

Orhan Dragaš
Ukraine-Crime Without Punishment



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Book review

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Orhan Dragaš

UKRAINE –
CRIME WITHOUT
PUNISHMENT

Belgrade, 2025

Book review

The book "Ukraine—Crime without Punishment" by Dr. Orhan Dragaš is the third collection of columns that the author has dedicated to the brutal Russian aggression against Ukraine, following the books "The End of the Russian World" and "Russia—From a Failed State to a Rogue State." This book is a collection of columns covering the period from August 2023 to the present day, which in many ways represents one of the worst periods of this war. The period covered by the author was characterized by a catastrophic moral failure of humanity, which neither knew how nor wanted to stop the atrocious crimes of Vladimir Putin's regime against the civilian population of Ukraine.

With this book, Dr. Orhan Dragaš has established himself as the most reputable chronicler of Russian crimes against the people of Ukraine. However, Dr. Dragaš does not limit himself to chronologically recording the events but seriously analyzes the causes that led to them, predicts the consequences that they will entail, and, as an expert in international security and international relations, makes suggestions for specific political, security, military, media, financial, and other measures that civilized humanity should take against the barbaric regime in the Kremlin.

The predictions about the consequences of events, which the author formulates very boldly and directly in his columns, have proven to be astonishingly accurate. Each of the author's columns is a direct moral condemnation, not of Vladimir Putin and his criminals, for they have long since crossed over to the other side of morality, but of the hypocrisy of that part of the world that we have so far called "free," "democratic," and "civilized" and that, with its cowardice and direct collaboration with Putin, is putting Ukraine in an increasingly difficult position every day and destroying the results of the heroic struggle of the Ukrainian people.

A particularly dark moment in the period covered by the author is Donald Trump's return to the White House. From the first day of Trump's new term, the author mercilessly dissects his irrational, harmful, and often nefarious moves toward Ukraine. Without hesitation, as we have come to expect from Dr. Dragaš, Donald Trump's moves are called by their proper names. The author does not limit himself to analyzing Trump's policy toward Ukraine but offers the reader a deeper analysis of the consequences that such an irrational, selfish, and quasi-pragmatic policy will have on global relations. Trump's tragicomic statements and moves from his first days in office have seriously damaged Euro-Atlantic relations and called into question the role of the USA as the global leader of the free world and a key pillar of international security. The author relentlessly deconstructs the new reality of which Donald Trump is a consequence, pointing out that the complete loss of the moral compass and the abandonment of the values on which modern civilization was built are fundamental features of the moment in which we live. In his distinctive style, Dr. Dragaš does not allow various euphemisms that would dilute the true meaning of the immoral and cowardly attitude toward Ukraine to creep into the everyday political vocabulary.

The new book by Dr. Orhan Dragaš is characterized by a refined style, clear language, sharp analysis... everything we have come to expect from the author in his earlier works. His precise predictions, which he presents without hesitation in his texts, can frighten the reader but also make them think, which is the greatest value of the work before us.

Belgrade, April 2025

Prof. Dr. Zoran Dragišić,
Professor at the Faculty of Security Studies,
University of Belgrade

Foreword

The fate of Ukraine is the priority of European civilization and its moral imperative. The pages that follow offer a chronicle of a tragic reality in an attempt to confront Serbian culture, which is in its most degraded state, with the origins and consequences of its consensual support for aggression and its causes. The official positions of Russia and Serbia, especially regarding their neighbors, the concepts of the “Russian world” and the “Serbian world,” are two connected paradigms. The time for their relativization has passed.

Modern Russia and modern Serbia emerged from two similar and closely related processes: the collapse of the Soviet Union and the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Following Russia’s example, Serbia attempted to dominate the significant remainder of Yugoslav territory. Russia pursued its path regardless of the victims or The Hague verdicts starting from the final days of Slobodan Milošević’s regime, when Vladimir Putin quietly came to power and gradually took over. In 1998, he became director of the FSB, the service that succeeded the Soviet KGB. Boris Yeltsin appointed him Prime Minister in 1999 when Russia had already adopted a hostile stance toward the West during the NATO intervention in Serbia and Montenegro and after the crimes committed in Chechnya. Yeltsin resigned by the end of the year, and Putin took over his post, which he confirmed in the 2000 elections. In 2004, he won a second term. Drawing on a narrative of alleged humiliation Russia had endured after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Putin revived Russia’s imperial claims to dominate the Baltic and its defined spheres of interest in the Black Sea region and the rest of the former Yugoslavia and thus also to reach the Mediterranean. Russia was unwilling to accept globalization, which holds that free trade implies free navigation, and its every intention remained imperial. Putin also revived the Soviet legacy by rejecting rep-

representative democracy, human rights, and freedoms, returning to the Cold War doctrine.

Since assuming power, Putin has made decisions that have remained unquestioned, with institutions merely endorsing his personal will. He has captivated the Western world with his unchallenged authority. That is the same world whose democracy and freedoms he despises. By returning to the Soviet course, he earned the support of the left and became the global leader of every extreme right. A fifth of voters in Germany support the Nazis, many with roots in the Soviet camp.

During Putin's first five years in office, 2000–2004, a fatigue of democracy had become noticeable worldwide. Globalization gave legitimacy to totalitarian regimes willing to act freely; the internet offered relativizations, half-truths, lies, and conspiracy theories. Western democracy remained overly complex, slow, and indecisive in the face of sudden challenges. Instead of managing crises as opportunities (the only alternative to the current weakness), the West delivered every crisis to Putin: the 2008 financial crisis, the 2014 Ukraine crisis, the 2015 migrant crisis, Brexit, and Trump in 2016.

Since Putin came to power, and especially since the major EU-NATO enlargement into Eastern Europe in 2004, Russia has created three strategic pressure points: the Baltic states, Ukraine, and the Western Balkans. NATO protected Eastern Europe and the Baltic states. The West abandoned Georgia in 2008 and then Ukraine in 2014 to Russian aggression, retreating from Russian threats of nuclear weapons and the European economies' need for cheap energy.

The Ukrainian Maidan revolution was intolerable for the Kremlin. Ukraine's freedom to choose Europe and democracy, probably in that order, was a personal humiliation for Putin. Russia could not bear to have a pro-European democratic regime on the territory it traditionally considers its own. It also

claimed that during the 1990 negotiations on the reunification of the two Germanys, the US had allegedly verbally promised the Soviets not to expand NATO. This was just one of many untruths. The Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union were still present, and NATO enlargement (which began much later) was not even on the agenda. The US did everything in its power to help Russia build institutions and launch its economy. Thanks to American efforts, Russia secured a USD 20 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund in the 1990s. With the support of the US and the UK, Russia signed the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, which transferred nuclear weapons from Ukraine and Belarus to Russia in exchange for recognizing the inviolability of their borders. Although the Russian Federation failed to meet the criteria of economic and institutional excellence, in 1998 it became a member of the G7, a grouping of the world's most powerful industrialized countries, which thus became the G8. Since the beginning of the 2008 financial and economic crisis, Russia has had the support of the EU. France and Germany rejected the idea of Ukraine and Georgia joining NATO so as not to offend Russia. Russia and NATO concluded the first strategic partnership in 1991, and Russia joined the Partnership for Peace program in 1994. Far from being humiliated, as Putin often claimed to mask his true intentions, Russia was granted an undeserved degree of equality and respect – at every crucial juncture.

In response to the Maidan revolution, which signaled Ukraine's decisive turn toward Europe, Putin decided in 2014 to occupy the Donbas and annex Crimea, convinced that the US had lost its strategic authority. Just nine months after taking office, US President Barack Obama was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize on the grounds that he had created a new climate on the international stage and helped to revitalize multilateral diplomacy. For those who remembered the Cold War well and

were convinced that Russia would not abandon its imperial ambitions and the restoration of Soviet power, this award might seem frivolous. Obama was held in high esteem in Europe, but the trust placed in him would prove misplaced. Obama was unable to address global challenges, partly because he was not interested in them and partly because he did not understand them. His pacifism opened the way for new massacres in the Middle East, in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. He cowardly left the alleged destruction of Syrian chemical weapons to Putin. The American intervention in Iraq in 2003 also neglected Syria as a center of terror and terrorism and Assad's regime as a role model for everyone, including Putin. Putin counted on Obama's true nature and his limitations. In 2014 he attacked Ukraine; in 2015 he openly entered the war in Syria on Assad's side and triggered a migrant crisis in Europe. Then, in 2016, Donald Trump won the American election thanks to the manipulations of the Russian intelligence and their influence on social media and conservative media outlets. The UK made an ill-advised, deeply flawed Brexit decision. Putin remained unfazed by Trump's defeat in the next election. The new American president, Joe Biden, was old (born in 1942) and was declared the winner under chaotic conditions. Biden, President Obama's vice president, was too indecisive and weak for Putin, while his administration was equally frustrated, unwilling, and incapable of responding in a timely and forceful manner. Putin also counted on Lukashenko, who suffered a defeat in the 2020 elections and only survived thanks to the Russian support. In the summer of 2021, the USA handed Afghanistan over to the Taliban. This served as fresh evidence of America's decline in Putin's eyes. One of the episodes that further emboldened him was the behavior of China, which took over Hong Kong and trampled on all agreements. Putin had every reason to expect Trump's return. He penetrated deep into the structure of Con-

gress and the Senate, dominated the influential media outlets, and poisoned a third of Americans with conspiracy theories, half-truths, and all kinds of craziness.

The invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, was an operation to “denazify” the neighboring “fraternal land,” which was unjustly separated from its natural motherland. Russian propaganda also claimed that the attack was necessary to prevent an imminent NATO invasion, of which Ukraine was allegedly a mere vassal territory. Furthermore, the objectives included the arrest of the “drug addicts” in power in Kyiv, especially President Volodymyr Zelensky.

Europe was helpless. Putin did not factor in any potential European response. Europe could only react with sanctions, which Putin despised.

The European Union is not fundamentally designed for strategic responses. It was founded in the more comfortable era of Fukuyama’s “end of history,” when liberal democracy was believed to be the logical and only source of social change following the fall of the Berlin Wall. Putin dismissed the European Union, doing so through a combination of his best and worst qualities at the same time. Putin is a predator and a serial killer. Putin’s obvious personal stupidity (he is his own caricature) has fooled everyone who underestimated Russia’s ability to contaminate the Western world by using operations of deception, relativization, and intimidation. Meanwhile, aging and the pandemic have affected Putin’s mental state, making it more primal. Perhaps he regressed to the frustrations of his youth when he tried to establish himself as the ringleader of a local gang. He always played the bizarre role of the dominant male. He revitalized the Gulag culture, a system of “dominant domination” that compelled prisoners to inflict punishment on one another as a strategy for survival. Putin applied this model to Russian society. At the top of the criminal oligarchy,

he chose for himself the role of the camp's only occasionally visible warden. To the convicts and to everyone else, he left the roles of guards, victims, informants, and executioners, each according to their abilities or merits.

The resistance that Ukraine put up from the very first days, when it had already been written off, surprised Putin. Ukraine reminded him of the very European ideas of freedom and resistance to totalitarianism that Europe itself, lulled by prosperity, had forgotten. Ukraine's self-sacrifice is truly indescribable. The resistance was intelligent, resourceful, ingenious, and not just fearless. The resistance that Putin had not anticipated: a strength he had despised, a force he could neither comprehend nor counter. This became a horizontal network of Ukrainian society that distributed the defense in such a way that its structure and principles did not depend on a single person, not even on President Zelensky himself, who uncompromisingly took the burden of defense upon himself. This profound resistance unmasked and dismantled the essence of the aggressor and aggression—above all, the historical code, the paranoid obsession with the alleged superiority of Russian culture, and the continuity of militant, exclusive Marxism-Leninism, which preserved the feudal hierarchy of privileged boyars and resigned muzhiks.

Two special circumstances have saved Ukraine from a total catastrophe. First, Putin has, at least temporarily, brought Russia back to the center of US strategic priorities. Since the start of Russian aggression, Ukraine and Europe have relied on the American security umbrella, with Ukraine building a system of resistance and Europe reorganizing its foreign and security policy. Another important change was probably the unexpected reaction of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who knew well the malign influence of Russia and Syria in the region and was forced to confront the Russian threat to the Straits. In 2019, Turkey offered Ukraine the Bayraktar drone, a

formidable weapon, the “star of drones.” The joint production of new-generation drones then began. For the first time, the West benefited from the Cyprus paradigm, but from a different perspective. The Kremlin was forced to understand that some roles had been reversed.

With the attack on Ukraine, Putin tried to swing the pendulum back in the opposite direction following the major EU and NATO wave of enlargement between 2004 and 2020, when Eastern Europe joined the Western world. EU accession opened up prospects for dynamic development, while NATO membership offered guarantees under Article 5 (all for one, one for all), especially with regard to future Russian ambitions. The Western Balkans, the former Yugoslavia alongside Albania, with access to the Mediterranean, is not fully integrated, so Putin achieved another useful counterbalance to Ukraine’s detriment. Germany abandoned its pacifism and begun to re-arm. The EU is a political community based on the values of free trade, democracy, and the rule of law. Putin did not expect it to be committed to freeing itself from Russian energy dependence, which implied both economic and political corruption. But in the face of Putin’s aggression, the Visegrád Group, which had undermined European political and strategic unity for years, disintegrated. Only Hungary and Slovakia remained on the margins of an agreement on a new political, strategic, and value community.

Guided by the Soviet experience, Putin sought legitimacy in the “Third World,” in Africa, Central Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East (the Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito, who had no intention of joining the European Economic Community, acted similarly). Putin believed that he was not alone and that the majority of the “world” supported him.

In a global context, the use of nuclear weapons against “Western degenerates” (as Vladimir Zhirinovsky phrased

it) was also open. In 2014, Russia invaded Ukraine, trusting that NATO would hold back in the face of a nuclear threat. Then it began the subjugation of the conquered territories, the Russification of minds, the distribution of passports, and the introduction to the Russian payment system (Serbia is the only country in the region that has remained outside the European payment system SEPA). Crimea was annexed thanks to a Soviet-style referendum (polling stations were controlled by unmarked Russian special forces). The Kremlin did the same in four regions of eastern Ukraine: Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson. Any attempt by Ukraine to return these territories or any NATO intervention would be met with Russia's nuclear doctrine. At that point, the conflict in Ukraine was frozen (Serbia acted similarly in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Kosovo, with increasingly visible support from the Russian services).

Even during the Cold War crises, Soviet leaders did not immediately threaten a nuclear apocalypse (although the issue came up during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis). Putin's media outlets openly proclaim that Russian nuclear missiles could strike Berlin or Paris within minutes and that London (where Putin's oligarchs have hidden the looted capital) could disappear in a second. On the Chernobyl site (a nuclear power plant where the 1986 incident occurred), the Russian army occupied the "Red Forest," an ultra-radioactive area where pine trees had changed color due to radiation, without protective suits, digging trenches, and hunting wild animals. The nuclear power plant in Zaporizhzhia is part of a package of Russian nuclear catastrophe blackmail.

On the ground, Russian troops are often a disorganized, unruly mob. In several towns and villages in northern Ukraine, Russian soldiers raped, tortured, and executed civilians, helpless people, women, and the elderly. They believed they were

exterminating “Nazi” Ukrainians, “non-men.” Putin has condensed the nation into a tribal community that unleashes a primal, atavistic form of anthropological expression.

From the first days of the attack on Ukraine, Putin’s strategic goals and ontological intentions were clear. To conquer Kyiv, the cradle of the first Russia from a distant past. To secure direct rule over the Donbas. To secure Crimea from the land side and to occupy the entire Ukraine’s Azov and Black Sea coastlines. To erase every trace of Ukraine’s uniqueness, statehood, sovereignty, and identity. He continued to threaten Moldova, the Baltic states, and Poland and maintained a state of tension and hatred in the former Yugoslavia that fueled identity-based conflicts. Convinced that NATO was weak and would not respond, Putin was convinced that he would swiftly and safely install a puppet government in Kyiv and further break Western unity. Instead of Kyiv, he installed a puppet government in Washington. With Trump’s return to office in 2025, NATO ceased to exist in its original structure and purpose.

The era of cheerful globalization is coming to an end. European nations are beginning to realize the extent to which their domestic well-being has depended on the existence of a totalitarian regime in Russia. The world finds itself in a state of unprecedented uncertainty. Until recently, Putin was the greatest threat to global peace; now, that threat is Donald Trump, who is taking over institutions and constitutional order and threatening America’s allies. It is likely that only the rivalry between the US and China will be a balancing factor, and it may not affect Russia’s relations with Ukraine and Europe. For China, Ukraine represents a precedent, a mirror of Taiwan following the occupation of Hong Kong. China hopes to one day buy Russia to get its energy resources and raw materials, but in the meantime, it maintains an understanding with its neighbor given that they share the same totalitarian nature, personality cult, presidency

for life, lack of democratic rights, no free elections, control over all aspects of citizens' lives, camps for deportation, re-education, and brutal punishment. Kissinger's Chinese paradigm is now completely inverted. Confused with the vastness of American freedoms, Kissinger got it all wrong anyway, but the need for a new balance of power is obvious. One of Putin's successes has been to waste Europe's intelligence and time.

A time of uncertainty has dawned, whose only special value lies in the narrowing of space for relativization. We are frequently reminded of how the Western world faced the end of the 1930s, uncertain of the danger that was immediate and obvious. Orhan Dragaš, in his series of columns published since July 20, 2022, in the Kyiv Post, The National Interest, Euractiv, The Jerusalem Post, The National Journal, WSJ, CEPA... has demonstrated that the nuances have faded, even if he once entertained the idea that they might still exist. Excellent knowledge of the issues at hand, the clarity of his moral positions, and his humanity, and empathy—all are contained in the author's decision to stand against the domestic political entropy that has become systemic and confront the consensus of tacit complicity in Russian aggression, which represents Serbia's most profound moral collapse since the early 1990s. The attempt to undo ethical deficits and heal frustrations through intellectual regression is not a novel concept in Serbian politics and culture. But in the face of Ukraine's defense against aggression, this response against reason and enlightenment loses its illusory meaning.

Belgrade, April 2025

Prof. Dr. Nikola Samardžić,
Professor at the Faculty of Philosophy,
University of Belgrade

Author's Introductory Note

I am publishing a third book on the same subject, although I had hoped that it would not be necessary and that the reason, justice, and political responsibility of the leaders of Europe and the world would finally come to an agreement and that the crime in Ukraine would be punished as the world with a healthy moral reflex expects.

The war that Russia started with its aggression against Ukraine in February 2022 continues. Destruction, mass murders, rapes, deportations of children, and exhausting sieges of cities—all this is happening before the eyes of the world. And the world... remains silent. Or, worse, it adopts an ambivalent attitude that borders on unspoken support.

This book is a continuation of my research series that began with the books “The End of the Russian World” and “Russia—From a Failed State to a Rogue State.” In these books, I analyzed in detail the Russian aggression against Ukraine, its historical, political, and social causes, and the catastrophic consequences not only for Ukraine but also for Russia, the Balkans, Europe, and the whole world. Unfortunately, this analysis continues today.

That is why I have included a detailed chronology of the key events leading up to the February 2022 invasion in the introduction to this edition. This clearly demonstrates that a decade of systematic aggression and destabilization in Ukraine prepared the groundwork for the war and that it did not break out suddenly. This documented genesis of the war serves to debunk the myth of the “sudden crisis” and to provide the reader with a more profound understanding of how the crime was planned, tolerated, and ultimately carried out. Each date mentioned in that chronology is also an indictment against the world that watched—and remained silent.

I am still preoccupied with the question of why this war happened and why it continues. How is it possible that, despite the clear documentation and analysis of numerous obvious crimes, the world still lacks the courage to establish boundaries and punish the aggressor? How is it possible that the Western powers, proud of their values, turn away from the obvious crime and continue to balance between condemnation and economic cooperation with the regime that has plunged the European continent into bloody chaos?

The question is whether the world really wants to end this war or if the words of support for Ukraine are just an empty echo in an endless political game where economics and trade are still more important than human lives. Perhaps the problem is that many have abandoned their moral principles to create the appearance of stability and false security while the death toll rises daily.

This collection of columns covers the period from August 2023 to the present day. It records the most important events related to the Russian aggression against Ukraine but also something much more serious—it documents the hypocrisy of a large part of the international community.

While Vladimir Putin and his war machine continue to brutally destroy Ukraine, some Western politicians are trying to redefine their interests, balancing between economic pressure and occasional condemnation.

The West had a chance to show resolve. Instead, it has shown weakness. Politicians rushed to express their solidarity with Ukraine while looking for ways to cultivate pragmatic relations with Russia.

Donald Trump, the President of the United States of America, represents the unique phenomenon of our time. His policy toward Russia and Ukraine is nothing other than a

grotesque return to the age in which crimes are amnestied for political advantage. His public statements relativizing Russian crimes, calls for negotiations, and forcing Ukraine to make painful concessions to the aggressor are a historic disgrace to the United States and a devastating betrayal of all the principles on which the free world was built.

Trump is no stranger to the political stage. He is the president of a country that should be the linchpin of international law and human rights. But he chooses to be the Russian regime's advocate out of personal interest, political ambitions, and ignorant pragmatism. And while Ukraine fights for its survival, Trump makes common cause with those who are killing it.

But it is not just Trump who is responsible. A whole series of Western leaders continue to pander to Russia out of fear, self-interest, or geopolitical cowardice. They still pretend to believe that they could negotiate with Russia, that they will find a common language with a regime that has made war and destruction the basis of its policy.

Meanwhile, Ukraine and its people are experiencing a level of hardship unprecedented in Europe since the Second World War. And all this is happening at a time when human rights, democracy, and the rule of law should be the undisputed foundations of a modern society.

The title of this book, "Ukraine—Crime without Punishment," is not just a rhetorical figure. It stands for a devastating reality in which crime continues and goes unpunished, while the world wavers between cries for justice and cynical pragmatism.

Perhaps these texts will one day serve as a record of what really happened. As a testament to a time when the world had the opportunity to be on the right side of history but instead

chose to calculate, hesitate, and betray its principles for economic gain and political bargain.

Above all, this is a book about truth. About the brutality of crime and the shame of those who condone it. About the morality that gets lost somewhere between international summits and diplomatic compromises.

History, as always, will pass judgment. My task is to document the truth at this moment, no matter how dark and painful it may be.

If anything remains after all this, it should be a clear message to those who had the power to punish crimes but chose to do nothing.

Belgrade, April 2025

Dr. Orhan Dragaš

How It Began:
Preparing Invasion (2013-2022)

Prelude to the War (2013–2022)

This chronology of key events in the decade leading up to the war is a precise and clear demonstration of how the Russian Federation planned, promoted, and executed step-by-step a brutal aggression against Ukraine. I have included it in the introduction to this book because it debunks the narrative of a “sudden crisis.” This sequence of events shows how the crime was prepared for years — with silence, hesitation, and often complicity on the part of the international community. Every point in this overview is a wound for international law.

November 2013 – February 2014: Euromaidan and the Fall of Yanukovych

Viktor Yanukovych rejects the agreement with the EU. The Ukrainian protests escalate into a general uprising. Of particular significance was the “Bloody Week” in February, when snipers fired into the crowd. More than 100 civilians were killed — later known as the “Heavenly Hundred”. This was followed by a political collapse of the regime in Kyiv.

March 2014: Annexation of Crimea

Russia uses the chaos in Kyiv to launch a rapid military operation. Russian troops without insignia — so-called “unmarked soldiers”—occupy strategic points in Crimea. A referendum is organized without interna-

tional supervision, which is a gross violation of international law. The annexation took place without much international resistance.

April – August 2014: War in the Donbas and the downing of the Malaysian airplane

Pro-Russian insurgents establish the self-proclaimed republics of Donetsk and Luhansk. The fighting in these eastern Ukrainian regions escalates. In July, a missile fired by Russian forces shot down Malaysian Airlines flight MH17, killing 298 people, including children. Investigations and court proceedings confirmed the responsibility of the pro-Russian forces. This crime proved that the conflict was not localized but part of a wider imperial project.

September 2014 – February 2015: The Minsk agreements and a frozen conflict

The Minsk agreements brokered by the OSCE provided for a ceasefire, but the fighting continued. Russia used the agreements to legitimize the separatists' presence in eastern Ukraine, while Ukraine lost institutional control over the Donbas. The agreements became a political trap for Kyiv, which Moscow used to freeze the conflict and consolidate its influence.

2015–2018: Intensification of hybrid warfare

Russian cyberattacks target the energy grid, banks, and government, along with disinformation campaigns, intelligence operations, and political infiltration. Ukraine suffers an attempt at total destabilization. The Donbas becomes a lawless zone.

2018: Kerch Strait incident—aggression at sea

The Russian navy opens fire on Ukrainian ships in the Kerch Strait and takes sailors prisoner. The incident is the

first direct armed confrontation between the official armed forces of Ukraine and Russia since 2014.

2019: Zelensky comes to power—hope and disappointment

Volodymyr Zelensky, a former comedian, wins the presidential elections by a landslide. He takes office with a message of reconciliation, but Moscow ignores him. A brief withdrawal of the armed forces from parts of the Donbas does not last. The Kremlin clarifies that it is not seeking compromise but submission.

2020: Pandemic and military preparations

While the world fights COVID-19, Russia intensifies its propaganda, destabilization, and support for separatists. It builds a bridge across the Kerch Strait to Crimea, which becomes a symbol of aggression and occupation. New military scenarios are being rehearsed near the Ukrainian border.

2021: First major mobilization and NATO ultimatum

Russia demands that NATO never admit Ukraine as a member. An attack is simulated during military exercises with Belarus. Moscow announces a “red line.” The West tries to negotiate, but Putin remains firm.

2021: Second major mobilization and information operations

Russia deploys troops and equipment along the entire border. At the same time, it conducts a media campaign about “Nazis in Kyiv” and alleged “threats to Russians.” The intention is clear: to dehumanize the enemy.

January – February 2022: Preparations for aggression

The intelligence services of the USA and the UK warn that Russia is preparing a full-scale invasion. Putin sends

NATO a list of ultimatums. Moscow demands a “sphere of influence” reminiscent of the Cold War. Visits by Emmanuel Macron and Olaf Scholz to Moscow fail. Embassies begin to evacuate from Kyiv.

February 21, 2022: Legal cover for aggression

Putin recognizes the separatist entities in eastern Ukraine, the DPR and the LPR, as “independent states,” signs agreements, and orders troops to move into these areas. This was the moment when war became inevitable.

February 24, 2022: Total war

The Russian armed forces attack from three directions. Airports, military bases, and residential areas are attacked. Kyiv becomes the target. It is the largest attack on a European state since the Second World War.

When Trump and Putin agree on Zelensky

April 9, 2025

Since the first day of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, President Volodymyr Zelensky has shown exceptional courage and leadership. When the aggressor started its attack on February 24, 2022, Zelensky refused offers to evacuate, saying he needed ammunition, not transport. He remained in the capital despite personal danger, inspiring his people to fight. Zelensky was considered a war hero by many around the world because he refused to leave Kyiv, raising the morale of the nation and becoming a symbol of resistance. His straightforwardness—from daily speeches in an olive-green T-shirt from besieged Kyiv to going to the front—gave Ukrainians the belief that the state would stand by them even in the most difficult moments.

Zelensky visited the destroyed Kharkiv, the trenches of Bakhmut, and the liberated Kherson, wearing a military jacket instead of a suit to make it clear that he shared the fate of his soldiers. Such presence at the front, his leadership qualities, and his symbolic power made him the embodiment of the defiance of the free world.

Of course, Zelensky did not achieve Ukraine's successes alone—behind him stand countless heroes of the Ukrainian army and people—but his role as a catalyst of resistance is undeniable. As a wartime president, he maintained the unity of a country fighting for its survival while rallying support around the world. It is no coincidence that *Time* magazine named him Person of the Year in 2022 and the "Spirit of Ukraine," recognizing the strength of his leadership.

Donald Trump, the President of the United States of America, recently called Zelensky a "dictator" because Ukraine did not hold elections during the war. In doing so, he repeated the same rhetoric used by Vladimir Putin. This absurd coincidence should serve as a warning: if the President of the United States aligns himself with an autocrat from the Kremlin, there is a serious problem.

The Ukrainian constitution and laws clearly prohibit the holding of national elections during a state of war. Since February 2022, the country has been under martial law—a state of emergency (war) necessary to defend itself against Russian aggression. Under such conditions, there are no prerequisites for free and safe elections. Here are just a few reasons why:

Security risks: The Russian military is shelling Ukrainian cities on a daily basis and does not shy away from attacking civilian targets. Holding elections would mean mass gatherings in polling stations, which would be targets for enemy attacks. Many schools and buildings that would have served as polling stations have already been razed to the ground, and no government can guarantee the safety of voters and election observers in the middle of a war zone.

Population displacement: Over six million Ukrainians have fled to Europe as refugees, and millions more are either internally displaced or living under Russian occupation. Hundreds of thousands of people are on the front line as soldiers. How is it possible to organize voting when a large proportion of the electorate is not at home or is at the front in uniform? In order for all these citizens to be able to vote, Ukraine would have to demobilize around 700,000 soldiers in the middle of the war—a practically impossible undertaking.

Democratic standards: Free elections include campaigning, debates in the media, and the presence of international observers. During the war, the media is restricted due to national security, freedom of movement is difficult, and foreigners cannot move freely around the country. Millions of voters outside the country would vote by mail or at embassies, which is logistically beyond the capacity of the state at this time. All this would call into question the regularity and credibility of the elections.

In short, elections in the midst of active fighting would be a farce. Even key Ukrainian opposition leaders, who are Zelensky's rivals, agree that elections during the war are not feasible until peace is restored. It is not about party politics but about the bare survival of the nation. Zelensky was legally elected in 2019 with an overwhelming majority, and his mandate is considered extended as long as the state of emergency lasts. The Ukrainian parliament has recently formally confirmed that Zelensky and the institutions are legitimate and that there will be no elections until the end of the aggression. In doing so, it has directly rejected Trump and Putin's insinuations that the legitimacy of the government is questionable due to the failure to hold a vote.

History teaches us the same. The UK did not hold general elections during the Second World War until after the end of war operations. The UK held its last election before the war in 1935, and the next one did not occur until July 1945, after the victory over Nazism. The Churchill government was granted parliamentary approval for postponing elections every year, believing that campaigning and voting during the war of survival would be irresponsible and risky for the unity of the country. Similarly, Ukraine today is fighting for the very life of the nation. Democracy is not being abolished but temporarily put on hold while the bombs fall. The ideals Ukrainians are fighting for—freedom, democracy, and the right of the people to decide—are best defended when the war is won. Holding "regular" elections at extremely irregular times would mean gambling with the fate of the country.

Democracy does not disappear when elections are postponed during an invasion—on the contrary, this defends its essence. Zelensky was legitimately elected, and his mandate was extended until the end of the state of war. The enemy is trying to delegitimize him, but the fact that he has stayed and is leading the people in the most difficult days confirms his legitimacy.

Trump's demand to hold the elections immediately or to label Zelensky a "dictator" for not calling them cynically ignores these facts. Such a demand is logistically absurd and morally unfair to the people who bury their loved ones every day. Every day, civilians in Ukraine lose their lives in markets, their homes, bus stations, and children's playgrounds. From the beginning of the invasion until today, more than 12,000 Ukrainian civilians have been killed in the war and tens of thousands wounded.

How can the elections be organized if there aren't enough cemeteries to accommodate the innocent victims? This is something that both Trump and anyone who attributes "lack of democracy" to Zelensky should think about before recklessly making a criticism that departs from any humanity.

Adding to the concern are reports that Trump's team has been negotiating with Zelensky's opponents, including Tymoshenko and Poroshenko. If it is true that the American president and his associates are trying to "install" a replacement for the Ukrainian leader, this is direct interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state while it is bleeding.

Such actions in the midst of the chaos of war undermine trust, weaken Ukrainian unity, and are basically subordinate to one man—Vladimir Putin.

Putting morality aside, this situation directly benefits Moscow. The Kremlin has long sought to remove or weaken Zelensky, seeing him as an obstacle to its goals of conquest. It is no secret that since the beginning of the war, Putin has wanted someone in Kyiv who would be "softer" to Moscow's demands. This is why Russian propaganda is constantly slandering Zelensky and fueling disputes and conflicts within Ukraine. When US officials resort to similar tactics, whether out of ignorance or calculation, they effectively become tools of such propaganda.

The most dangerous thing about the whole story is that Trump uses the same formulations and attitudes as Putin. The Kremlin has been promoting these positions for years, calling Zelensky a "dictator," insisting on elections in the midst of bombings, and minimizing support for Ukraine.

This decline is both political and moral. If the US president agrees with the aggressor in his assessment of who is

the enemy, it's not a coincidence. It represents a deliberate stance that weakens Ukraine while strengthening Russia.

During the Cold War, it would have been unthinkable for any American president to repeat the Kremlin's propaganda. America, despite all its internal divisions, was aware that it was the leader of the free world. Today, unfortunately, we see that some political figures are prepared to neglect this responsibility. Trump's policy toward Zelensky clearly favors the interests of the Kremlin, and that should be made clear. His words and actions seem to come from the same workshop that broadcasts the news on Russian state television—the same television that calls Zelensky a Nazi and invents reasons to justify Russian crimes.

Zelensky is not a perfect leader. His decisions, including the dismissal of General Zaluzhny, were unpopular and controversial. It is understandable that war exhausts a nation; daily losses, destruction, and a difficult economic situation create discontent and mistrust, even toward those who had been trusted. Some accuse Zelensky of restricting the freedom of the media and the opposition during the war (closing down pro-Russian media and parties, which his defenders described as necessary steps against the fifth column). Others are unhappy that corruption has not been eradicated and that scandals continue to occur, even within the army and ministries, while ordinary people give their last ounce of strength for the fatherland.

But we have to look at the bigger picture and the context. Ukraine is a country engaged in an existential war in which the president has to make fateful decisions at any moment. Some of these decisions will not meet with approval—sometimes they will seem wrong—yet they stem from a responsibility that cannot be imagined in peace-

time. Zelensky carries a burden on his shoulders that most would shy away from: the fate of millions of people and the future of a sovereign country. Under such circumstances, a decline in popularity is almost inevitable, because a war inevitably tests the trust between citizens and authorities. People want quick victories; they want an end to suffering—and unfortunately neither Zelensky nor anyone else can miraculously bring this to them overnight.

Zelensky has been at the side of his people since day one. He leads the country under siege, with a front more than a thousand kilometers long. He is responsible for the fate of the nation and defends the values of the free world—the right of the people to decide, the right to live without fear, and the right not to change borders by force.

And if Trump and Putin agree that Zelensky is the problem, then it's clear that Zelensky is doing something right. His courage, his determination, and his willingness to stand by his soldiers make him a problem for autocrats. And what bothers the Putins of this world deserves to be supported, not attacked.

This text was not written to idealize Zelensky or to claim that the Ukrainian leadership is blameless. No—it is about recognizing which side justice is on in this war. A small democratic country is bleeding to preserve its freedom and its right to survive. Opposing it is an imperial aggressor who wants to wipe it out. Volodymyr Zelensky became the face of this struggle, whether he wanted to or not, and the attacks on him today carry a weight that goes beyond the usual political criticism. When these attacks originate from the former leader of the free world and align with the propaganda of the greatest enemy of freedom, it serves as a clear warning.

It is therefore time for the world, especially America, to say clearly: we strongly support Ukraine and its president. And not because he is perfect, but because he is fighting for what protects us all—freedom, democracy, and human dignity.

Mr. Musk, How Much Is a Ukrainian Child Worth?

March 15, 2025

Children should never be weapons of war. Yet, in the 21st century, before the eyes of the entire world, Russia is systematically abducting Ukrainian children, erasing their identities, and turning them into little Russians, while the West collectively shrugs. And now, to make the irony even greater, Elon Musk has decided to financially cut off those working to bring them home.

This is not just another decision by a billionaire. This is not one of his whims, like renaming Twitter or pumping Dogecoin. This is complicity in one of the most insidious war crimes of our time—the systematic theft of children, an act that amounts to nothing less than genocide.

More than 19,500 Ukrainian children have disappeared into Russia. Some were taken from orphanages and hospitals; others were kidnapped from occupied territories. All have undergone the same process—forced name changes, new passports, and indoctrination into the “Russian world.” They are taught to forget the Ukrainian language. To despise the country they came from. To never learn the truth about their origins.