# Wars and the World

# Wars and the World:

## *The Russian Army in Afghanistan, Chechnya, Georgia, and Popular Culture*

By

Tim Kucharzewski

In memoriam of my father and mother

*на нас, на вас, на родина кавказ*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

# PREFACE

## BY MICHAEL DAXNER

Tim Kucharzewski has done more than most authors of doctoral theses. In order to understand his sources, and to search for them, if not on the surface, he learned Russian language, and he acquired a deeper understanding for the Russian culture in three complex conflicts. Afghanistan, Chechnya, Georgia – three wars, while the formal systems of Russia changed, and the structural format of the country remained the same, and will survive. The main thesis within the broad unfolding is that the imaginary war can become an eternal real war fought for the identity of a nation, beyond all changes in the political structure.

The narrative refers to the recent past, and, irrespective of documents, archives, reports and eye-witnesses testimony, it offers a pretty good account of wars and interventions that never have been central to the German, even European, perception. Thus, for the German reader, the thesis is a kind of *discourse on war*, and not so much a *documentary*, based merely on facts. The facts make the ingredients, nevertheless, and the author's facts are as much reality as texts, pictures, metaphors… Reading means always bridging the gap between the narration and the facts, and it depends, upon which reality the judgment will be based. I know that it is risky to enter the field of discourse analysis at the same time, when one must catch up the facts of three military events that really had happened but appear today as if they never had happened in reality, but are only understandable through the narrations – nightmares for many, heroic tales for others, prone to forgetfulness or permanent remodeling as a legend. Is that too far-fetched? Look at Sergey Eisenstein's "Battleship Potemkin", and you will know about the bridge…Tim Kucharzewski has written a thesis about that bridge. As one of his supervisors, I have had the chance to discuss this kind of approach with him thoroughly, i.e., how to "use" the media (film, texts, sketches etc.) as a bridge to understand what was behind the acts of warfare that, in themselves, were not so easily to explain and legitimize rationally.

The Russian war against Ukraine is a good example for the timelessness of this kind of warfare. Russia will not reach victory, neither a military defeat. This is not necessary for the imaginary eternal battle. Just recently, President Putin has stated that Russia today is "stronger" than before the latest war in Ukraine, which means, it is more respected, more recognized for its strength and power, for its role among global discourses. The whole scenario reminds me of George Orwell's "1984" and the permanent wars among the three super-powers. But there is more to it, and the book allows an entry into the intermediate field of the imaginary and real war.

The imaginary war is ongoing and never has been completed or replaced by another global pattern of imaginary reality. *Imaginary* does not mean *fictitious* or *transcending reality*: it means that the representation brings to the viewer and listener the imagined reality, and one does often forget that the *real reality* is much harder, crueler, and deadlier than the imagined imprint on our consciousness. The author succeeds in showing how this imagery attracts very real fighters, politicians, influencers, if you will, and more so on levels that are not without complexity attached to "war": religion, culture, ethnicity, gender, but also taste, private resilience and opposition, also personal radicalization. It is as if the radical cultural company to the real war has replaced science and experience as advisors to political action. "Popular culture" as a frame or appendix to real wars is important, the more as we have left the world of letters and exchanged it for a world of images, sounds, rhythms …This has been always true in the history of war, but never so intense as in the 20th century with film and audio-visual representation, and more recently the digital representation has changed the trust in facts. Of course, "culture" has become a simmering term, almost enigmatic, in this context. In a way, it has changed its character together with "politics" within the imaginary universe. The Russian war against Ukraine is not allowed to be called a "war". That is not only an instrument of repression by Putin, it is also a cultural aggression, hitting everybody under his regime, not only journalists and intellectuals. It is, like Orwell's "Minipax", a part of the political transformation. In many texts and other specimen of Kucharzewski's material, the transformation becomes evident. As a sidenote I want to say that only irony and satire can get round the imposed meaning, irony and sometime pathos. And, of course, "Newspeak" is not a privilege of the Russian aggressor…but it can become better implanted than in democracies. What is remarkable in the description of cultural imagination is the depth of ideological intrusion into deeper layers of society. It is not only the "Russian" society in Russia, but many other ethnicities are being subjugated under diverse promises or simple threats, and they are culturally "russified"

through the material of imagination.

*

Part of my second reading, after the academic finalization of a thesis, has been the consideration that this text bears an enormous outlook into worldwide future scenarios. The penetration of politics by culture and the political conformity of culture both seem to fit into the trend to replace democracy by diverse forms of authoritarianism, from fascism to unruly anarchism. To be clear: that is a global development. It is a trend, not a worldwide reality yet. The Russian example is important insofar, as it bypasses the almost improbable positive developments of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Putin behaves as if this period of Russian liberation had never happened, or, if it had, it must be overcome even more effectively. This occurs not only by activating brutality and torture, but also through the support from religion and ultra-conservate history distortion. It works, not only through force, but also through a cultural purging and narrowing knowledge and the right to interpret all elements of culture. We know this from Hitler, Stalin, and other dictators, and there are many followers of Putin also in the West. But only few are as powerful as the Russian dictator. Why he has become so powerful, is partially explained by the cultural regression we can learn from Kucharzewski's book. This is what makes it so precious for me, and hopefully for many readers. It is also a kind of handbook. Readers can structure and order the material that can be collected from violent situations and from ongoing wars. This is of eminent secondary importance. If we don't have this rich and multifold material from conflicts and violent encounters, the danger is high that the place and time of the events will be forgotten rather early. This is already the case with Afghanistan, and it may be the case with Ukraine, if the crisis of Middle East continues. Together with failing memories there are two effects: a lack of continuing empathy with the victims of such conflicts, and, more enduring, the qualifying of the conflicts themselves. They will maintain in our memory no longer as real, but imagination is also playing a relativizing role. Here we are again on the level of *imagination*.

*

One aspect of the doctoral thesis is the crumbling of traditional views of a *nation*, or a *nation state*. The examples of Chechnya and Georgia discuss this problem largely. The Russian war against Ukraine is another example that the former empire has not really changed its fundamental ideology –

of course, under Stalin neither. It was a kind of illusionary hope that has expected that the idea of the eternal empire and its destiny would have disappeared within a few days of democracy. The importance of this observation goes beyond the examples in the book. There is no return of the nation. There is a different notion of this kind of organizing a state and a society, with less attachment to democracy and republicanism. Countries like Turkey or Hungary follow the Russian example, and many political parties even in the EU are inclined to follow it, without using the same terminology, of course. I think that Kucharzewski's approach can be used to analyze the level of imaginary politics in all these countries, the earlier the better. It has been an approach *avant la lettre*.

One example for the complexity of this idea is the reality of Afghanistan after the takeover of power by the Taliban two years ago. It really depends on the standards by which the new regime is being observed and valued. From the point of human rights, it is even more negative than the former pseudo-democratic regime. From the routine of everyday, it can be classified as one more dictatorship which does not follow the traditional and wishful idea of a democracy, but it works. This is not trivial when we analyze the cultural and routine structures simply adapted to the manipulative religious outside of the regime. It is backward, reactionary, anti-feminist, …but it works in a way that is following the model of Russia. And we could have anticipated this outcome of an erroneous intervention policy. A present analysis of the Afghan reality could use Tim Kucharzewski's terminology and observations to get a fertile continuation of his Afghanistan chapter in the book. And this is only one example why I like reading and commenting it.

*Popular culture* is a phenomenon of society. Each society has it, in different forms and intensity, no one is lacking it completely. The transition from it into different levels of *populist* politics is really important for analysts and observers, but also for individuals who have to live with it or suffer from the transformation of an open culture into coercion. It has always been in danger and at risk, from the early days of civilization. And it has always supported the democratic transformation of society, even before the state could adapt and change. We hold a very effective handbook for this transformation in our hands.

Berlin, 17.12.2023

# ABBREVIATIONS

**A**

AA - German Federal Foreign Office (*Auswärtiges Amt*)

ABL - Administrative Boundary Line

AGS-30 - *Автоматический станковый гранатомётAutomatic*, Grenade Launcher, Soviet/Russian

AJP - Afghanistan Justice Project

AK - *Автома́т Кала́шникова*, lit. "Automatic Gun ", Soviet/Russian assault rifle

AKM - Automatic Rifle „Kalaschnikow" modernized

AKS - Automatic Rifle „Kalaschnikow" folding stock

ARD - *Arbeitsgemeinschaft der öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Working group of public broadcasters of the Federal Republic of Germany)

ARK - Assault Rifle Kalaschnikow variation

ASSR - Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics

AWFF - Asian World Film Festival


**B**

BBC - British Broadcasting Corporation

BMP - *Боевая Машина Пехоты*, lit."Infantry Fighting Vehicle", Soviet/Russian combination of a light tank and Armoured Personnel Carrier, APC

BMPS - Soviet amphibious tracked infantry fighting vehicle

BMR - *Бронированная Машина Разминирования,* lit. "Armored Mine Clearance Vehicle" Soviet/Russian

BND - Federal German foreign intelligence service, *Bundesnachrichtendienst*

BTR - *бронетранспортёр*, lit. "Armoured Transporter", Soviet/Russian equivalent to Armoured Personnel Carrier, APC


**C**

CBS - Columbia Broadcasting System

CC - Central Committee

*СССР - Союз Советских Социалисмических Республик* USSR, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

CNA - Computer Network Attack

CEU - Central European University, Budapest Hungary
CGI - Computer Generated Images
CIA - Central Intelligence Agencies, USA
CIS - Commonwealth of Independent States
CNN - Cable News Network
COIN - Counter-Insurgency
CPSU - Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CU - Cinematographers Union

**D**
DARPA - Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency
DCS - Digital Combat Simulator
DDOS - Distributed Denial of Service Attack
DDR - *Deutsche Demokratische Republik*, see: GDR
DLC - Downloadable Content
DRA - Democratic Republic of Afghanistan
DRC - Danish Refugee Council
DVPA - *Demokratische Volkspartei Afghanistan*, German abbreviation of
    People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan

**E**
ECHR - European Court of Human Rights
EU - European Union
EUMM - European Union Monitoring Mission

**F**
FATA - Federally Administered Tribal Areas, former semi-autonomous
    tribal region in north-western Pakistan
FIM-92 - "Stinger" air-to-air Missile
FRAGOs - Fragmentary Orders
FSB - *Федеральная служба безопасности Российской Федерации*,
    Federal Security Service, Russia, main successor of the KGB
FT - Financial Times

**G**
G-36 - *Gewehr 36*, German assault rifle
GDR - German Democratic Republic
Gen. Sec. - General Secretary
GI - General Infantry, Government Issue or General Issue
GO - Governmental Organization

GROM - *Grupa Reagowania Operacyjno-Manewrowego*, Polish Tier One
      Special Forces

GRU/GU - *Главное управление Генерального штаба*, Main Directorate
      of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation,
      former Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of
      the Russian Federation, Russian foreign military intelligence agency

GSG9 - *Grenzschutzgruppe 9*, lit. "Border protection group 9 ", German
      Tier One Special Forces

GWOT - Global war on Terror/ism

**H**

HK-36 - Heckler & Koch *Gewehr 36*, see G-36

HRIDC - Human Rights Center

HWR - Human Rights Watch

**I**

ICC - International Criminal Court

ICG - International Crisis Group

ICRC - International Committee of the Red Cross

IDF - Israel Defence Force

IDP - Internally Displaced Person

i.e. - Latin 'id est': 'that is'

IED - Improvised Explosive Device

IIFFMCG - Independent International Fact-finding Mission on the
      Conflict in Georgia

IMDb - Internet Movie Database

IO - International Organisation

IOM - International Organisation of Migration

ISAF - International Security Assistance Force

ISI - Inter Service Intelligence, Pakistani intelligence service

**J**

JFFG - Joint Fact-finding Group

JSOC - Joint Special Operation Command, USA

**K**

K6-92 - submachine gun, Armenia

KGB - *Комитет государственной безопасности*, lit. "Committee for
      State Security", main security agency of the Soviet Union

KhAD - Main security agency and intelligence agency of Afghanistan,
      Chidamāt-i Illilā'āt-I Dawlati

**L**
LCOSF - Limited Contingent of Soviet Forces (in Afghanistan)
LGBTQ - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer/Questioning
LTTE - Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam

**M**
M4 - Military Model 4 Carbine, US assault rifle
M16 - ArmaLite Rifle Model 16, US assault rifle
MAD - Mutual Assured Destruction
MANPADS - Man-Portable Air-Defence System
MGS5 - Metal Gear Solid 5
MIFI - Moscow Engineering and Physics Institute
MiG - Mikoyan and Gurevich Design Bureau/Mikoyan, Soviet/Russian
    aerospace and defence company, mostly known for fighter jets
MIL MI 24 - Russian Helicopter named after its inventor Mikhail Mil,
    Nato reporting name: Hind
MP - Member of parliament
MP5 - *Maschinenpistole 5*, German submachine gun
MSF - Mèdicins Sans Frontières, Doctors Without Borders
MVD - *Министерство внутренних дел*, Ministry of Internal Affairs,
    Russia

**N**
NAM - Non-aligned Movement
NATO - North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NBC - National Broadcasting Company
NGO - Non-Governmental Organisation
NPC - Non-Player Character
NSA - National Security Agency, USA
NSC - National Security Council, USA
NY - New York

**O**
OKSVA - Limited Contingent of Soviet Troops in Afghanistan, Russian
    version of LCOSF
OMON - *Отряд Мобильный Особого Назначения*, former *Отряд
    Милиции Особого Назначения* Special Purpose Mobile Unit of
    Russian Police in National Guard
OPFOR - Opposing Force
OSCE - Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

**P**

PDPA - People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan
PFM-1 - *противопехотная фугасная мина 1*, lit. "Anti-infantry high-explosive mine 1"
Ph.D. - Doctor of Philosophy
PHR - Physicians for Human Rights
PK - *Пулемёт Калашникова*, lit. "Kalashnikov's machine gun", Soviet/Russian
POTUS - President of the United States
PPS - *Пистолет-пулемёт Судаева*, lit. "Sudayev's submachine-gun", Soviet/Russian
PR - Public Relations
PRIO - Peace Research Institute Oslo
PTSD - Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

**R**

R2P - Responsibility to Protect
RAND - Research and Development, US think tank
RAWA - Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan
RDX - Research Department Explosive
RFE/RL - Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty
RIA -Russian Information Agency, Federal State Unitary Enterprise Russian Agency of International Information «RIA Novosti» (Федеральное государственное унитарное предприятие Российское агентство международной информации «РИА Новости»)
RPG - Rocked-propelled Grenade Launcher
RPO-A - Shmel rocket-assisted flamethrower ‚Bumblebee'
RT - Russia Today

**S**

SAM - Surface to Air Missile
SAS - Special Air Service, British Tier 1 special forces
SDI - Strategic Defence Initiative
SFB 700 - Special Research Branch (Sonderforschungsbereich) 700, Free University Berlin
SIGINT - Signals Intelligence
SIPRI - Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
SNAFU - 'Situation normal:all fucked up'
SRBM - Short Range Ballistic Missile
SS 26 - "Iskander", road-mobile short-range ballistic missile (SRBM)

SSI - Strategic Studies Institute
SSR - Soviet Socialist Republic
STANAG - Standardization Agreement in Nato
SUV - Sport Utility Vehicle

**T**
T 72 - *танк 72*, lit. "Tank 72", Soviet main battle tank version from 1972
TNT - Trinitrotoluene
TsSN FSB - Special Purpose Center, Gen.Gennady Zaitsev. Spetsgruppa,
    A', also known as Alpha Group, Russian Tier 1 special forces
TV - Television

**U**
UAV - Unmanned Aerial Vehicle
UK - United Kingdom
UN - United Nations
UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural
    Organisation
UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNOMIG - United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia
UNSC - United Nations Security Council
US - United States
USA - United States of America
USAID - United States Agency for International Development
USD - United States Dollar
USD-I - Under Secretary of Defence for Intelligence
USS Aren't - Ironic take on the disintegrating USSR
USP - Unique Selling Point/Proposition
USSR - Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

**V**
VBIED - Vehicle-borne Improvised Explosive Device
VHS - Video Home System

**W**
WMD - Weapon of Mass Destruction
WUFA - Writers Union of Afghanistan

**Y**
Y2K - Year 2000 Problem, aka millennium bug

**Z**
ZDF - *Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen*, Second German Television
ZOG - "Zionist Organized Government"
ZOiS - *Zentrum für Osteuropa-und internationale Studien*, Centre for East
    European and International Studies

# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION:
# THE RUSSIANS ARE COMING!

For a long time this phrase represented, and to some extent still continues to represent, a modern day equivalent of the ancient notion of "barbarians at the gate[1]"[2]. In the context of the First World War the imagined "Russian Steam Roller […] exercised a spell upon Europe"[3]. Quite to the contrary, the First World War in fact shell-shocked Imperial Russia and reshaped its public culture by the spread of images and semiotics of mass destruction.[4] During the next World War, Adolf Hitler himself framed the Russians as the "Asiatic colossus" which was about to seal "The fate of Europe, and with it of a culture going back thousands of years".[5] Towards the end of the Second World War, the invocation of coming Russians again scared civilians and soldiers on the territory controlled by the Axis powers alike and denoted (an often illusive) hope for those opposed to and oppressed by the National Socialist and fascist regimes of Europe. Soon the phrase evolved into something different. During the period commonly known as the "Cold War", the term stood for the omnipresent potential war-scare that dictated much of international politics during that bi-polar era. At that time, the idea of Russian tanks rolling westwards on European soil was no

---

1    Neumann, Iver B.: Russia as Europe's Other. Barbarians at the Gate, Gatekeeper and Golden Gate to the Future", in: Postmodern Studies 24, 1997, p. 119-161.

2    In her Introduction to Youngblood, Denise: *Russian War Films. On The Cinema Front, 1914-2005*, Kansas: 2007, (p. 1) Youngblood uses exactly this analogy to describe the mindset of Russian people towards their perceived threats emanating form other states, i.e. always foremost the "West".

3    Tuchman, Barbara W.: The Guns of August: The Outbreak of World War I, New York: 1962, p. 67.

4    Cohen, Aaron J.: Imagining the Unimaginable: World War, Modern Art, & the Politics of Public Culture in Russia 1914-1917, Lincoln and London: 2008, p. 51.

5    Maser, Werner: Hitler's Letters and Notes, New York: 1973, p. 192.

longer seen as a moving bulwark against fascism and National Socialist ideology but as a harbinger of dictatorship and oppression itself. In popular culture the term found application on both sides of, what Winston Churchill first metaphorically called, the "Iron Curtain"[6]. In the German Democratic Republic (GDR) a movie about the Second World War used the title *Die Russen kommen*[7] (1968) and in the United States, a war comedy emphatically used it twice: *The Russians are Coming, the Russians Are Coming*[8] (1966), to name just two examples of this widespread, generic dispersion of the slogan. In the USSR and the US, the collective paranoia encompassed by the phrase, has famously been attributed to the personal mental problems of United States Secretary of Defense James Forrestal. At the outset of the Cold War, in 1949, Forrestal allegedly exclaimed: "*The Russians are coming. The Russians are coming. They're right around. I've seen Russian soldiers*"[9]. While this is an often reproduced quote, it seems to originate from a of contemporary Soviet propaganda cartoon.[10] As will be seen in this book, this kind of metamorphosis from fiction into "fact" – and vice versa – is a common occurrence when dealing with Russia related history and memory, with the imaginary war. In central Europe, especially in Germany, the main faultline of the Cold War, the phrase has a far longer history. Russia, the "Steam Roller" from the East, has alternatively been a boogeyman-like phobia and an object of ridicule, not only during the two World Wars. In Germany, the phrase had been a declaration of a real state of affairs at the end of World War II. The memory of that event echoed for a long time. After the end of the Cold War, however, the redundant phrase became little more than a well-known catchphrase from the cartoon *Werner – Beinhart!*[11] (1990). The perception pendulum had swung back from

---

6    Churchill, Winston: The Sinews of Peace ('Iron Curtain Speech'), 05. March, 1946, https://winstonchurchill.org/resources/speeches/1946-1963-elder-statesman/the-sinews-of-peace/ [accessed 31.07.2021].

7    *Die Russen kommen*. 1968. Heiner Carow. dir. GDR: DEFA, KAG "Babelsberg".

8    *The Russians are Coming, the Russians Are Coming*. 1966. Norman Jewison. dir. USA: The Mirisch Corporation.

9    Carroll, James: House of War: The Pentagon and the Disastrous Rise of American Power, Boston and New York: 2007, p. 254.

10   Kurdadze, Dali: Georgian media revives soviet propaganda myth about James Forrestal's Russophobe, in: Myth Detector, 20. July, 2016, http://www.mythdetector.ge/en/myth/georgian-media-revives-soviet-propaganda-myth-about-james-forrestals-russophobe [accessed 31.07.2021].

11   *Werner – Beinhart!*. 1990. Niki List et al. dir. GER: Neue Constantin Film, TFC Trickompany Filmproduktion GmbH.

phobia to ridicule.

For a short period of time, after the Cold War, the idea of coming Russians indeed lost its capacity to frighten "Western" states in the knee-jerk like manner common during the age of confrontation between the two superpowers. A "New World Order"[12] had been proclaimed and the Russian people seemingly found their room in – to use Michael Gorbachev's (or before him Konrad Adenauer's) idea – the "House of Europe" or "Common European Home" as a "normal" member of the international community. As is well known, this respite did not last very long.

The emergence of Putin as head of state and the related re-militarisation of Russia, as also the often exceedingly controversial (foreign) policy choices of his administration revived old fears and notions. A "new Russian hysteria"[13] has been spreading through "Western" media, old and new. Other voices, both on the left and right ends of the political spectrum, have for a long time called for more empathy towards and cooperation with Russia.[14] Despite these sporadic dissenting opinions, the discursive line dominating the mainstream remained obvious. Once again, at least in the minds of many, the Russians were coming.

During the Cold War an entire academic discipline dedicated itself to researching all things related to Russia, or back then, more accurately, the Soviet Union. "Sovietologist" is the somewhat derogative designation, which is often applied to members of that school of thought. In a cataclysmic manner, at least from a certain point of view, these academics

---

12    Bush, George H. W.: After the War: The President; Transcript of President Bush's Address on End of the Gulf War, Transcript of President Bush's address to a joint session of Congress, and House Speaker Thomas S. Foley's introduction, as recorded by The New York Times, in: The New York Times, 07. March, 1991, https://www.nytimes.com/1991/03/07/us/after-war-president-transcript-president-bush-s-address-end-gulf-war.html    [accessed 31.07.2021].

13    Kuzmarov, Jeremy; John Marciano: The Russians Are Coming, Again: The First Cold War as Tragedy, the Second as farce, New York: 2018, p. 4.

14    E.g. on the left: Weißbecker, Manfred: „Die Russen kommen …" Ein Blick in die Geschichte der Russophobie oder Geschichtliches und Aktuelles zu deutscher Russophobie" Presentation, 01. June, 2015 at an event hosted by the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung Thüringen e.V. in Jena, and on the right: AfD: Leitantrag der Bundesprogrammkommission Programm der Alternative für Deutschland für die Wahl zum 9. Europäischen Parlament 2019 zur Europawahlversammlung der AfD in Riesa 11. bis 14. Januar 2019, p. 12.

lost their *Raison d'Être* almost literally over night when the USSR ceased to exist. Relevance of and interested in Russia as an intellectual topic waned massively in the course of the 1990s. However, similar to NATO and its crisis of identity[15], it soon turned out that this kind of research was not obsolete. Far from it, the subject under scrutiny had not vanished at all; it had just changed shape and metamorphosed into something arguably even more complex than during the reign of the relatively clear-cut lines of Cold War paradigms.

Once again, in some parts of the world, the Russians came to stay. The most recent and striking example is, beyond question, the annexation of Crimea and the emergence of the quasi-statelet Nova Russia followed by the all-out aggressive invasion of the whole of Ukraine. Initially. these events were seen by many Russians as acts of taking back what belongs rightfully, historically, linguistically, and culturally to their nation. Naturally, as it is intrinsic to any conflict, there has been a different point of view right from the start, in this case taken by the Ukrainians and predominantly supported in the "West". International law merits that latter side. With the Russian war on Ukraine most, if not all, of the world supported Ukraine's right to exist. In the cases of the transatlantic alliance states this support includes military help.

In a more complex, less evident and less reported manner, this happened several times before. Among these precedents that can be cited here are the creation of the quasi-states[16] (or, depending on the preferred academic frame, "de facto states", "unrecognized states", "contested states", etc) South Ossetia and Abkhazia on territory that according to international law should be governed by the South Caucasian state of Georgia. Here, Russian involvement might be slightly less obvious, as the self-proclaimed states insist on being their own subjects. Yet, they could hardly exist without the support, subsidiaries, and military protection offered by their bigger brother nation, Russia. Cynically they might be seen as mere proxy pawns in the intransparent game of near-abroad-foreign-policy chess masterminded in the Kremlin. However, this, like all possible minimalistic synopses, would be an over-simplification of these drastically complex situations. Yet, a common frame sees Russian policy regarding the two

---

15    Cimbala, Stephen J.: Introduction. In: Cimbala, Stephen J. (ed.): Clinton and Post-Cold War Defense, Westport, Conneticut and London: 1996, pp. i-1, p. xiii.

16    Andresen, Julie Tetel; Phillip M. Carter: Languages In The World: How History, Culture, and Politics Shape Language, West Sussex: 2016, p. 241.

formally Georgian regions as "a slow annexation"[17].

In another narrative, often encountered during academic discourses in Georgia and the Ukraine before the 24th of February 2022, Russian near abroad policy aimed at destabilising its neighbour states but doing so in a contained manner.

Based on the observation that each time that a state approaches closer ties to the West and considers potential cooperation with – or even aspiring ascension to – NATO a new or frozen conflict[18] (re-)erupts, this allegation is made. It has been a permanent norm that unresolved (military) conflict prevents any aspirant from becoming a NATO member, as that is clearly forbidden by the seminal 1995 *Study on NATO Enlargement*[19].

Next to near-abroad proxy conflicts, another battlespace has entered the world stage of global confrontation: the cyber realm. While the basic Cold War principle of Mutual Assured Destruction still applies, the loophole of proxy theatres also does; now online as well as offline. Russia is reckoned to command one of the top three[20] most effective (and arguably the most obviously used) branch of offensive cyber capabilities in the world. Attribution is usually an exceedingly tricky business in the online world[21] but allegations concerning Russian involvement have been made, which

---

17    Hierman, Brent: Russia and Eurasia 2019-2020, Lanham: 2020, p. 257.

18    "Frozen Conflict" became a term that sparked quite a lot of academic debate in recent years, yet for the analytical purposes in this study remains a fitting metaphor. See: Kofanov, Dimitrii; Anton Shirikov; Yoshiko M. Herrera: Sovereignty and regionalism in Eurasia. In: Paasi, Anssi; John Harrison, Martin Jones (eds.): Handbook on the Geographies of Regions and Territories, Cheltenham UK, Northampton, MA, USA: 2018, pp. 395-406, p. 403.

19    NATO: Study on NATO Enlargement. Chapter 1, Paragraph 5, 03. September, 1995. The official text passage requires states aspiring to membership ascension to "*settle any international disputes in which they may be involved by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security and justice are not endangered, and refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force in any manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations*".

20    The USA and China are the other two. See: Limnéll, Jarno: The Use of Cyber Power in the War Between Russia and Ukraine, in: Council on Foreign Relations, 11. January, 2016, https://www.cfr.org/blog/use-cyber-power-war-between-russia-and-ukraine [accessed 31.07.2021].

21    Singer, W. Peter; Friedman, Allan: Cybersecurity and Cyberwar. What Everyone Needs to Know, Oxford: 2014, p. 75.

include incidents that vary from Distributed Denial of Service (DDOS) attacks against Estonia's government internet presence[22] up to meddling in the 2016 US elections.[23] As will be discussed later in this study, the digital and the analogue fighting capacities overlapped during the 2008 Russo-Georgian War and already during the Chechen war(s) before. After the dawn of the "Information Age", digital capabilities became integrated in modern warfare, breaching borders between the haptic and the imaginary. This book will show how these borders became especially blurry in the realm of popular culture. Imaginary war is a central theme of this manuscript. Imaginary war is a construct. Nevertheless, like imagined communities[24], it is not a purely artificial construct that has neither a "real" basis nor impact. From the perspective of this study the term could be modified to *imagined war* instead of imaginary war. Due to the latter being the currently common term for the basic idea it describes, this text will also stick to its application. In each of the three instances under scrutiny here, Afghanistan, Chechnya, Georgia, as is most often the case, an imaginary war escorted the haptic war.

Outside of Russia's immediate sphere of influence the political behaviour of its (foreign) policy makers is often bashed as atavistic, going back to the bad old days of war as just a continuation of policy by other means. As a result of this threat perception, saber-rattling could be perceived from both sides in regular intervals, up to the moment when Russian tanks crossing the border into Ukraine spelled out a clear resurgence of the not-so-Cold War between Russia and the "West" that should be plain for anyone.

In a very basic simplification, the security policy discourse concerning Russia can be divided into two major streams. On the one hand, there is the allusion to August 1914, the outbreak of the First World War. Proponents of this view share the idea that policy makers always must be aware of the danger of stumbling ("sleepwalking", as famously coined by

---

22    McGuinness, Damien: *How a cyber attack transformed Estonia*, in: BBC News, 27. April, 2017, https://www.bbc.com/news/39655415 [accessed 31.07.2021].

23    The New York Times: *Russian Hacking and Influence in the U.S. Election. Complete coverage of Russia's campaign to disrupt the 2016 presidential election*, in: The New York Times, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/news-event/russian-election-hacking [accessed 31.07.2021].

24    Ronald Suny briefly discussed the difference between "imagined community" and "imaginary community": Suny, Ronald Grigor: The Revenge of the Past. Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union, Stanford: 1993, p. 12.

Christoper Clark[25]) into an unnecessary war, which no one really wants or must fight. The other major historical precedent that is drawn upon is the fateful Munich Agreement of 1938 and Neville Chamberlain's notoriously failed appeasement policy.[26]

What both of these prognoses have in common, is the idea that a potential Third World War between Russia and NATO is to all intents and purposes currently still quite possible, maybe more so than ever before. After all, this seems to remain the most plausible or at least most common and popular Third World War scenario. This applies to academic and political discourse, as well as popular entertainment. Sometimes the barrier between those two realms is far more porous than might be supposed. *War with Russia*[27], a text that has to be categorised somewhere between adventure novel and strategic paper, is a prime example in this context. Video games, so far, never resigned their tendency to exploit a war with Russia as generic setting. The *Call of Duty* and *Battlefield* franchises involved many actual military advisors in their respective productions, to name just two famous and successful examples.[28] Only China and North Korea can claim to rival the status as favoured antagonist in a fictive Third World War (with "Islamist" countries or non-state actors now and then only functioning as triggers, if at all). Although, these nations do not seem to run a chance of dislodging Russia from that questionable position, there are several incidents, where they displaced the Russians as opponents.

Herfried Münkler pointed out that a Eurocentric perspective identifies Russia, despite all other palpable challenges of contemporary conflicts, as the main threat to peace and stability again and/or still. Memories of the East-West-conflict, in Münkler's opinion, are responsible for this threat perception.[29] Imaginary war soon became perpetually self-propelling

---

25    Clark, Christopher: The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914, London: 2012.

26    I have already verbally publicly summarised this contemplation during an interview with the former Chairman of the NATO Military Committee Harald Kujat and me that was broadcast live on BBC World Service Radio, World Update: Daily Commute on the18th of July 2014.

27    Shirreff, Richard (General Sir): War with Russia, London: 2016.

28    Less frequently and endowed with less budget, international productions also took on Russian themes with a less antagonistic outlook. Yet these too remained at best ironic stereotypes. Mother Russia Bleeds. [Video game]. 2016. Paris: Devolver Digital. and Assassin's Creed Chronicles: Russia. [Video game]. 2016.: Portsmouth and Montreal: Ubisoft can be cited here.

29    Münkler, Herfried: Kriegssplitter. Die Evolution der Gewalt im 20. und 21.

again in the post-Soviet period, even before the more haptic war in Ukraine became full-scale.

With Russians coming on and off over the past centuries, the academic and popular discourse revolving around them has, of course been shaped by the relevant tides of history. The tone of the discussions ranged from panic and urgent warnings to disinterest and ignoring and back again. This cycle seems to be a permanent constant and by all indications appears to continue its revolving in the future. Historians have a notoriously bad track record when it comes to predicting the future, but the notion that Russia will continue to challenge the "West", is not a very daring prognosis. A study of Russian warfare and its framing, therefore, continues to have its relevance because well into the foreseeable future, the Russians will keep on coming.

## 1.1 Why We Write

Beyond the realm of fictional conversions and an initial euphoria, the fall of the Soviet Union might have brought a provisional end to a Cold Third World War but it spawned a considerable number of intense hot regional wars. Russia's "near abroad" ("*meaning the former Soviet Union minus the Baltic states*"[30]), especially the Caucasus region has regularly been ravaged by low to high intensity conflicts ever since the "Iron Curtain" came down. Before the *Götterdämmerung* of communism with global ambitions, the Soviets fought a final and cataclysmic war: The Soviet-Afghan conflict, the last major engagement of Soviet forces, bled out some of the budget, equipment and moral of the already unstable political construct of the Soviet Socialist Republics united under the firm grip of Moscow. A decade of war in the mujahideen-ridden mountains of Afghanistan represents a factor which is by no means negligible among the reasons for the end of the Soviet Union, the Warsaw Pact and the end of the world as everybody knew it up to the beginning of the 1990s, even though it was by far not the only cause. It was not the silver bullet that put down the Cold War alone, as it is sometimes framed – especially from US and other "Western" perspectives, which credit the introduction of the FIM-92 Stinger weapon system to be that specific silver bullet[31] – yet the Soviet-Afghan War was a considerable factor for the changing of the

---

Jahrhundert, Berlin: 2015, p. 7.

30    Radin, Andrew; Clint Reach: Russian Views of the International Order, Santa Monica: 2017, p. ix.

31    Everton, Sean F.: Disrupting Dark Networks, New York: 2012, p. 367.