Zelenskyy government “offers the best deal” to the United States because in exchange to weapons and money to “finish the job” the US saves “the most important,” lives of the American soldiers (Ukraine, 2024).

US officials pressed the Ukrainian government to adopt a law on forced mobilization. Such law was adopted in April 2024. It required Ukrainian men 18 to 60 years old to register for military service, imposed heavy fines and other penalties for the failure to register, lowered the draft age to 25, and eliminated or limited categories eligible for exemption on medical and other grounds. The forced mobilization law also included Ukrainian citizens abroad, including permanent residents and dual citizens (see O’Grady, 2024; Varenikova, 2024).

The proxy war in Ukraine, like other proxy wars, such as the wars in Vietnam and Angola, prolonged the war. The massive supplies of weapons by the US-led NATO members and EU member countries, intelligence, advisers, military planning and training, and large scale economic and humanitarian aid to Ukraine allowed Ukraine to continue resistance against the Russian and Donbas separatist forces. Ukraine could have lost the war much sooner without such support. But such military supplies and other aid also made Ukraine heavily dependent on support of NATO and EU countries.

The New York Times reported that "according to officials from multiple governments" soon after the Russian invasion. The United States and US-allied governments discussed "how to secure the line of succession in Ukraine in the event President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is captured or killed by Russian forces." (Russia-Ukraine, 2022).

The Ukrainian forces and the government becoming largely depended after the Russian invasion on supplies of weapons and financial aid by the United States and other NATO members and the EU also fits the classifications of a client state and a proxy war. The amount of the military, financial, and humanitarian aid, mostly in the form of loans, by these countries to Ukraine in 2022 exceeded the size of the state budget of Ukraine.

The finance minister of Ukraine noted that Ukraine received $42.5 billion in 2023 and $31.1 billion in 2022 in the form of grants, loans, and loan guarantees for its state budget from the EU, the United States, the IMF, Japan, Canada, the UK, and other countries and organizations. International aid was the most important source of state budget revenues in January-October 2023 accounting for 29% of the state budget revenues (U Minfini, 2023). The foreign funding was used to pay pensions to retired people and social benefits to internally displaced people, persons with disabilities, low-income families, housing and communal subsidies, payments to employees of the State Emergency Service, and wages for Ukrainian government officials, public servants, and teachers. Such foreign funding was critical to the state budget, functioning of the government, and social welfare payments of Ukraine.

The Western military and financial aid, provision of intelligence, training, and war planning enabled the Ukrainian forces to rearm themselves with mostly Western-supplied weapons and to continue the war with Russia for a long time. Ukraine received from NATO and US-allied countries, such as South Korea, large amounts of Western-type and Soviet type artillery shells, tanks, missiles, multiple rocket launchers, armed fighting vehicles, air defense systems, drones, and other weapons.

Thousands of videos on the social media and in the media showed since the second half of 2023 mostly artillery, armed fighting vehicles, and personnel carries of models produced by NATO countries. A large number of the Ukrainian troops were trained in NATO countries, in particular, for the counteroffensive in summer 2023.

Without massive Western military, financial, and humanitarian aid, Ukraine would have lost the war much sooner and would have been forced to reach a peace deal with Russia largely on Russian terms. Zelenskyy admitted during his US visit in September 2023 in the US Congress that "if we don't get the aid, we will lose the war." (Harris, 2023). Josep Borrell, the EU chief for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy also stated in October 2024 that "if we stop supporting Ukraine, the war will be over in fifteen days and Putin will achieve his goals." (Ordiz, 2024). The prolongation of the war without real prospects of Ukraine winning the war also meant large military and civilian casualties, economic and other damage, and much worse onditions for Ukraine for any future peace deal (Fig. 9.1).

Various evidence of US and UK direct involvement in planning, training, intelligence gathering, arming, and financing of the Ukrainian forces, in particular, for the Kherson and Kharkiv counter-offensives in 2022 and the summer 2023 counteroffensive, is also consistent with the proxy war and Ukraine as a US client state (Barnes et al., 2022). The United States provided real-time intelligence to the Ukrainian forces to identify, precisely locate, and target the Russian and separatist forces, military equipment and weapons, Russian generals, and the Black Sea flagship Moskva (Dilanian et al., 2022).

For example, a Pentagon official and Zaluzhnyi aides revealed that the US "pushed" Ukraine's Zelenskyy and Valerii Zaluzhnyi, the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, to undertake counter-offensive in the Kherson Region in 2022, even though the highest Ukrainian political and military leaders wanted then to conduct the counteroffensive in the Zaporizhzhia Region (Panella & Pickrell, 2024). US and Ukrainian officials also revealed to the Washington Post "America's deep involvement in the military planning behind the counteroffensive" in summer 2024, in particular, that "Ukrainian, U.S. and British military officers held eight major tabletop war games to build a campaign plan." (In Ukraine, 2023). This failed counteroffensive with large Ukrainian military casualties in summer 2023 in the South of Ukraine was planned and undertaken with US involvement as a patron

Fig. 9.1 President Zelenskyy meeting with the US Secretary of Defense in Kyiv. Public domain photo. https://www.flickr.com/photos/president_of_ukraine/53345105656

and Ukraine as a client state and a proxy even though it had no real chance of success because of the Russian military advantage and heavily fortified defensive lines built by the Russian forces. Ukrainian media reported that the failed Krynky bridgehead operation was planned with British involvement and resulted in over 1,000 missing in action Ukrainian forces members, who were presumably killed.

However, Zelenskyy and Zaluzhnyi did not always follow the US plans in Ukraine. For example, contrary to the US war plan to focus the Ukrainian forces on the counteroffensive in the South of Ukraine and to withdraw from Bakhmut. Zelenskyy for political and propaganda reasons ordered the Ukrainian forces to defend Bakhmut in spite of heavy casualties and danger of encirclement by the Russian forces. Similarly, Zaluzhnyi soon after the start of the counteroffensive in summer of 2023 abandoned the US-preferred counteroffensive plan after the loss of many Leopard German tanks and US Bradley fighting vehicles and chose to attack the Russian forces with small infantry units (In Ukraine, 2023).

This demonstrates that contrary to the Russian government and media narrative Ukraine is not a US colony and the Ukrainian leader is not a US puppet.

The SBU used “naval drones that were developed as part of a top-secret operation involving the CIA and other Western intelligence services” to strike the Crimean bridge and Russian Black Sea Navy ships (In Ukraine, 2023). Senior Ukrainian and US intelligence officials revealed that

> The C.I.A. and other American intelligence agencies provide intelligence for targeted missile strikes, track Russian troop movements and help support spy networks... A secret nerve center of Ukraine’s military... is almost fully financed, and partly equipped, by the C.I.A. The listening post in the Ukrainian forest is part of a C.I.A.-supported network of spy bases constructed in the past eight years that includes 12 secret locations along the Russian border... And the C.I.A. also helped train a new generation of Ukrainian spies who operated inside Russia, across Europe, and in Cuba and other places where the Russians have a large presence. The relationship is so ingrained that C.I.A. officers remained at a remote location in western Ukraine when the Biden administration evacuated U.S. personnel in the weeks before Russia invaded in February 2022. (Entous & Schwirtz, 2024)

The British special forces trained and “guided” the Ukrainian special forces, in particular, in “the ‘deep battlespace’ fight against Russia during the Russia-Ukraine war.” (Rogan, 2022). Since the violent overthrow of the Ukrainian government in 2014, the US Special Operations forces have planned and trained the Ukrainian forces for “partisan campaign.” (Ignatius, 2022).

After denying and covering up the proxy war in Ukraine, the New York Times published “untold story of America’s hidden role in Ukrainian military operations against Russia’s invading armies” and confirmed in detail based on over 300 interviews that the US and NATO military were directly and closely involved in the war planning, intelligence provision, strategy, and technology supply and development for the Ukraine. The United States provided to the Ukrainian military specific locations of Russian military targets and authorization of Ukrainian HIMARS missile strikes and ATACMS missile strikes against the Russian forces and other military targets in Ukraine and Russia (Entous, 2025).

However, the NATO weapons, military and financial aid, intelligence, training, advise, planning, guidance, and other involvement short of direct military involvement would not be able to win the proxy war because Russia maintains a significant military advantage over Ukraine even with Western weapons and other aid in terms of weapons, ammunition, and manpower potential. The possibility of the direct military participation in the war by NATO or individual NATO countries is not real since such military confrontation would sharply raise the possibility of a nuclear war between the West and Russia.

There are reports of deployment of US and British special forces in Ukraine during the war. For example, a senior British general admitted that 350 British marine commandos took part in covert operations in Ukraine, specifically, supported "discreet operations" that carried "a high level of political and military risk" in a "hugely sensitive environment." (Grylls, 2022). However, there is no evidence of their direct involvement in the combat with the Russian forces.

However, the proxy war and such deployment of the American and British forces increased a possibility that the Ukraine war could escalate into a war between NATO and Russia, including potentially a nuclear war. Possibility of this war escalating into a nuclear war is the most significant since at least the Cuban missile crisis 60 years ago. However, such significant escalation is not very likely because consequences of such a nuclear war would be devastating to both the United States and Russia.

The United States and other NATO members publicly promised before and during the war that Ukraine would become a member of NATO in the future. Zelenskyy before the NATO Vilnius summit in 2023 and in his "Victory Plan" in 2024 called for NATO to issue an invitation for Ukraine to join. However, there has been no real possibility of NATO membership for Ukraine, especially during the war with Russia, because this could have led to a war between NATO and Russia since Russian President Vladimir Putin cited the NATO accession of Ukraine as a major reason for the invasion and inflated the NATO threat. For the same reason, the United States, German, and Hungarian leaders and leaders of some other NATO countries opposed admitting Ukraine into NATO during the war or direct participation of NATO in the Russia-Ukraine war, such as sending large military units for participation in combat or instituting a no-fly zone in Ukraine (Pavliuk & Kizilov, 2024). Likewise, the NATO membership of Ukraine is unlikely in the foreseeable future for the same reason (see Chapter 8).

After refusing to recognize Ukraine as even a potential EU member before the Russian invasion, the EU opened accession process for Ukraine during the war and offered Ukraine a candidate status. In contrast to the NATO membership in Ukraine, Russia did not oppose the EU membership. However, the EU accession process for Ukraine is made by the EU de facto dependent on the proxy war in Ukraine, and the EU membership can be significantly delayed or stalled after the end of the war in Ukraine.

The United States and the UK blocked a peace deal, which was close to being finalized during the talks between Ukraine and Russia in spring 2022. This is confirmed by overwhelming evidence. Such evidence includes statements or suggestions by the ex-Israeli prime minister, the head and two members of the Ukrainian peace talks delegation, the Ukrainian officials close to Zelensky, the ex-chancellor of Germany, the Turkish president and foreign minister, a Swiss ambassador in Turkey, the US president-elect Donald Trump, and then senior US State Department official Victoria Nuland (see Chapter 12; Alexei, 2024; Arestovich, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c; Bennett, 2023; Geneva, 2023; GeoInsider, 2025; Kurianowicz & Eichhorn, 2023; Mikhail, 2024; Moseichuk, 2023; Presidential, 2024; Putin, 2024; Romaniuk, 2022; Schröder, 2024; Some, 2022; Vladimir, 2023).

9.4 The Civil War

The war in Ukraine since the Russian invasion in February 2022 also has elements of the civil war which began in Donbas in 2014. Most political scientists, who published or presented in Western academic venues their studies concerning the war in Donbas before the Russian invasion in 2022, classified it as a civil war with Russian military interventions or internationalized civil war (see, for example, Arel & Driscoll, 2023; Hahn, 2018; Katchanovski, 2016; Kudelia, 2016; Petro, 2023; Sakwa, 2015).

The contestation or denials of the civil war in Donbas were based on uncritical acceptance of statements by the Ukrainian and Western governments and the media that primarily Russian regular forces and not Donbas separatist forces along with Russian nationalist volunteers and mercenaries were fighting with the Ukrainian forces in Donbas before the Russian invasion in February 2022. They also argued that dependence of the Donbas separatist forces on Russian weapons, military advisers, training economic, and political backing and client-patron status classified as the Russia-Ukraine war in Donbas since 2014 contrary to common academic definitions of interstate wars and civil wars. The denials of the civil war were also based on claims that there was no significant separatism in Donbas (see, for example, Hauter, 2021).

However, there were no video, satellite, or other verifiable evidence of regular Russian military units in Donbas at the time of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 in contrast to such evidence during the Russian military interventions in Donbas in August 2014 and January–February 2015. The British Ministry of Defense map of the deployment of the Russian forces on the eve of the invasion also did not show any regular Russian military units in Donbas. Similarly to the involvement of the NATO members in the war in Ukraine, the Russian involvement in the war in Donbas in the form of weapons supplies and economic aid to Donbas separatists, the covert deployment of the Russian military intelligence units and military advisers, the relatively limited in time and place direct military participation in the war, and de facto client state status of self-proclaimed separatists republics do not make the Donbas war an interstate war before the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

In contrast to the brief direct Russian military interventions in Donbas in support of pro-Russian separatist in August 2014 and January–February 2015, the Russian forces numbers, casualties, and POWs since February 24, 2022, far outnumbered those of the Donbas separatist forces. As noted, estimated 25,000 residents of Donbas in separatist forces and later Russian forces were killed since February 24, 2022. In contrast, the Donbas separatist forces casualties before the invasion were estimated based on the UN reports at a few thousand killed, while Russian forces casualties in Donbas were estimated at couple hundred based on identification of specific killed Russian forces members in the media reports, videos, and social media (see Katchanovski, 2016; Chapter 5).

Similarly, the examination of government officials, media, and social media reports and various videos of POWs that were exchanged from the Ukrainian captivity since the Russian invasion in 2022, showed that the absolute majority of them were Russian forces members and a significant minority were members of the Donbas separatist forces. In contrast, the analysis of similar sources identified that POWs exchanged from the Ukrainian captivity in 2014–2021 included only about 1.5 percent of identified Russian forces members and 3.5% Russian volunteers and mercenaries. Furthermore, the Russian invasion in 2022 involved not only Donbas but also other regions in the Eastern, Southern, and Central Ukraine.

Out of more than 8 million Ukrainian refugees recorded by the UN in January 2023, 2.9 million were reported in Russia before October 2022, compared to 1.6 million in Poland and 1.0 million in Germany (Operational, 2023). Such large number of Ukrainian refugees in Russia during the Russian invasion of Ukraine is another evidence of the civil war in Ukraine. Various UN, government, and media reports, videos, and testimonies showed that many Ukrainian refugees were forced to move to Russia during the war. However, the analysis of similar sources shows that absolute majority of the Ukrainian refugees moved to Russia voluntarily and remained in Russia long after their arrival and did not move to other countries despite better economic benefits and opportunities for Ukrainian refugees in EU member states, Canada, and the United States.

A poll, which was commissioned by the author and conducted by the Kiev International Institute of Sociology in April–May 2014 before the armed conflict in Donbas turned into a war, showed the majority support in Donbas for various forms of separatism (see Chapter 5; Katchanovski, 2016). Other polls during the Orange Revolution in 2004 showed similar results (Katchanovski, 2006).

The Russian government recognized the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk separatist republics as independent states a few days before the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. But they de facto remained client states of Russia before their annexation. For instance, Russian officials were appointed to the top positions in the DNR and LNR governments, and the separatist forces under de facto Russian command were deployed beyond Donbas to the Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, and Kharkiv Regions. Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, estimated over 200,000 residents of Donbas and Crimea were fighting in the Donbas separatist forces and the Russian forces against the Ukrainian forces.

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CHAPTER 10

Genocide or War Crimes During the Russia-Ukraine War?

10.1 Conflicting Narratives

The Ukrainian government and media stated that Russia conducted genocide of Ukrainians during the Russian invasion. The Ukrainian government and the Ukrainian and many Western media attributed civilian casualties in separatist-controlled Donbas and occupied regions of Ukraine to false-flag shelling by the Russian forces.

In contrast, the Russian government and media presented the invasion as a humanitarian intervention aimed at stopping a genocide of ethnic Russians and Russian speakers in Donbas during the civil war there. They denied Russian war crimes or claimed that they were staged.

US President Joe Biden and many other top Western government officials and politicians and media outlets, and some parliaments, classified the war as Russian genocide of Ukrainians and war crimes (Hutzler et al., 2024). Donald Trump, before he was reelected as US president in November 2024 also called the Russian invasion of Ukraine a genocide. He claimed in September 2024 that Ukraine is "absolutely obliterated" and "millions and millions people," including soldiers are dead. Trump stated that the war could have been prevented if he were the US president instead of Biden and that he would end this war within 24 hours after being elected the US president again (Cochran, 2022).

Some Western commentators state that the Russian actions during the war in Ukraine can be classified as a genocide. However, they either take at face value claims by the Ukrainian and Western governments or refer

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to “cultural” genocide, i.e., assimilation of Ukrainians and elimination of the Ukrainian language. Dudko (2022, 133) states that “few scholars and lawyers believe it would be legally possible to prove Russia’s genocide in Ukraine.” The genocide proponents claim that the aim of the Russian invasion is physical or cultural destruction of the Ukrainian nation.

Genocide is commonly defined in political science and conflict studies as mass murder and other similar acts committed with the intent to destroy in whole or in part an ethnic, racial, religious, or social group. A similar definition was adopted by the UN Genocide Convention:

> In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group. (Convention 1948)

The Genocide Convention was adopted by the UN in 1948 based specifically on all such actions and plans by Nazi Germany during World War Two. They included, intended, and implemented to various extents in occupied countries or territories, the physical annihilation of Jews as a whole and significant parts of other groups, which were declared by the Nazis as also racially inferior, in particular, Belarusians, Poles, Roma, Russians, and Ukrainians (See, for example, Katchanovski, 2010, 2014, 2019, 2020).

War crimes are violations of the laws concerning wars, such as the Geneva Conventions. War crimes can be committed against civilians and prisoners of war during the war. There is a large variety of war crimes (See Henckaerts et al., 2005). Genocide is the most significant and severe crime. Wars can be used to perpetrate genocide, like in the case of the genocides perpetrated by Nazi Germany during World War Two.

The Zelensky government and the Ukrainian media claimed that the bombing of the Nord Stream natural gas pipelines was a false-flag Russian bombing. After initial claims by the Western officials and much of the media of false-flag Russian bombing of the Nord Stream natural gas pipelines in the Baltic Sea, German and US media reported citing the German investigation and their own investigations that the Nord Stream pipeline was blown up with involvement of the Ukrainian special forces and that Poland refused to disclose the information about the perpetrators and allowed a Ukrainian suspect to escape to Ukraine after Germany informed the Polish authorities about him (Harris & Khurshudyan, 2023; Pancevski, 2024a). Senior Ukrainian defense and security officials, cited by the Wall Street Journal, stated that Valeri Zaluzhny, the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and at least initially President Volodymyr Zelenskyy approved the Nord Stream gas pipelines sabotage operation in the Baltic Sea near Germany (Diehl et al., 2024; Pancevski, 2024b).

The investigation by a leading American investigative journalist Seymour Hersh based on insider information from the US intelligence reported that the US Navy and intelligence with involvement of the Norwegian forces on the Biden's order blew up in September 2022 the Nord Stream gas pipelines that supplied natural gas from Russia to Germany. As reported by a Danish newspaper in September 2024, the harbor master of Christiansø island said that a few days before the Nord Stream pipelines explosions nearby, he noticed US Navy ships in the area. They had their transponders switched off and told him to turn back when he approached them. He believes that this suggested the US Navy involvement in the Nord Stream sabotage and said that he was not allowed to talk about it (Frandsen, 2024). Such evidence of the possible direct US involvement is consistent with the public promise of Biden to end the Nord Stream 2 pipeline in case of the Russian invasion of Ukraine (Hersh, 2023).

Both versions of the US and Ukrainian involvement in the Nord Stream pipelines bombing might also be consistent since, as the next section shows, Ukraine is used as a proxy during the war with Russia, and its special services are under the tutelage of their American and British counterparts. The leaked Pentagon documents and other sources reported by German and US media revealed that the US and Dutch intelligence agencies had information about at least the initial Ukrainian plan to blow up the Nord Stream gas pipelines. A former deputy of the Ukrainian parliament and a former officer of the Security Service of Ukraine, both of whom defected to Russia, identified along with purported Ukrainian deep divers and some other purported participants, the same SBU officer and the same Andromeda yacht as were identified by the US and German media as carrying the Nord Stream sabotage. But they stated that the Ukrainian team was prepared and used as a cover for the United States. They also identified the same former SBU officer, who was arrested in August 2025 in Italy on German charges of leading the special Ukrainian task group which blew up the Nord Stream. (BelTA, 2024; Prozorov, 2024).

The Washington Post reported that the Dutch military intelligence and the US intelligence agencies also knew about a planned bombing on the TurkStream natural gas pipeline in the Black Sea by Ukraine. Putin and the Russian media stated that the Russian security services prevented a bombing of the TurkStream by the Ukrainian special services (Harris & Mekhennet, 2023).

In contrast to various such sources of evidence and admissions against interest, there is lack of comparable evidence that Russia blew up the Nord Stream pipelines. Claims by various Ukrainian and Western government officials and media about the Russian false-flag bombing of the Nord Stream pipeline lack any supporting evidence (See for example, Economist, 2022; Cooper, 2023). Such conspiracy theory also implied that such false-flag bombing would have been an irrational act since the Nord Stream pipelines were built and owned mostly by Russia, and they were the main suppliers of natural gas from Russia to Germany via the Baltic Sea. It is also noteworthy that pipelines that supplied via Ukraine natural gas and oil from Russia to some of EU countries, such as Austria, Hungary, and Slovakia, continued to operate in such transit capacity during the Russia-Ukraine war.

10.2 Civilian Casualties

The analysis of the evidence shows no evidence of Ukrainian genocide in separatist-controlled Donbas and Russian genocide in Ukraine. The UN and the US intelligence also did not find evidence of the genocide in Ukraine corroborating the analysis of this study (Lee et al., 2022). False genocide claims were used by Russian President Vladimir Putin to justify the invasion of Ukraine, which resulted in many more civilian casualties than the war in Donbas prior to the invasion. False claims of genocide and inflated Russian war crimes in Bucha were also used by the Zelenskyy government and the United States and some other Western governments to justify ending the peace talks to stop the war. There have been many more additional civilian casualties as a result of the ongoing war versus a possible peace deal that was close to agreement in the beginning of April 2022.

Estimated 4000 civilians were killed in Donbas during the civil war since 2014. These estimates are based on at least 3404 confirmed civilian casualties by the UN during the Donbas civil war in 2014–2022. The UN data are adjusted by rough estimates of missing persons who were killed. UN and OSCE reports and the analysis of thousands of videos and media and social media reports show that the absolute majority of the civilian casualties were in separatist-controlled parts of Donbas, primarily as result of shelling by the Ukrainian forces aimed at military targets or indiscriminate shelling (See Chapter 5). The UN documented at least 808 killed civilians in separatist-controlled Donbas and 1349 in other Russian-controlled parts of Ukraine from the start of the Russian invasion in 2022 until October 2023 (UN 2024).

The civilian casualties in the separatist-controlled Donbas constituted about 0.2% of the population of the self-proclaimed separatist republics in Donbas and were much smaller than the separatist and Russian military casualties. The UN estimated that about 4400 members of the Ukrainian forces and about 6500 members of separatist forces were killed in 2014–2021 (UN 2022). As noted, the Russian and separatist military casualties since the Russian invasion in 2022 were much higher. The head of the Russian Investigative Committee said in May 2025 that at least 621 civilians, including 38 children, were killed during the Russia-Ukraine war in Russian regions, primarily Kursk, Bryansk, Belgorod, and Krasnodar, and in Russian-annexed Crimea.

This is consistent with other evidence that civilians in separatist-controlled Donbas were not systematically targeted by the Ukrainian forces as a matter of policy as a part of the group, and their killings did not constitute genocide of Donbas residents, ethnic Russians, or Russian speakers. However, there is various evidence of war crimes, such as killings of civilians and POWs, and indiscriminate shelling, by both the separatist forces and the Ukrainian forces, in particular, the far-right armed formations.

Estimated 20,000 civilians were killed in Ukraine, including about 4000 in Donbas separatist and Russian-controlled territories of Ukraine, and about 80,000 were injured during the three and half years of the war since the Russian invasion in February 2022. This estimate is based on the UN data of 14,116 confirmed killed civilians in Ukraine during that time period. The UN confirmed casualties include 733 children killed and

2,734 (19%) civilians killed in Russian- and separatist-controlled territories of Ukraine from the start of the Russian invasion in 2022 until the end of August 2025 (UN 2025).

This confirmed casualty number is close to the one provided by Prosecutor General of Ukraine in April 2024. He stated that based on their investigations, over 12,000 civilians, including 543 children, were killed in Ukraine as a result of the Russian invasion (Genprokuror, 2024).

The UN documented casualties are adjusted by adding estimated unaccounted casualties in Mariupol and other cities and towns in Donbas and other regions and missing persons who were killed and by using the 4 wounded to 1 killed ratio. The UN verified 1348 civilians killed during the siege of Mariupol, and a UN senior representative stated that the actual number of killed civilians in Mariupol "is likely thousands higher" (OHCHR 2022a). The Human Right Watch/SITU report estimated, based on the number of new burials, about 8000 excess deaths in Mariupol during the entire first year of war (Counting, 2024). This includes killed civilians and military members and civilians who died as result of lack of medical care, medicine, heating, clean water, and sanitation during and after the siege. The head of the Investigative Committee of Russia admitted that over 3000 bodies of dead civilians had been found in Mariupol (Roshchina, 2022). This is close to the UN and Human Rights Watch/SITU estimates of civilian casualties there.

The official number of civilians identified as missing in the Ukrainian government database of missing "under special circumstances," primarily the war, was about 11,000 as of October 2023 (MVS, 2023). In addition to civilians who were killed but identified as missing, this number included missing civilians in Ukraine due to the Russian occupation of their locations, civilians in Russian captivity, and up to about 300 civilians missing during the war in Donbas. Along with the UN reports of documented civilian casualties, the Ukrainian government number of missing civilians due mainly to the war shows that claims of hundreds of thousands or dozens of thousands of killed civilians in Ukraine, including 25,000 in Mariupol alone, are inflated and false.

The UN identified 36,481 injured civilians in Ukraine from the start of the Russian invasion in 2022 until the end of August 2025. The UN confirmed casualties include 4486 wounded civilians in Russian and separatist-controlled territories of Ukraine. However, the number of wounded civilians was undercounted by the UN in the first few months of the war. For example, the wounded to killed ratio ranged each month since June

2022 from about 2.5 to 6 vs. the 0.7 to 1 ratio in March 2022, when it confirmed 4206 killed civilians (UN 2025).

The civilian casualties in Ukraine constituted about 0.05% of the pre-war population of Ukraine on the territories controlled by the Ukrainian government and were about 11 times smaller than the estimated Ukrainian forces casualties during the Russia-Ukraine war. Similarly, the civilian casualties in separatist- and Russian-controlled Donbas during the Russia-Ukraine war constituted about 0.08% of its pre-war population and were about 38 times smaller than the estimated Russian and separatist forces casualties during the Russia-Ukraine war. This is consistent with other evidence that civilians in Ukraine were not systematically targeted by the Ukrainian, Russian, and Donbas separatist forces as a matter of policy in order to exterminate a large part of, respectively, Ukrainians and Russian-speaking Donbas residents as a group and that their killings did not constitute genocide.

Civilian casualties in Ukraine were often inflated or misrepresented for political reasons by the Russian, DNR, LNR, and Western governments and the media. For instance, the claim that more than 100,000 Mariupol residents were killed during the siege and the capture of this Donbas city by the Russian and separatist forces is beyond the realm of possibility since it implies that all city residents were killed or wounded, based on typical ratio of 1 killed to 4 wounded during the modern wars. The same concerns the reports of at least 25,000 killed civilians in Mariupol. They are based on an evidence-free statement by a Mariupol city official in evacuation in other region of Ukraine with no access to sources to determine the casualty number (Hinnant et al., 2022).

The estimated civilian casualty ratio of 1 killed civilian to about 17 killed combatants during three and half years of the Russia-Ukraine war is one of the lowest in modern wars and the lowest in wars of such scale, intensity, and duration in modern times. The number of civilian casualties during the Russia-Ukraine war exceeded significantly the number of civilian casualties during the civil war in Donbas in 2014–2022 but was significantly lower than in nearly all other modern wars, such as wars in Bosnia, Georgia, Chechnya, and Gaza. The civilian casualties of the Russia-Ukraine war are much lower compared to the civilian casualties of the civil war and ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, ethnic cleansing and terrorism by the OUN and the UPA in Ukraine, and especially the Nazi genocide during World War Two in Ukraine.

For example, there were about 38,000 killed civilians identified by name among about 100,000 identified killed persons during the civil war and ethnic cleansing in Bosnia in the 1990s (Bosnia's, 2007). There were identified about 35,000 Polish civilians killed in Volhynia in Western Ukraine during World War Two in the ethnic cleansing by the OUN and the UPA (See Katchanovski, 2015, 2020; Siemaszko & Siemaszko, 2000). There were 19.1 thousand identified civilians killed by the OUN and the UPA during the Soviet rule in Western Ukraine, 3.2 thousand Soviet, Communist Party, and Komsomol officials, and 7.3 thousand military, police, security forces, and paramilitary yastrubky members (Politychnyi 2002, 771).

Civilian victims of the Nazi genocidal policy in Ukraine included close to 1.5 million Jews and more than 3.5 million Ukrainians and other civilians and POWs from estimated 6.7% loss of the population of Ukraine (See Katchanovski, 2010, 2014, 2019). The artificial famine that resulted from Stalin's genocidal policy towards peasants led to 3 million deaths in Soviet Ukraine in 1932–1933 (Katchanovski, 2010).

The UN reported that 90% of killed civilians in Ukraine, including separatist and Russian-controlled territories of Ukraine, were killed from February 24, 2022 till the end of August 2025 by shells, bombs, missiles, mines, and explosives, while 10% or 1351 civilians were killed by other weapons, i.e., by small arms and light weapons (handguns, automatic assault rifles, machine guns, grenades, grenade launchers, etc.) in crossfire, indiscriminate fire, willful killing, and in road accidents involving military (UN 2025). The analysis of various videos, photos, media and social media reports, and the UN reports shows that the absolute majority of civilian casualties were in the Ukrainian government-controlled territory and inflicted by the Russian and separatist forces.

Various evidence, such as thousands of videos, media and social media reports, along with findings of UN and Amnesty International reports and US intelligence and military experts, shows that the overwhelming majority of civilians in the Ukrainian-controlled territories and in separatist-controlled Donbas were killed by explosive weapons with wide area effect or not-precise weapons during, respectively, Russian and separatist and to a much lesser extent Ukrainian military strikes. The analysis of the evidence suggests that such civilians were killed by strikes against military targets or during apparent indiscriminate shelling/bombing, overwhelmingly by the Russian forces, in populated urban and rural settlements. Videos, photos, and Amnesty International's (2022a) report show that populated civilian areas and facilities, such as cities, towns, villages, apartment buildings, schools, universities, hospitals, hotels, etc. were often used for military purposes, primarily by the Ukrainian forces.

For example, the analysis of videos, media and social media reports, eyewitness testimonies, and geolocations suggests that almost all strikes with largest Ukrainian and Russian civilian casualties either happened near military targets as result of missed or deviated for various reasons strikes, such as missiles inaccuracy, guidance, shot-downs by air defense or jamming and from indiscriminate shelling, bombing, or resulted from indiscriminate targeted missile strikes of buildings with both civilians and military personnel and indiscriminate use of unguided and inaccurate weapons with large areas of impact in cities, or in cities and towns or premises with both civilians and military personnel. Such indiscriminate strikes are violations of international law.

Such cases include Russian shelling, bombing, and rocket and missile strikes with the largest numbers of Ukrainian civilian casualties in Mariupol, Kyiv, Vinnytsia, Kremenchuk, Kramatorsk restaurant, Kryvyi Rih, Chernihiv, Chasiv Yar, Izium, Chaplino, Bilohorivka, Mykolaiv, Kharkiv, Hroza, and Dnipro. For example, both civilian and military casualties of the Russian missile strikes in such locations as Vinnytsia, Chasiv Yar, Chaplino, Bilohorivka, and Kramatorsk restaurant, were identified by various Ukrainian media after initial government and media reports of only civilian casualties. These findings are corroborated by assessments made by US military and intelligence experts, a Newsweek investigation, which was partly based on the US intelligence, of Russian missile strikes with the largest number of reported civilian casualties, and by the Amnesty International reports (Arkin, 2022a; War, 2022).

Such strikes were misrepresented by the Russian, Donbas separatist, Ukrainian, and Western governments and media and by the Wikipedia as evidence of respectively, Ukrainian and Russian policy of deliberate targeting of civilians, while the analysis of primary evidence shows that such strikes can be classified as indiscriminate. The government and media reports concerning such strikes, with few exceptions omitted military casualties during such strikes and their location near military targets or critical infrastructure.

For example, Ukrainian and Western government statements and media reports stated as a matter of fact that a Russian missile strike targeted the Okhmadyt children's hospital in Kyiv, while the Russian government and media stated that a Ukrainian NASAMS air defense system hit the hospital. They omitted that two transformer substations on the territory of the hospital were hit by the missile. Videos and photos of the missile strike and its aftermath suggest that this was a Russian Kh 101 missile because of its distinct engine in the back and that it hit about 1 kilometer from the missile-producing Artem factory, which was hit by at least 6 other Russian cruise missiles. The videos and photos show that the missile hit within meters from two electric substations in the children's hospital territory and partially destroyed a nearby small two-story hospital building killing two adults there, while the blast impact damaged one of the large main hospital buildings. The Rinat Akhmetov's energy company stated that its three transformer substations in Kyiv, including two on the hospital territory, were destroyed by Russian missiles during this strike (See Ivan, 2024). Claims by Zelenskyy and other Ukrainian senior officials that children were deliberately targeted were reported by the Ukrainian and Western media at face value and taken even by many academics at face value. The same concerns the Russian media propagating the Russian government claim that this missile was from a Ukrainian NASAMS air defense system. Such Russian missile strike of the critical electrical infrastructure located on the children's hospital territory can be classified as an indiscriminate strike and a violation of international law.

Similarly, the analysis of various videos, eyewitness testimonies, and experts used in Amnesty International reports suggests that explosions in Mariupol maternity hospital and the Mariupol theater were likely from large Russian unguided aviation bombs, which lack precision and can strike far from targets (Amnesty International 2022b). There is similar evidence of large Russian unguided aviation bombs killing several dozen residents in an apartment building in Izium and in a street queue in Chernihiv (Amnesty International 2022c). Such bombings by inaccurate aviation bombs with wide impact area in populated areas during combat fit definitions of indiscriminate attacks in the international humanitarian law (See Henckaerts et al., 2005).

Contrary to claims by the Russian Defense Ministry and Donbas separatists and contrary to overwhelming evidence of the false-flag Maidan massacre, there is no confirmed evidence of false-flag bombings of the Mariupol maternity hospital and the Mariupol theater by the neo-Nazi-led Azov Regiment or by other Ukrainian forces (Katchanovski, 2024a, 2024b). Contrary to the claims by the Ukrainian government officials and the Ukrainian and Western media, there is no corroborating evidence of several hundred casualties of the Mariupol theater bombing.

The same concerns indiscriminate shelling and rocket and missile strikes by the Ukrainian forces with the largest numbers of civilian casualties in Donetsk, Horlivka, and Belgorod and a June 23, 2024 missile strike that killed 4 people, including two children on a beach in Sevastopol in Crimea. For example, the analysis of videos and testimonies suggests that a shot-down Ukrainian Tochka-U missile, which killed about two dozen civilians in Donetsk, apparently aimed at the nearby separatist DNR government headquarters.

The number, the nature, and the location of such strikes with large civilian casualties do not show Ukrainian or Russian government policies of specifically targeting civilians in order to perpetrate genocide. However, deliberate targeting of civilians in some of such cases by individual military commanders and units, which is a war crime, cannot be excluded. The evidence suggests that a few strikes with large Ukrainian civilian casualties, such as in Kostiantynivka and Vuhledar, resulted from hits by the Ukrainian missiles (Ismay, 2023; War, 2022). The evidence concerning the Tochka-U missile strike that killed 60 civilians in the Kramatorsk train station is contradictory.

There is no corroborated evidence of systematic false-flag shelling/bombing of civilians by the Russian, separatist, and Ukrainian forces. This concerns, for example, claims by the Russian and separatist governments that the bombing of the maternity hospital and a theater in Mariupol were false-flag attacks and claims by the Ukrainian government that the shelling of Donetsk and the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant were false-flags. But there is clear evidence of Russian missile and Iranian drone strikes of thermal and hydro power plants and electrical substations in Ukrainian government-controlled regions in September-December 2022 and in spring 2024. These strikes destroyed or damaged almost all thermal and hydroelectric power stations in Ukraine and resulted in significant power, heating, water, and internet outages in Ukraine. There is lack of evidence to determine with sufficient certainty which party of the conflict destroyed in June 2023 the large Kakhovka dam that resulted in significant flooding and civilian casualties on both sides of the frontline.

However, there is various evidence of war crimes by individual soldiers, commanders, or units during the Russia-Ukraine war, primarily by the Russian forces. Contrary to the Russian government claims of staged killings in Bucha, analysis of UN and Amnesty International reports, forensic expert reports, videos, satellite images, eyewitness reports, media investigative reports, and other sources suggests that a few dozen civilians and territorial defense members were likely shot deliberately or indiscriminately or summarily executed by individual Russian soldiers or Russian units during the Russian occupation of Bucha. Such summary executions and killings are classified as war crimes.

The UN human rights mission report documented unlawful killing, including by summary executions and indiscriminate shootings, of 73 civilians in the town Bucha and 441 civilians in the Kyiv, Chernihiv, and Sumy regions of Ukraine from 24 February until 6 April 2022, in particular during searches and detention of suspected supporters of the Ukrainian forces (OHCHR, 2022b). Videos, satellite images, and eyewitness testimonies confirmed indiscriminate shooting or summary executions of at least several civilian residents and at least 8 unarmed territorial defense members in Bucha by the Russian forces (Berehulak & Gall, 2022; The Man, 2022). However, circumstances of the killings of most of the victims in Bucha have not been made public by the Ukrainian and Western investigations and the media.

Contrary to the claims by the Ukrainian and Western governments and the media, there is no documented evidence of Srebrenica-like mass execution (massacre) of a large proportion of the Bucha town residents by the Russian forces. The total 458 victims identified in Bucha after the Russian force's withdrawal included some non-civilians and 39 who "appeared to have died of natural causes." (Sly & Khudov, 2022). Forensic experts confirmed that many victims were shot in the head or by automatic gunfire but did not reveal their specific number (Guardian, 2022). The other victims or the absolute majority of them were likely killed by shelling since videos, photos, and eyewitnesses showed shelling in Bucha by Russian and Ukrainian forces during fighting for control of this town. A US military intelligence official expressed a similar view (Arkin, 2022b). Forensic experts revealed that dozens of Bucha residents were "killed by tiny metal arrows from shells" (flechettes) (Tondo, 2022).

The UN mission report found that in 100 civilians' killings, which it examined in detail out of confirmed killings of 441 civilians during the Russian invasion in the Kyiv, Chernihiv and Sumy regions of Ukraine from February 24 until April 6 2022, 57 victims were summarily executed. Thirty of them were killed in places of their detention by the Russian forces, and 27 persons were killed on the spot after coming under the Russian forces control. The executed Ukrainian civilians were primarily accused or suspected of providing assistance to the Ukrainian forces (OHCHR 2022b).

There are videos and eyewitness testimonies suggesting that neo-Nazi-led Azov Regiment members killed many Mariupol residents during the battle for Mariupol and used apartment buildings, schools, and other civilian facilities during the fighting with the Russian and separatist forces (See, for example, Anatoly, 2022). Videos and eyewitness testimonies revealed executions of Russian POWs by the Georgian Legion and by the neo-Nazi-led Kraken unit, which was formed by the civilian wing of the neo-Nazi-led Azov regiment (see BBC 2022). There were also admissions, photos, and videos posted on Telegram channels by Azov leaders of killing of Ukrainian civilians accused of collaboration with Russians. Such killings are classified as war crimes (Fig. 10.1).

The evidence concerning mass killing of Azov POWs in the Olenivka prison in separatist-controlled Donbas is lacking or contradictory. Various publicly available evidence suggests that a Russian IL-76 military transport plane was shot-down in January 2024 by the Ukrainian air defense and that some 65 Ukrainian POWs, including at least 12 from neo-Nazi-led Azov Regiment, who were being transported to exchange, were killed.

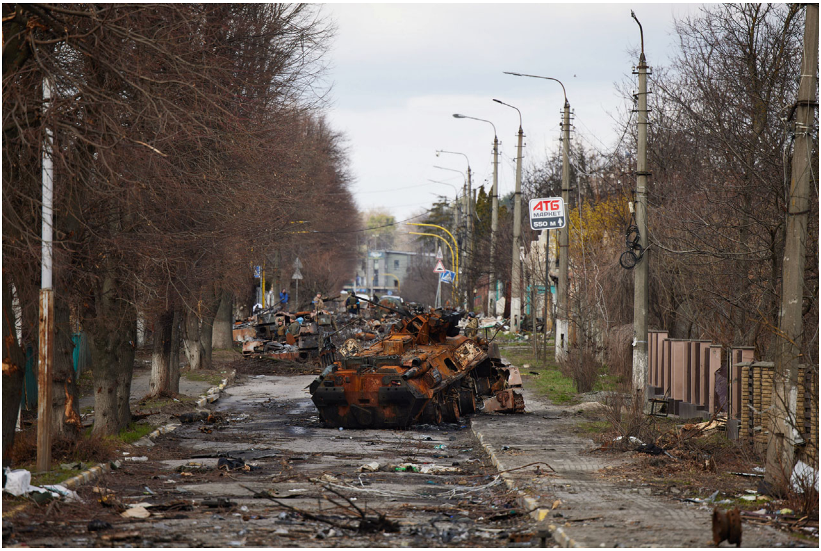

Fig. 10.1 The destroyed Russian military equipment in Bucha. (Public domain photo, https://www.flickr.com/photos/president_of_ukraine/51987935513/)

However, there is no reliable evidence that this was intentional killing of Ukrainian POWs by the Ukrainian forces. Videos show fragments of many bodies on the crash site, multiple fuselage holes consistent with missiles impact and the plane explosion that looks like typical plane fuel explosion and not like S-300 missile explosion. The General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine initially claimed responsibility for the shot-down in the Ukrainian media and then de facto officially confirmed the shot-down of the Russian Il-76 in its statement that it will continue shooting down such planes transporting S-300 missiles.

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CHAPTER 11

The Far-Right Involvement in the Russia-Ukraine War

11.1 Conflicting Narratives

The Russian government and the media justified the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 by claiming that the Ukrainian state is Nazi or partially Nazi/neo-Nazi and that one of the main goals of the invasion was to “denazify” Ukraine. Russian leader Vladimir Putin stated that “Russia’s confrontation with the Neo-Nazi regime that emerged on the territory of Ukraine was inevitable” (Clash, 2022).

Putin stated in 2025 that neo-Nazi formations, such as Azov, have de facto power in Ukraine:

> So, under these circumstances of de facto illegitimacy, neo-Nazi formations receive additional weapons and recruit new personnel. What does this lead to, what could it lead to? It results in de facto power being in their hands… The issue is not just this uncertainty; it is that these neo-Nazi formations, such as Azov, among others, are effectively beginning to run the country. (Vladimir, 2025)

In sharp contrast, since the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, many Ukrainian and Western government officials, politicians, media outlets, and academics adopted a stance that Azov and other neo-Nazi and far-right-led armed formations had not only abandoned extremist elements but were heroes against Russia’s illegal invasion (See Katchanovski & Abrahms, 2024). For example, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy made similar claim and awarded “Hero of Ukraine”

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titles to Azov Regiment Commander Denys Prokopenko, the deputy commander Sviatoslav Palamar, and the senior officer Oleh Khomenko. He denied that the Azov brigade is neo-Nazi (Zelensky 2023).

Zelensky, Ukrainska Pravda, and other Ukrainian and Western media whitewashed and glorified a couple from the Azov brigade even though this couple openly admired Adolf Hitler, Nazi SS, and white supremacism (Robeson, 2024a). Ukrainska Pravda and other Ukrainian media, which glorified and propagated neo-Nazi-led Azov brigades and their commanders and other members, was funded by the USAID, the EU, NATO, the US Embassy, the National Endowment for Democracy, and other Western governments and organizations.

Similarly, former British Prime Minister Boris Johnson called neo-Nazi-led Azov "heroes" and personally greeted and honored the Azov delegation that visited the UK. He openly embraced the Azov's flag with its symbol, which was based on Wolfsangel used by Nazis and neo-Nazis (Boris, 2024).

There was standing ovation given during a public event in the Danish parliament in 2025 to a member of Misanthropic Division, an open neo-Nazi organization that joined neo-Nazi-led Azov. Neo-Nazi Azov members were photographed with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and British Prince Harry at "Invictus Games" in Vancouver. Former CIA director David Petraeus visited an Azov base in Ukraine and was photographed with one of commanders of Azov 3rd Assault brigade. These Azov members openly brandished 88 (Heil Hitler), racial supremacist and other neo-Nazi symbols (See Moss, 2025).

Azov delegations visited during the Russia-Ukraine war the US Congress, the Pentagon, the British parliament, and the NATO headquarters. They included neo-Nazi Azov commanders and other representatives who previously openly displayed neo-Nazi symbols (Robeson, 2025).

Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, the Western governments and media increasingly whitewashed the empirical record to present the Ukrainian neo-Nazi and other far-right formations as categorically moderate in order to boost international support. In June 2024, the US State Department stated that the Azov brigade was eligible to receive US weapons under the "Leahy Law" because it was clear from human rights violations. It made such determination by claiming that the Azov brigade is a new unit and that the separate US Congress ban does not apply for the same reason even though this brigade was created on the basis of the Azov regiment, celebrated the 10th anniversary of the

Azov battalion creation as its own anniversary, and is led by original Azov battalion commanders (Birnbaum et al., 2024). However, an amendment, which was subsequently included in the US defence bill under consideration by the US House of Representatives, specifically stated that "none of the funds appropriated or otherwise made available by this Act may be used to provide arms, training, intelligence, or other assistance to the Azov Battalion, the Third Separate Assault Brigade, or any successor organization" (Congressional, 2024; Katchanovski & Abrahms, 2024).

However, videos, photos, and social media reports showed that the Azov's 3rd Assault brigade received Western weapons and training without any hindrance. For example, recruits from this brigade were training in England under the supervision of British Army instructors and were firing from British armored self-propelled artillery AS-90s.

While a number of major Western media, such as the New York Times and the Guardian, called the Azov Battalion/Regiment neo-Nazi before the Russian invasion, they and other Western mainstream media after the Russian invasion dropped such identifications and claimed that the Azov Regiment and other far-right-led units abandoned their neo-Nazi or radical nationalist ideology and became ordinary units of the Ukrainian forces during the Russia-Ukraine war (See Golinkin, 2023).

For example, *The Times* denied that Azov brigades were neo-Nazi-led and called the Azov brigade "heroes of Mariupol" (Loyd, 2024). *The Times* illustrated its article by a photo of Azov member who was photographed previously with swastika and 14/88 (Heil Hitler) sign. Similarly, such major Western media as The Economist, the Guardian, the Wall Street Journal, the Washington Post, the Reuters, Bild, and the New York Times, after the Russian invasion omitted or denied that the neo-Nazi or far-right background of Azov and other neo-Nazi-led and far-right-led formations in Ukraine and glorified them or their members (Birnbaum et al., 2024; Ukraine's, 2023; Santora, 2023).

The number of the academic studies examining the far-right involvement in the Russia-Ukraine war is very limited. Previous studies found significant far-right involvement in the Maidan massacre of the protesters and the police, the Odesa massacre, and the war in Donbas (Hahn, 2018; Katchanovski & Abrahms, 2024; Katchanovski, 2015, 2016a, 2016b, 2020a, 2020b,). Far-right organizations had a leading role in violent mass protests during and after Euromaidan (See Ishchenko, 2016, 2018a, 2018b). Some other studies, in particular, by researchers from partisan think tanks, called the far-right role in Ukraine marginal, maintained that the Azov brigades became depoliticized and were not neo-Nazi became and denied or omitted the far-right involvement in these cases of political violence (see Chapter 6). However, these studies did not examine comprehensively the issue of the far-right involvement in the Russia-Ukraine war in Ukraine.

11.2 The Far-Right Involvement in the War

The Russia-Ukraine war has not contained but increased far-right power in Ukraine. Because the far-right organizations and their members were highly ideologically motivated and had military experience, they took active part in the war with Russia. The Azov regiment played a leading role in the Mariupol battle in Spring 2022, but its members surrendered to the Russian and Donbas separatist forces in May 2022 after the siege of Azovstal steel plant. During the Russia-Ukraine war, the number of far-right-led units and their strength significantly increased. While armed formations of the neo-Nazi other far-right organizations were formally integrated in the Ukrainian Armed Forces, the National Guard, the Security Service of Ukraine, and the Military Intelligence, the far-right organizations maintained political and ideological influence and commanding positions in these units.

For example, the neo-Nazi Azov movement expanded from the one Azov Regiment to two brigades and one special unit during this war and then to two corps and the Kraken special unit of the military intelligence of Ukraine (HUR). In 2025, the neo-Nazi led Azov brigade of the National Guard of Ukraine became the 1st National Guard Azov Corps. This corps incorporated three other brigades. It is commanded by the Azov brigade commander Prokopenko and retained the modified neo-Nazi symbol of this brigade.

Similarly, the 3rd Assault brigade was expanded into an army corps, which was commanded by Andrii Biletsky. He was the founder and the first commander of the Azov battalion in May 2014 and the leader of neo-Nazi Patriot of Ukraine, which was transformed into the neo-Nazi National Corps party. He became the commander of 3rd Separate Assault Brigade of the Ukrainian Ground Forces. This brigade was created from veterans of Azov battalion and the Azov regiment.

Biletsky stated in his video message that his Azov brigade “created the best recruiting in the country” and “large-scale cultural and educational projects” and “it is time to broaden our horizons” (Protz, 2025). He noted in October 2023 that the Azov movement was united and included two brigades and the Kraken unit:

> There is no separation.... So the entire National Corps is either in the Third Assault Force, or in the DSH somewhere, or in special forces, in the same "Kraken" and so on.... And now 90% of the National Corps is serving somewhere. (Andrii, 2023)

The Kraken unit, which was organized by the neo-Nazi National Corps party from Azov veterans, became formally integrated in military intelligence of Ukraine. But it is commanded by the neo-Nazi leaders of the National Corps in Kharkiv. The Kraken insignia includes Tyr symbol, which is classified as neo-Nazi and hate symbol by the ADL and researchers of the far right (Tyr ND).

Commanders and absolute majority of the members of the original neo-Nazi-led Azov Regiment surrendered to the Russian forces during the siege of Mariupol in May 2022. However, after the exchange of the Azov commanders and many members by Russia for the Medvedchuk under the condition of the stay of the Azov commanders in Turkey, they were personally brought to Ukraine by Zelenskyy. Denys Prokopenko, the Azov regiment commander became the commander of the Azov Brigade of the National Guard of Ukraine in 2023. He belonged to the neo-Nazi White Boys Club of ultras of the Dynamo Kyiv football team, and his unit in the neo-Nazi-led Azov battalion used Totenkopf insignia which was used by the Nazi SS (Golinkin, 2023). Svyatoslav Palamar, the deputy commander of the Azov Regiment during the Russia-Ukraine war and the siege of Mariupol, was a member of the neo-Nazi Patriot of Ukraine and also served in the Azov battalion from the start (Golinkin, 2023).

Neo-Nazi-led Azov corps and the Kraken unit, which was integrated into one of the Azov corps, included at least 5% of the Ukrainian forces members by September 2025. But they had outsize power because they were elite units, ideologically motivated, and promoted by Zelensky and the media. The Canadian directorate of NATO policy stated that the Azov Regiment continued to be "fanatics" despite their integration into the National Guard of Ukraine (Cosh, 2024). Videos show that the Azov Brigade continued to held torch-lit ceremonies and used "Glory to the nation, death to the enemies," and "Ukraine above all," far-right chants (Leonid, 2023).

Azov commanders never publicly renounced their neo-Nazi views, symbols, and organizations. In fact, Azov leaders routinely denied in media interviews that they, their units, and organizations were neo-Nazi, claiming that the well-documented Nazi symbols were fakes or Russian propaganda. Scholarly research by the author and other researchers of the far right in Ukraine, such as Nejc Eber, Marta Havryshko Jean Kerney, Oleksiy Kuzmenko, Moss Robeson, and Leonid Ragozin, identified in the social media and the media hundreds of cases of displays of Nazi and neo-Nazi symbols by Azov movement members during the Russia-Ukraine war. This number includes displays by commanders and members of different Azov units and civilian wings of Azov movement on their uniforms, patches, photographs, flags, videos, and tattoos of neo-Nazi and Nazi symbols such as the swastika, SS sign, 88 (Heil Hitler code), Hitler images, Nazi flags, and Totenkopf, and a fascist hand salute. (See, for example, Moss, 2024). Many of them were hidden or scrapped after the Russian invasion in 2022, but they were never renounced and still used by many members and commanders. This does not include their official neo-Nazi symbols of Wolfsangel and Black Sun (See Golinkin, 2023; Katchanovski & Abrahms, 2024; Ivan 2022–2025; Moss 2022–2025; NAFO 2022–2025; Oleksiy 2022–2025; Dreznica 2022–2025; Marta 2024–2025; Leonid 2022–2025).

Similarly, the far-right Right Sector-led Ukrainian Volunteer Corps after the Russian invasion was transformed into the 67th Separate Mechanized Brigade of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. But despite of its formal integration into the Ukrainian military, Andriy Stempitsky, the commander of the Ukrainian Volunteer Corps, remained initially the commander of the brigade. He afterward identified this 67th brigade as a brigade of the Ukrainian Volunteer Corps (DUK) under his command, and DUK as a part of the Right Sector movement (Andrii, 2024).

The Bratstvo (Brotherhood) battalion was organized during the Russia-Ukraine war based on the far-right Bratstvo party and veterans of its St Mary's battalion, which they called the "Christian Taliban." (Khalel & Vickery, 2015). The Bratstvo battalion members were used by the Ukrainian military intelligence during their raid missions in Russia and in the Russian-annexed Crimea (Shoaib, 2023). Oleksiy Serediuk, "Borghese," who commanded the St Mary's battalion, became the commander of the Bratstvo (Brotherhood) battalion.

The same concerns the Sich battalion of the far-right Svoboda and the Svoboda commanded Carpathian Sich battalion. They retained their far-right Svoboda links after the integration into the government forces. The German investigation of the Nord Stream bombing identified an involvement of a member of Sokil, neo-Nazi youth wing of Svoboda, who served in the Ukrainian military during the bombing (Botnariuc et al., 2023).

The leader of the neo-Nazi C14 became deputy commander of the 14th Regiment of Unmanned Aviation Systems of the Unmanned Systems Forces. Nachtigall battalion is in this regiment. One of battalions of this regiment was named Nachtigall after the Nachtigall battalion, which was organized by Nazi Germany's Abwehr and the Bandera faction of the OUN under Roman Shukhevych command. Its members participated in a pogrom of Jews after the Nazi occupation of Lviv and massacred Jews in Vinnytsia during the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 (See Himka, 2011; Katchanovski, 2019). The commander of current Nachtigall battalion fought in the OUN battalion during the civil war in Donbas and posted on his Telegram a billboard with a photo of SS Galicia division and the Nazi SS commander Himmler as recruiting ad for the Ukrainian armed forces (Marta, 2024).

Neo-Nazi led Russian Volunteer Corps was organized during the war from Russian volunteers in Ukraine. This unit, which was backed by the Ukrainian military intelligence, raided two villages in Belgorod Region in Russia near border with Ukraine. Denis Kapustin, aka Denis Nikitin, a Russian neo-Nazi, commanded the Russian Volunteer Corps (Kilner, 2023).

An Azov brigade officer organized in 2024 in Lviv a conference of Ukrainian, Russian, and other European neo-Nazi organizations in Lviv in Ukraine in 2024. It included participants from Azov brigades, the Kraken unit, C14, the Right Sector-led Ukrainian Volunteer Corps and other far-right-led units, the Russian Volunteer Corps, Wotanjugend, German Der Dritte Weg, Italian Casa Pound, and other neo-Nazi and far-right organizations.

There were also Russian neo-Nazi and other far-right-led units fighting for Russia. But they were much smaller compared to their counterparts on the other side of the frontline. Small Russian neo-Nazi Rusich unit was affiliated with the Wagner mercenary company. The special Rusich unit was led by Alexei Milchakov, a Russian neo-Nazi. Dmitry Utkin, the Wagner military commander, used Nazi SS symbols as his signature and the name of the Hitler's favorite composer as his nom de guerre, which became the name of the Wagner mercenary company.

This mercenary company recruited Russian prisoners and captured the towns of Popasna, Soledar, and Bakhmut in Donbas. However, the Wagner company was disbanded after the failed mutiny attempt which was led by its owner Yevgeny Prigozhin and Utkin, both of whom were killed soon afterward in their private plane explosion in Russia.

Other Russian far-right-led units fighting for Russia included the Russian Imperial Legion and Espanola. The Russian Imperial Legion was an arm of the Russian Imperial Movement. Espanola unit was organized by Russian football ultras (Pigni, 2024).

Contrary to the Russian government and media claims used to justify the Russian invasion, President Zelensky, the Ukrainian government and the military are not Nazi or neo-Nazi. Zelensky is of Jewish descent. The Ukrainian government and the Ukrainian parliament at the time of the Russian invasion and since did not include any neo-Nazis.

The author's estimate based on the membership of neo-Nazi organizations and neo-Nazi-led units shows that members of neo-Nazi organizations constituted approximately 1% of the Ukrainian forces during the war. The members of the far-right organizations, such as the Right Sector, Bratstvo, and UNSO, comprised also about 1% of the Ukrainian armed forces.

Contrary to the Ukrainian and Western governments and media claims, the far right, including neo-Nazis have outsize power relative to their numbers. Their power was much stronger than their numbers suggest. The neo-Nazi and other far-right organizations led during the Russia-Ukraine war three brigades and at least four separate battalions.

As noted, Zelensky is not neo-Nazi. However, he mainstreamed, glorified, and placated the neo-Nazi-led Azov and its commanders. Zelensky replaced in June 2014 the commander of the Ukrainian Joint Forces right after the same Chief of Staff of the Azov brigade filed a statement with the State Bureau of Investigation calling for his investigation, in particular, for "collaboration with Russia." (Oliynyk, 2024). Zelenskyy visited the Azov's 3rd assault brigade, met and thanked its commander Biletsky, and praised the Kraken unit on Twitter (Volodymyr, 2023). Zelenskyy awarded Heroes of Ukraine titles to Azov regiment commanders, who surrendered to the Russian and separatist forces during the siege of Mariupol in 2022, He greeted as heroes and personally brought from Turkey to Ukraine commanders of the neo-Nazi-led Azov.

11.3 Mainstreaming of the Far Right During the Russia-Ukraine War

Zelensky gave a battalion of the Ukrainian Armed Forces honorary name in honor of the far-right OUN founder Yevhen Konovalets (President, 2023). This battalion was organized by the far-Right UNSO. Neo-Nazi-led Azov brigade also named its military school after Konovalets. Zelenskyy also wear military style clothing brand made by a Ukrainian company with neo-Nazi links (Robeson, 2023). He frequently used the “Glory to Ukraine. Glory to the Heroes” (Slava Ukraini) greeting. This greeting, which was modeled by the OUN in 1941 on the basis of similar greetings of the Nazi and other parties and was used by the far-right parties and organizations before and after the Maidan in 2014, was also used during the Russia-Ukraine war and by the Ukrainian military, senior government officials.

This greeting also became mainstream in the West after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. It was widely used by Western government officials and politicians, for example, by Justin Trudeau and other leaders of G7 countries (see, for example, CTV, 2024).

They overlooked the OUN origins of this greeting. Non-academic sources, such as Wikipedia, falsely claimed that the “Glory to Ukraine! Glory to the Heroes!” and similar greetings preceded its use by the Bandera faction of the OUN and the UPA and was used by some Ukrainian military formations after Ukraine proclaimed independence from the Russian Empire in 1918 (See Slava 2022–2025). However, such claims are not confirmed by archival and other documentary sources, and there is no other contemporaneous evidence of use of the greeting in such form and as a formal greeting and not just as the “Glory to Ukraine” phrase or slogan. These claims are based primarily on a fictional novel published in the 1930s, i.e., after similar greetings were adopted by the Nazi party and other fascist and semi-fascist parties, by a Ukrainian refugee, who would become a Nazi collaborator during World War Two. Archival documents and scholarly studies show that the “Glory to Ukraine! Glory to the Heroes!” greeting along with a fascist style hand salute were modeled by the OUN-B on a basis of similar greetings and salutes by other fascist and semi-fascist parties, such as the National Socialist German Workers Party in Germany, the National Fascist Party in Italy, and Ustasha party in Croatia. The OUN-B greeting, which was adopted during its congress in Nazi-occupied Poland in 1941 after the

OUN split, was a modified form of the greeting that was adopted by the OUN during its second congress in fascist Italy in August 1939. The official OUN greeting used "Glory to the Leader!" instead of "Glory to the Heroes!" as a response to "Glory to Ukraine!" (See Katchanovski, 2014, 2015, 2020a, 2020b; Sprava 376; Rossolinski-Liebe, 2011; Rudling, 2011).

In contrast to Anthony Rota, the speaker of the Canadian parliament, and Justin Trudeau, the Canadian prime minister, Zelensky did not apologize for giving standing ovations to a veteran of the SS Galicia Division in the Canadian parliament during his visit in 2023 (See CTV, 2023; Ivan, 2023). An SD police battalion and an SS police regiment, which were subsequently incorporated in the SS Galicia division, committed mass killings of Poles, Jews, and Ukrainians in Ukraine and Poland. The 31st SD battalion executed about 100 Jews, Poles, and Ukrainians in Pidhaitsi near Lutsk and massacred residents of several Polish villages and participated in the suppression of the Warsaw uprising in 1944 (See Katchanovski, 2019). The SS police regiment massacred close to 1000 Polish civilians in the village of Huta Peniatska in Galicia and participated in other massacres of Polish civilians and suppression of the anti-Nazi uprisings in Slovakia and Yugoslavia (See Rudling, 2012).

Centuria, which is a part of the neo-Nazi Azov movement, neo-Nazi-led Karpatska Sich Battalion also glorified SS Galicia Division on the 80th anniversary of its creation in 1943. Members of Azov and various other neo-Nazi-led and far-right-led units also wear the symbol of the SS Galicia Division, which was created by the Nazis from volunteers in Galicia.

There is also mainstreaming of far right, including open Neo-Nazis. Such mainstreaming concerns not only integration of the neo-Nazi-led and other far-right armed formations and members of neo-Nazi organizations into the National Guard, the military, the police, and the Security Service of Ukraine, but also mainstreaming of the far-right symbols and leaders.

The same concerns mainstreaming, whitewashing, and glorification of the historical far-right organizations, their leaders, such as the OUN, the UPA, Bandera, and Shukhevych, and their symbols, such as "Glory to Ukraine. Glory to the Heroes" (Slava Ukraini) greeting and the red and black flag of the OUN and the UPA. Their Nazi collaboration and involvement in mass murder of Jews, Poles, and Ukrainians was denied or omitted.

For example, Valerii Zaluzhny, the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, was photographed with Right Sector leaders Yarosh and Stempitsky, and portraits of Stepan Bandera and red and black flag of the Bandera faction of the OUN and the UPA (Andrii, 2024). His tweet mentioning World War Two, included a photo of Zaluzhny wearing a "Viking" bracelet with stylized swastika (Commander-in-Chief, 2022). However, Zaluzhnyi himself is not a neo-Nazi or far right.

Two founders of NAFO, respectively from Poland and the United States, were identified as neo-Nazis. This international troll group became active on X (Twitter) during the Russia-Ukraine war. NAFO trolls systematically whitewashed Azov, other neo-Nazis in Ukraine, and far-right involvement in political violence and war crimes (See Moss, 2022; Robeson, 2024a, 2024b).

Neo-Nazi-led Azov brigades and other far-right-led armed formations can overthrow Zelenskyy if he were to agree to a peace deal. Biletsky, the neo-Nazi Azov movement leader, threatened Zelenskyy against making a peace deal at the beginning of the war. This neo-Nazi National Corps party leader before he became the Azov assault brigade commander called Zelenskyy and his Servant of People party "servant of Russian people" after Zelenskyy offered to negotiate with Russia following the Russian invasion (Oleksiy, 2022). The Chief of Staff of the Azov brigade of the National Guard issued a similar threat in June 2024 after Zelensky and others expressed willingness to negotiate to end the war:

> No peace without victory. There is only one victory – not a single Russian soldier on Ukrainian territory. We will not leave this war to our descendants, and you won't either because if you try, it will be bad. For you and for them. If this is a test, don't even think about it. Wrote discreetly. (Taran, 2024)

Former British Prime Minister Boris Johnson stated that "Ukrainian nationalists couldn't accept the compromise" to end the Russia-Ukraine war. Since he stated that they vetoed in 2019 a peace that Zelensky promised during his elections, this means that Johnson refers to the far right, in particular, the neo-Nazi Azov movement, which vetoed a peaceful resolution of the war in Donbas (Boris, 2025).

Similarly, Oleksandr Merezhko, the head of the foreign affairs committee of the Ukrainian parliament from Zelensky's Servant of the People party, said the following:

> There will always be a radical segment of Ukrainian society that will call any negotiation capitulation. The far right in Ukraine is growing. The right wing is a danger to democracy. (Hall et al., 2024)

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CHAPTER 12

The Russia-Ukraine War or Peace?

12.1 The War Outcome

The Ukrainian and Western governments and the media called this war the war of aggression aimed since the 2022 invasion at occupying entire Ukraine. Until the failure of the Ukrainian counteroffensive in summer 2023, the governments and the mainstream media in Ukraine and the West claimed that Ukraine was winning the war and would win the war with Russia and restore its control over all regions, including Donbas and Crimea. Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky, US President Joe Biden, and other Ukrainian and Western leaders as well as other politicians, media, commentators, and various academics publicly stated that Ukraine would win the war or was winning the war with Russia (Dupuis, 2024).

For example, Volodymyr Zelensky after banning the peace talks with Russia stated that Ukraine would restore control over entire territory in the 1991 borders, including Crimea and Donbas. In September 2024, he proposed to the United States "The Victory Plan." (Zelenskyy 2024; Yaffa, 2024). Zelensky and much of the Ukrainian media and many Western leaders since the failed counteroffensive continued to propagate such narrative until Donald Trump was elected as the US president in 2024 and called for ending the war. Commentators from partisan think tanks reinforced propaganda narratives about the Russia-Ukraine war and its outcome and opposed peaceful resolution of this conflict.

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Some researchers have drawn similar conclusions (See, for example, Plokhy, 2023). However, they often were based on uncritical reliance on such government and media sources.

The scholars who publicly argued that the war could have been avoided or minimized with a peaceful resolution of the conflict and that there was no real possibility of Ukraine defeating Russia even with Western countries backing were in a minority. In addition to the author, they included John Mearsheimer, Jeffrey Sachs, Richard Sakwa, Glenn Diesen, and some other scholars (see Katchanovski,). Contrary to the dominant narrative, Katchanovski (2023a, 2023b) predicted that the Ukrainian counteroffensive in 2023 would fail to reach its stated goals and that the continuation of the war would, in addition to many more casualties and devastation of Ukraine, lead to worse position and terms for Ukraine in case of any peace deal with Russia.

Following the failed Ukrainian counteroffensive in 2023 many Western politicians, media outlets, and commentators started to argue that the war had reached a stalemate and could end in a draw or in better position for Ukraine in case of a peace deal with Russia. They maintained that Ukraine has to continue fighting to reach better terms of any peace deal with Russia, even though the balance of military power was against Ukraine in the war of attrition.

Narratives the Ukrainian and Western governments and the media that Ukraine winning the war with Russia and could defeat Russia and return its control over all Russian-annexed parts of Ukraine, including Crimea and Donbas, were propaganda, and have been disproved by the war. This was a massive folly which could have been avoided or minimized with a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Oleksiy Arestovych, who became the main promoter of Zelensky's narrative about the war during the first stage of the war as a Zelensky presidential office advisor, later admitted that he himself was misleading Ukrainians about the imminent Ukrainian victory and other key aspects. However, his such false statements were then reported at face value by the Ukrainian and much of the Western media even though they lacked evidence and were in his interest and Zelensky's interest. After Arestovych left his adviser's position and Ukraine, stayed in the United States, and faced prosecution in Ukraine, his admissions against his interest concerning the war and the peace deal were not reported by the same media, even though they were corroborated by various other sources.

The analysis of various evidence and the size and deployment of the Russian forces in Ukraine suggest that Russian invasion plans did not envision occupation or annexation of entire Ukraine, in particular Western and Central Ukraine. The US intelligence reported that Russia amassed 190,000 troops in Russia and Belarus near borders with Ukraine before the invasion. The size of initial invasion force was estimated by Pentagon officials at 75% of this force (Wintour, 2022). Such size of the Russian force was insufficient to occupy the entire Ukraine and capture Kyiv.

The apparent initial goal of the Russian invasion was to do the regime change in Ukraine or to quickly force the Zelensky government to accept a peace deal on Russian terms. Putin demands of neutrality, demilitarization, denazification of Ukraine and recognition of separatist republics in Donbas in borders of Donetsk and Luhansk Regions suggested such invasion goals. This is confirmed by other sources.

The peace deal negotiations started just a few days after the invasion. The Russian delegation head at the first peace talk meeting in Belarus on February 28, 2022, reportedly demanded replacement of Zelensky and his government. He "recited a long list of the Kremlin's demands," which included "the replacement of Zelensky's administration with a puppet regime, Ukrainian troops handing over all their tanks and artillery, the arrest and trial of 'Nazis'… and the restoration of Russian as Ukraine's official language." (Trofimov, 2024).The Deputy Head of the Security Council of Russia, Dmitry Medvedev, stated that the undeclared goal of Russian invasion is regime change in Ukraine (Medvedev 2023).

The Russian initial advance close to Kyiv without sufficient military force to capture it, unless there was no significant resistance, suggests that it was primarily aimed at not seizing and occupying or annexing Kyiv but at conducting a regime change or forcing the Zelensky government to sign a peace deal on Russian terms. Negotiations with the Zelensky representatives that started in Belarus within days after the invasion are consistent with such a goal.

In contrast, the claims that Russia planned to capture Kyiv in two or three days lacked any corroborated primary sources. CIA director Bill Burns stated without providing any evidence or sources that Putin thought that he could capture Kyiv in two days (Epstein & Davis, 2022). But such a statement could also have been in his vested interest. Mark Milley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff told US Congress members three weeks before the Russian invasion that Kyiv could fall within 72-hours (Heinrich & Sabes, 2022).

The only real possibility of capture of Kyiv by the Russian forces within 3 days was absence of any significant resistance by the Ukrainian forces, like was the case during the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, or if Zelensky and his government fled from Kyiv or were overthrown and replaced by a pro-Russian government. Such contingency was also likely considered by the Russian leaders in the invasion planning. While the Russian forces seized large parts of the South, the East, and the North of Ukraine within days of the invasion with limited resistance offered by the Ukrainian forces there, the Ukrainian forces resistance concentrated around Kyiv and other large cities, such as Kharkiv and Mariupol, and Zelensky and his government remained in Kyiv.

Similarly, statements by Zelensky about dozen assassination attempts against him by Russia were reported at face value by the Western and Ukrainian media but lacked reliable evidence, and he and his officials also had the vested interest. Former Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett stated that during his meeting on March 5, 2022 with Putin as a peace talks mediator the Russian leader provided assurances that Russia would not kill Zelensky. The ex-leader of Israel said that right after he informed Zelensky concerning this, president of Ukraine left the bunker and stated that he was not afraid to be in his office (Bennett 2023). There were no Russian missile strikes of the Office of President or other exact locations during appearances of Zelensky there.

The same concerns withdrawal of the Russian force from the Kyiv area and entire North Ukraine as a part of the peace deal talks. The daily analysis of hundreds of videos and reports shows that the Russian forces basically retreated from Kyiv and Northern Ukraine areas in spring 2022 largely as result of peace talks and then from thinly defended Kharkiv area and from vulnerable right-bank Kherson area in fall 2022 following Ukrainian counteroffensives there. Such retreats were misrepresented by Zelensky and other Ukrainian and Western politicians and many military experts as evidence that Ukraine was winning the war, and that Ukraine could take back Crimea and Donbas in a new counteroffensive in 2023 (Brennan, 2023). However, Russia launched a partial mobilization in fall 2022, and the Russian forces before the Ukrainian counteroffensive erected fortified defensive lines in the South and did not retreat during the summer 2023 counteroffensive by the Western-trained and Western weapons-equipped Ukrainian forces. This counteroffensive by the Ukrainian forces failed.

The representation of Ukrainians as nearly unanimous since the Russian invasion in supporting the war policies of Zelensky, opposing any peace deal short of the Russian defeat, and willing to fight Russia until its defeat and until Ukraine would take back Crimea and Donbas were based on unreliable public opinion polls, a rally around the flag effect, and on selective and unrepresentative "Ukrainian voices" in the Western media. Polls conducted during the war showed relatively mixed results on these issues and significantly inflated pro-war attitudes because of systematic biases.

For example, US National Democratic Institute polls in Ukraine showed that 59% of the respondents in May 2022 and 57% in May 2024 supported peace talks with Russia. In comparison, 44% of the responds in August 2022, 29% in January 2023, and 33% in May 2023, and 42% in November 2023 supported such talks (NDI, 2024). However, a minority of the respondents in the polls agreed with territorial concession as a part of a peace deal. For example, depending on the framing of the survey question, between 34% to no more than 10% supported such territorial concessions in a 2024 poll (Toal, O'Loughlin & Bakke, 2024).

In the WSJ-NORC poll in Ukraine in June 2022, 85% of the respondents said that Russia bears great deal or some responsibility for the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. However, 70% named the Ukrainian government responsible, while 58% of the respondents surveyed in Ukraine held the United States responsible for the Russia-Ukraine war, 55% NATO, 35% the Ukraine's far right (Wall, 2022). In a 2023 VOX Ukraine poll, 26% of respondents in Ukraine and 29% of Ukrainians sampled in the EU and the UK agreed that "Russia is fighting against the West/NATO in Ukraine." And 25% of respondents in Ukraine and 29% abroad agreed that "The West is using Ukraine for its own purposes in the war against Russia." (Tropynina, 2023).

Polls in Ukraine were unreliable during the war and during criminalization of political dissent by the undemocratic Zelensky government. Exclusion from the polls of Russian-occupied or annexed parts of the East and the South with about one fifth of the pre-2014 population of Ukraine and the move of 6.8 million Ukrainians to other countries as refugees as refuges (over 15% of the pre-war population) made polls during the Russia-Ukraine war unrepresentative of the entire Ukrainian population because over third of the Ukrainian population was excluded from the polls. Social (political) desirability bias and fear to express opinions critical of the Ukrainian government policies during the war also significantly affected validity and reliability of the polls during the war, especially on politically sensitive questions concerning the war. All these factors significantly skewed polls in the same direction. Such polls during the war were also conducted by telephone, and telephone polls were regarded by the KMIS as less reliable than the face-to-face polls even prior to the war (See Chapter 7).

Similarly, Kost Bondarenko, a noted Ukrainian political expert, stated during the war that he "does not trust polls that are conducted today at all," "they cannot be objective," and "the polls, which are published now, cannot reflect real attitude that exists" (Katastrofa, 2024). Volodymyr Ishchenko, a leading Ukrainian political sociologist, also noted that "Ukraine war-time polls were used to manipulate the perception of the war, perhaps no less than the 'voices'" and that a polling experiment conducted by Western scholars in Ukraine "shows how nuances in framing can significantly change support for essentially the same very sensitive proposal" concerning support for territorial concessions as a part of a peace deal to end the war (Ishchenko, 2024).

The laws adopted after the Russian invasion criminalized "public denial of armed aggression against Ukraine; public denial of the establishment and formation of the temporary occupation of part of the territory of Ukraine; public appeals to support the decisions and/or actions of the aggressor state, armed formations and/or occupation administration of the aggressor state; public appeals for cooperation with the aggressor state, armed formations and/or occupation administration of the aggressor state; public calls for non-recognition of the extension of the state sovereignty of Ukraine to the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine." (ZAKON, 2022). Public denial of territorial integrity of Ukraine and support for separatism were also criminal offenses.

Criminalization of expression of such views and other dissenting views concerning the Russia-Ukraine war made people afraid to express them in public opinion polls. Telephone calls, conversations between people, and social media posts and likes were treated as "public" venues, and many people were charged and prosecuted for such actions. For example, a resident of Irpin in the Kyiv region was informed of a suspicion for "denying the military aggression of the Russian Federation" in telephone conversations because she denied violence by Russian troops against civilians (Zhytelnitse, 2022). A female pensioner was sentenced by a Lviv court to 4 years in prison but released from serving the sentence with a three-year probationary period for her one "like" of a social media post that Russians who are "victims for the future of Russia" are being killed in Ukraine (Lazurkevych, 2024). A female blogger was charged by the Kyiv City Prosecutor's Office and faced 5 years in prison for saying in her TikTok video that there is a hybrid war going on in Ukraine that needs to be stopped (Strana, 2023). Some of the most popular Ukrainian non-political bloggers after they called for ending the war in July 2024 were interrogated by the Security Service of Ukraine, put on the Myrotvorets blacklist of "criminals," subjected to threats in the media and social media, and one of them had to escape from Ukraine to Spain (Kalnichenko, 2024; Kovalinska, 2024).

While there was close to 0% volunteers to join the Ukrainian military by that time, according to a KIIS(KMIS) survey in September 2025, 63% of Ukrainian men, including 60–64% of men under 60 years of age, and 46% of women responded that they were personally ready "if necessary or if the situation develops" "to become part of the Defense Forces to defend Ukraine with weapons in hand." (Results, 2025). In the Institute of Sociology/KIIS polls, percent of Ukrainians who said that the current economic situation in Ukraine was bad dropped from 58% in November 2021 before the Russia-Ukraine war to 28% in December 2022 in spite of the GDP drop of over 30%, jumps in unemployment and inflation, and massive power cuts because of the war. In the December 2022 poll, Ukrainians said that on average they needed to receive about 14,200 hryvnias ($340) per month in order to live normally, compared to 16,400 ($630) in November 2021 (Public, 2023). Such illogical poll results during the war show social desirability bias.

The analysis of various sources suggests that over 100,000 Ukrainians voluntarily joined the territorial defense and the Ukrainian military soon after the Russian invasion. But joining the territorial defense was also a way to avoid mobilization at the beginning of the war.

However, mobilization, including forced mobilization, was the main source of the military personnel, especially since the beginning of 2023. For example, the head of the territorial recruitment center in the Lviv Region, the most nationalist region in Ukraine, stated in June 2023 that only 20% of conscripts for mobilization plan in the Lviv Region voluntarily come to military commissariats and half of these 20% come to enlist under contract (Do, 2023).

A draft of the new mobilization law in 2024 proposed to mobilize even men with disabilities and Ukrainian citizens in foreign countries and contained severe penalties for dodging the draft or registration for military service. More than 1,500 videos on Telegram, X/Twitter, and in the Ukrainian media that the author examined show use of force by military draft officers to mobilize men in different locations in Ukraine by grabbing them on the streets, in stores, buses, parks, workplaces, etc. Numerous Western and Ukrainian media reports show that after being snatched by force, men are then driven to military mobilization centers, forcefully confined there for days with their cell phones confiscated. They are then made to pass medical commission without any real examination of their health and fitness and are sent to a brief and insufficient military training and then are sent to fight in the war. There are numerous videos and reports that they are often beaten, in some cases to death, by the military draft officers during the forced mobilization (See for example, Conscription, 2024, Ivan, 2024; Khurshudyan, 2024; Lvivych, 2024a, 2024b; MacFarquhar, 2023; Polytsi, 2024; Strana, 2024a, 2024b). A term "busification" was coined and widely used in Ukraine during the war to describe such forced mobilization.

The Zelensky government almost immediately after the Russian invasion banned men 18 to 60 years old from leaving Ukraine, with limited exceptions. However, despite the ban, Eurostat data showed that 650,000 Ukrainian men of military age fled to the EU countries, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, and Norway. The German Ministry of the Interior data showed that 221,571 Ukrainian men between the ages of 18 and 60 have come to Germany since the start of the war and that 189,484 men have remained in Germany, and that the ministry estimated that 100,000 more Ukrainian men were in Germany illegally (Eurostat-Zahlen, 2023).

Oleksiy Arestovych said that 4.5 million Ukrainian men avoided going to military recruitment centers not even for mobilization but for check of their personal data. He said that he learned this when he worked in the Office of President of Ukraine as an adviser during the war (UnHerd, 2024). Based on the official data, there were 265,843 criminal cases opened in Ukraine for desertion and AWOL since the Russian invasion in 2022 until the end of August 2025, including 142,711 for the eight months of 2025. Ukrainian journalists, such as Volodymyr Boiko, reported that the actual number of deserters was much higher since many such cases were not reported by military commanders and criminal proceedings were not opened in many cases (Zapysky, 2025).

The war could have been avoided by Russia in 2022 by not launching the invasion of Ukraine. It was a war of choice for Russia. The war also could have been prevented by the Ukrainian government and the United States, NATO, and the EU, for instance, by providing implementation of the Minsk agreements and neutrality and EU membership of Ukraine. The Minsk agreements were signed as result of covert Russian military interventions in Donbas in August 2014 and January–February 2015. The Ukrainian and Western governments did not implement the agreements. The former president Petro Poroshenko, the former German chancellor Angela Merkel, and the former French president Francois Hollande stated after the Russian invasion in 2022 that they signed the Minsk agreements to buy time and strengthen the Ukrainian forces (Merkel, 2022; Prouvost, 2022). Zelensky also admitted that he did not intend to implement the Minsk agreements.

Compared to Ukraine, Russia also had larger potential military manpower. The size of the Russian population was more than five times larger than the size of the population in the Ukrainian government-controlled territory. The Ukraine's population was 45.4 million in the beginning of 2014 (Esch et al., 2023). However, it dropped according to reported Ukrainian government estimates to between 25 and 27 million by 2024, following the annexation of almost 20% of the territory of Ukraine and about 7 million Ukrainians leaving Ukraine during the Russia-Ukraine war (Pancevski, 2024; Population 2014).

Russia also has nuclear weapons, in contrast to Ukraine. Ukraine at the beginning of the 1990s gave up nuclear weapons which remained on its territory after the collapse of the Soviet Union but were not controlled by the Ukrainian military. The Budapest Memorandum which was signed by Ukraine with the US, the UK, and Russia as a part of a deal to give up the nuclear weapons on its territory provided only security assurances but not binding security guarantees in case of invasion of Ukraine and was not legally binding.

Putin and other Russian leaders, such as Medvedev, suggested during the Russia-Ukraine war that Russia would resort to use of nuclear weapons if Russia would face a threat of defeat. The Russian nuclear doctrine was officially modified in September 2024 to expand the use of nuclear weapons to such cases (Mao, 2024).

This meant that odds of winning the war, specifically the war of attrition, were heavily weighted in favor of Russia since the Russian invasion. The uncertainty involved the scale of the defeat of Ukraine and loss of its territory, which could only be reduced by a peaceful settlement.

Following the inauguration of Trump as US President in January 2025, the continuation of the war for some time is much less likely than a peace deal with a partial defeat of Ukraine but still possible. The continuation of the war, in addition to many more casualties and devastation of Ukraine, would lead to Ukraine losing more territory to Russia and to worse position and terms for Ukraine in case of a peace deal with Russia. Even with support of the UK and the EU countries, such as France and Germany, Ukraine would not be able to continue the war for a long time without the US supply of weapons, intelligence, and economic and financial support. In such a case, Ukraine can face a real possibility of front collapsing, a complete defeat, and capitulation (See Katchanovski, 2022; 2025).

12.2 The Blocked Istanbul Peace Deal in Spring 2022

Ukrainian officials close to Zelensky revealed, according to the Ukrainian media, that the British Prime Minister Boris Johnson visited Kyiv on April 9, 2022, to block a peace deal with Russia after the Ukrainian government delegation in peace talks with Russia in its written peace plan proposal agreed to neutrality of Ukraine, no bases and troops from foreign countries, and no nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction (Romaniuk, 2022). Ukrainska Pravda explicitly stated citing "sources close to Zelensky" that "possibility of talks between Zelensky and Putin came to a halt" after the Johnson's visit, that he delivered a message on behalf of the Western countries, including refusal to provide guarantees for the peace agreement:

> Boris Johnson, who appeared in the capital almost without warning, brought two simple messages. The first is that Putin is a war criminal, he should be pressured, not negotiated with. And the second is that even if Ukraine is ready to sign some agreements on guarantees with Putin, they are not. Johnson's position was that the collective West, which back in February had suggested Zelensky should surrender and flee, now felt that Putin was not really as powerful as they had previously imagined, and that here was a chance to 'press him.'" Three days after Johnson left for Britain, Putin went public and said talks with Ukraine "had turned into a dead end. (Romaniuk, 2022)

Naftali Bennett also said that the United States and other Western leaders blocked the Ukraine-Russia peace deal, which he negotiated with Putin on Zelensky's request in March 2022 when he was prime minister of Israel, and which according to him had about 50% chance of being reached, because they wanted to "continue to strike Putin." Bennett specifically stated concerning this peace deal and its blocking that "anything I did was coordinated down to the last detail with the United States, Germany and France… They blocked it and I thought they're wrong." He said that after Putin promised him not to kill Zelensky and dropped demilitarization of Ukraine demand during his meeting on March 5, 2022, Zelensky dropped the NATO membership of Ukraine goal (Bennett 2023) (Fig. 12.1).

Davyd Arakhamia, the head of the Zelensky's party faction in the Ukrainian parliament and the head of the Ukrainian delegation in the Ukraine-Russia talks independently confirmed that the peace deal could had been reached in spring 2022 if Ukraine agreed to neutrality and that

Fig. 12.1 Ukrainian President Zelensky meeting with British Prime Minister Boris Johnson on April 9, 2022. https://www.flickr.com/photos/president_of_ukraine/51995264914/

the British prime minister blocked it. Arakhamia said that Russia was ready to end the war in such a case and that Ukrainian neutrality was the main Russian condition. He also said that Western countries knew everything concerning peace talks and told Zelensky not to sign the peace deal. Arakhamia specifically said that British Prime Minister Boris Johnson during his visit told his Ukrainian counterparts to continue fighting. The head of the Ukrainian delegation at the Ukraine-Russia talks stated the following:

> They [Russia] really hoped almost to the last moment that they would force us to sign such an agreement so that we would take neutrality. It was the most important thing for them. They were prepared to end the war if we agreed to, – as Finland once did, – neutrality, and committed that we would not join NATO. In fact, this was the key point... Moreover, when we returned from Istanbul, Boris Johnson came to Kyiv and said that we would not sign anything with them at all, and let's just fight. (Moseichuk, 2023)

Mevlut Cavusoglu, the foreign minister of Turkey, which hosted the peace talks in Istanbul, said on April 20, 2022 that Turkey "did not think that the Russia-Ukraine war would last that long after the peace talks in Istanbul" "but following the NATO foreign ministers' meeting, it was the impression that… there are those within the NATO member states that want the war to continue, let the war continue and Russia get weaker." (Some, 2022).

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan corroborated in 2024 the involvement of Boris Johnson in blocking the possible peace deal in spring 2022. Erdogan noted in his response to Putin's Tucker Carlson's interview, in which the Russian leader cited the statement by Arakhamia, the head of the Ukrainian delegation at the peace talks:

> There is sincerity in these statements of Mr Putin, to put it bluntly. We have taken all sincere steps in these talks, which we will call the Istanbul process. My ministerial colleagues have held talks with the Russian side on this issue. We worked in a result-oriented way, but somehow, peace could not be established... We worked together before former Prime Minister Boris Johnson of the UK withdrew his hand from the peace efforts, we continued our efforts, but to no avail. (Presidential, 2024)

Gerhard Schröder, the ex-leader of Germany, made similar statement in 2023, which is consistent with cited statements or suggestions of the three Ukrainian participants of the talks, Nuland, the former Israeli prime minister, and Turkish leaders:

> At the peace negotiations in Istanbul in March 2022 with Rustem Umerov, the Ukrainians did not agree on peace because they were not allowed to. For everything they discussed, they first had to ask the Americans. I had two talks with Umerov, then a one-on-one meeting with Putin, and then with Putin's envoy. Umerov opened the conversation with greetings from Zelensky. As a compromise for Ukraine's security guarantees, the Austrian model or the 5+1 model was proposed. Umerov thought that was a good thing. He also showed willingness on the other points. He also said that Ukraine does not want NATO membership. He also said that Ukraine wants to reintroduce Russian in the Donbass. But in the end, nothing happened. My impression was that nothing could happen, because everything else was decided in Washington. That was fatal. Because the result will now be that Russia will be tied more closely to China, which the West should not want. (Kurianowicz & Eichhorn, 2023)

In his 2024 interview, the ex-leader of Germany stated that the Ukrainian side was not entirely free in making decision concerning the peace deal because they had to ask concerning this the United States, the main supporter of Ukraine, and the UK. He said that the peace talks ended because there were "problems" with the United States and the UK («Wir» 2024).

Schröder said that it was he who proposed Turkey as the peace talks venue («Wir» 2024). He stated that he received a request from Ukraine to "mediate between Russia and Ukraine" and to "convey a message to Putin" and that he met with Rustem Umerov, who had "a very close relationship with the Ukrainian president himself" and became in 2023 the Minister of Defense of Ukraine, concerning "how to end the war." (Kurianowicz & Eichhorn, 2023). The New York Times report in April 2022 confirmed this (Bennhold, 2022).

Victoria Nuland, who was at that time one of the top US State Department officials, stated in her interview in September 2024 that the Ukraine-Russia peace deal, which was close to being finalized in spring 2022, "fell apart" because the United States, the UK, and other Western governments "advised" the Zelensky government that it was not "a good deal." She said the following when asked by the Russian opposition journalist Mikhail Zygar about statements by the former Israeli prime minister and the head of the Ukrainian delegation at the peace talks:

> But relatively late in the game, the Ukrainians began asking for advice on where this thing was going, and it became clear to us, clear to the Brits, clear to others that Putin's main condition was buried in an Annex to this document that they were working on. And it included limits on the precise kinds of weapons systems that Ukraine could have after the deal, such that Ukraine would basically be neutered as a military force. And there were no similar constraints on Russia. Russia wasn't required to pull back. Russia wasn't required to have a buffer zone from the Ukrainian border, wasn't required to have the same constraints on its military facing Ukraine. And so, people inside Ukraine and people outside Ukraine started asking questions about whether this was a good deal, and it was at that point that it fell apart… . (Zygar, 2024)

Nuland basically confirmed statements or suggestions by the ex-Israeli prime minister, the head and two members of the Ukrainian delegation, the Ukrainian officials close to Zelensky, the ex-chancellor of Germany, and the Turkish president and foreign minister that the United States and the UK blocked this peace deal, which was close to being finalized. With a partial exception of Gerhard Schröder, who served on the boards of Russian state-owned companies, such as Nord Stream, Rosneft, and Gazprom, all these statements were against interest. The United States, UK, and other Western governments had de facto power to block such as peace deal by refusing to be its guarantors, as was specified in the drafts of the deal, and because Ukraine was a US client state which was heavily dependent of the United States and other Western military, economic, and political support.

Arestovych, who was a member of the Ukrainian delegation at the peace talks in spring 2022, said after leaving his position as an adviser of Zelensky that this was the most advantageous "draft of agreement" that Ukraine could have. He stated that the last round of the peace talks in Istanbul was "completely successful negotiation" and that the Ukrainian delegation even opened a bottle of champagne afterward. Arestovych also said that "the Istanbul agreement was a protocol of intentions and was completely/90% prepared for a direct meeting of Putin and Zelensky." Zelensky told them that he could decide the undecided issue of the size of the Ukrainian forces in peacetime question directly with Putin during their meeting (UnHerd, 2024).

Arestovych stated that heads of the Ukrainian and Russian delegations signed a peace plan in spring 2022 and that only meeting of Zelensky and Putin remained (Arestovych 2024a). He said that the head of the Russian delegation at peace talks frequently called Putin during the talks. Arestovych also stated that he "knew that in two or three weeks there would be a meeting in Istanbul, and it should end the war altogether. And then the meeting between Zelensky and Putin. All this was decided, there was a calendar… I knew exactly the calendar of Istanbul meetings, everything was moving towards reconciliation." (Arestovych 2024b). He elaborated that Russian representatives offered the talks on the first day of the invasion, that the Istanbul agreements were "fully acceptable," and that a meeting between Zelensky and Putin was supposed to be on April 9, 2022. The former Zelensky's adviser and a member of the Ukrainian delegation at the peace talks stated that the talks ended because the West decided to use Ukraine as a trap to fight Putin's Russia (Arestovych 2024c).

Russian President Putin made similar statements concerning the peace deal. He also said that the peace deal was initiated or signed: "In Istanbul they agreed on everything… Moreover, the head of the negotiating group from Ukraine even put his signature under this. The signature is there, we have the document." (Putin 2024). Putin along with the head of the Russian delegation at the peace talks and the Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov, also blamed the United States and the West for blocking this peace deal (Vladimir, 2023).

Alexei Venediktov, the well-connected former editor of the pro-Western Ekho Moskvy radio station, which was banned following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, commenting on the Nuland's admission in September 2024 confirmed that the peace treaty "was already initialed by the head of the Ukrainian delegation" and said that "he saw this signature." (Bez, 2024).

Ukraine's Ambassador Oleksandr Chalyi, who participated in the peace talks with Russia in Spring 2022, stated that "we concluded" the "Istanbul Communique" and "were very close in… April to finalize our war with some peaceful settlement." He said that Putin "tried everything possible to conclude agreement with Ukraine." He noted that it was Putin's "personal decision to accept the text of this communique" (Geneva, 2023).

Chalyi (2023) also stated the following concerning the peace talks ending:

> In mid-April 2022, after the whole world learned about the massive war crimes of the Russian army in Bucha, Irpen and Borodianka, the leaders of the United States and Great Britain declared that it was unacceptable for their states to participate in the multilateral Treaty on Security Guarantees for Ukraine together with the Russian Federation. At the same time, they assured that they were ready to give security guarantees to Ukraine.
> Independently or in a multilateral format without the participation of the Russian Federation. In this situation, when the provision of joint security guarantees to Ukraine.
> By All five permanent members of the UN Security Council became fundamentally impossible, the relevant negotiations with the Russian Federation were terminated.

However, Chalyi (2023) noted the following, which was consistent with refusal by the United States, the UK, Germany, and other NATO members to provide the NATO-style guarantees to Ukraine or admit Ukraine into NATO during the war in Ukraine in order to avoid a direct war between NATO and Russia:

> So, immediately at the end of April - beginning of May 2022, Ukraine held a series of consultations in a multilateral format with high representatives of the United States, Great Britain, France and Germany, submitting for their consideration a draft 'Treaty on Guarantees of Ukraine's Security,' in which the mechanism for providing security guarantees to Ukraine was regulated similarly to Article 5 of the NATO Charter. Their reaction to the Ukrainian proposals was extremely cautious and restrained. It became obvious that they were not ready to provide Ukraine with security guarantees close in content to NATO Article 5, which would include 'the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of Ukraine' and which would be enshrined in an international multilateral treaty.

Zelensky stated before the last round of the Istanbul peace talks that "security guarantees and neutrality, non-nuclear status of our state — we are ready to go for it" and that the peace agreement and said that his meeting with Putin could end the war. He said that Ukraine can declare its neutrality and "offer security guarantees to Russia to secure peace 'without delay'" (Ukraine's, 2022). His statement is consistent with the text of the peace plan outline proposed by the Ukrainian delegation and statements about the talks by 12 other sources, who either participated in the peace talks or had access to information about them.

Johnson (2024) in his memoirs denied his involvement in blocking the peace agreement which was close to finalizing in spring 2024. However, his denial is contradicted by statements, suggestions, or de facto admissions against interest that he or the United States and the UK blocked such deal by Nuland, then Israeli prime minister, head and two members of the Ukrainian delegation at the Istanbul peace talks, Ukrainian officials close to Zelensky, and the Turkish president and foreign minister. This also contradicts a statement by a senior UK government source in *Times* on March 31, 2022, that the Johnson government "urged" Ukraine not to "back down" by accepting such peace deal under the terms negotiated in Istanbul and that the British prime minister "warned" Zelensky in a phone call (Swinford et al., 2022).

The "Istanbul Communiqué" was the 10-point plan proposed in writing by Ukraine during the talks and "pre-agreed by the parties" as "the basis for a negotiated settlement." (Fischer, 2022). It included Ukraine's proposal of "proclaiming itself a neutral state, promising to remain nonaligned with any blocs and refrain from developing nuclear weapons — in exchange for international legal guarantees" which "would not extend to Crimea, Sevastopol, or certain areas of the Donbas." It specified that "possible guarantor states include Russia, Great Britain, China, the United States, France, Turkey, Germany, Canada, Italy, Poland, and Israel, and other states would also be welcome to join the treaty." The Ukrainian peace plan stated that "Ukraine vows not to join any military coalitions or host any foreign military bases or troop contingents" and "any international military exercises would be possible only with the consent of the guarantor-states." In exchange, the "guarantors confirm their intention to promote Ukraine's membership in the European Union." (Rustamova, 2022; Troianovski et al., 2024).

The proposed plan of agreement also specified that "the parties' desire to resolve issues related to Crimea and Sevastopol shall be committed to bilateral negotiations between Ukraine and Russia for a period of 15 years. Ukraine and Russia also pledge not to resolve these issues by military means and to continue diplomatic resolution efforts." "The treaty" was to "provisionally apply from the date it is signed by Ukraine and all or most guarantor-states," and it was to enter into force "after (1) Ukraine's permanently neutral status is approved in a nationwide referendum, (2) the introduction of the appropriate amendments in Ukraine's

Constitution, and (3) ratification in the parliaments of Ukraine and the guarantor-states." The final Ukrainian proposal stated that "the parties consider it possible to hold a meeting between the presidents of Ukraine and Russia for the purpose of signing a treaty and/or adopting political decisions regarding other remaining unresolved issues." (Rustamova, 2022; Troianovski et al., 2024).

Fiona Hill, the ex-deputy assistant to the US president and the senior director for Europe and Russian affairs in the National Security Council and Angela Stent, the former US official in charge of Russia and Ukraine in National Intelligence Council and the State Department, and multiple former senior US officials whom they referred to also confirmed such peace deal framework agreement: "According to multiple former senior US officials we spoke with, in April 2022, Russian and Ukrainian negotiators appeared to have tentatively agreed on the outlines of a negotiated interim settlement: Russia would withdraw to its position on February 23, when it controlled part of the Donbas region and all of Crimea, and in exchange, Ukraine would promise not to seek NATO membership and instead receive security guarantees from a number of countries." (Hill & Stent, 2022).

There is overwhelming evidence of such a peace deal framework agreement. It was independently confirmed by the head of the Ukrainian delegation at the peace talks, officials close to Zelensky, the ex-Israeli prime minister, the ex-German chancellor, the deputy head of the US State Department, the Turkish foreign minister, the Russian president, the head of the Russian delegation at the peace talks, the Russian foreign minister, the multiple former senior US officials, the Zelensky's ex-adviser, and the Ukrainian ambassador who all participated in the peace talks or had insider knowledge about them. The first nine of these sources emanating from Ukraine, Israel, the United States, Germany, Turkey, and Russia independently either explicitly stated or suggested that the peace deal was blocked by the United States and or the UK. The evidence of this is overwhelming.

The Western governments and the mainstream media with a few exceptions did not report or deny sources that a peace deal was close to finalizing but was blocked by the West even though the authors tweets with quoted and cited statements by various abovementioned sources became viral on Twitter with over 30,000,000 views (See, for instance, Ivan (). They were not reported by the media even after statements by Robert Fico, a leader of an EU and NATO country, who condemned the illegal Russian invasion of Ukraine but supported peaceful resolution of this conflict, and the US senator JD Vance, who later became the US vice president.

Robert Fico, the Prime Minister of Slovakia, stated publicly that the West blocked a peace deal to end the Ukraine war in spring 2022 and used Ukraine for a proxy war with Russia in a failed strategy:

> It is proven that right at the beginning of the war in Ukraine in 2022, on at least two very promising occasions, the West did not allow the Ukrainians to conclude a ceasefire with fair conditions. Because a painfully wrong decision has already been made. The West will take advantage of Russia's violation of international law, supplying Ukraine with heaps of weapons, billions of dollars, burdening Russia with massive sanctions, attacking Russia's main mineral wealth revenues, and expecting a Ukrainian soldier, until the last one, to bring him the head of a Russian bear on a platter in the form of a militarily exhausted, economically ruined, internationally isolated and internally subverted Russia. This was, and unfortunately still is, a Western strategy that I say openly at home and abroad is not working, that it has failed. (Fico 2024)

Vance made a similar statement:

> Indeed, as multiple people, both critics of Vladimir Putin and supporters of Ukraine have pointed out, there was a peace deal on the table approximately 18 months ago. And what happened to it? The Biden administration pushed Zelensky to set aside the peace agreement and to engage in a disastrous counter-offensive, a counter offensive that killed thousands, tens of thousands of Ukrainians, and depleted a decades worth of military stock and left us where we are now, where every observer of the war acknowledges that the war is worse for Ukraine than it was 18 months ago. Could we have avoided it, yes, we could and we should have avoided it. We would have saved a lot of lives and American weapons and we would have had this country in a better and more stable place if we had. (C-SPAN, 2024).

Only in June 2024 the New York Times published drafts of the peace agreement dated March 17 and April 15, 2022, and the Istanbul Communique. The peace deal draft on April 15 included such withdrawal of the Russian forces from Ukraine with the exceptions of Crimea and Donbas. It also included disagreements by both the Ukrainian and Russian delegations, in particular, concerning countries guarantors of the deal and the size of the Ukrainian military. This draft was one of numerous drafts and was issued after the peace deal was already de facto abandoned following the visit by the British prime minister on April 9 (Troianovski et al., 2024).

The withdrawal of the Russian forces from the areas near Kyiv and Northern Ukraine overall in the beginning of April 2022 is consistent with this peace deal agreement framework which specified withdrawal of the Russian forces from the occupied territory of Ukraine with the exceptions of Crimea and Donbas. The Russian delegation announced such withdrawal as a "goodwill gesture" right after the last round of the peace talks in Istanbul. Arakhamia, the head of Ukrainian delegation at peace talks appeared to independently confirm that Russia withdrew its forces from the Kyiv area and other large areas of Northern Ukraine as a part of peace deal talks. He evaluated results of the peace deal talks as 8 out of 10 and said that "we made it so that they went" (Moseichuk, 2023). Putin also stated that in Istanbul "they just told us that we need to show a sign that Russia really intends to resolve these issues peacefully, that we need to withdraw troops from Kyiv, which we have done." (Putin 2024).

The Western and Ukrainian governments and the media also claimed that the negotiations ended because of the Bucha massacre and that the Russian forces left the area near Kyiv as a result of the military defeat (Trofimov, 2024). However, Victoria Nuland did not mention at all the Russian war crimes in Bucha as the reason that the peace deal "fell through" (Zygar, 2024). The various evidence, such as her interview and the peace deal draft, which was dated by April 15, 2022, shows that the peace talks continued online for weeks after the Russian war crimes in Bucha were publicized and inflated. As noted, while the Ukrainian forces resistance largely stopped the Russian advance near Kyiv, the Russian forces were not defeated there.

Zelensky abandoned the peace deal right after the visit by the British prime minister on April 9, 2022, and not after the revelations of the Russian war crimes in Bucha several days before. Zelensky explicitly stated after visiting Bucha on April 4 his willingness to continue the negotiations with Russia (Strana, 2022). He stated in his Indian TV interview on April 7, 2022: "We are ready to conduct negotiations with the leader of the Russian Federation despite how difficult it might be after Bucha…" He said that he "is ready to meet with Putin, and that faster we will meet the less would be amount of casualties on both sides." (Republic, 2022).

Zelensky reiterated in his Associated Press interview on April 9, 2022 that despite many civilian casualties in Bucha and in the Kramatorsk train station "he is committed to pressing for peace," "we don't want to lose opportunities, if we have them, for a diplomatic solution," and that "he is confident Ukrainians would accept peace despite the horrors they have witnessed in the more than six-week-long war." (Chernov & Schreck, 2022). Peace talk participants confirmed that the negotiations continued online afterward in April (Troianovski et al., 2024). The former Zelensky's adviser and a member of the Ukrainian delegation at peace talks stated that the Bucha was not the basis of the stopping the talks because they continued afterward in April (Arestovych 2024c).

But right after the Boris Johnson's visit, Zelensky and other senior government officials of Ukraine did the complete turnaround and rejected the peace deal. Zelensky and the Defense Minister of Ukraine stated that the war would only end with taking back all lost territory of Ukraine, i.e., not only territories occupied during the Russian invasion but also separatist-controlled Donbas and Russian-annexed Crimea, and that such outcome would constitute the Ukrainian victory. Such policy reversal happened even though the odds of such outcome remained close to zero because of the Russian military advantage over Ukraine in terms of weapons and manpower.

Many Western and Ukrainian senior officials, politicians, journalists, commentators, and various academics in non-scholarly publications argued that any peace deal to end the war short of the Russian defeat was either unrealistic or that the Russia could invade Ukraine again. They often called such a peace deal appeasement and equated it with the Munich Agreement signed by the British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain in 1938 with Nazi Germany and Italy. However, the Russia-Ukraine war is not comparable to World War Two. It is most comparable to other modern wars, like the Russia-Georgia war, the Iraq war, and the Kosovo war.

The Istanbul peace talks showed that reaching such a deal was a real possibility. The EU-brokered ceasefire agreement, which ended Georgia-Russia war in 2008 with a withdrawal of the Russian forces from Georgia with the exceptions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, whose independence was recognized then by Russia but not the absolute majority of other countries, also demonstrated that a lasting peace deal to end the Russia-Ukraine war was a real possibility.

The analysis shows that a peace deal was the best option for Ukraine as a whole prior and after the Russian invasion in February 2022, since chances of Ukraine defeating Russia were close to zero because of the noted Russian military advantage in various key areas. Such peaceful resolution of the conflict could have avoided or minimized devastating consequences of the war to Ukraine, in particular, a large number of casualties, loss of territories, destruction of energy generation, and significant economic losses. The longer the war continues, the worse the conditions of any peace deal to Ukraine would be.

The narrative that Ukraine would defeat Russia was a war propaganda and a major folly for Ukraine and the West. US officials privately admitted even soon after the US and the UK de facto blocked in spring 2022 a peace deal, which was close to being finalized, that Ukraine winning the war with Russia and taking back all territories in the 1991 borders was highly unlikely (Dilanian, 2022; Parker, 2022).

Donald Trump stated shortly before the 2024 US presidential election that Zelensky "should never have let that war start; that war is a loser." ("Our" 2024). A Financial Times report stated in fall 2024 that Ukraine "is losing on the battlefield," "the Biden administration is aware that its present strategy is not sustainable" because "we are losing the war," and that "US officials were unimpressed by Zelensky's 'victory plan,'" while Ukraine's new foreign minister "struck a more pragmatic tone on the possibility of land-for-security negotiations." (Hall et al., 2024).

A senior Ukrainian official admitted in October 2024:

> We believed that victory must be the unconditional surrender of Putin's Russia. But it cannot be done without concessions. A deal must also be advantageous for Russia… Whether it's Trump or Harris, the Americans will slowly but surely withdraw… The prognosis is poor. People don't really want to fight anymore. The injustices of war could tear society apart. (Boy et al., 2024)

12.3 Peaceful Conflict Resolution?

Since the election of Donald Trump as US president in November 2024, Western and "increasingly Ukrainian officials" admitted a possibility of "a negotiated settlement in which Russian retains de facto, but not de jure, control of all or part of the Ukrainian territory it currently occupies." Zelensky suggested that such peace deal can only be accepted in exchange for Ukraine becoming a NATO member or similar security guarantees which would provide deployment of peacekeepers from the United States and other NATO countries in Ukraine (Boy et al., 2024;

Hall, 2024). However, such security guarantees to Ukraine by the US and other NATO countries are very unlikely because they mean a real danger of a war with nuclear Russia.

However, such security guarantees to Ukraine by the United States and other NATO countries were very unlikely. The Russian leaders prior to the war and during the war stated that NATO membership of Ukraine would never be accepted by Russia and it is the red line. They also stated that Russia would not accept any peacekeepers from NATO countries in Ukraine and would target them in case of their deployment. Trump and other members of his administration after his inauguration as the US president stated that Ukraine would not join NATO and that Ukraine would have to make territorial concessions as a part of a peace deal with Russia.

There is a real possibility of a peaceful resolution of the war in Ukraine following the inauguration of Trump as US president in 2024 since Trump made this his priority and Ukraine is heavily dependent on the United States. Trump made the ending the Russia-Ukraine war a key element of his election campaign and repeated this goal often since his inauguration. Peace talks between the United States and Russia and between the United States and Ukraine started in February 2025.

After the failed Istanbul peace deal in spring 2022, Zelensky banned any peace talks with Russia. However, after Trump became the US president, Zelensky significantly changed his rhetoric and said that he was ready for peace talks with Russia on his terms. Trump has significant leverage over Ukraine and can force Zelensky to make a peace deal. Zelensky's power and possible even freedom and life depend on the continuation of the war. He would likely lose any relatively free and fair elections which he postponed and might be prosecuted by his successor or targeted by the far right, which opposes such a peace deal.

However, there are significant disagreements on some key conditions of a potential peace deal among Ukraine, the United States, and Russia. They include specific territories of Ukraine that Russia claims, the size of the Ukrainian military, the security guarantees, and the status of Zelensky. Putin's peace conditions include major terms of the peace deal, which was negotiated in Istanbul and was close to being finalized in spring 2022, such as a neutrality, no NATO membership, and demilitarization of Ukraine plus annexation of entire territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions and those parts of Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia regions, which are occupied by Russia Western media reports suggested that Putin agreed in August 2025 to renounce the Russian claims to the parts of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions, which were not occupied by Russia, in exchange for a peace deal that included withdrawal of the Ukrainian forces from Ukrainian-controlled part of Donbas.

Trump basically conceded Putin's demand of no NATO membership for Ukraine and stated that Ukraine would have to give up its territories as a part of a peace deal. He also supports the peacekeepers from the UK and the EU countries. Trump also wanted a ceasefire before a peace deal would be reached. But Putin stated that Russia was advancing on the front and would accept such ceasefire only with conditions that US military aid and mobilization in Ukraine would stop. Zelensky stated that Ukraine would not de jure recognize Russian control of any Ukrainian territory, would not accept reduction of the Ukrainian military, and would require military security guarantees from the West.

Putin also stated that Zelensky's presidential power expired and that he could not sign a peace deal. Putin raised a possibility of temporary international administration in Ukraine, but this was rejected by Trump. However, Trump and his administration's top officials, in particular, Elon Musk also suggested that the US can stop supply of weapons to Ukraine and that Zelensky could be removed via the elections if he continued to refuse a peace deal to stop the Russia-Ukraine war. Trump leverage over Putin is limited. Trump imposed secondary sanctions on Russia by imposing additional tariffs on India and threatening to impose them on China for buying Russian oil. But such sanctions are ineffective, and both India and China refused to stop buying Russian oil.

The analysis shows that a peace deal has been the best option for Ukraine prior and after the Russian invasion in February 2022 since chances of Ukraine defeating Russia were close to zero because of the Russian military advantage in various key areas. Such peaceful resolution of the conflict could have avoided or minimized devastating consequences of the war to Ukraine, in particular, a large number of casualties, loss of territories, destruction of energy generation and other critical infrastructure, and significant economic losses. The longer war continues, the more casualties and damage to Ukraine would be, while conditions of a peace deal would likely to become worse for Ukraine.

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CHAPTER 13

Conclusion: Battlefields Ukraine Between Russia and the West

Abstract The conclusion summarizes the main findings and discusses their implications and prospects for the conflict resolution in Ukraine. This book shows that the Russian, Ukrainian, and Western governments, the Maidan forces, the Ukrainian far right, and Crimean and Donbas separatists contributed to the violent conflict escalation ladder, which culminated in the Russia-Ukraine war that also became a proxy war between Russia and NATO in Ukraine. This conflict ladder started with Euromaidan, in particular, the Maidan massacre and escalated into the Crimea and Donbas conflicts and conflicts of Ukraine and the West with Russia. Russia strongly escalated these conflicts with its invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Peaceful resolution of these conflicts could have stopped the conflict escalation ladder and prevented or minimized devastating consequences to Ukraine. The Russia-Ukraine war outcome will shape the future not only of Ukraine and Russia but also the world order.

This book has examined the Russia-Ukraine war and its origins. In contrast to the overwhelming majority of other studies, it is based on the analysis of tens of thousands of primary and secondary sources in Ukrainian, Russian, and English. It shows that the Russian, Ukrainian, and Western governments and the media often misrepresented to various extents different aspects of this most significant conflict of the twenty-first century and the preceding conflicts, such as Euromaidan, the Maidan massacre, the war in Donbas, the Russian annexation of Crimea, and the

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Russia-West conflicts that Russia drastically escalated with the illegal invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Many studies uncritically rely on such narratives and unreliable sources. Wikipedia is even more unreliable. Table 10.1 summarizes how the dominant narratives propagated by the Russian, Ukrainian, and Western governments and often repeated by their media differ from the academic analysis based on such primary sources.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, contrary to the denials by the Russian government and the media, is a war because the number of combat casualties far exceeds the 1000 casualty threshold, which is typically used by scholars to define a war. The war combines elements of an interstate war between Russia and Ukraine, a proxy war between the West and Russia, and a civil war in Ukraine. Interstate war between Russia and Ukraine and, especially since the Western governments blocked in spring 2022 a peace deal, the proxy war between the West/NATO and Russia are much more dominant than the civil war, which continued in Donbas since 2014. Contrary to the claims of the Russian government leaders and the media, the war in Ukraine is not a war between NATO and Russia (Table 13.1).

The Russian invasion of Ukraine is illegal under international law. It cannot be classified as a preventive war because security threats, such as policies of the Zelenskyy government of taking back Crimea and Donbas, and potential NATO membership of Ukraine or Ukraine developing nuclear weapons, were not imminent and were inflated by the Russian government.

Russia drastically escalated conflicts with Ukraine and the West and the civil war in Donbas in February 2022 by launching the invasion of Ukraine. These conflicts started with the Western-backed illegal and undemocratic violent overthrow of the pro-Russian Ukrainian government by means of the false-flag Maidan massacre and assassination attempts against Yanukovych that were perpetrated by the elements of the Maidan oligarchic and the far-right opposition in February 2014. In response, Russia escalated the conflicts by annexing pro-Russian and pro-separatist Crimea and supporting pro-Russian separatists in Donbas, including by means of the direct military interventions. However, contrary to the Ukrainian and Western governments and much of the media and Wikipedia, the Russia-Ukraine war started with the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, and not in 2014.

As result of the overthrow of the Yanukovych government during Euromaidan, Ukraine became a US client state, made the NATO

Table 13.1 Dominant narratives by Ukrainian, Western, and Russian governments and media vs. primary sources-based academic analysis of the Russia-Ukraine war and its origins

	Western governments and media	*Russian and Donbas separatist governments and media*	*Ukrainian government and media*	*Primary sources-based academic analysis*
Russian invasion in 2022	Illegal	Legal	Illegal	Illegal
Russia-Ukraine war classification	Full-scale interstate Russia-Ukraine war	Special military operation in Ukraine; NATO-Russia war	Full-scale interstate Russia-Ukraine war	Interstate Russia-Ukraine war and proxy NATO-Russia war with elements of continuing civil war
Russia-Ukraine war origins	Unprovoked aggression, Russian imperialism-driven occupation of Ukraine	Threat of NATO accession of Ukraine and US missiles deployment; Nazi regime in Ukraine since Maidan coup; preventative special military operation to stop Ukrainian attack in Donbas; humanitarian intervention to stop genocide in Donbas	Unprovoked aggression, Russian imperialism-driven occupation of Ukraine	Extreme escalation by Russia of Euromaidan, Donbas, and Crimea conflicts and conflicts with the West since the Western-backed violent overthrow of the pro-Russian government in Ukraine during Euromaidan; NATO accession of Ukraine a major factor but, like the far-right role, inflated by Russia; Russian imperialism significant but secondary factor

(continued)

Table 13.1 (continued)

	Western governments and media	*Russian and Donbas separatist governments and media*	*Ukrainian government and media*	*Primary sources-based academic analysis*
Russia-Ukraine war outcome	Ukraine victory; peace on Ukraine and West terms/ stalemate since 2023 counteroffensive and frozen conflict	Ukraine defeat/peace on Russian terms of neutrality, denazification and demilitarization of Ukraine	Ukraine victory with restoration of 1991 borders; peace on Zelenskyy's terms	Limited defeat of Ukraine with Russian annexation of parts of East and South of Ukraine
Genocide	Russian genocide of Ukrainians	Genocide of ethnic Russians/ Russian speakers in Donbas	Russian genocide of Ukrainians	No Ukrainian or Russian genocides
War crimes	Russian war crimes	Ukrainian war crimes	Russian war crimes	War crimes primarily by Russian forces
Bucha	Russian massacre of several hundred civilians	False-flag killings by Ukrainian forces/Western-organized provocation	Russian massacre of several hundred civilians	Videos and testimonies confirming shooting of several identified civilians and 8 territorial defense members by the Russian forces; indiscriminate shootings and summary executions of several dozen civilians; most of about 400 documented victims killed by shelling. No evidence of false-flag killings
Nord Stream bombing	Russian false-flag; Ukrainian forces	US and UK	Russian false-flag	Ukrainian forces and US involvement

Table 13.1 (continued)

	Western governments and media	*Russian and Donbas separatist governments and media*	*Ukrainian government and media*	*Primary sources-based academic analysis*
Political system in Ukraine	Democracy	Junta/Nazi regime	Democracy	From semi-democratic to largely undemocratic; undemocratic rule
Ukraine relations with United States/West	Allies	US colony	Allies	Client state
Euromaidan	Peaceful revolution and popular mass protest	US organized coup by Maidan opposition and neo-Nazis/fascist coup	Revolution of Dignity, peaceful revolution, and popular mass protest	Combination of popular protest, revolution/rebellion, coup, and US-led regime change
Maidan massacre	Massacre of Maidan activists by government snipers/Berkut police on Yanukovych government orders	Violent provocation by Maidan opposition/Georgian snipers/Ukrainian neo-Nazis with US involvement	Massacre of Maidan activists by Berkut police/government snipers on Yanukovych government orders	False-flag massacre of Maidan activists and police by Maidan snipers with involvement of elements of Maidan oligarchic and far-right opposition
Crimea conflict	Illegal annexation without majority support of Crimea population	Legal reunification with overwhelming support in a referendum	Illegal annexation without majority support of Crimea population	Illegal annexation with majority support of the population of Crimea
Odesa massacre	Clashes and fire	Massacre by Maidan leaders and neo-Nazis	Killings and fire started by separatists	Massacre by far right with Maidan government involvement
Donbas War	Russia-Ukraine war/Hybrid war	Civil war/No Russian military interventions	Russia-Ukraine war/no civil war	Civil war and Russian military interventions in August 2014 and January 2015

Table 13.1 (continued)

	Western governments and media	*Russian and Donbas separatist governments and media*	*Ukrainian government and media*	*Primary sources-based academic analysis*
Malaysian MH17 Boeing shot-down	Deliberate shot-down by Russian forces	False-flag shot-down by Ukrainian military plane or Buk	Deliberate shot-down by Russian forces	Unintended shot-down by Russian Buk/Donbas separatists
Far right	None/Marginal/ Deradicalized	Nazi regime in Ukraine	None	Outsize power

membership the principal policy goal and a part of the Constitution, and was used by the United States and other NATO members as a bulwark to contain Russia. Various evidence shows that the NATO accession of Ukraine and using Ukraine as a bulwark by NATO countries was a major factor in the Ukraine war. However, the Putin government inflated the imminency of these security threats.

Russian imperialism was a significant but a secondary factor in the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The analysis of various evidence suggests that the initial goal of the Russian invasion was not to occupy or annex entire Ukraine but to undertake a regime change or to force a peace deal on Russian terms, such as neutrality and demilitarization of Ukraine, and giving up control over Donbas. The peace deal framework that included Russian withdrawal, with exceptions of Crimea and Donbas, and lack of creation of the Russian or separatist military-civilian administrations in the occupied regions of Ukraine, with the exceptions of Donbas, in the first month of the war suggested that the annexation or long-term occupation of these regions of Ukraine was not initially planned. However, creation of such administrations since April 2022, Putin's Victory Day speech on May 9, 2022, and various subsequent statements by other Russian and separatist officials and Russian-appointed officials in Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions suggested Russian policy shift and plans to annex these regions in Southern and Eastern Ukraine. Russia annexed Donbas and Kherson and Zaporizhzhia Regions in September 2022.

While neo-Nazis and other far right have outsize influence in Ukraine since Euromaidan, Russia also inflated their influence to justify the invasion by misrepresenting Ukraine as a Nazi or a Neo-Nazi state. The claims that Russia invaded Ukraine because Ukraine is a democracy are not supported by evidence since Ukraine is largely undemocratic.

Contrary to the claims of, respectively, the Ukrainian and Western governments and much of the media and the Russian government and the media, there is no evidence of the Ukrainian genocide of ethnic Russians in separatist-controlled Donbas and the Russian genocide of Ukrainians in Ukraine. But there is various evidence of war crimes, such as summary executions of civilians and POWs by individual soldiers or units of the Russian forces and the neo-Nazi-led Azov and the Georgian Legion. The publicly available evidence suggests that the Russian forces committed most such war crimes, in particular, shooting dozens of civilians and territorial defense members in Bucha, Similarly, various evidence shows that the absolute majority of civilian casualties resulted from indiscriminate shelling or bombing, overwhelmingly by the Russian forces, typically, in populated areas that were often used for military purposes, primarily by the Ukrainian forces.

The Russia-Ukraine war resulted in the largest military casualties of a war in Europe since World War Two. It exceeded casualties of the civil war and Russian military interventions in Donbas and other wars in Europe, such as the Kosovo war, the civil war in Bosnia, the Russia-Georgia war, and two wars in Chechnya. However, civilian casualties far exceeded the civilian casualties of the civil war in Donbas. But their number, and especially civilian-military casualties's ratio were smaller than in most modern wars, in particular, the wars in Bosnia and Gaza.

Truth also became a casualty of the war in Ukraine. Many claims promoted by the Russian, Donbas separatist, Ukrainian, and Western governments and the media, and Wikipedia are not supported by evidence. This includes claims that there have been Ukrainian genocide of Russian speakers in Donbas, the Russian genocide of Ukrainians, the neo-Nazi regime in Ukraine, and false-flag killings or attacks in Bucha, Mariupol, the Zaporizhzhia nuclear station, Nord Stream pipelines, and separatist- and Russian-controlled Donbas. Because of systematic biases, polls in Ukraine since the Russian invasion were generally unreliable and significantly inflated pro-war attitudes, popular support for the war policies of Zelenskyy and opposition to peace talks to end the Russia-Ukraine war.

The outcome of the Ukraine war would determine the future not only of Ukraine but also of the world order. Based on Russian military superiority over Ukraine in terms of the number of weapons and military personnel potential, the most likely outcome of the war ceteris paribus would be a military defeat of Ukraine and annexation of significant parts of Eastern and Southern Ukraine by Russia. The chances of the Ukrainian victory are close to zero. Such victory would have to involve taking back not only parts of Ukraine annexed by Russia since February 24, 2022, but also Russian-annexed Crimea and Donbas and it was improbable since the war started.

The United States, the UK, and other NATO countries used Ukraine as a client state or a proxy in a proxy war with Russia and blocked a possibility of a peace deal in spring 2022 to end the war. Their military, economic, and humanitarian aid, military intelligence, target selection, military advise, and planning of military operations enabled Ukraine to prolong the war. However, NATO is unlikely to intervene directly in the

Russia-Ukraine war because it would involve a war with a nuclear Russia with a real possibility of a nuclear war.

Contrary to claims by Zelensky, the Western governments and with some exceptions the media, there is overwhelming evidence of a peace deal framework agreement between Ukraine and Russia in spring 2022 to end the war. Such peace deal framework was independently confirmed by the head of the Ukrainian delegation at the peace, two delegation members, one of whom was then a Zelenskyy's adviser and a propaganda chief, Ukrainian officials close to Zelenskyy, then prime minister of Israel, top official of the US State Department, the ex-German chancellor, president of Turkey, and the Turkish foreign minister, Russian president Putin, the head of the Russian delegation at the peace talks, the Russian foreign minister, and the multiple former senior US officials. They all participated in the peace talks or had insider knowledge about them. The first 12 of these sources emanating from Ukraine, Israel, Germany, Turkey, and Russia independently either explicitly stated or suggested that the peace deal was blocked by the United States and or the UK.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine, which inflated security threats and falsely claimed genocide to justify the illegal invasion, and the Zelenskyy and Western governments folly of failing to prevent the war and respectively abandoning and blocking the peace deal, which was close to being finalized in Spring 2022, had disastrous consequences to Ukraine and Ukrainians, including estimated 180,000 Ukrainian forces members killed and 720,000 wounded, about 20,000 civilians killed, including on the Donbas separatist and Russian-controlled territory, about seven million refugees, and destruction of half of the energy generation, many other critical infrastructure, and much of the housing in Mariupol, Bakhmut, and several other cities in Donbas. Large parts of Eastern and Southern Ukraine were annexed by Russia.

The war was unwinnable for Ukraine because of the Russian military and manpower advantages. The Ukraine war outcome would also affect Russia, the West, NATO, the EU, and other countries, their position in the world, and the future of the US-led world order. The defeat of Ukraine would also mean the defeat of the United States and NATO in a proxy war. Because of such high stakes of the war for Ukraine, Russia, and the United States, the Ukraine war contains a possibility of a dangerous escalation.

The analysis shows that Euromaidan combined elements of mass protest, political revolution, coup, and US-led regime change. The last two were dominant in political transition from the Yanukovych government to the Maidan government. The Yanukovych government was overthrown not by peaceful mass protests which started after his decision to suspend signing of the EU free trade and association agreement but by means of the false-flag Maidan massacre of the Maidan protesters and the police and assassination attempts against Yanukovych. There is overwhelming evidence that the massacre and assassination attempts were perpetrated with covert involvement of small number of the Maidan oligarchic leadership and the far-right members. Various evidence shows that the US government was involved in the political transition in Ukraine during the Maidan in order to replace the pro-Russian government with the pro-Western government and turn Ukraine into a client state in order to use it to contain Russia.

The various evidence shows that the violent dispersal of Maidan protesters by the Berkut police on November 30, 2013, was orchestrated and publicized by oligarchic politicians from the Yanukovych government and by the Maidan opposition with involvement of the far-right Right Sector, which attacked the police during this dispersal.

The mass protests against the police violence on November 30 followed on December 1 in Kyiv City. In addition to peaceful rallies, they included seizures of the Kyiv City Hall and the Trade Union Building by a radical wing of the opposition and a violent attack led by radical nationalist and neo-Nazi organizations and football ultras, which formed the Right Sector, on the presidential administration. Yanukovych attempted again to disperse protesters on the Maidan by force and adopted laws restricting the freedoms of assembly and protest. At the end of January, the far-right elements of the opposition, led by the Right Sector and football ultras, led an attack on the parliament. The attack escalated the conflict, and it resulted in a violent confrontation and a stand-off with the special police and interior troops units.

Videos, testimonies, admissions by some Maidan leaders, and other evidence show that the Maidan opposition leaders mobilized mass protests with help of staged violence. The violent dispersal of protesters on the Maidan on November 30 by the Berkut was known to the Maidan opposition leaders in advance, and the far-right Right Sector attacked the police during this dispersal. This violent dispersal by the Berkut police was highly publicized and misrepresented by the Ukrainian and Western media and by the Maidan opposition as unprovoked beating of peaceful students on an order of Yanukovych. The violence by the Right Sector against the Berkut police during this dispersal was omitted. This highly publicized and misrepresented violent dispersal became a turning point of Euromaidan.

Similarly, the forensic examinations and videos revealed that the killings of the first three protesters at the end of January 2014 was deliberately attributed by the Maidan opposition and the media to the police. The investigation under both the Yanukovych and Maidan governments determined that these three protesters were killed from a distance of a few meters in the Maidan-controlled area, while the live streams and videos showed that the police and the protesters were separated by several dozen meters. Similarly, the Ukrainian government investigation in 2019 indicated that kidnapping and "crucifixion" of Dmytro Bulatov was staged with his involvement. The Prosecutor General Office of Ukraine since the end of 2014 has been investigating leaders and members of UNA-UNSO, one of the founding organizations of the Right Sector, as suspects in the killings of these three Armenian, Belarusian, and Western Ukrainian protesters and another protester who was killed on February 18, 2014.

Public opinion polls show that public opinion concerning Euromaidan in Ukraine was split and regionally divided. Most residents of Western and Central Ukraine backed Euromaidan, while the majority of the residents of the East and South opposed Euromaidan.

The Maidan opposition, the Maidan government, and the Western governments and, with some exceptions, the media in Ukraine and the West propagated narratives that the Maidan protests were peaceful, democratic, grassroots, and representative of all Ukrainians. Contrary to the evidence, they claimed that all the violence was perpetrated by the Yanukovych government and its forces.

The Maidan opposition leaders falsely claimed that the government forces killed the first three protesters in January 2021 and kidnapped and crucified the Automaidan leader. The Ukrainian and Western media widely reported about the killings of these Maidan activists and the Bulatov abduction and immediately attributed them to the government forces. The same concerns Wikipedia. In contrast, the Russian and Donbas separatist governments and the media misrepresented Euromaidan as a "fascist coup" or "Nazi coup."

The analysis found that the Maidan massacre of the protestors and the police on February 20, 2014, was a successful false-flag operation that was rationally organized and conducted by elements of the Maidan leadership and concealed groups of Maidan snipers in Maidan-controlled buildings in order to win the asymmetric conflict during the “Euromaidan” and seize power in Ukraine. This massacre was a key element in the violent overthrow of the semi-democratic government in Ukraine.

The various types of evidence analyzed indicate that elements of far-right organizations, such as the Right Sector and Svoboda, and oligarchic Maidan parties, such as Fatherland, were directly or indirectly involved in various capacities in this massacre of the protesters and the police. Such a false-flag massacre by its nature could have been covertly organized and successfully carried out by only a small number of Maidan leaders and snipers.

The study shows that concealed armed groups of Maidan snipers, based in particular in the Music Conservatory and Hotel Ukraina, started the massacre in the early morning on February 20 by targeting Berkut and internal troop units on the Maidan itself with live ammunition fire, inflicting their mass casualties, and forcing them to retreat. The armed Maidan groups, in particular the same ones, massacred the unsuspecting Maidan protesters from concealed positions in more than 20 Maidan-controlled buildings and areas, in particular Hotel Ukraine, Zhovtnevyi Palace, and Bank Arkada.

Content analysis of synchronized videos, audio recordings, and photos, and analysis of various publicly available evidence showed that killed and wounded policemen and at least the absolute majority of 49 killed and 172 wounded Maidan protesters were massacred on February 20, 2014 by snipers in Maidan-controlled buildings and areas. The content analysis shows that at least eight videos filmed snipers in Maidan-controlled buildings and areas aiming or shooting at the Berkut police during the Maidan massacre. Their and other Maidan snipers’ admissions, witness testimonies, and content analysis revealed that six of these videos show Maidan snipers, in particular, from the far-right-linked special armed Maidan company. Snipers in Maidan-controlled buildings aimed at or shooting Maidan protesters are filmed in at least 14 videos. They included 10 videos in which these snipers were identified as Maidan snipers by Maidan protesters, journalists, content analysis, and other evidence. At least 26 videos show groups of armed Maidan snipers and spotters moving into, looking for, changing, or leaving shooting positions in Maidan-controlled buildings and areas. There were also more than 80 videos of protesters, journalists, and policemen during the Maidan massacre, pointing to or testifying about Maidan snipers or snipers in the Maidan-controlled buildings. This is consistent with the audio recordings of a group of such snipers shooting on commands.

The statement by the far-right Svoboda party, videos, and testimonies by the Maidan self-defense commander, Maidan protesters, Ukrainian journalists, and Hotel Ukraina staff show that this hotel was guarded and controlled by the Maidan opposition, specifically Svoboda, before, during, and immediately after the massacre of the protesters and the police by snipers located in this hotel. Similar evidence shows control by the Maidan opposition of other buildings and areas from which snipers shot protesters and police.

Several hundred witnesses were also reported in the media and social media snipers in Hotel Ukraina and other Maidan-controlled buildings during the massacre. Eight Maidan politicians and activists publicly stated that they witnessed the involvement of specific top Maidan leaders from oligarchic parties and far-right organizations in the massacre, such as their advance knowledge about the massacre, deployment of snipers, and evacuation of snipers who were captured by Maidan protesters. This is consistent with other evidence, such as testimonies by 14 self-admitted members of Maidan sniper groups, particularly from a far-right-linked covert Maidan company and Georgia.

Synchronized videos show that specific times and directions of shooting by the Berkut policemen did not coincide with the specific times and directions of shooting of specific protesters. A long German ARD TV video, which simultaneously captured the killings and wounding of protesters and the positions of the Berkut Police, also shows this. This visual evidence alone shows that the Berkut policemen, who were charged with the massacre of the protesters, did not massacre at least the absolute majority of killed and wounded Maidan protesters.

The videos reveal snipers in the Maidan-controlled buildings and show that Maidan protesters were lured and then massacred by snipers from such Maidan-controlled buildings as Hotel Ukraina. The study also showed that Western, Polish, and Russian journalists during the Maidan massacre were shot by snipers located in Maidan-controlled buildings.

There is no specific evidence that Yanukovych or his ministers and commanders ordered or were involved in other ways in the massacre of Maidan protesters. Bullet hole locations showed that Berkut policemen were mostly shooting above and in front of the Maidan protesters, particularly above the protesters on the second and higher floors of Hotel

Ukraina, which was the main location of the snipers, and in trees, poles, walls, and the ground. Evidence, such as videos and testimonies, also shows that American, British, German, Polish, and Russian journalists were shot at by snipers located in Maidan-controlled buildings.

There was no evidence of any “third-force snipers. Several Georgian self-admitted members of sniper groups testified in the media and for the Ukrainian trial and investigation that they and other Georgian and foreign snipers received orders from the Maidan opposition and ex-Georgian leaders.”

The findings are corroborated by evidence from the Maidan massacre trial and investigation in Ukraine. Such evidence includes testimonies of the absolute majority of wounded Maidan protesters that they and other protesters were shot by snipers in Hotel Ukraina and other Maidan-controlled buildings, and testimonies by nearly 100 prosecution and defense witnesses concerning such snipers. The evidence also includes videos presented at the trial, findings of forensic medical examinations that almost all the protesters were shot from steep directions from the sides or the back, determinations by government ballistic experts that many protesters were shot from Hotel Ukraina and other Maidan-controlled buildings, and initial ballistic examinations that did not match bullets extracted from the bodies of killed protesters to the Berkut Kalashnikovs. The cover-up of the snipers and the key evidence and stonewalling of the investigations and trials by the Maidan governments and the far right, the denial of the prosecution that there were any snipers in the Maidan-controlled buildings, and the failure to convict anyone for the massacre of the protesters and the police for almost 10 years after one of the most documented mass killings in history also corroborate this study.

Even the Ukrainian Prosecutor General’s investigation determined that about half of Maidan protesters were wounded from locations other than the Berkut police positions and did not charge anyone with their attempted murder. The GPU investigation also initially found that the snipers in the Hotel Ukraina massacred the protesters.

The absolute majority of wounded Maidan protesters, with whose shooting Berkut policemen are charged and whose testimonies were revealed at the trial, testified at the trial and the investigation that they were shot by snipers from the Hotel Ukraina and other Maidan-controlled buildings or witnessed snipers there. Nearly 200 witnesses, including dozens of the prosecution witnesses, also testified about snipers in these

Maidan-controlled locations, in particular, massacring the police and the protesters.

Synchronized videos presented at the trial show that the times and directions of the shots by the Berkut policemen did not coincide with the times and directions at which specific protesters were killed. Other videos showed Maidan protesters being lured into positions that were exposed to snipers from such Maidan-controlled buildings as the Hotel Ukraina.

Forensic medical examinations by government experts determined that the majority of the protesters were shot from a steep angle from either the side or back. This is consistent with locations of the Maidan-controlled buildings, and inconsistent with the locations of the Berkut police on the ground. Also, the initial ballistic examinations did not match the bullets extracted from the bodies of killed and wounded to the Kalashnikov rifles used by Berkut.

Nor did the trials and investigations reveal any evidence that President Yanukovych or his law enforcement ministers and commanders ordered the massacre. Forensic examinations of the bullet holes by the government experts and the videos they presented showed that the Berkut policemen were mostly shooting above the Maidan protesters, and in particular into the Hotel Ukraina, which was the main location of the snipers.

The accidental killing and wounding of a small number of protesters by the Berkut police by ricochet bullets, or in a crossfire with snipers in the Maidan-controlled buildings, cannot be completely excluded because of the lack of publicly available data or because of contradictory data. But their killing and wounding together with other protesters suggests that they were also likely shot by the Maidan snipers.

There are various indications of stonewalling and cover-up of key evidence. It is noteworthy that the government investigation denied presence of any snipers in the Maidan-controlled buildings, in spite of its own initial findings that no fewer than 13 protesters were killed from shots fired from the Maidan-controlled buildings and areas. When bullet trajectories, as determined by government ballistic experts and lasers in on-site-investigative experiments, showed that many Maidan protesters had been shot at from the Hotel Ukraina and other Maidan-controlled buildings, this result was covered-up and ballistic experts were no longer used. The GPU did not use ballistic experts to determine the bullet trajectories and locations of shooters even after being ordered to do so by the judge and the jury.

Unexplained reversals of results of some 40 forensic ballistic examinations, including computer-based examination which showed that bullets of Berkut Kalashnikovs did not match bullets from bodies of killed Maidan protesters, also suggest a cover-up and evidence tampering. Synchronized content analysis of the videos of the Berkut police and killed and wounded protesters along with locations and directions of wounds in forensic medical examination, testimonies of eyewitnesses among Maidan protesters, and on-site investigative experiments by government ballistic experts show that Maidan protesters could not have been physically shot from the Berkut positions.

The Maidan massacre trial verdict, which was issued by a Kyiv court in October 2023 shortly before the 10th anniversary of Euromaidan, confirmed that many Maidan protesters were killed and wounded and BBC and ARD TV journalists were shot at not by Berkut or other law enforcement officers but by snipers in Hotel Ukraina and other locations and that this hotel and these locations were not controlled by the government forces but were Maidan "activists-controlled." The verdict also confirmed that there were no Russian snipers involved in the massacre and that there were no massacre orders from Yanukovych or his ministers. The verdict means that almost 12 years since this crucial massacre, which is one of the most documented cases of mass killings in history, nobody is in prison for the murder and attempted murder of the Maidan activists and the police in Ukraine and shooting at foreign journalists.

The Prosecutor General Office investigation admitted that about half of 172 wounded Maidan activists were shot not from Berkut-controlled locations and did not charge anyone with the attempted murder; this also means that they were shot by the Maidan snipers. The trial verdict along with this government investigation findings means de facto official admissions that at least 10 out of 49 killed and 115 out of 172 wounded Maidan activists were shot on February 20, 2014, not by Berkut or other law enforcement agencies but by Maidan snipers from the Maidan-controlled locations.

The verdict decision to convict in absentia 3 Berkut policemen, who were exchanged by Zelensky to Donbas separatists, for the murder of 31 protesters was politically motivated. It was based on a single forensic examination of bullets, which reversed results of some 40 previous forensic examinations of bullets. This forensic examination also contradicted synchronized videos, forensic medical and ballistic examinations by government experts, and testimonies of the absolute majority of wounded Maidan protesters and several hundred witnesses.

This book also shows visually, based on synchronized videos, bullet hole locations in shields and helmets, wound locations and directions in forensic medical examinations, an on-site investigative experiment by government experts, and testimonies of eyewitnesses among Maidan protesters, that the SITU architecture model produced for the Maidan victims' lawyers misrepresented locations of the wounds and directions of the gunshots that killed three protesters.

The evidence also suggests that there were armed Maidan shooters linked to the far right and to the oligarchic Fatherland Party and that they killed and wounded both the police and the protesters on February 18 and 19, 2024. The Maidan leaders initiated the violent storming of the parliament on February 18. The first casualty was the computer technician in the Party of Regions office, who was killed during the arson of the building by Maidan activists, including the far right. The Trade Union Building on the Maidan was set on fire by the far-right activists during the attempt by the Security Service of Ukraine Alfa unit to storm this building.

This false-flag mass killing on February 18–20, 2014, produced public backlash against the incumbent Yanukovych government and its forces, which were immediately blamed by the Maidan opposition, Western governments, a part of the ruling party, and Ukrainian and Western media for ordering and perpetrating this massacre. The condition reported by Maidan leaders, including the far-right Svoboda party leaders and a Western government representative before the massacre that the Western governments would turn on the Yanukovych government after casualties among protesters would reach 100, created rational incentives to the Maidan leaders to "sacrifice" 100 Maidan protesters and attribute their killing to the government forces. The killed protesters were called Heavenly Hundred immediately after the massacre, and protesters who died from illnesses and people who were not on the Maidan were included to bring the number of victims to 100.

Such information on Western involvement and the de facto backing of the violent undemocratic overthrow of the Ukrainian government by means of the Maidan massacre and the misrepresentation of this massacre by the Western governments, despite the evidence, including in the phone call between the Estonian foreign minister and the EU foreign affairs chief, that this mass killing was perpetrated by the involvement of the elements of the oligarchic and far-right Maidan opposition, requires further research and analysis of evidence which is not made public by these governments. But this and the overwhelming publicly available evidence concerning involvement of the oligarchic and far-right elements of the Maidan leadership and Maidan snipers suggests that the United States and other Western governments at least knew about the actual perpetrators of this false-flag massacre.

The book shows that the Maidan massacre narrative that was propagated by the governments and the mainstream media in the West and Ukraine, as well as Wikipedia was false. They called the Maidan a peaceful protest and presented the massacre of the Maidan protesters as perpetrated by the government snipers on the orders of Yanukovych and his government. The prosecution, Maidan victims, lawyers, and the mainstream media with some notable exceptions denied presence of snipers in Hotel Ukraina and other Maidan-controlled buildings, their shooting of the Maidan protesters, and the far-right involvement in this mass killing and claimed that this was "a conspiracy theory" and "propaganda."

This false-flag killing of the protesters and police, along with several assassination attempts that followed, led to Yanukovych fleeing Kyiv and then Ukraine and to the violent overthrow of the Ukrainian government. The false-flag massacre was a key part of the violent undemocratic overthrow of the government in Ukraine and a major human rights violation and crime.

The massacre of Maidan protesters and the police on February 20, 2014, was a tipping point in the conflict that spiraled into other major conflicts in Ukraine and conflicts between Ukraine and Russia and between the West and Russia, in particular, the Russian annexation of Crimea, the war in Donbas, the illegal and devastating Russian invasion, and the war with Ukraine, which also became a dangerous proxy war between the West and Russia. The Maidan massacre does not justify the illegal Russian invasion of Ukraine. Conversely, the Russian invasion does not justify the Maidan massacre of the police and the protesters

The Russian annexation of pro-Russian Crimea, which had the majority ethnic Russian population and was the base of the Russian Black Sea Fleet, represented in spring 2014 drastic and illegal escalation of the conflict that involved the violent and illegal overthrow of the pro-Russian government in Ukraine in February 2014. The Crimean separatism and Russian imperialism were relatively less important factors. The analysis of various evidence, such as interviews, videos, public opinion polls, and media reports, shows that the conflict in Crimea in spring 2014 involved both secession of this predominantly ethnically Russian region of Ukraine with support of the majority of Crimean residents and its illegal annexation by Russia with help of covert military intervention. But the Russian annexation and covert direct military intervention were more decisive. Contrary to the claims of the Russian government the unilateral secession and annexation of Crimea are illegal under the international law.

The secession and the Russian annexation of Crimea with help of the direct Russian military intervention represented a major turning point in the political history of the region, which experienced many conflicts in the past and was controlled by different powers during various historical periods. There was a significant rise in separatist orientations in Crimea after Euromaidan. The analysis shows that a return of Crimea from Russia to Ukraine is virtually impossible, in particular, during the Russia-Ukraine war. Crimea remains a major point of conflict between Ukraine and Russia and between the West and Russia. Ukrainian, English, and Russian. Narratives concerning the 2014 conflict in Crimea by the Russian, Ukrainian, and Western governments and the media and especially Wikipedia misrepresent many of its key elements.

Separatists, the Yanukovych government, the Maidan opposition, the Maidan government, far-right organizations, Russia, the United States, and the EU contributed to the start and escalation of violent separatist conflict in Donbas, and the de facto break-up of Ukraine, in different ways, but their actions did not all have an equal impact. The study links the start of the separatist conflict in Donbas to the violent overthrow of the Yanukovych government by means of the Maidan massacre and the US-led regime change in Ukraine.

The evidence shows that the narratives of pure civil war in Donbas propagated by the Russian and separatist governments and the media and their denials of the direct Russian military interventions in support of separatists in Donbas in August 2014 and January–February 2014 are propaganda, disinformation, or fake news. The study demonstrates the same concerning claims of the Ukrainian and Western governments and, with some exceptions, the media as well as English, Russian, and Ukrainian-language Wikipedia that there was no civil war in Donbas but a war of Russia with Ukraine. The analysis of the exchange lists of POWs along with various other evidence also suggests that Ukrainian and Western governments and media reports of captures of numerous Russian intelligence groups in Ukraine in spring 2014 and permanent presence and permanent participation in combat of at least several thousand regular Russian troops in Donbas are fake.

The study found that the absolute majority of the casualties on both sides of the frontline in Donbas were Ukrainian citizens. The evidence shows that, contrary to the narratives propagated by the Russian and separatist governments and the media, a separatist or Russian Buk crew shot-down Malaysian passenger Boeing plane MH17 in July 2014, likely by mistaking it for a Ukrainian military plane.

This study based on the analysis of a large volume of primary sources and common political science definitions shows that interstate war, genocide, fascist junta, and terrorism are not appropriate terms to define the conflict in Donbas before the Russian invasion. The book shows that the Russian, Ukrainian and Western governments, the media, and the Wikipedia misrepresented the nature and the origins of the conflict in Ukraine.

The presumed covert involvement of the United States and Russia, the former in the violent regime change during Euromaidan, the latter in the start of the conflict in Donbas requires further research because of lack of publicly available data concerning these events. Regional political culture in Donbas and Russian ethnicity were strongest determinants of support for separatism in Ukraine after the Russian annexation of Crimea. A survey commissioned by the author and conducted by Kiev International Institute of Sociology in Spring 2014 shows that Donbas was the only region besides the annexed Crimea with the majority support for various forms of separatism.

The civil war in Donbas, with Russian military interventions in August 2014 and January–February 2015, has led to the de facto independence of the DNR and the LNR, which controlled the most populated parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk Regions. Alongside the annexation of Crimea, this meant the de facto break-up of Ukraine, similarly to the violent secessions of pro-Russian regions of Transdniestria in Moldova and Abkhasiza and South Ossetia in Georgia with Russian military backing. As this book shows, the civil war and Russian military interventions in Donbas were elements of the chain of conflicts that started with Euromaidan and the Maidan massacre and escalated into the Russia-Ukraine war in February 2022.

This book shows that Ukraine after Euromaidan remained divided along regional lines in terms of support for pro-Western/pro-nationalist and pro-Russian/pro-communist and political parties and presidential candidates and attitudes concerning such principal foreign policy issues as Ukraine's membership in NATO, the European Union, the Russia-led Customs Union, and relations of Ukraine with Russia. However, regional divides concerning EU, NATO, and Customs Union membership and concerning Ukraine and Russia uniting into one state decreased after Euromaidan.

The analysis of various survey data indicates that support for separatism in Crimea and Donbas increased significantly after Euromaidan that resulted in a violent overthrow of the relatively pro-Russian government. A civil war in Donbas by pro-Russian and Russian backed separatists and the Russian military interventions in Crimea and Donbas in support of separatists signified a de facto break-up of Ukraine.

The 2014 KIIS survey commissioned by the author and other surveys results show that views expressed by the Russian government and media concerning widespread popular support for separatism or joining Russia in all of Eastern and Southern Ukraine, referred by President Putin and pro-Russian separatists as Novorossia, were unfounded. However, the analysis of the survey data shows that, contrary to the Ukrainian and Western governments narratives, there was majority support for different forms of separatism in Crimea and Donbas after Euromaidan.

This book shows that the far-right organizations had significant but minority representation among the Maidan leadership and protesters. However, the analysis also shows that the far-right organizations and football ultras played a key role during violent attacks. They include violent attempts to seize the presidential administration on December 1, 2013 and the parliament of Ukraine in January and on February 18, 2014, and involvement in clashes with the Berkut police during its dispersal of protesters on November 30, 2013.

The results of the analysis show that the Right Sector and Svoboda had crucial roles in the violent overthrow of the Viktor Yanukovych government, in particular, in the Maidan massacre of the protesters and the police on February 18–20, 2014. Such mass killings aimed at overthrowing the government are consistent with their illiberal ideology of a national revolution. The far-right organizations and members were involved in the Maidan massacre of the protesters and the police and covering up of the Maidan snipers.

These findings indicate that as a result of the far-right involvement in the violent overthrow of the Yanukovych government by means of the Maidan massacre the far-right organizations achieved their strongest influence in Ukraine since its independence in 1991. Because of their involvement in Euromaidan violence, in particular, the Maidan massacre that led to the overthrow of Yanukovych government and because of their reliance on violence, the far right radically increased their power and influence in Ukraine and attained the ability to overthrow the Ukrainian governments, including the newly elected president Volodymyr Zelensky.

This study shows that the far-right organizations and their armed units had significant but not dominant role in the civil war in Donbas. Because of their involvement in the war in Donbas and the Maidan and Odesa massacres, creation of their own armed formations, and reliance on use of force and threat of force, the influence of the far-right organizations in Ukraine since 2014 became one of the greatest among countries in Europe and the world.

In spite of their relatively small numbers and relatively weak electoral support, the far-right-led armed formations and radical nationalist and neo-Nazi organizations have achieved significant political influence and became integrated in the government, the police, military, and security services during the war in Donbas. This study implies that radical nationalist and neo-Nazi organizations and their armed units had attained power to overthrow by force the government of the one of the largest European countries because of their involvement in the war in Donbas and the Odesa massacre, their possession of arms and war experience, and their reliance on violence.

This study also suggests that the narratives of Euromaidan and the Maidan massacre by the governments and the media in Ukraine, the West, and Russia, as well as Wikipedia have been inaccurate to various extent. The governments and the media in Ukraine and the West and even many researchers examining the Ukrainian far right either ignored, minimized, or denied the far-right involvement in the violent overthrow of the government, the Maidan massacre of the protesters and the police and other significant cases of violence during Euromaidan. Similarly, a small group of editors systematically whitewashed the far right in Ukraine, the far-right involvement in the Maidan and Odesa massacres, as well as Nazi collaboration of the OUN and the UPA and their involvement of the Nazi genocide and in the ethnic cleansing.

Contrary to the narrative by Russian and separatist politicians and the media, and the Yanukovych government, Euromaidan was not a “fascist coup” and the Maidan government was not a “fascist junta” because the neo-Nazi organizations did not have dominant roles among the Ukrainian far right. The far-right organizations were involved in the violent overthrow of the Yanukovych government and in the Maidan governments in the alliance with oligarchic Maidan parties and leaders.

This study also suggests that the predominant narratives propagated by the governments and the mainstream media in Ukraine, the West, Russia, and separatist-controlled Donbas and by Wikipedia concerning the role of the far right in the war in Donbas, the Odesa massacre, and the Russia-Ukraine war have been inaccurate to a various extent or fake. The governments and the media in Ukraine and the West and even many researchers of the Ukrainian far right either ignored or denied the power of the far right in Ukraine and their involvement in the start of the war in Donbas and the Odesa massacre. Contrary to the narratives by Russian and separatist politicians and the media, the neo-Nazi organizations did not have decisive influence in the Ukrainian forces in the war in Donbas.

This study shows that contrary to the Ukrainian and Western governments and media claims, the far right had outsize power relative to their numbers. The far-right organizations and volunteer battalions and paramilitary units organized and led by them had a significant role in the start and escalation of war in Donbas. The Right Sector, the Social-National Assembly, Patriot of Ukraine, and groups of far-right football ultras were involved in the Odesa massacre of separatist protesters on May 2, 2014.

However, contrary to the Russian government and media claims used to justify the illegal Russian invasion in February 2022, the Ukrainian government and the military are not Nazi or neo-Nazi. There were no neo-Nazis among the Ukrainian government leaders and ministers and among parliament members. The Ukrainian governments since the Maidan and Zelenskyy are not neo-Nazi. Neo-Nazis constituted about 1% of the Ukrainian forces during the civil war in Donbas in 2014–2022 and at the start of the Russian invasion in 2022.

While Russia justified its invasion of Ukraine by “denazification,” this study shows that the power of the far right, in particular, neo-Nazi Azov movement, significantly increased in Ukraine during the Russia-Ukraine war. The far-right-led units increased their numbers and membership. They, their symbols, and the “Glory to Ukraine. Glory to Heroes” greeting became mainstream. Zelenskyy praised the far-right-led units. The far right have the power to overthrow him.

This book shows whether and how the Russian, Ukrainian, and Western governments, the Maidan forces, the Ukrainian far right, and

Crimean and Donbas separatists contributed to Euromaidan, the Maidan massacre, the Crimea and Donbas conflicts, and the Russia-Ukraine war. The claims of supporting Ukraine by the Western governments, the media, and various info-warriors in fact meant supporting the proxy war in Ukraine, the civil war in Donbas, and the violent illegal overthrow of the Ukrainian government during Euromaidan. Along with the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Russian backing of separatists in Donbas in 2014, and the illegal annexation of Crimea, all these had devastating consequences to Ukraine.

Peaceful resolution of these conflicts by the Russian, Ukrainian, and Western governments could have stopped the conflict escalation ladder and prevented or minimized such consequences to Ukraine. However, this does not imply that they all are equally responsible for the Russia-Ukraine war and the preceding conflicts which contributed to it.

After the election and the inauguration of Donald Trump as a US president in 2025, a real possibility to end the war in Ukraine via a peace deal has appeared. However, there are major differences in positions of Russia, the United States, and Ukraine. Ukraine faces a possibility of a “bad” peace deal on the terms of a partial defeat or continuing the unwinnable war with prospect of total defeat and capitulation. “Bad” peace was better for Ukraine than the “good” war since the start of the Russian invasion and even before. The outcome of this most important war since World War Two will shape the future not only of Ukraine and Russia but also the world order.

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