



## **Imperial and colonial Russia and its aggression against Ukraine**

Every nation has the right to self-identification and self-determination. The residents of Iraq, both Arabs and Kurds, as well as other ethnic groups, know this perfectly. Many times they have had to shed their blood to defend themselves against tyranny, colonialism of powers and terrorism. Stronger ones often seek to subjugate the weaker neighbours, take advantage of their internal problems, and the great powers instrumentally treat other nations, using them in their game. Therefore, nations experiencing the struggle for freedom should understand each other.

However, different nations also have different historical experiences. The Middle East has experienced the colonial rivalry of European powers. However, no one today disputes the existence of British or French colonialism, but these times are over. However, the era of Russian imperialism and colonialism has not ended, and the irony is that Russia is trying to present itself as a liberating and anti-imperial force wherever its knout has not been experienced. Neither tsarist nor Soviet, nor the current, Putinist Russia has never been and is not a liberator, and the nations of Central Europe, such as Poland and Ukraine, know this very well.

The fact that the Russian conquests have not been overseas does not change the fact that this empire have occupied areas that had nothing to do with the Russians, their identity and their history. This was the case in vast areas of Siberia, the Far East, Central Asia, the Caucasus, as well as in Central Europe. Russia has subjugated other nations, plundered their territory, populated them with Russians, and also Russified the local population. Currently, Russian mercenaries, the so-called Wagnerites, are operating in a similar way. Russia is sending them, among others, to the Middle East, e.g. to Syria, or to Africa, to fulfill the Russian empire's dream of overseas colonies.

In 1831, the great Russian poet Alexander Pushkin wrote a poem entitled "Slanderers of Russia" in which he claimed that the struggle of Poles for freedom was a "family dispute". It was at a time when Russian troops were drowning the Polish national uprising in blood, and no one in Poland treated it as a "family dispute". "Leave us, after all, you do not know these blood-drenched sides [...] for you it is an alien, incomprehensible our eternal family dispute," wrote Pushkin. But the Poles saw it completely differently. Russia conquered Poland, taking advantage of its internal problems, enslaved it, and then claimed that the fight of Poles for



freedom is an internal matter of Russians and Poles, which others are unable to understand, so they should not interfere.

### **Russian propaganda: preying on resentment and falsifying history**

Today, Russian propaganda presents its assault on Ukraine in a similar, falsified way. Cynically using the negative historical experiences of the Middle East, it tries to forage on resentments directed against the former European colonial powers and the USA. Russia preaches that it is defending itself against the invasion from the USA and NATO, and that Ukrainians are "brothers" whom the West allegedly uses instrumentally. In this falsified image, Russia once again appears as an anti-imperial force. Only that Ukrainians dying under Russian bombs, like Poles 200 years ago hanged by merciless Russian "brothers", see it completely differently. Poles know this not only on account of their own experiences, but also because millions of Ukrainians have found shelter in Poland, fleeing from criminal "brothers". Reducing the fight of Ukrainians for their freedom and independence to the global game of the USA is a big lie formulated to sound credible to those who have other historical experiences.

Poles are not and never have been Russians, although in the 19th century The Russians tried to persued the world otherwise. The same is true for Ukrainians. It is a separate nation, with its own language, its own identity and its own history. The fact that the Ukrainian language is similar to Russian does not make Ukrainians Russians. Iran might as well base its territorial claims to the Kurdistan Region in Iraq on the similarity of the Persian and Kurdish languages. For centuries, the history of Poles and Ukrainians has been united, and relations between the two nations have been sometimes better and sometimes worse. As recently as 100 years ago, some areas, today belonging to Ukraine, were part of Poland and Poles lived there. However, unlike Russia, Poland respects the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine. This is what fraternity is all about, not rape, because one is stronger and at the same time lying to the world about one's motives.

Russia presents a false picture of history to justify its aggression. Meanwhile, it is true that Ukraine found itself within its borders as a result of imperial conquest in the 17th and 18th centuries, just like Poland a little later. Intensive Russification and the policy of denationalization in the nineteenth century had an effect, although limited. As a result, some Ukrainians became Russian-speaking. However, they did not cease to be Ukrainians and did not become Russians. Today, Russian-speaking Ukrainians suffer as much from Russian



aggression as those who speak Ukrainian. In Poland, it is just as easy to meet Ukrainian refugees who speak Russian today as those who speak Ukrainian.

In 1991, a colonial colossus called the Soviet Union disintegrated, just as the colonial empires of Great Britain or France had disintegrated a little earlier. Ukraine declared independence, which was supported by 90% of its citizens in a referendum. In Crimea, occupied by Russia in 2014, 54% of the population voted for the independence of Ukraine, and in the oblasts that Russia currently wants to conquer, i.e. Donetsk, Luhansk and Kherson, 77%, 84% and 90%, respectively. At that time, Russia did not question the legality of these referendums and recognized both the independence of the new country and its territorial integrity. 23 years later, it suddenly changed its mind because it did not like the new Ukrainian authorities and their political decisions. Every nation and every country has the right to decide what foreign policy it wants to conduct and with whom to enter into alliances. This applies to all Iraq, Ukraine and Poland. Manipulating history, on the other hand, is a dangerous game. Crimea or Kiev have been part of various countries and empires throughout their long history, as was the case with Baghdad, Basra, or Mosul, and this is certainly not the basis for claiming territorial claims by neighbours. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine is not related to the aspiration of an ethnic group to self-determination, but is based on the revisionism of an aggressive power in relation to the borders it has recognized itself.

A different geographical location and different historical experiences mean that countries choose different allies and have a different view of great powers such as the USA or Russia. However, one thing is clear: no power can command another nation to love it and recognize it as a friend or brother. All the more so, it cannot punish and terrorize another nation in order to force it into friendship. After all, friendship imposed by force is absurd. All nations and countries should understand and respect the decisions of others. Russia believes that only the great powers have the right to vote, to which it also counts itself, and the rest are toys that are being played for. Freedom-loving nations cannot accept such an approach.

Russia claims that the Ukrainian authorities do not represent Ukrainians, as a supposed "overturn" took place in 2014. Since then, presidential and parliamentary elections have been held there twice, in which various parties and candidates competed fiercely. The current president, Volodymyr Zelensky, was elected in 2019 in elections whose validity was not questioned by anyone, and in which 63% of Ukrainians took part.



Who is to decide who is the legal authority in Iraq, Poland or Ukraine? Neighbours or foreign powers or the nation? Is Iraq still ruled by the Baath Party and all elections are illegal? Is the Iraqi constitution of 2005 illegal because it was not approved by Saddam Hussein? Who should decide about it? Moscow, Washington, Ankara, Tehran, London, or maybe Israel or the nation? The Ukrainians have elected the president and the parliament, and other states have no right to interfere in this. The same as in the case of Iraq.

### **Cynicism and hypocrisy – an art that the Russians have mastered to perfection**

Moreover, Russia's cynicism and hypocrisy are shown by its attitude towards Saddam Hussein and his overthrow. Russia has never been disturbed by the crimes of this tyrant. Neither the chemical weapons attack on Halabja nor the 1991 slaughter of Shiites in southern Iraq. It would be difficult to prove otherwise when Russia is burdened with a long list of crimes. As part of their colonial conquests, the Russians mercilessly murdered not only "Polish rebels" but also Muslim nations of Central Asia and the Caucasus.

In the 1990s, in two Chechen wars, tens of thousands of civilian residents of the Caucasus, citizens of Russia, died at the hands of Russian soldiers. At the time, Russia claimed it was defending its territorial integrity against separatists. A few years later, in 2008, Russian troops invaded the territory of Georgia and to this day occupy part of its territory. Polish President Lech Kaczynski warned the world about Russian imperialism, and two years later he was killed in a plane crash on Russian territory. Four years after his death, Russia questioned the territorial integrity of Ukraine, stirred up separatism and began to call itself a defender of the right to self-determination, and its mercenaries operating on the territory of Ukraine shot down a passenger plane, killing 283 passengers and 15 crew members.

In the case of Ukraine, Russia began to invoke dubious historical arguments, forgetting at the same time that when it came to the Caucasus, where Russia considered its territorial integrity sacred, it had suddenly conquered it in the 19th century. Crimea, on the other hand, was conquered by Russia in 1783, and its indigenous people, the Muslim Tatars, are now persecuted because they did not recognize the Russian annexation in 2014. Many of them stay in prisons and penal colonies. In this connection, it is worth mentioning how Russia treats Muslims. Although they represent at least 15% of the country's population, they are almost absent from the authorities at the central level. Islamophobia is deeply rooted in Russia, as evidenced by the fact that there are only 4 legal mosques in Moscow for 2.5 million Muslim



residents of the Russian capital. Meanwhile, in Ukraine, Muslims have never complained about persecution.

Russia supported Saddam Hussein up until the end, and considered his overthrow a crime, but there is no problem with cooperation with those who came to power thanks to his removal. Moreover, it wants to convince them that the Ukrainian authorities are illegal despite the elections, and the legal authority is a man who was expelled by the Ukrainian people 7 years ago and is now hiding in some luxury villa in Russia. At the same time, Vladimir Putin stated that since the US invaded Iraq in 2003, Russia could also invade Ukraine. So Russia admits that in its own understanding it is acting illegally and doing what it condemned in the case of Iraq. At the same time, however, no other country has annexed part of Iraq, as Russia does in the case of Ukraine. The fact that Saddam Hussein was an enemy of Iran does not prevent Russia from bringing drones from Iran to spread terror in Ukraine. Is it possible, then, to be more deceitful than Russia?

From the bloody pacification of the 1920 uprising to the assault on Daesh, Iraqis have repeatedly fallen victim to the crimes committed against them. The Kurds will never forget that Saddam Hussein carried out a chemical attack on the inhabitants of Halabja, thus murdering approx. 5,000 civilians. It wasn't his only crime, after all. Today, Ukrainians are the subject to such crimes, and the perpetrator is colonial and imperial Russia. In March 2022, The Russians murdered approx. 400 defenseless civilians in Bucha, Ukraine. The aim was to intimidate residents and punish them for resistance. Russian President Vladimir Putin is being prosecuted by the International Criminal Court for the mass deportation of Ukrainian children. Abducted from their parents, they end up in new "families" that try to instill in them hatred for their own nation and relatives. Exactly the same way as Daesh did in Iraq a few years ago, murdering parents and forcing children to obey with terror, brainwashing them and training them to be terrorists. Therefore, what's the difference between Daesh and Russia? Approximately 19,500 Ukrainian children have been abducted by the Russians and they do not want to give them back to their families. The Wagner Group is part of the Russian armed forces. Although it is officially a private military enterprise, it is actually subordinate to the Russian authorities. At the same time, Wagner's group commits crimes whose brutality does not give way to Daesh. This applies, among others, to public executions involving smashing the head with a hammer, mass rapes of women and underage girls, etc.

Human life has the same value whether in the Middle East or Central Europe. Aggression against another country is evil, as is murdering people defending their homes and families and



fighting for their homeland. Imperial conquests and colonial exploitation are also bad, and Russia is precisely an imperial and colonial country. Poland and Ukraine were colonies of this empire, but they freed themselves from it. Now the empire is attacking again, because that is its nature. It cannot exist without conquests. Therefore, the war in Ukraine is not only about a territorial dispute, but about unbridled ambitions to rebuild the empire, and not within the borders of the USSR, but of tsarist Russia. If the world allows Russia to conquer Ukraine, the Baltic countries will be next, followed by Poland and other Central European countries. Russia will only stop where it is stopped and there will be no peace until then. This, in turn, will trigger a chain reaction of destabilization in other parts of the world, including the Middle East, bringing new wars.

The Russians proclaim one thing on their television, and another thing they tell nations that do not know them as well as Poles or Ukrainians. At their place, they preach Great Russian imperial propaganda, announcing the conquest of half of Europe, the destruction of cities and the murder of the population. On state television, supposedly serious experts threaten to bomb European cities with nuclear weapons. They make no secret of the fact that their goal is to rebuild the Empire to its widest borders in history. They tell others that they want peace.

Peace in Europe can only be achieved in one way, i.e. by Russia's withdrawal to the 2014 borders and its commitment to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of its neighbours. This is not an exorbitant demand. After all, no one is requiring the partition of the Russian colonial empire by allowing all indigenous nations of its territory to self-determine, although this would be as just as the dismantling of the British or French colonial empire. It is therefore difficult to call such a restraint of one's imperial ambitions a push against the wall. No one expects residents of other regions of the world, including the Middle East in particular, to make Ukraine's drama a priority. We understand that you have your own issues. We just want understanding.



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