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RHETORIC OF THE “COLLECTIVE WEST” AND GLOBAL POLITICAL VIOLENCE**

Abstract

This paper aims to critically examine the nature of political rhetoric formed in the era of post-democracy, that is, to point out the importance and role that political discourse has in the formation of political violence, understood primarily as a global postmodern phenomenon that in the broadest sense refers to the violent creation and imposition of certain policies, forms of behavior and cultural patterns. Relying on an analytical/interpretive approach, and in light of the war in Ukraine and the current geopolitical turmoil on the international political scene, this paper points not only to the correlation between political communication of a post-democratic society and political violence but also to the intensification and relativization of political violence within the framework of the neoliberal hegemonic concept of rule and the general tendency towards the de-sovereignization of states. Based on a qualitative interpretation of the Western political narrative inherent in the era of global escalation of violence, the main conclusion of the paper is the need to preserve a sovereign, i.e., politically responsible and organized state as a key factor of individual and collective security, as well as understanding the hybrid character of contemporary political conflicts.

Keywords: political discourse, post-democracy, Ukrainian conflict, political violence, hybrid war, de-sovereignization

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INTRODUCTION

Considering the Russian-Ukrainian conflict not only as a conflict that revitalized the Cold War era but also as a conflict that opened the door to World War III (D'Anieri 2023), and in light of John Mearsheimer's theory of offensive realism, which characterized the Russian invasion of Ukraine as "the fault of the West" (Mearsheimer 2014, 2022), this paper points to various aspects of escalation and the hybrid character of political violence on a global scale. In this sense, the first part of the paper is dedicated to the theoretical definition of political rhetoric, which is analyzed through thematic analysis of the content of certain discursive forms of the dominant pro-Western political discourse, which on a macro level depicts and shapes the anti-Russian narrative in the light of global hybrid warfare, and not only generates various forms of political violence but also leads to its escalation on a global level. The second part of the paper focuses more on the definition of political violence itself and some of its manifestations in the context of global geopolitical turmoil.

Namely, based on a functional approach to the analysis of political discourse placed by the leading media, as well as a qualitative description and interpretation of the content of certain discourse samples, i.e., actualized linguistic data related to social and political contexts and aligned with the goals of the spokesmen of neoliberal globalism, we can conclude today that the rhetoric of the West based on the postulate "Russia must be defeated" is a product of the post-democratic era, i.e., the era of post-truth in which corporate elites and centers of power unscrupulously fight for their interests, resorting to absolute monopolization of truth, political engineering, media manipulation and propaganda, repression of freedom, and violence in general.¹ By constructing a narrative according to which "Ukraine is a victim of criminal Russian aggression," we believe that the political rhetoric of the "collective West" has relied on the "struggle to preserve Ukrainian sovereignty" with which the United States of

¹ During the second half of the 20th and early 21st centuries, under the influence of neoliberalism, transnational corporate networking and the strengthening of supranational international organizations such as NATO, the IMF, and the EU, the modern nation-state weakened, i.e., the process of de-sovereignization as a natural consequence of economic globalization, while the concept of violence became more complex, so that every type of political conflict took on a hybrid character, and its conventional character was blurred by an informational one, in which the main strategic tools were social media and propaganda. More will be said about political violence and some of its manifestations in the final part of the paper.

America (USA), supported by members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), is actually defending its own hegemonic interests, which is confirmed by numerous statements such as Jens Stoltenberg's, according to which "Putin must not win" because that would not only be a defeat for Ukraine, "but would also be dangerous for our security and the security of the entire world" (Tanjug 2022).²

In fact, this rhetoric is a reflection of the aggressive expansionist policy of the USA, which Zbigniew Brzezinski clearly defined in his "Grand Chessboard," stating that "[...] Eurasia has always been the center of world power" and that the USA, as a world hegemon, has "[...] an imperative to prevent the emergence of a challenger in the Eurasian region, a challenger capable of dominating it, and thus at the same time capable of posing a threat to America" (Brzezinski 1997, xi, xiv).³ In this context, Russia and China, as strategic bearers of the "Eurasian Partnership" (President of Russia 2024) and signatories of the "partnership agreement without restrictions" (Reuters 2022), are explicitly designated in NATO's new strategic concept as a threat, i.e., enemies of the "international legal order" (NATO 2022b). Therefore, the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and Russia's subsequent special military operation in Ukraine in 2022 shaped the political discourse about Russia as a "state sponsor of terrorism" (European Parliament [EP] 2022) and Putin as the "new Hitler" (Herman 2022).

In this way, the global public sphere is polarized affectively and ideologically and divided between promoters of Western militarism and NATO's aggressive policy, who in the name of "defending democracy and sovereignty" are fueling all-out war, and those who choose to pursue sovereignist policies and cooperate with the Russian Federation. Based on the premise of "divide and rule," the Western propaganda narrative of

² The concept of the West as a social phenomenon of Western European civilization based on the ideology of liberalism, geopolitical thalassocracy, Atlanticism, offensive realism, trade, and competitiveness dates back to World War II, while the concept of the "collective West" has been shaped in recent years by the official rhetoric of the Kremlin to designate in public, scientific and political discourse the generally pro-Western policies of actors such as the USA, NATO, Germany, Norway, Estonia. Otherwise, the concept itself implies a larger, hostile collective entity and was originally promoted by marginal nationalist Russian media in 2015, and over time, it became represented in the social sphere and in the statements of Russian officials such as Maria Zakharova (*Мария Захарова*) and Vladimir Putin (*Владимир Путин*) (Chimiris 2022).

³ Author's translation.

“Russian aggression” has positioned Ukraine as a burning issue, or “the biggest time bomb in NATO Europe” (Kršljanin 2023). Under the slogan “help Ukraine win, no matter the cost” (The New York Times 2023a), the US and its NATO allies continuously support Ukraine militarily and economically and, ignoring the massive suffering of Ukrainians, are waging the “World’s First Hybrid War” (Kršljanin 2023) in the global media space in which, according to Ursula von der Leyen, “Russian President Vladimir Putin is planning a war of conquest against Europe” (Krzysztosek 2024), and, as Lloyd Austin believes, “Putin will not stop” (Tisdall 2024), but, as Biden points out, “if Russia wins in Ukraine, Putin will move on to Poland and other countries” (CNN 2024).

In the spirit of this rhetoric, the North Atlantic Council (NAC) also characterized Russia’s invasion of Ukraine as “a grave violation of international law, including the UN Charter,” adding that it “represents an act of aggression against an independent, peace-loving country [...]” and that Allies have an obligation to “support the people of Ukraine and its legitimate, democratically elected President Volodymyr Zelensky” (*Володі́мир Олекса́ндрович Зеле́нський*) (NATO 2022a) because “a sovereign, independent and stable Ukraine, firmly committed to democracy and the rule of law, is essential to Euro-Atlantic security” (NATO 2024b). At the same time, this political discourse was promoted by the Ukrainian political leadership and President Zelensky, and Ukraine was presented in the public sphere as a bulwark of defense of transatlantic values and unity, and the Russian-Ukrainian war became the embodiment of the conflict between the modern, liberal, democratic world and its backward and authoritarian opponents.

WESTERN POLITICAL RHETORIC AND THE HYBRID CHARACTER OF THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN CONFLICT

Understanding rhetoric as a technique of persuasion that has the power to convince someone to do something against their own interests (Eco 2010, 46), it is impossible not to understand the importance of public or political discourse as a constitutive element of contemporary political communication. Since discourse is primarily a social phenomenon, the very concept of discourse implies fluidity and complexity that prevents its precise definition. In this sense, although discourse can be interpreted in different ways, both in everyday speech and from the perspective

of various scientific disciplines, discourse as a linguistic achievement (whether in written or oral form) inevitably exists in interaction with society, i.e., as a complete communication event in a given social context (Wodak 1997, 5), i.e., a phenomenon that both shapes society and is socially shaped, because it manifests itself not only as a social practice of constituting or signifying the world in meaning but also as a practice of representing the world created and conditioned by a given social structure in every sense (Fairclough [1992] 2006, 63–64).

In today's era, which can be defined as the era of post-democracy⁴ and hybrid war,⁵ In accordance with constructivism, the struggle for democracy actually leads to its collapse because every truth is relativized and transformed into a post-truth (Džalto 2024), while, as we consider,

⁴ The term post-democracy was coined by British political scientist and sociologist Colin Crouch, pointing to the paradoxical fact that although democracy, i.e., the implementation of free elections through which the electorate grants legitimacy to certain political actors, reached a historical peak at the beginning of the 21st century, the democratic systems of developed societies in Western Europe have experienced a decline, since political power, instead of the broader civil society, is actually exercised by a narrow, elitist circle of "business lobbies." In such circumstances, "liberal democracy" is nothing but "elitist democracy," and in formal democratic societies, in fact, only the "illusion of democracy" is maintained, i.e., the functions of democratic institutions have been replaced by "corporate social responsibility" (Crouch 2004).

⁵ Although there is no generally accepted definition, the concept of hybrid war as a broader concept than direct, armed conflict between states, has its roots in ancient times and implies warfare in all spheres of social activity, i.e., the synergy of unarmed and armed forms of conflict, and is also referred to as total war, information war, unlimited war, nonlinear war, etc. Originally to denote modern conflicts since the 1980s, the concept of "fourth generation war" was used in the United States, and the term hybrid war itself is of more recent date and is associated with the beginning of the 21st century, when William Nemeth introduced it in 2002 in his master's thesis on the Chechen war, as well as authors such as Frank Hoffman and James Mattis, who define the threats to which the US and NATO forces fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq are exposed as hybrid. Since 2010, the term has also become established in official documents of the USA and Great Britain, where the main feature of modern conflicts is hybridity, which implies the joint action of conventional and irregular, terrorist and criminal resources (Cvetković, Kovač, i Joksimović 2019, 325). Finally, hybrid war is a complex concept that implies the operation of combined forms of conflict - diplomatic-political, military, terrorist-criminal, intelligence-information, information, psychological-ideological, economic-financial and legal, as well as the synchronized and long-term application of comprehensive aggression against the vital values and interests of the enemy, projected through any form of power (political, socio-economic, technical, intelligence-subversive, media, terrorist, etc.) in order to achieve certain strategic goals for which the conflict exists.

democratic institutions exist only nominally and instead of the common good, the corporate interests of the ruling elite dominate, on whose orders strategic narratives are carefully developed by PR agencies or *think tanks* and placed in order to manipulate the public. In other words, political communication is colored by seemingly neutral discursive strategies, but they are primarily ideological and aimed at shaping social representations in accordance with certain interests (Pešić 2024, 8–9). Starting from this approach, the rhetoric of power centers and the political West must inevitably be viewed through the prism of strategic communication in which linguistic choices are adapted and shaped in accordance with the function they have in the broader political context and the interests of the principals as staged narratives or promoters of certain political-ideological matrices.⁶

Namely, we must not lose sight of the fact that the conflict in Ukraine broke out at a time when Russia had already positioned itself as a powerful military-political power (Masters 2015) and China as an economic power (Wayne 2013). It is in this sense that the actions of the Russian Federation since 2014 towards Ukraine have been characterized in the public discourse of the United States and Europe as hybrid warfare or a special military operation that involves military, but also political, socio-economic and information warfare. At the same time, a controversy about hybrid war developed in Russia itself, and in 2013, Valery Gerasimov (*Валерий Васильевич Герасимов*) promoted the “Russian model of hybrid war” or the “Gerasimov doctrine” for Western analysts, defining the nature of modern war as total and comprehensive, whereby, in order to achieve strategic interests, the rules of classical military conflict are exceeded, and the emphasis is placed on unconventional and subversive military means, and a guerrilla approach to warfare is adopted, which

⁶ According to Mitić (2024, 30; 100–101), strategic communication implies the concept of organized persuasion, i.e., “a system of coordinated communication activities implemented by specific organizations with the aim of advancing their missions, based on allowing understanding of target groups, finding channels and methods of communicating with the public, developing and implementing ideas and attitudes that, through these channels and methods, promote a certain type of behavior or opinion.” Therefore, “To be persuasive, strategic communication requires clearly defined and coordinated operational and tactical goals, messages and activities [...] as well as adequate structure and resources, especially management, leadership and coordination.” In this sense, strategic communication is more a process than a set of capabilities and, therefore, requires greater investment in the organizational structure itself than in communication resources. Author’s translation.

involves the activation of various actors and means (state and non-state, i.e. media, corporations, non-governmental and terrorist organizations, cyberattacks, security services, special military and proxy forces, etc.) (Gerasimov 2014). Analyzing the Arab Spring and NATO interventions in Libya, Gerasimov pointed out the fact that hybridity is actually the main feature of the Western approach to warfare and US strategic action since the Gulf War (Gerasimov 2014). To respond to the defensive digital struggle of the adversary, the political West has pumped hundreds of millions of dollars into various *fact-checking* organizations and projects aimed at combating "disinformation," that is, checking the veracity, or rather the suitability, of certain information. In fact, at the very beginning of the conflict, news of an intercepted telephone conversation between Victoria Nuland and the US ambassador to Kyiv, Geoffrey Pyatt, was leaked to the public via YouTube and Twitter (BBC 2014). In the conversation, Nuland, as the US Deputy Secretary of State for European Affairs, suggests which of the Ukrainian opposition leaders is most suitable to enter the Ukrainian government and, speaking about the role of the UN and the EU, makes a disparaging remark about the EU, revealing in that way, as we believe, the extremely arrogant and undiplomatic attitude of the US when it comes to conducting foreign policy and generally interfering in the internal affairs of other countries (Gearan 2014).⁷ Although the authenticity of the recording was initially questioned, Nuland soon apologized for the "gaffe."

It is clear that the conflict in Ukraine was marked by the use of social networks and cyberattacks to achieve political goals. Namely, social networks were actively used to gain mass sympathy and support from other countries, form nationalist movements, call for protests, and spread, but also suppress the propaganda activities of the enemy by blocking certain media.⁸ However, according to many Western theorists (Maigre 2015, 2; Thomas 2015, 453; Reisinger and Golt 2014, 3; Schnauffer 2017), the war between Russia and Ukraine is a blatant example of a hybrid war because information or nonlinear warfare was put in the foreground since,

⁷ Incidentally, Nuland herself actively participated in anti-government demonstrations in Ukraine, meeting not only with Ukrainian opposition leaders but also handing out cookies to protesters on Maidan (Parry 2015) while the arming of Ukraine was taking place during Trump's first administration, i.e., long before the outbreak of the conflict itself (Martinez, Finnegan, and McLaughlin 2019).

⁸ In 2022, the YouTube platform blocked the work of Russian state media such as RT (Russia Today) and Sputnik International (Voice of Russia).

as it is emphasized, Russia does not have enough military resources to win a conventional war against NATO and is forced to turn to civilian means to achieve its political and military goals. Also, since Russia has not fully matured to “overcome conventional military destruction,” it is the West that is “forced, due to the spread of Russian aggressive actions, to turn to unconventional means of warfare and respond in kind,” so in addition to a complete financial blockade and economic war against Russia through draconian sanctions or asset seizures, absolute isolation of Russia has been implemented internationally, which also included a cultural and sports boycott (Wigglesworth, Smith, and Jones 2022).⁹

In line with this political strategy and the spread of the narrative of global condemnation of Russia, its “dependence on Western markets and technology” was also highlighted, while Russia’s “aggressive” foreign policy and “nuclear threats 10 to 12 times a week”, i.e. Putin’s desire to “revitalize Russia’s imperialist ambitions” were disguised by a so-called protective stance towards Russian ethnic minorities and the pro-Russian population and presented in the context of an “attack on NATO itself” (Euronews Srbija 2024). Furthermore, this discourse highlights how the Russian political establishment, by promoting a conservative and nationalist ideology based on references to the glorious Russian past, sometimes “fictional and certainly selectively interpreted,” has actually built a cult of Putinism in which the president, “nurturing ideas of his own grandiosity,” compares himself to figures like Peter the Great, who “did not conquer, but rather returned territories inhabited by Slavs” (Rejnsford 2022). In other words, it has launched the image of Russia as an anti-modern and radically conservative state based on Putin’s dictatorial regime, authoritarianism, and desire to build a “Greater Russia” with an absolute trampling of democracy and human rights (Mearsheimer 2022).

⁹ In an attempt to crush the Russian economy and completely isolate Russia on the world stage in order to awaken the revolt of the Russian people against Putin, the EU, in addition to the initial sanctions on individuals and certain Russian companies, as well as the ban on Western financial institutions from cooperating with them in any way and the exclusion of Russian banks from SWIFT, also introduced an embargo on the export of oil and gasoline, and then even initiated a seizure of immobilized Russian assets. Also, FIFA banned Russia from international football competitions; the International Ice Hockey Federation suspended the Russian and Belarusian teams; Russian athletes were banned from participating in the Beijing Winter Paralympic Games; Formula One canceled the Russian Grand Prix; Eurovision canceled the Russian Eurovision Song Contest; the International Cat Federation sanctioned the Russian cat competition; Many prominent Russian artists were excluded from public life (Financial Times 2022).

On the other hand, since the end of World War II, Britain has led 83 military operations in as many as 47 countries (Curtis 2023), while from 1798 to 2023, the US has conducted over 400 foreign military operations (Congressional Research Service [CRS] 2023), it is almost impossible to find information in the Western media about NATO members as imperialist or criminal powers (Schiffer 2022). In contrast, the representation of Russia as an enemy has been progressively developed in Western political discourse through the heating up of sentiments about the "Red Scare" and the urgent need for the state to defend itself against the undermining influence of the "communist plague."¹⁰ After the outbreak of the conflict in Ukraine, Western Europe easily and complacently accepted the revival of the rhetoric of the Cold War period. In this sense, the promotion of the discourse about Putin as a villain and the embodiment of the already hated post-Soviet Russia was actually a pragmatic political tool to distract public attention from the West's inherently aggressive policy, while Russia's concerns about NATO expansion were uniformly presented as "unreasonable and inexplicable paranoia" (McLaughlin 2020, 175–176).

In this way, the official narrative of the political West completely ignored the fact that NATO's expansionist policy towards Eastern Europe and the militarization of the region threatened Russia's strategic interests and thus potentially provoked the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, which not only omitted the broader picture of the genesis of the conflict but also drastically narrowed the room for maneuver for finding its diplomatic and compromise solutions. This is clearly evident from the analysis of the content of news broadcast by the political West, which revives Cold War rhetoric and ties Russia to rigid communist ideology, as well as the uniformly deployed discourse about Putin as a primarily politically responsible actor for the escalation of the conflict, i.e., an "aggressor and criminal," a "monster and a madman ready to destroy the entire world," as well as the complete demonization of Russia (Keeble 2000, 65; McLaughlin 2020, 174–176, 181).

¹⁰ The "Red Scare" is associated with the period from 1919 to 1920, when Anglo-Saxons, as members of the ruling, white class, in the context of racist nativism and ideological racism, defined themselves as superior to newcomers, i.e., Bolsheviks and representatives of the working, lower class; and the period of the Cold War and tense relations between capitalist America and the socialist Soviet Union, when, during the time of Senator Joseph McCarthy, US domestic policy was focused on the persecution of leftists (intellectuals, actors, civil servants, etc.) and the public interrogation of potential communists as spies (Foster 2000).

At the same time, in the context of hybrid warfare, Russia was also accused of interfering in the 2016 US presidential election, but it turned out that the political leadership, supported by the intelligence service, exaggerated these accusations, which were dismissed after two years, and which were probably also placed in order to divert public attention from NATO's militarization of Europe (Boyd-Barrett 2020, 83–98).¹¹ In addition, a series of political-ideological projects launched in the form of fighting the subversive influence of the Russian “internet troll factory” contributed to creating a sense of general vulnerability of any liberal-democratic candidate – from Emmanuel Macron to Joseph Biden, and it became obvious that these “defensive means” or disinformation have a clear ideological, national or geopolitical signature, which became clear when Washington think tank known as the “Alliance for Securing Democracy” as part of its “Hamilton 68” operation aimed at exposing so-called fake Russian accounts on Twitter led mainly to accounts of American conservatives (Mitić 2024, 99). Therefore, as they conclude (Cvetković, Kovač i Joksimović 2019, 328), it is clear that the introduction of the new term “hybrid war” had a primarily political and strategic dimension, as it not only enabled the political West to exert a stronger influence on public opinion and achieve easier public compliance with the decisions of state bodies but also enabled NATO security structures to act outside the classical concept of warfare in the direction of uniting and strengthening cooperation between states against a common enemy, with the aim of a better and more comprehensive organization.

THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN CONFLICT IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBAL GEOPOLITICAL TURMOIL AND LEGITIMIZATION OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE

The post-Cold War period brought the collapse of the bipolar structure of the international order and the formation of a world system based on the unilateral action of the USA. Guided by the principle that “the end justifies the means” and “the promotion of democratic peace as a paradigm of international security,” the USA continuously implements

¹¹ US intelligence agencies have accused Putin of launching Operation Lakhta (Project Lakhta), in which a “troll factory” from St. Petersburg spread disinformation on social media “with the aim of spreading discord, causing destabilization and socio-political polarization of American society, and undermining faith in democratic institutions.” (Hanlon 2024).

the militarization of the world and the "geopolitics of destruction" that undermine the interests of other states (Stošić 2023, 26). In light of such a policy, the US continued its strategy of encircling Russia after the Cold War, and through the process of NATO expansion, America found itself in the "Russian neighborhood" because, despite the promise to Mikhail Gorbachev (*Михаил Сергеевич Горбачёв*) that NATO would not expand eastward after the collapse of the USSR in 1991, i.e. into the "intermaritime corridor" area if a unified Germany remained in the Atlantic Alliance, NATO expanded from Estonia in the north to Bulgaria in the south, and by placing Eastern Europe and the western coast of the Black Sea under its influence, it made it impossible for Russia to control the Black Sea coast, pushing it inland. In this way, the US and NATO actually implemented a strategy of "tight anaconda embrace" based on "dominance of the peripheral parts of the Asian ring and tightening the hoop around Eurasia" (Spykman 1942, 17).¹² Since 2007, there has been a shift in the economic and financial centers of global power from the Euro-Atlantic area to the East Pacific region, but also a shift in Russia's foreign policy, which is beginning to condemn the aggressive unilateral policy of the United States.

At the same time, the US, in its national security doctrine (NATO 2022b), identifies Russia as its greatest enemy, and since 2011 a Russophobic narrative has been intensively promoted, which was certainly encouraged by the Kremlin's rapprochement with Iran and the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria, as well as the repositioning of Russia as a regional power in 2013 when Germany turned economically to Russia, which resulted in a change in the geopolitical perspective of Europe established during the Cold War (Stošić 2023, 27).¹³ Relying on geopolitical teachings

¹² Compared to the initial 12 members it included at the time of its founding in 1949, NATO gained 13 more members in the period 1999–2017. Despite Moscow's insistence on NATO's reconfiguration in 1997, i.e., "withdrawal of NATO infrastructure from the Baltic states (Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and the Balkans)," the only document that testifies to the West's commitment not to expand was signed in 1997, i.e., before the Alliance's expansion in 1999, which caused Russia to lose its "superpower status in Europe" after the end of the Cold War. Therefore, any subsequent expansion of the Alliance represented for Putin "crossing a red line," i.e. a "direct security threat to Russia" (Stošić 2023, 26).

¹³ "By developing its energy network, Russia has become a major supplier of oil and gas to Europe and the major economic and demographic centers of East Asia (China, India, Japan, South Korea), which has led to the repositioning of former Western allies on the international stage" (Stošić 2022, 85).

such as that of Alfred Thayer Mahan, who believed that since they had a “maritime destiny” and thus the possibility of ruling the world, “the United States must, in coalition with other powerful maritime states, prevent Russia as a powerful continental power on the Eurasian landmass from breaking out onto the warm seas” (Mahan 1890, 6–8, 25–89), or that of Halford Mackinder, who in his thalassocratic theory of the Heartland defines Russia as the “Pivot Area” or Heartland, i.e., “a monolithic entity framed by the coastal territory of Eurasia called the Inner or marginal Crescent,” and claims that “who controls the World Island, i.e., Asia, Europe and Africa as a vital space and its center or heart, which is in contrast to the periphery, i.e., polycentric expansion in the form of a mosaic, establishes world domination”;¹⁴ the USA tried to keep Germany under its control through “a cordon sanitaire in the middle sea, i.e., military-political and economic dependence and thus form a transatlantic American bridgehead towards Eurasia via Europe, maintaining Russia’s geopolitical pretensions at the regional level” (Stošić 2023, 28). Considering that Ukraine’s inclusion in NATO would make this area “a zone of Atlantic influence in the entire Caspian region, and thus an undoubted threat to Russian interests” (Dugin 2004, 203), the emergence of conflict in Ukraine became inevitable. At the same time, “the multiple undermining of Ukraine (cultural-civilizational, socio-political and military-security), as the narrowest area of Russian strategic interests outside the borders of Russia, served not only as a training ground for the confrontation of different interests between the US and Russia but also as a neuralgic point for the collapse of Europe” (Stošić 2023, 28–29).

From a cultural and civilizational perspective, Ukraine was part of Russia not only during the Middle Ages or Kyivan Rus’ but also during the time of Tsarist Russia, “i.e., from 1654, as well as during the USSR, with the exception of a short period of Ukrainian independence in 1917. Although modern Ukraine was one of the largest European states in terms of size and population, after the collapse of the USSR and the acquisition of independence in 1991, its national identity was

¹⁴ “The inner Crescent is made up of the countries along the maritime perimeter of Eurasia, from the Baltic to the Pacific, while the outer Crescent is made up of Anglo-Saxon countries such as the USA, Canada and Great Britain, and whoever dominates Eastern Europe will control the Heartland, and whoever controls the Heartland will control the World Island, just as whoever controls the World Island will, in effect, rule the world” (Mackinder 2009, 82–83, 155; Mackinder 1904, 421–437).

divided between the southeastern and northwestern parts, i.e., the more industrially developed and pro-Russian oriented part and the poorer, pro-Western-Euro-Atlantic oriented part of Ukraine" (Stošić 2023, 29). Thus, since 1992, Ukrainian politics has oscillated between alliances with Russia, the USA, and the EU, which makes the geopolitical background of the genesis of the war in Ukraine more than clear. Violent protests in Kiev, i.e., Euromaidan or the Maidan Revolutions of 2013, culminated on February 22, 2014, with an organized coup d'état and the violent overthrow of President Yanukovich (*Віктор Федорович Янукович*). With the aim of "demilitarizing" and "denazifying" Ukraine, i.e., to prevent further killings and oppression of the pro-Russian population, Russian authorities ordered a "special military operation" on February 24, 2022, attacking major Ukrainian cities such as Kyiv, Kharkiv, Odessa, Mariupol, and Kramatorsk (Stošić 2023, 32).

Therefore, for Russia, the Ukrainian issue is a matter of national and strategic security because Ukraine is a critical security area from which the conflict must not be allowed to spill over into the European part of Russian territory because, in an international sense, this could potentially ignite World War III. Therefore, the Russian invasion of Ukraine is not only a guarantor of preserving vital geopolitical interests but also of Russia's international credibility (Stošić 2023, 33). If Russia were to allow NATO expansion by surrendering Ukraine, it would show that it is not worthy of being a leader in the process of reshaping the global world order towards a multipolar order in which a multitude of "global swing states" are strategically interconnected, from Argentina and Brazil to India, South Africa, and Saudi Arabia,¹⁵ and regional expansionism and territorial consolidation are facilitated. On the other hand, European nations and the EU, as well as states like Australia, South Korea, and the US, whether through NATO or other alliances like the QUAD (the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue between the US, Australia, India, and Japan), will have to balance their power in the context of growing competing economic and political interests. In this sense, it is clear that the Ukrainian War is more than a defense of national Russian interests; it is actually "an arena destined to show whether the defensive of the West under American leadership is an unstoppable

¹⁵ With over 40 countries from Africa, the Middle East, South America, Eastern Europe, as well as Cuba and Iran united against the common enemy of the USA, BRICS, as an expanded bloc, has the potential to reconfigure the axis of the geopolitical international scene.

process or whether the collective West will remain united in the face of the Russian offensive and capable of maintaining its position as a unilateral hegemon, capable of preventing Russia's integration into the Eurasian space" (Stošić 2023, 33).

Finally, the political agenda and rhetoric of the "collective West" have not only radically influenced Russia's position in international relations and the consequent redefinition of the concept of strategic stability of the US, the EU, and NATO, as well as global politics in general, but have also influenced the escalation of political violence on a global scale. Namely, it should be borne in mind that the phenomenon of political violence is inextricably linked to every society and state and is especially evident in times of turbulent geopolitical upheavals and crises, i.e., a time of emerging multipolarity in which the international system is marked by intrinsic uncertainty and distrust. At the same time, understanding that power, force, and violence do not have a clearly demarcated meaning (Simeunović 1989, 5) and that "power as supremacy fundamentally contains violence" (Petrović 1983, 103), today it is more than ever, especially considering the hybrid character of contemporary conflicts, very difficult to identify the scale of political violence.¹⁶

Thus, in our opinion, in the context of the doctrine of just war and in light of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the political West, "in the name of peace and freedom," "defense of democracy," and "the rules-based international order," through NATO, the EU and its allies, has chosen the continuous pumping of weapons into Ukraine, the massive militarization of Europe, the spread of a Russophobic narrative and various forms of silencing and sanctioning its dissidents around the world as various instruments of achieving its dominance, indirectly becoming the greatest instigator of political violence on a global scale.

As we believe, through the consensually accepted Western narrative on "Russian aggression," the Ukrainian nation is being sacrificed internationally, and the member states of the military-political alliance led by America are being used as its pawns in the fight against Russia. In this regard, various forms of political violence were practically legitimized, like the threat of force, intimidation, and coercion, sanctioning and various forms of pressure, psychophysical abuse, political murder and assassination, violent protests, rebellions, unrest and riots, terrorism, repression, uprising, civil war, and military aggression (Gaćinović 2008, 160–161).

¹⁶ According to data from the World Health Organization, political violence is the leading cause of death for people aged 15 to 44 (Stojadinović 2015, 93).

In other words, the fear of "Russian aggression" has been used as a legitimate call to prepare for global warfare and develop various war scenarios of a hypothetical conflict between various states and Russia, which introduce various security measures. For example, in order to strengthen Taiwan's defense against external aggression, Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-Wen has introduced significant changes, such as updating the 2023 Civil Defense Manual, which instructs civilians on how to distinguish Chinese from Taiwanese soldiers based on their uniforms (Reuters 2023), as well as extending the mandatory military service from four to 12 months starting in 2024 (Dodds 2023, 1527), while Moldova, through NATO assistance, received a package of tailored measures and, in order to strengthen national security, was provided with support for training and logistics, human resource management, cyber defense, and strategic communication (NATO 2024a). Similar situations have also befallen countries such as Germany, Finland, Norway, and Sweden, where, due to the intensification of security tensions, the preparation of the civilian population for war has begun by distributing brochures and guides for crisis situations, organizing preparedness courses, and survival training.¹⁷ This type of political pressure in many countries can certainly be characterized as a certain form of indirect psychological violence against citizens.

In terms of global militarization, while the military response from Western allies has not met all of Ukraine's weapons demands, it has certainly been impressive. Since the beginning of the conflict, NATO members and US partners have steadily increased arms deliveries to Ukraine, supplying increasingly sophisticated weapon platforms. In this sense, initial deliveries of military aid ranged from the basic – rifles, ammunition, helmets, vests, artillery shells and grenade launchers – to the sophisticated – Stinger anti-aircraft missiles, American Javelin anti-tank missiles, Swedish AT-4 rocket launchers, British new-generation anti-tank weapons and armed drones, followed by tanks and fighter jets (Gheciu and von Hlatky 2024, 278), and in the process of the transition of power between the two American presidents, the outgoing Biden administration also allowed Ukraine to use long-range missiles on

¹⁷ For example, in Germany, due to the small number of bunkers, a national civil protection plan was launched, which envisages the construction of bunkers and shelters, as well as the development of mobile applications with their geolocations, while in Sweden and Finland, citizens were suggested to stock up on water, food, battery-powered radios, etc. (The Guardian 2024).

Russian territory (The New York Times 2023b), which, as we consider, instead of ending the conflict led to an escalation. In this sense, it is also logical that the US maintained its lead with over 70 billion euros in total aid to Ukraine, half of which went to military aid alone (Bomprezzi *et al.* 2023). In this context, in the period from 2009 to 2023, total global military spending increased by 6.8% (Tian *et al.* 2024, 1).

In this regard, among 11 out of 31 members in NATO that since the end of the Cold War till 2023 met or exceeded the 2% GDP target (Pieper 2024), Germany made the first leap forward, as it had created extra-budgetary €100 billion fund in 2022 (Tian *et al.* 2024, 9). In addition, Germany also created its plan to achieve energy security, including restarting coal-fired power plants and energy diversification (Schmitz 2022). In this sense, the once strongest economy in Europe has suffered a meltdown for the sake of American interests, tacitly passing over the cover-up of the investigation into the Nord Stream mine, which is, in our view, one of the clearest examples of political violence because in this way not only is a terrorist act legitimized, but the political sovereignty of a state is also delegitimized.¹⁸

Another example of sublimated political pressure is certainly the recent case of the annulment of the results of the first round of the presidential elections in Romania, when, despite the convincing victory of candidate Călin Georgescu, a critic of NATO and an advocate of stopping support for the war in Ukraine, over the pro-European Marcel Ciolacu, local authorities accused Russia of using the social network TikTok to influence the elections, annulling the results (BBC 2024). Also, we observe an equally obvious form of indirect political violence that results in violent protests and street unrest is the attempt to provoke a “Georgian Maidan” and the political destabilization of Georgia, which the US is trying to push back into war in order to further weaken Russia in its peripheral areas.¹⁹

¹⁸ Before the conflict, Russia was the EU’s largest energy supplier, but the US realized that it would profit far more by supplying its liquefied natural gas to Europe. In this regard, Biden has repeatedly publicly criticized the Russian-German project, and the results of the investigation into the Nord Stream mining have not yet led to the identification of the culprit.

¹⁹ After the ruling party announced that it would suspend negotiations on joining the EU, pro-European protests began in Tbilisi, while the President of Georgia, Salome Zourabichvili, denying the legitimacy of the parliament, refused to leave power at the end of her term. Namely, in 2008 the Russo-Georgian war broke out, during which Russia declared the independence of the separatist regions of Abkhazia and

At the same time, in addition to the indirect exercise of political pressure and general militarization as the most blatant examples of indirect political violence, restrictive measures were implemented, and sanctions were imposed on disputants of the political West, such as Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who, since the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, has taken a negative stance on NATO cooperation with Ukraine, and during his re-election, openly supported President Putin, criticizing Zelensky (Adler 2022), which led allied politicians to introduce draconian punitive measures against Hungary within the EU and to ban access to certain funds (Baczynska and Szakacs 2022).²⁰ Other forms of more direct political violence include the assassination attempt on Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico, as well as Donald Trump.²¹

Unfortunately, due to the scope of this paper, we are unable to address this topic in more detail, but it is certain that the Ukrainian conflict, or rather the war between Russia and Ukraine, certainly stands out not only for the multiplicity of causes and motives but also for the consequences it brings. At a time when the concept of strategic stability is being shaken, that is, a time of confrontation between great powers, the ruling principle of the new European and global security architecture is primarily related to the fear of guaranteed mutual destruction. In such an atmosphere, a discourse of symbolic violence is purposefully developing, which naturally results in an escalation of political violence at the international level.

South Ossetia. The then President of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili, advocated for Georgia's entry into NATO and is known as the leader of the "Rose Revolution." He was arrested upon his return from Ukraine to Georgia in 2021 (Ecman 2024).

²⁰ Due to its policy towards asylum seekers, the European Court of Justice fined Hungary 200 million euros in 2024 (Reuters 2024).

²¹ During the presidential election and high tensions in the country, Fico, a pro-Russian politician and advocate of stopping military aid to Kyiv, was shot four times while greeting supporters, and the crime itself was characterized as politically motivated. As a Republican presidential candidate and advocate of ending the war between Kyiv and Moscow, Trump experienced his first assassination attempt during a political rally in Pennsylvania on July 13, 2024, when an assassin shot him in the ear, killing one and wounding two people. Two months later, while Trump was playing golf, a second assassination attempt was made, which was prevented by security services, while a third assassination attempt, which was also prevented, took place during Trump's speech on the stage while he was standing behind protective, bulletproof glass.

CONCLUSIVE CONSIDERATIONS

Literally understanding war as “the continuation of politics by other means” (*von Clausewitz*), the neoliberal policy of the collective West has paved its way on neo-imperial practice and in favor of big capital and corporate interests over international law. In this way, not only have the most diverse forms of political violence been legitimized, but also its escalation on a global level. This thesis gains special weight when one considers the complexity of strategic communication and political rhetoric of the West, in which post-truth dominates instead of truth, post-democracy instead of democracy, and peace is defended by warfare. Acting propagandistically through most Western mainstream media on a global level, this rhetoric actually acts as a catalyst through which not only the concept of hybrid war is actualized for the purpose of Western strategic communication but also the entire international community and NATO alliance are engaged. Namely, interpreting the Russian-Ukrainian conflict exclusively through the prism of good and evil, i.e., a democratic-liberal regime versus an authoritarian-oppressive one, enables the abolition of the critical function of the media and the negation of their political independence, while in order to achieve the US political agenda, European states are de-sovereignized and political violence is legitimized.

Considering all of the above, the complexity and multidimensionality of the Ukrainian conflict is clear. It is also clear that Ukraine’s geopolitical situation is multi-layered and conditioned by its specific geostrategic position. Namely, “Ukraine is a part of Russia known as the soft belly where the Euro-Atlantic claims of the so-called Rimland confront the Eurasian continental ones, which, as the heart of the land, act as a restraint” (Stošić 2023, 33). In this sense, “Ukraine is a bulwark that protects Russia all the way to the Carpathians, and if Ukraine were to become part of NATO, not only the Russian but also the Belarusian ‘southern wing’ would remain unprotected in the area from the Polish eastern border almost to Volgograd in the south to the Sea of Azov” (Stošić 2023, 33).

Therefore, it is clear that for the West, Ukraine is important not only as a territory rich in natural resources but also as a geostrategic weapon that uses its “cannon fodder” in the fight against Russia. Having always lived thanks to the exploitation of other people’s resources, the Western powers that are on the path of decline are trying to maintain their power by provoking wars and conquering new resources. In this

way, precisely through Ukraine as a "testing ground for reaffirming their power," the West is trying to get its hands on a new market and the wealth of both Russia and Ukraine. Also, "for the EU, the energy corridors of Ukraine are of crucial importance because they supply gas to energy-deficient member states, but the North Atlantic policy of the US is moving towards weakening the EU in order to preserve its position as a global hegemon and is bringing the EU into conflict with Russia, not caring about the development of global conflicts and the consequent collapse of the EU itself" (Stošić 2023, 33). It is precisely in this context of geopolitical turmoil and global escalation of conflict, dominated by hybrid threats and legitimized political violence,²² that, in addition to wise foreign policy conduct, the political leadership of any state must be able to be guided by national interests and a sovereign policy of protecting its own citizens.

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²² The resistance and war activities of the Ukrainian army itself include a whole series of terrorist actions, such as the attempted assassination of Dugin when his daughter Darya Dugina was killed or the recent assassination of General Igor Kirilov.

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РЕТОРИКА „КОЛЕКТИВНОГ ЗАПАДА” И ГЛОБАЛНО ПОЛИТИЧКО НАСИЉЕ**

Резиме

Савремено друштво интензивно сведочи убрзаном повећању политичког насиља. Због убрзаног технолошког развоја и развоја хибридног начина ратовања, западна елита која има користи од америчке хегемоније је руско-украјински рат концептуализовала као горући међународни сукоб подржан реториком принуде која позива на хитне мере за подршку Украјини. У складу са генерализованим представљањем намере Русије да поред Украјине освоји европске и друге земље НАТО-а, политички интерес „колективног Запада” конципиран је као глобални јавни интерес. Другим речима, концепт Кремља о „руском свету“ одређен је у складу са војним циљевима унутар граница „колективног Запада” што има озбиљне геополитичке последице. На тај начин, сучељавајући се са Путином, САД су добиле могућност да покушају да очувају униполарни систем унутар и око Евроазије. Ипак, у контексту хибридног ратовања и променљиве геополитичке динамике, сматрамо да је одлука Русије да покрене инвазију на Украјину у пуном обиму у фебруару 2022. била подстакнута страхом од опкољавања НАТО савезницима. Један од закључака овог рада је да су западни медији и Европска унија имплементирали стратешки наратив угроженог „колективног Запада” „заснованог на правилима” и „демократском поретку”, демонизујући и санкционишући Русију на међународном плану. Заговарајући моралну обавезу да се украјинским снагама обезбеде различити офанзивни системи, такође сматрамо да је политика САД-а утицала на развој различитих облика политичког насиља широм света. Другим речима, један од закључака овог рада је да су својом реториком, земље „колективног Запада” превазишле саветодавне оквире и улогу заштитника у виду пружања безбедносне помоћи

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украјинској војсци и заправо су се умешале као подстрекачи или извршиоци политичког насиља. Стога, закључујемо да у контексту геополитичког превирања на светској политичкој сцени, као и континуираног хибридног ратовања, руководство било које државе може да сачува свој легитимитет искључиво штитећи економске и националне интересе сопственог народа.

Кључне речи: политички дискурс, постдемократија, украјински конфликт, политичко насиље, хибридни рат, десуверенизација

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