

Volodymyr Holovchenko and Mykola Doroshko: **Hibrydna viina Rosii proty Ukrainy: istoryko-politychne doslidzhennia**. Kyiv: Nika-Tsentr, 2016. 184 pages. ISBN 978-966-521-689-6

Russia's attempted annexation of Crimea, its occupation of Donbas, and the protracted conflict in the east of Ukraine have given impetus to an expansion of the study of contemporary Russia and Ukraine, the history of Russian-Ukrainian relations, and related topics. This monograph, *Hibrydna viina Rosii proty Ukrainy: istoryko-politychne doslidzhennia* (*Russia's Hybrid War Against Ukraine: A Study in History and Politics*), written by Ukrainian authors Volodymyr Holovchenko and Mykola Doroshko, is evidence of the growing interest in the subject matter. It adds to the available literature, some of which has already been reviewed in this journal.¹

The authors of the book are well-known as research fellows at the Taras Shevchenko Kyiv National University, Ukraine. Holovchenko, a historian by education, was a professor of political science at the university's Institute of International Relations until his death in 2017. His fields of research included the history of Ukraine's diplomacy, political thought, and social movements. Doroshko is a professor of history at the same institute. He focuses primarily on the history of the Soviet Ukraine of the 1920s and 1930s. In their jointly authored book, the authors have set the goal of unveiling the political component of what they regard as a "hybrid war" being waged by Russia against Ukraine. They place their emphasis on the underlying historical and root causes of that war.

To fulfill their stated goal, the authors have structured their book into eight thematically defined chapters. After a short preface, Chapter One of their narrative opens with a review of the currently available literature dealing with the phenomenon of "hybrid wars." The authors understand the term in its broadest sense, as an innovative form of warfare that engages the full spectrum of a state's war-making capabilities, with increasing reliance on non-military means and methods. To begin, the authors trace the genesis of the concept of hybrid war and describe its defining features. They identify the conditions that are necessary for a hybrid attack to succeed. Next, they outline the individual phases of a hybrid war campaign. In Chapter 2, the authors provide historical examples of twentieth-century conflicts that employed rudiments of this military strategy. The authors argue that while hybrid war is by no means a solely Russian invention, certain elements of hybrid warfare, such as spreading disinformation and ideological discord, sabotage, and sponsoring militant insurgencies that have subverted governments across the globe,

¹ See the reviews of Peter Pomerantsev's *Nothing is True and Everything is Possible: The Surreal Heart of the New Russia*, Elina Lange-Ionatamishvili's *Redefining Euro-Atlantic Values: Russia's Manipulative Techniques*, David Satter's *The Less You Know, the Better You Sleep*, Mikhail Zygar's *All the Kremlin's Men: Inside the Court of Vladimir Putin*, Karen Dawisha's *Putin's Kleptocracy: Who Owns Russia?*, Mark Galeotti's *Spetsnaz: Russia's Special Forces*, and Yury Fedorov's *Hybrid War à la Russe*, in *Acta Universitatis Carolinae – Studia Territoria* No. 1 (2017), No. 2 (2017), No. 1 (2018) and No. 2 (2019), respectively.

have been an inherent part of Russia's (and the Soviet Union's) foreign policy toolbox ever since the Bolshevik coup of 1917.

Chapter 3 is concerned with the political preconditions and ideological foundations of Russia's war on Ukraine, placing them in historical perspective. The aim of this part of the book is to juxtapose the tenets of Russia's nationalist historiography with a fact-based, international historical view of Russia's relationship with Ukraine. The authors show how much the Russian state distorts historical memory for its policy goals. Its purpose can be downplaying its own crimes or quasi-legitimization of its imperial claims to territory in Ukraine, other nations in Russia's neighborhood, and beyond. The authors critically scrutinize Russia's most common historical myths and narratives, which systematically seek to downgrade Ukraine to a mere historical construct at best, starting with the Muscovites' claim to the legacy of Kievan Rus. In Chapter 4, the authors specifically discuss the mainstream Russian interpretations of the history of the Crimea peninsula, to which Vladimir Putin's ruling ideology has ascribed the status of "sacred Russian soil."

Chapter 5 is devoted to the Kremlin's "natural gas wars," highlighting the role of economic warfare in Russia's foreign policy. The chapter provides a chronological account of Russian-Ukrainian energy relations since 1991. In particular, the authors focus on Ukraine's inherited dependence on Russia for supplies of that strategic commodity. The authors illustrate the ramifications of the Ukraine's persisting vulnerability to Russia with regard to its energy security, using the example of two gas crises in 2006 and 2009 that both entailed a cut-off of gas supplies to Ukraine.

In Chapter 6, the authors focus on how Russia instrumentalizes its "fifth columns" abroad. They use the word "fifth column" in a figurative sense, as a metaphor denoting Russia's networks of agents of influence that work to disrupt a targeted state from within. The authors demonstrate how the contemporary Russian regime increasingly relies on local proxies in its foreign operations aimed at interference in the politics of other countries. The Kremlin thus exercises its malign influence, inciting civil unrest and disinformation campaigns to legitimize its aggressive foreign policies. The chapter sketches out the networks of influence the Kremlin has created in Ukraine and Western Europe to justify its ongoing war on Ukraine. It highlights the great variety of these proxy agents, who include anti-immigration activists, Euro-sceptics, anti-establishment and anti-system parties and movements, Russia's own ethnic diaspora, and the institutions of the Russian orthodox church abroad. Corruption facilitates the establishment of Russian criminal networks in the target territory.

Chapter 7 recounts the evolution of political relations between Russia and Ukraine from 1991 to now. The authors regard the period up to 2014 in Russia's Ukraine policy as a preparatory phase, followed after 2014 by the attack phase in a hybrid war that epitomizes the model they outlined in the book's first chapter. They proceed from the assumption that "gathering in the Russian lands" has been part of the Kremlin's agenda ever since the Soviet Union collapsed. Only momentary weakness and the general backwardness of the Russian state prevented the Kremlin from pursuing these plans before 2014. Moscow limited itself to soft pressure and non-military coercion in its policies *vis-à-vis*

Ukraine. Russia launched diplomatic initiatives aimed at making Ukraine's integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structures impossible, ran massive campaigns to discredit Ukraine internationally, and torpedoed its attempts at reform, to name just a few tactics. Last but not least, delaying the process of state and nation-building in Ukraine, including discouraging the use of the Ukrainian language, served Russia's interests as well.

The book's eighth and concluding chapter presents a synthesis of the authors' findings. The authors conceived the chapter as an overall review of Russia's aggressive revanchism *vis-à-vis* Ukraine, which culminated in overt military aggression against Ukraine in 2014. The authors conclude by arguing that Ukraine's importance to Russia lies in Russia's quest for its national identity. The Kremlin views control of Ukraine as the key to renewal of the Russian empire.

Holovchenko's and Doroshko's book has all the formal attributes of an academic publication, including endnotes, a final bibliography, and an index. The authors' choice of topic is perhaps the book's strongest side. The book covers a broad, yet by no means exhaustive, range of the aspects of Russia's ongoing war on Ukraine. The authors have intuitively succeeded in picking out the topics that are of the utmost relevance, but which are not necessarily always seen in the literature through the prism of the revisionist agenda that underlies Putin's foreign policy. However, a strong, interdisciplinary approach is required for deeper understanding. Regrettably, the authors mainly skim the surface in their analysis. They excessively emphasize the supposed historical roots of Russia's latest aggressive act, but their numerous excursions into the past only demonstrate Russia's longstanding imperial designs. To imply that Russia invaded Ukraine simply because it has always behaved that way borders on determinism and tautology. Moreover, the authors focus too much on refuting the Russian state's countless distorted narratives without showing how its discursive themes fuel Russia's information warfare. The Kremlin's propaganda alone is only of limited value for understanding how Russia's hybrid war machine works.

The concept of hybrid warfare the authors have taken as the conceptual framework for their analysis is also problematic. Russia's aggression against Ukraine has sparked an intense debate in Western academia over the meaning of hybrid war. Russia's new generation warfare has yet to be satisfactorily defined. The concept of "hybridity" is easily stretched, redefined, and filled in with different substance. Many scholars question its appropriateness when applied to Russia's aggression against Ukraine, given the manner in which its military operations have been conducted. Since the invasion of Donbas by Russian regular forces in summer 2014, the war has primarily been a conventional conflict. Likewise, the annexation of Crimea was largely a covert operation by Russian special forces, which is not necessarily the same as a hybrid attack. The authors use the term without attempting to reflect this debate. The sources cited in this part of the book are rather weak and do not suffice to explain the premises of the debate.

To conclude, despite the authors' claimed desire to keep the focus of their book narrow, the book's overall concept is much looser. That may not be all bad, because the book clearly appeals to a broad readership. I see the book's target group as being lay

readers who seek historical context for the fragmentary data they are fed by the daily press, and who would like a fuller picture in line with the prevailing Ukrainian national narrative. The book may well satisfy the expectations of those readers. Its accessibility, readability and clear arrangement may make it their book of first choice. Unfortunately, the book has little new to say to a reader who already has knowledge of the problems that stand behind the recent tragedy in Russian-Ukrainian relations. A solid library of similarly conceived books has appeared in Ukraine in the last few years, many of which have higher informational and analytical value.² Nevertheless, Holovchenko's and Doroshko's book addresses a topic that is of the utmost relevance today, both politically and academically. Every serious attempt to illuminate the Ukraine-Russia conflict and hybrid war, which this book definitely is, must be welcomed.

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doi: 10.14712/23363231.2020.13

² For perhaps the best Ukrainian books on this topic, see the publications by Volodymyr Horbulin and his collaborators of the National Institute of Strategic Studies, in particular their *Svitova hibrydna viina: ukrains'kyi front* (Kyiv: Natsional'nyi instytut stratehichnykh doslidzhen', 2017). In addition, there are some insightful journalistic accounts documenting the individual phases of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. See, for example, Taras Berezovets', *Aneksiia. Ostriv Krym. Khroniky hibrydnoi viiny* (Kyiv: Bright Books, 2015); and Dmitrii Tymchuk, Yurii Karin, Konstantin Mashovets and Viacheslav Gusarov, *Vtorzhenie v Ukrainu: Khronika rossiiskoi agressii* (Kyiv: Bright Star Publishing, 2016).