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## Sources of russian policy aggressiveness

### Abstract

The main reasons of aggressive Russian policy are investigated. The origins of aggressiveness are viewed at the following three levels: the political system, society, and V. Putin's personality. It has been determined that the Russian political elite historically has developed a fear of external danger as well as a sense of insecurity in relation to the developed West. Therefore, Russia traditionally seeks to expand its borders as far as possible or to create a belt of loyal countries around itself as a buffer zone. It is also determined by a high degree of militarization and active use of various means of influencing over other states. Russian society looks at the outside world through the artificially made system that is perceived as hostile and aimed at destroying traditional values. Conservative ideas on which modern Russian ideology is formed are characterized by eclecticism and engagement. The aggressiveness of the Russian political discourse is largely influenced by V. Putin himself, whose psychological profile is characterized as expansionist, aggressive, forceful, and militant.

**Keywords:** aggressive policy, militarism, expansion, totalitarianism, authoritarianism, militancy, psychological type

## Introduction

The beginning of the full-scale invasion on the territory of Ukraine by Russian Federation troops in February 2022 forced a rethinking of Russia's place and role in world politics, as well as the configuration of global and regional security systems. The experience of deepening cooperation with Moscow in the context of its direct departure from the norms of international law and provoking crises in Transnistria, Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Syria, Crimea, Eastern Ukraine, etc. was subject of critical assessment.

Against this background, the task of identifying and understanding the factors that determine the militancy and aggressiveness of the Russians political discourse or their strategic culture reached a new level. At the same time, several directions can be distinguished, such as the political model of modern Russia, where corruption and undemocratic regime must be covered by external successes and weight on the world stage; the aggressiveness of Russian society itself, its persistent demand for imperialism; the personality of V. Putin, his foreign policy ambitions and desire to restore the USSR. The effect of the system plays a role here, as the combination of factors gives a much greater impact than each of them individually.

## Research methods

The study of the various factors should be based accordingly on a combination of methods, including historical and comparative analysis, political and structural approaches, political and psychological approaches, linguistic analysis, etc.

## Research results

### Aggressiveness as an attribute of Russia's political model

Back in 1946, G. Kennan noted in his "Long Telegram" that Russians perceive the surrounding world as a hostile environment. He explained this "maniacal point of view of the Kremlin" as a "traditional and instinctive feeling of insecurity for Russia. Firstly, it was a feeling of insecurity among agrarian people who lived in large open territories in the neighbourhood of warlike nomads. With the establishment of contacts with the economically developed West, fear of a more competent, powerful, organized community was added to this feeling. [...] For this reason, they were always afraid of foreign invasion, avoided direct contact between the Western world and their own, and were afraid of what might happen if the Russian people learned the truth about the surrounding reality or learn the truth about life inside Russia from the outside. And they looked for a way to ensure their security only in a persistent and deadly struggle for the destruction of competing states, never allowing agreements or compromises with them" (Telegram).

The geographical landscape, namely, the predominance of flat areas, led to the formation of an aggressive model of Russia's behaviour as a state. It has always sought to push its borders further away or to create a belt of loyal countries around itself as a buffer zone. The practical embodiment of such a policy was the formation after

the Second World War of the countries of the socialist camp on the territory of Central-Eastern Europe and the creation of the Warsaw Pact Organization. Therefore, the democratization and Euro-Atlantic integration of this space is recognized as a key threat to Russia's national security.

The specified factors inevitably lead to the militarization of society and the emergence of force as the main instrument for guaranteeing security.<sup>1</sup> G. Kennan wrote that "[i]nternal policy aimed at increasing the potential and prestige of the state, intensive military industrialization, maximum development of the armed forces, demonstration of high achievements in front of external observers, constant secrecy regarding internal processes, designed to hide weaknesses and keep opponents at a distance."<sup>2</sup>

To undermine stability within other countries and implement its narratives, Russia uses a wide variety of movements such as political, national, and religious ones. In modern conditions, the Russian mass media with their aggressive propaganda and bribery of influential Western politicians and figures have become important tools. Forming an extensive internal security apparatus within their country, they extended the long tentacles of the agency to all corners of the world. Largely, the calculation of the quick capture of Ukraine was based on them.

Along with the fact that Russia often declares a connection with Western traditions inherited, as it were, from the Byzantine Empire (the doctrine "Moscow is the third Rome"), its model of political development is completely based, as B. Akunin notes, on the Horde.<sup>3</sup>

Several important features can be distinguished in this Horde model:

- attraction to authoritarian forms of government;
- a permanent desire for expansion;
- disregard of legal norms;
- reliance on power tools;
- detachment of society from state management structures;
- hierarchy and domination of the practice of humiliating subordinates;
- lying and hypocrisy.

As A. de Coustin aptly noted at the time, "[t]hey learned the power of despotism well through their slavery."<sup>4</sup>

The Eurasianism positioning sometimes results in short-term attempts to liberalize and democratize, but as historical experience shows, these are temporary and often end in a backlash. Examples include the Alexander II reforms, the NEP, Khrushchev's

<sup>1</sup> Yurchenko, O. (2020). *Зовнішня політика Російської Федерації: вірити не можна зрозуміти* [Russian Foreign Policy: Believe Cannot Understand]. Adastra. Accessed March 21, 2023, <https://bit.ly/3pk6LLH>. [In Ukrainian]

<sup>2</sup> Telegram. *The Charge in the Soviet Union (Kennan) to the Secretary of State*. Accessed March 21, 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/4v2zf6z6>.

<sup>3</sup> Akunin, B. (2021). *История Российского Государства. Том IV. Между Европой и Азией. Семнадцатый век* [History of the Russian State. Volume IV. Between Europe and Asia. Seventeenth century]. Moscow: "Ast" Publishing House.

<sup>4</sup> Kiustin, A. (1990). *Николаевская Россия* [Nikolaevskaya Russia]. Moscow: Politizdat. [In Russian]

Thaw, and M. Gorbachev Perestroika. M. Zadornov mentioned this (with all the negative background he accumulated in the last years of his life) "Not Eurasia, but Aziopa."<sup>5</sup> Asian features in this system are much more than European ones.

### The roots of the Russian society aggressiveness

Russian society has a totalitarian character. Relatively recently, it could be called post-totalitarian or authoritarian one, but V. Putin, having eliminated independent mass media, cleared the political field of possible opponents and strengthened the positions of the security forces in the country, returning the system to totalitarianism. In recent days, one of its signs, which Z. Brzezinski once singled out, has been manifested: if society shows loyalty to an undemocratic state by observing prohibitions, then this is authoritarianism, and if, in addition, special requirements and prescriptions are fulfilled, then this is already totalitarianism – *Must Not* is supplemented by the option *Must Do*.<sup>6</sup> Many analysts note that, until recently, it was enough for the Russian authorities that people did not criticize them, but now this is no longer sufficiently effective. So, they are expected to openly demonstrate loyalty. For example, S. Aksyonov, the governor of the occupied Crimea, suggested those who do not stand up during the anthem of the Russian Federation is played be deprived of their Russian citizenship by the court order.<sup>7</sup>

At the psychological level, totalitarian consciousness is characterized by an artificially modelled coordinate system.<sup>8</sup> Demanding the internal consolidation of society, its concession in favour of state interests, totalitarianism must explain the necessity of such steps. This distinguishes it from a dictatorial regime, which, as a rule, does not need to explain anything, because it relies, first of all, on coercion. The totalitarian system is based on ideas about space in dimensions that the outside world is aimed at destroying their state and society, and that this state itself, unlike its enemies, is the bearer of the best moral values. Generating ideas about external enemies makes it necessary to search for internal enemies as well.

Ideology ensures the formation of the appropriate coordinate system with an emphasis on what is the essence of the existing system value of and who are its external and internal enemies.

Attempts to analyze the problem of Putin's regime ideology may reveal several contradictory approaches.

<sup>5</sup> YouTube. (2005). Михаил Задорнов "Азиопа и герб России" ("Да здравствует то, благодаря чему...") [Mikhail Zadornov "Aziopa and the Emblem of Russia" ("Long live that thanks to which...")]. Accessed March 22, 2023, [bit.ly/3mY2z9T](https://bit.ly/3mY2z9T). [In Russian]

<sup>6</sup> Gati, Ch. (Ed.). (2013). *Zbig: The Strategy and Statecraft of Zbigniew Brzezinski*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

<sup>7</sup> RBK. (2023). Аксенов предложил лишать гражданства не встающих под гимн России [Aksyonov proposed to deprive of citizenship those who do not stand up to the Russian anthem]. Accessed March 22, 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/4r2ry6tw>. [In Russian]

<sup>8</sup> Pocheptsov, H. (1993). Простір і час у тоталітарній свідомості [Space and time in the totalitarian mind]. *Політологічні читання. Українсько-канадський щоквартальник*, 1, 231–244. [In Ukrainian]

Some authors claim that V. Putin has absolutely no ideology. It covers a kleptocratic, corrupt regime with convenient slogans aimed at providing a luxurious life to the elite and certain handouts at the expense of excess profits from the sale of raw materials to the population. D. Treisman and S. Guriev introduce special terms for such a phenomenon: Information Dictators or Spin Dictators (under the concept of Spin as the manipulation of information). As S. Guriev himself says, it can best be translated as “dictators of deception” or “dictators of image.” Their essence boils down to the fact that they do not need a separate ideology. They pretend to be democracies to enjoy the benefits of civilization.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, historian M. Zygar notes that when V. Putin came to power, he did not have his ideology. Then it was formed by his environment, both liberal and pro-Western. During his first term, he behaved as a pro-Western leader. Indeed, even the issue of Russia joining NATO was discussed. However, after each “colour revolution” in the countries of the former USSR, conspiracy theories began to flourish.

The 2011–2012 protests became the strongest point of rupture. V. Putin was offended that the educated middle class considered his electoral base took to the streets against him. After that, he began to bet on representatives of working professions, poorly educated, inclined to nationalism, for whom pride in the country is a source of personal satisfaction. V. Putin, according to M. Zygar, restored an imaginary synthetic empire: “a bit of Stalinism, a small dose of pre-revolutionary Russia, a drop of Orthodoxy and a few Soviet attributes. Such a hybrid ideology attracts and unites the majority.”<sup>10</sup>

A. Kolesnikov shows this evolution as follows: until 2014, the formula “sausage in exchange for freedom” was in effect, and since 2014, when the economy of the Russian Federation began to have trouble due to sanctions, this formula shifted to “Crimea and spiritual bonds in exchange for freedom.”<sup>11</sup>

Historically, the imperial identity was deeply rooted in Russian society. It is important for Russians to feel a sense of belonging to a “great power.” V. Putin’s words that “the collapse of the USSR is the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century”<sup>12</sup> gave a clear signal that he wants to return that feeling to them.

At the same time, this imperialism among Russians is traditionally formalized in the format of messianic projects such as the Third Rome, the Greek Project, the world communist revolution or the Russian Measure. External aggression is presented by the

<sup>9</sup> Yablokov, I. (2022). *“Обман и страх – главные орудия автократа”: разговор с Сергеем Гуриевым* [“Deception and fear are the main tools of the autocrat”: a conversation with Sergey Guriev]. Accessed March 23, 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/2s3nzath>. [In Russian]

<sup>10</sup> Liberation. (2018). *Никто в России, даже в верхах, не хочет думать о будущем* [No one in Russia, even at the top, wants to think about the future]. Accessed March 21, 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/2p9pdrct>. [In Russian]

<sup>11</sup> Kolesnikov, A. (2015). *Российская идеология после Крыма. Пределы эффективности и мобилизации* [Russian ideology after Crimea. Limits of effectiveness and mobilisation]. Accessed March 21, 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/mr22bdnn>. [In Russian]

<sup>12</sup> Putin, V. (2005). *“Распад СССР – крупнейшая геополитическая катастрофа века”* [The collapse of the USSR is the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century]. Accessed March 21, 2023, <https://regnum.ru/news/polit/444083.html>. [In Russian]

authorities and perceived by Russian society itself as liberation, a help to the humiliated and disadvantaged people, etc.<sup>13</sup>

T. Stanova notes the tendency that the launched ideology later became beyond V. Putin's control: "The formation of a state ideology imperceptibly limits the scope of opportunities for a political leader, sets him the framework for rhetoric that he could previously freely define himself... The further the ideology moves across the country, the weaker the institution of political leadership becomes. At first, the leader becomes dependent on ideological attitudes, and later the personality factor dissolves, and it will not matter to the system who is on top."<sup>14</sup>

In the context of a full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, T. Snyder equated Putin's regime with the Nazi regime and conveys to the English-speaking audience the meaning of the term "rashism" formed from the words "Rasha" and "fascism."<sup>15</sup>

The new Russian ideology based on the archaization of mass consciousness, namely a phenomenon that can be called the "sacralization of unfreedom," exists within a "besieged fortress," surrounded from the outside by external enemies, and from the inside by a "fifth column." People begin to feel something like Stockholm syndrome towards the leader, caring about his logic and defending his interests, feeling like members of his team. Support for the government ideology has become a form of adaptation to external circumstances, conformity as a way of survival, "spirituality" as a method of justifying the "correctness" of one's social behaviour.<sup>16</sup>

The success of conservative, aggressive ideology in Russian society is explained not only by Putin's political evolution. The Russians themselves, who were used to existing in the aggressive Soviet ideological matrix of the Cold War, were prone to these attitudes. He only caught and picked up the existing public demand.

The search for enemies and the protection of national values are reflected in the National Security Strategies of the Russian Federation. It is characteristic that in the edition of 2009, the contours of traditional values, which are protected by the state and its enemies, are only beginning to emerge: "Primitive Russian ideals, spirituality, and a dignified attitude to historical memory are being revived. [...] Because of the strengthening new centres of economic growth and political influence, a qualitatively new geopolitical situation is emerging. A tendency is being formed to find solutions to existing problems and resolve crises on a regional basis without the participation of non-regional forces. The failure of the existing global and regional architecture, focused, especially in the Euro-Atlantic region, only on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, as well as the imperfection of legal instruments and mechanisms increasingly pose

<sup>13</sup> Yurchenko, O. (2020). op. cit.

<sup>14</sup> Stanovaya, T. (2015). Чем угрожает Путину новая российская идеология [How does the new Russian ideology threaten Putin?]. Accessed March 21, 2023, <https://carnegiemoscow.org/commentary/59679>. [In Russian]

<sup>15</sup> Chytailo, O. (2022). *Рашизм – страшніший за фашизм і нацизм: як сформувалась сучасна ідеологія РФ* [Rashism is worse than fascism and Nazism: how the modern ideology of the Russian Federation was formed]. Accessed March 22, 2023, <https://bit.ly/3O889IV>. [In Ukrainian]

<sup>16</sup> Kolesnikov, A. (2015). op. cit.

a threat to ensuring international security.”<sup>17</sup> And about relations with the USA, it was declared that “Russia will strive to build an equal and full-fledged strategic partnership with the United States of America based on overlapping interests and taking into account the key influence of Russian-American relations on the state of the international situation as a whole.”<sup>18</sup>

The National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation in its 2015 edition already stated that “[t]he implementation of an independent foreign and domestic policy by the Russian Federation leads to opposition from the United States and its allies, which seek to maintain their dominance in world affairs. The policy of containing Russia, carried out by them, involves exerting political, economic, military and informational pressure on it.”<sup>19</sup>

In the 2021 edition, the provisions are set out even more fully deepening the feeling of a “besieged fortress.” “The shaking of generally recognized norms and principles of international law, the weakening and destruction of existing international legal institutions, the long-term dismantling of the system of treaties and agreements in the field of arms control lead to the growing tensions and aggravation of the military-political situation, in particular near the state border of the Russian Federation. The actions of some countries are aimed at inspiring disintegration processes in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) to destroy Russia’s ties with its traditional allies. Several states call Russia a threat and even a military enemy. [...] Personal freedom is absolutized, permissiveness, immorality and selfishness are actively promoted, the cult of violence, consumption and pleasure is planted, drug use is legalized, societies are formed that deny the natural continuation of life. [...] Traditional Russian spiritual, moral and cultural-historical values are under active attack by the United States and its allies, as well as by transnational corporations, foreign non-commercial, religious, extremist and terrorist organizations.”<sup>20</sup>

Significantly, the United States and its allies are placed in the same line with extremist and terrorist organizations in this document. “Absolutization of individual freedom” stands here alongside “active propaganda of permissiveness, immorality and selfishness”.

The search and identification of enemies lead to aggressiveness. Research shows that in Russian society, totalitarian consciousness caused the formation of a specific phenomenon. Thus, the closeness, mistrust, and aggressiveness of the state at the international level gave rise to the transit of the model into society. Moreover, such phenomenon happened in the 1970s and 1980s, when a homegrown quasi-totalitarian system emerged from below as compensation for the weakening of the external totalitarian system. Another form of unfreedom was created by its forces within the

<sup>17</sup> National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020. (2009). Accessed March 21, 2023, <https://bit.ly/44JhBC6>. [In Russian]

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation. (2015). Accessed March 22, 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/23rf98mm>. [In Russian]

<sup>20</sup> Decree of the President of the Russian Federation *On the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation*. (2021). Accessed March 21, 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/2p9vkamt>. [In Russian]



already existing general one. A manifestation of these processes was the emergence of large gangs that divided almost all cities into warring districts. Enemies were usually defined according to a simple territorial principle, for example, “factory ones” versus “central ones,” etc.

However, closed-mindedness and aggressiveness have descended to an even more local level, namely individual apartments. As A. Arkhangelskyi summarized, “[t]he kitchen and the yard are the assembly points of Sovietness. [...] The Soviet kitchen and yard are places of extraction, development and manufacture of conflict.”<sup>21</sup> Again, it is symptomatic that V. Putin himself very often refers to the backyard experience of his personal development.

At the same time, such a psychological construct of totalitarian consciousness paradoxically dates back to the period following the collapse of the Soviet Union. A. Arkhangelsky notes that “[t]he uniqueness of the man of the Putin era is that in many of his manifestations, he looks more Soviet today than under Soviet power... The Soviet man was fully revealed only in the post-Soviet era.”<sup>22</sup>

The ideas of democracy, freedom, openness, and tolerance did not take root on Russian soil. Instead, Putin’s propaganda machine resonated with the prevailing public mood. Rashism with its arrogance and hatred of other peoples such as Churky, Khokhly, Pindosy, Gayropeans, etc. was not V. Putin’s know-how but was inherent to the majority of Russians as well as a distorted view of the history and place of Russia in world processes.

The majority of Russians gladly welcome the aggressiveness and brutality that comes from the mouths of officials or propagandists, such as “debily, blah...”<sup>23</sup> (Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation S. Lavrov at a press conference with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia in 2015), “Look at me, don’t look away, why are you looking away?”<sup>24</sup> (Deputy Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the UN V. Safronkov in an address to the UK representative to the UN M. Rycroft in 2017), “Nravitsa ne нравitsa – tierpi moya krasavitsa” [Eng. “You may like it, you may not, but you’ll have to endure it, my beauty”]<sup>25</sup> (the President of the Russian Federation V. Putin in February 2022 quoted a vulgar Russian ditty in the context of

<sup>21</sup> Arkhangelskii, A. (2018). *Майнинг конфликта и катастрофы. Чем путинский человек отличается от советского* [Mining conflict and catastrophe. How Putin’s man differs from the Soviet man]. Accessed March 21, 2023, <https://carnegiemoscow.org/commentary/75408>. [In Russian]

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> YouTube. (2015). *“Дебилы, ...”* [Morons, ...]. Accessed March 23, 2023, <https://bit.ly/3B6Pb7e>. [In Russian]

<sup>24</sup> YouTube. (2017). *В. К. Сафронков англичанину в совбезе ООН в глаза мне смотри!* [B. K. Safronkov to the Englishman in the UN Security Council look me in the eye!] Accessed March 23, 2023, <https://bit.ly/3B5VJ69>. [In Russian]

<sup>25</sup> YouTube. (2022). *“Нравится не нравится – терпи, моя красавица”* [You may like it, you may not, but you’ll have to endure it, my beauty]. (2022). Accessed March 22, 2023, <https://bit.ly/44DsDIT>. [In Russian]



Ukraine shortly before the full-scale invasion). They communicate in such a language of violence and aggression.

This is how one of the psychological techniques manifests itself. Therefore, when someone wants to win someone's sympathy or start manipulating someone, he starts repeating the movements and intonation of his interlocutor as if turning into his mirror image. Thus, the Russian government, after some unsuccessful attempts to reform and modernize, eventually found a simple and for some time effective model of ensuring its popularity aimed to satisfy the key demands of its population: imperialism, exclusivity, greatness.

However, the model of behaviour of the "aggressive gopnik" built by the Russian leadership ultimately leads the state and society to a natural end, namely collapse and the dock. No one in a civilized society wants to have an aggressive misfit by their side, even one who threatens to use nuclear weapons. In this context, the words of V. Putin may be recalled: "We, like martyrs, will go to heaven. And they will simply die"<sup>26</sup> (speech at the Valdai international forum in Sochi in 2018). The heroic resistance of Ukrainians forms new geopolitical realities in which the aggressor will be defeated and punished.

Putin's ideology by itself is non-constructive. It draws energy not from a vision of future development, but from being rooted in the past, which is also deeply distorted and mythologized. In the conditions of military defeats in Ukraine and deepening stagnation of the economy, it is rapidly losing resources for mobilizing the population. The Russian authorities can no longer offer the population either "sausage" or "Crimea." The aggressiveness and adventurism of its policy led to disaster. Now its outlines are beginning to emerge. We can only make certain assumptions on how the Russian society will survive the collapse of the system.

One of the trends that can manifest itself is the strengthening of the positions and activation of far-right nationalists, such as I. Girkin. Such processes can be dangerous for the government and it will oppose them. This, in turn, proves the need for V. Putin to change the national discourse, although he has less and less space and time for such manoeuvres. On the other hand, the scheme "if you can't overcome a movement, lead it" can work in practice. V. Putin may have no other option than to deepen Russia's fascism.

Another result of the rule of totalitarianism and authoritarianism is the deep rooting of paternalism in the mass consciousness of Russian society. The general mass of the population is determined to fulfil the will of the Kremlin passively and obediently and to tolerate the deterioration of living conditions. This prompts the leadership to look for ways to freeze the situation on the front with Ukraine. One can endure international isolation and economic troubles. The main goal is to keep power. Therefore, considerable attention is paid to work with young people in schools. Since September 2022, weekly lessons of patriotic education with raising the flag and listening to the national anthem are introduced.<sup>27</sup> The justification for this is

<sup>26</sup> YouTube. (2023). *"Мы, как мученики попадем в рай. А они сдохнут"* [We, like martyrs, will go to heaven. And they will simply die]. Accessed March 21, 2023, <https://bit.ly/3B8kuP0>. [In Russian]

<sup>27</sup> Interfaks. (2022). *В школах с сентября введут еженедельные уроки патриотического воспитания* [Schools will introduce weekly patriotic education lessons from September].

that they are fighting not only with Ukrainians, but with the whole of NATO on the territory of Ukraine.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to paternalism, another, more profound mechanism is at play. In Russian society, a stable priority of state security and political national interests over the individual was formed. The willingness to sacrifice oneself for the sake of the state has been cultivated here for centuries. The historical memory of the proximity of the national catastrophe due to the Troubles and the coronation of the Polish heir, Napoleon's invasion, or Hitler's aggression is deeply rooted in the fear both of the threat of the state loss and foreign intervention. Generations of Russians were brought up on such examples as Minin and Pozharsky, I. Susanin, 28 Panfilovites.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, one should be prepared for the fact that Russian society will be ready to support the war with Ukraine for a long time, perceiving it as another Great Patriotic War.

### The reasons for V. Putin's aggressive policy

In such a state as Russia, the person standing at the top of the power exerts a direct influence on both the political system and the society itself. It is not for nothing that eras associated with leaders such as V. Lenin, Y. Stalin, M. Khrushchev, L. Brezhnev, etc. are distinguished in its history. Each of the leaders imposed his style on the life of the entire country. Thus, Khrushchev's impulsive, voluntarist nature manifested itself in fluctuations from a Thaw in art to the persecution of avant-garde artists. The suspicion of the Andropov KGB resulted in total checks on the streets and in public places to identify truants, etc.

V. Putin left his mark on both the political system and society. Especially since he has been in power for over twenty years.

Personality can be defined as a complex pattern of deeply rooted psychological characteristics that are mostly subconscious and difficult to change. At the same time, they automatically manifest themselves in almost every aspect of the activity. They arise from a complex matrix of biological predispositions, learning, and experience, and ultimately constitute a unique pattern of perception, thinking, reactions, and behaviour of the individual.<sup>30</sup>

Psychologists who study the personality of V. Putin note that his formation was influenced by the childhood in the Leningrad yard, sambo and judo classes, service in the KGB, ties with crime.<sup>31</sup>

O. Immelman and J. Trenezlyuk conducted a deep psychological analysis of V. Putin's personality. They used the methodology of T. Millon's five-factor profiling model

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Accessed March 22, 2023, <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/854764/>. [In Russian]

<sup>28</sup> YouTube. (2023). *Ловушка 22* [Trap 22]. Accessed March 22, 2023, <https://bit.ly/3VGNas3>. [In Russian]

<sup>29</sup> Yurchenko, O. (2020). op. cit.

<sup>30</sup> Millon, T., Davis, R. D., and Millon, C. M. (1996). *Disorders of Personality: DSM-IV and Beyond*. Wiley.

<sup>31</sup> Dekleva, K. (2017). *The Many Faces of Vladimir Putin: A Political Psychology Profile*. Accessed March 23, 2023, <https://bit.ly/3LI0qrD>.

as the basis of the research. However, it was supplemented and correlated with the approaches of J. Barber, D. Simonton, L. Eteredge, M. German, and others.

Briefly, in their conclusions, they state that the personality template (personal leadership style) of V. Putin can be characterized as expansionist, aggressive, forceful, and militant. In foreign policy, he is a thoughtful introvert with a high degree of dominance.<sup>32</sup>

In the profile of V. Putin, the following personality traits stand out:

- dominant/controlling (a measure of aggression or hostility);
- ambitious/selfish (a measure of narcissism);
- conscientious/loyal.

As secondary ones, the following are distinguished:

- closed/reserved (in the direction of the introvert);
- fearless/adventurous (risky).

Less pronounced are mistrustful/suspicious traits.

In general, the mixture of main patterns in V. Putin's profile represents a complex personality type, which is described as a hostile expansionist.<sup>33</sup>

Dominant persons use power, command obedience and respect. They are tough and unsentimental. They often become effective leaders. This personality template contains the "hostile" component of V. Putin's personality.

Ambitious people are bold, competitive, and self-confident. They easily take on leadership roles. They expect others to recognize their special qualities and often act as if they are entitled to it. This personality template outlines the "expansionist" component of V. Putin's personality.

Conscientious people are executive and diligent, have a strong work ethic, and pay attention to detail. They know how to develop public policy, but often lack the political skills necessary to achieve political goals and are technocrats rather than visionary strategists. This personality pattern forms a component of the "forced" personality of V. Putin.

Closed people (introverts), as a rule, do not develop strong bonds with others. They do not know how to recognize the needs or feelings of others. They lack spontaneity in interpersonal relationships.

Fearless individuals are adventurers, individualists, and brave individuals. They show resistance to pressure and tend to take calculated risks.

The main strong qualities of V. Putin's personality in a political role are his imperious manner of behaviour and confident persistence. His main personal flaws are uncompromising intransigence, lack of empathy and benevolence, as well as cognitive inflexibility.

An elevated dominant pattern indicates the so-called "presidential" style. Dominant (controlling) individuals enjoy the power and the ability to intimidate others, as well as command obedience and respect from them. They tend to be tough and unsentimental and take pleasure in activities that allow them to manipulate the lives of others.

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<sup>32</sup> Immelman, A., and Trenzeluk, J. V. (2017). *The Political Personality of Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin*. Accessed March 23, 2023, <https://bit.ly/41k9fhh>.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

An example of the embodiment of this model of behaviour was the scandalous story when V. Putin, knowing about A. Merkel's fear of dogs, in 2007, during negotiations with her, let his Labrador Koni into the room.<sup>34</sup>

Dominant (controlling) types usually become effective leaders because they are talented at managing and persuading others to work toward common goals.

Aggressive (dominant) men and women move towards power instinctively. They are born to take charge. Such individuals can take an enormous responsibility without fear of failure. They easily resort to force and never back down from a fight. This model often finds a successful niche for itself in roles where hostile and belligerent behaviour is socially approved or admired, thus providing an outlet for vengeful hostility hidden under the guise of social responsibility.<sup>35</sup>

V. Putin's propensity for aggression at the political level was linked to the rise in his rating among the Russian population after his use of force. This happened in 1999 after the beginning of the Second Chechen War, as well as in 2008 after the military operations on the territory of Georgia and in 2014 after the occupation of Crimea.<sup>36</sup> Thus, V. Putin quite early found and began to use acts of aggression actively against neighbours and expansion of the Russian Federation as a mechanism for increasing his popularity in Russian society.

## Conclusions

Therefore, the nature of Russia's aggressiveness can be traced on three levels, namely the functioning of state mechanisms, the nature of Russian society, and the psychological characteristics of V. Putin's personality. At the same time, comprehensively complementing each other, they sent precisely the orientation towards an aggressive course and the implementation of armed violence.

Putin's regime has followed a difficult and contradictory path in the process of forming a political ideology. Starting with rather liberal positions, in the end, under the threat of democratic speeches and the spread of the wave of "colour" revolutions, he switched to right wing, conservative views. He tries to combine the traditions of Tsarist Russia, Stalin's regime, and Orthodox canons eclectically. At the same time, there is a tendency that these ideological attitudes were not imposed from above, but rather picked up by the authorities from within the Russian society itself, where there was a steady demand for them. Their roots go back to the times of the totalitarian era of the USSR, in which external isolation, aggressiveness, and mistrust were translated into society and were delayed both in the picture of the world and the behaviour of the population. Putin's regime skilfully developed and strengthened these tendencies, plunging Russians even

<sup>34</sup> Sokolovska, N. (2016). *ЗМІ: Путін мав знати, що Меркель боїться собак* [Media: Putin must have known Merkel was afraid of dogs]. Accessed March 23, 2023, <http://bit.ly/42nnHXv>. [In Ukrainian]

<sup>35</sup> Immelman, A., and Trenzeluk, J. V. (2017). op. cit.

<sup>36</sup> Levada-Tsentr. (2023). *Одобрение деятельности Владимира Путина* [Endorsement of Vladimir Putin's activities]. Accessed March 21, 2023, <https://www.levada.ru/indikatory/>. [In Russian]

deeper into the matrix of a “besieged fortress” that protects traditional values and is threatened by the conditional West, NATO, “Ukrainian fascism,” “Gayrope,” etc. At the same time, they manifest themselves as chauvinism, aggressiveness, and brutality.

However, such structure is beginning to experience a serious crisis in the conditions of military defeats in Ukraine as well as the economy overstrain, which was isolated under the influence of international sanctions. There is no positive way out for the Russian leadership from the situation they have involved themselves. The same deep disappointment and shock await the Russians themselves, who will have to face the reality of the loss of an influential state position on the world stage, the collapse of military, economic, and cultural potentials, the pressure of international sanctions and reparations.

In the future, several factors should be taken into account when solving the problem of Russia’s aggressiveness.

First, the feeling of external danger gives rise to the attraction of the Russian political system to authoritarianism, which theoretically can respond to threats faster and more effectively. Therefore, it is important to pay due attention to the establishment of democratic institutions and practices. A special role should be played by the independent mass media, which should make a lot of efforts to convey the truth to Russian society about the crimes and mistakes committed by the Putin regime, dispel imposed myths and fakes, and effectively monitor political processes in the country.

Secondly, the development of democracy should eliminate cruelty and violence from political practices, which in turn generate fear, hatred, and aggression.

Thirdly, existence in the matrix of a constant external threat led to excessive militarization and lowered the bar for the use of force and weapons. Therefore, the demilitarization and denuclearization of Russia should become a mandatory element.

Fourthly, when imposing sanctions and developing other post-conflict procedures, it is important to ensure the appropriate level of welfare of the population. Impoverishment and backwardness can give rise to revanchist attitudes, as well as contribute to the strengthening of the positions of radical forces. Democracy must rest on a developed middle class.

Fifthly, quality education should play an important role in overcoming entrenched social stereotypes and establishing the values of democracy and humanism. Serious attention and effort should be given to educational reform in Russia.

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