Cultural and Geopolitical Foundations of the Russia-Ukraine Conflict

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Lecture and Q&A with:

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The Primary Chronicle and Kyivan Rus'

- The *Primary Chronicle* (Повість временних літ) is considered the foundational historical document of Ukrainian, Russian, and broader East Slavic identity.

- It describes the early history of the Rus' (Русь) people, ruled by the Varangian Prince Rurik and his descendants from 860-1610.

- Askold, Dir, and Oleg the Seer: Viking founders of Kyivan Rus' (860-912)

- Vladimir the Great and the Baptism of Rus' (988)

- Saints Boris and Gleb: first official saints of Ukrainian and Russian Orthodox Christianity. Assassinated by their brother Sviatopolk (1015)

- Tatar-Mongol Yoke (1237-1480): Rus' as a vassal state of the Golden Horde

- Grand Duchy of Moscow: Ivan III defeats the Mongols (1480) and establishes Moscow as the "Third Rome"

- Ivan the Terrible becomes the first "Tsar" (1547) and founds the Tsardom of Russia

- First member of the Romanov Dynasty: Michael I (1613)

Timeline of Imperial Russian-Ukraine Relations

- Under the Tatar-Mongol Yoke, Moscow is established as the center of Russia. The Romanov Dynasty (1613-1917) rules an independent Empire and expands its territories.

- Most of Ukraine is subjected to the Tatar-Mongol Empire (1240), Grand Duchy of Lithuania (1300s), and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1569-1797).

- The Cossack Hetmanate (Військо Запорозьке), which ruled central Ukraine from 1648-1764, is considered the precursor to modern Ukraine. In 1654, Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky swore an oath of allegiance to the Russian Tsar for military protection.

- In 1686, the Metropolitanate of Kyiv was annexed by the Moscow Patriarchate. This effectively consolidated the Ukrainian Orthodox Church under Moscow.

- Empress Catherine the Great officially ended Ukrainian autonomy in 1764, absorbing it (and Crimea) into the Russian Empire until 1917.

Timeline of Soviet-Era Russia-Ukraine Relations

- The Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic is established in 1919 and joins the USSR.
- The Holodomor (1931-1932): A massive famine caused, in part, by Joseph Stalin's first Five-year plan and policy of collectivization. The famine was made worse by a policy to shoot those who resisted the export of grain from Ukraine or stole bread.
- The Great Purges (1936-1938): Historically, the purges that took place in the Ukrainian SSR were ordered and organized by Moscow.
- Ethnic Deportations, World War II, and the Gulag (1939-1956)
- Chernobyl Nuclear Disaster (1986)
- In December 1991, the Ukrainian SSR officially declared independence from the Soviet Union.

Post-Soviet Ukrainian Leaders

- Leonid Kravchuk (1991-1994): Former Soviet Chairman
- Leonid Kuchma (1994-2005): Economics, Cassette Scandal
- Viktor Yushchenko (2005-2010): Assassination attempt, Orange Revolution
- Viktor Yanukovich (2010-2014): 2004 Electoral Fraud, 2013 Euromaidan, Exile
- Petro Poroshenko (2014-2019): War in Donbas, De-Sovietization, Oligarchy
- Volodymyr Zelenskyy (2019-present)

Timeline of Post-Soviet Russia-Ukraine Relations

- In the 1991 Ukrainian Independence Referendum: Over 92% voted in favor of declaring independence. The regions with the least "yes" votes were in Crimea (55%).

- Economic Collapse and Rebound (1991-2005)

- Orange Revolution (2004): Party of Viktor Yanukovich accused of electoral fraud, Viktor Yushchenko wins run-off election.

- Euromaidan (2013): Yanukovich rejects a political/trade agreement with EU in favor of closer relations with the Russian Federation. Political protests lead to his ouster, exile, and a policy of renewed decommunization.

- Crimean Annexation (2014): Russia invades Crimea. Men with no military insignia take control of critical infrastructure and government offices.

- War in the Donbas (2014-present): Russia employs Hybrid Warfare to destabilize the industrial centers of Eastern Ukraine. Pro-Russian separatists declare independent states (DNR/LNR) and align with Russia.

- Russian "Special Military Operation" (February 2022-present)

Ideological Foundations of Contemporary Ukrainian Identity

- Strikingly different interpretations of the medieval state of Kyivan Rus appear in the four schools of historiography within Ukraine: Russophile, Sovietophile, Eastern Slavic, and Ukrainophile. (Taras Kuzio-Wiki)
- The Russophile and Sovietophile schools have become marginalized in independent Ukraine, with the Ukrainophile school being dominant in the early 21st century.
- The Ukrainophile school promotes an identity that is mutually exclusive of Russia. It has come to dominate the nation's educational system, security forces, and national symbols and monuments...
- The East Slavic school, an eclectic compromise between Ukrainophiles and Russophilism, has a weaker ideological and symbolic base, although it is preferred by Ukraine's centrist former elites. (Taras Kuzio-Wiki)

Official Positions on the Russian-Ukraine Conflict: Russian Federation

- Russian President Vladimir Putin announced on February 24 that in response to a request by the heads of the Donbass republics he had made a decision to carry out a <u>special military operation</u> in Ukraine in order to protect people "who have been suffering from abuse and genocide by the Kiev regime for eight years." The Russian leader stressed that Moscow had no plans of occupying Ukrainian territories and the operation was aimed at <u>demilitarizing and denazifying Ukraine</u>.

- When clarifying the developments unfolding, the Russian Defense Ministry reassured that Russian troops are not targeting Ukrainian cities, but are <u>limited to surgically striking and incapacitating Ukrainian military infrastructure</u>. <u>There are no threats whatsoever to the civilian population</u>. – TASS News

Official Positions on the Russian-Ukraine Conflict: The West

- In an essay last summer Putin claimed Ukraine and Russia were "one people" and Zelenskiy has argued the Kremlin's ultimate goal is the "erasure" of Ukraine as an independent sovereign state. That includes its language, people and culture, suppressed during previous eras of Russification. – The Guardian

- Putin deliberately frames his operation in Ukraine in the same way that the United States has framed its own regime-change operations in Kosovo, Iraq and Libya, charging that Ukraine has committed human rights violations and is a terrorist state. For good measure, Putin throws in the ludicrous assertion that Ukraine is fascist. These are transparent fig leaves for what is nothing more than a war of brute imperialism. – The Guardian

Official Positions on the Russian-Ukraine Conflict: U.S. Intelligence Report

- Russia does not want a direct conflict with U.S. forces. Russia seeks an accommodation with the United States on mutual noninterference in both countries' domestic affairs and U.S. recognition of Russia's claimed sphere of influence over much of the former Soviet Union.

- Russia's officials have long believed that the United States is trying to undermine Russia, weaken President Vladimir Putin, and install Western-friendly regimes in the former Soviet states and elsewhere, which they conclude gives Russia leeway to retaliate.

- Moscow views its nuclear capabilities as necessary for maintaining deterrence and achieving its goals in a potential conflict against the United States and NATO, and it sees a credible nuclear weapons deterrent as the ultimate guarantor of the Russian Federation. – (Annual Threat Assessment)

Timeline of the Russian-Ukraine Conflict 2022

- Western powers, including the U.S. and Great Britain, warned of a Russian troop build up and plans to invade Ukraine in late 2021.

- Vladimir Putin consistently denies plans to invade. On February 21, Russia officially recognizes the independence of the Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) and Donbas People's Republic (DNR).

- On February 24, Putin announces a "Special Military Operation."

- The Russian military invades Ukraine from the North through Russia and Belarus, from the South through Crimea, and from the East through DNR/LNR.

- Major attacks in Kiev, Kharkiv, Mariupul, Kherson, and other major cities.

- In recent days, many western cities have come under attack. Including L'viv (UNESCO World Heritage site), Odessa, Dnipro, and Lutsk.

Russian-held area and troop movement

Reporting in Ukraine and Russia

- An overwhelming amount of evidence related to the war has come from individuals uploading self-shot videos. In particular: videos of Russian losses (military equipment), Russian prisoners of war, and destroyed civilian infrastructure (apartment blocks, schools, hospitals)

- Ukrainian news organizations are in some ways struggling to cover all local events. Attacks on TV towers and other infrastructure has limited output and reach.

- Russia has significantly tightened its media, eliminating virtually all entities that are not subject to the state. A 15-year prison sentence is established for reporting "falsehoods" on the Ukraine conflict. "Invasion" and "War"

- Russian state media has also avoided reporting on large protests inside the Russian Federation. Thousands of protesters have been arrested.

Ukraine Military Reporting

LOSSES OF THE RUSSIAN OCCUPYING FORCES IN UKRAINE

08.03, preliminary numbers as the Russian invasion continues

~12000 personnel killed

48 aircraft

80 helicopters

303 tanks

60 cisterns

7 UAV

1036 armored vehicles of different types

120 artillery pieces

56 MLRS

474 vehicles

3 vessels

27 anti-aircraft warfare systems

#StopRussianAggression #RussiaInvadedUkraine #UkraineUnderAttack

Sanctions

- Western governments and other members of the international community have attempted to isolate Russia through sanctions:
- SWIFT
- Russian Central Bank
- Nord Stream 2
- Oligarchs and Putin's inner circle (Siloviki)
- Russian businesses
- Western businesses
- Exports and Imports

War Crimes?

- The international community is currently seeking evidence of Russian war crimes committed in Ukraine.

- Examples of alleged war crimes include:

1. Shelling of civilian population and civilian infrastructure

2. Attacks on non-military targets, particularly water/power sources

3. Seizure of nuclear reactors (Chernobyl and Zaporizhzhia)

4. Thermobaric munitions and chemical warfare

Volodymyr Zelenskyy

- Perhaps the most significant personality in the conflict, President Zelenskyy has been adamant about the need to repel Russian invaders.

- His regular videos and messages to the Ukrainian people and international audiences have been critical to foreign support and domestic morale.

Links to Sources

- **Orthodox Church in America: https://www.oca.org/saints/lives/2022/07/24/102082-martyrs-and-passion-bearers-boris-and-gleb**

- **TASS (Russian News): https://tass.com/world/1418287**

- **The Guardian: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/08/russia-ukraine-war-possible-trajectories?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Other**

- **Office of the Director of National Intelligence: Annual Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community: https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/ATA-2022-Unclassified-Report.pdf**

- Taras Kuzio – Wikipedia summary of:
  Taras Kuzio, "National Identity and History Writing in Ukraine," *Nationalities Papers* 2006 34(4): 407–427, **EBSCO**