TRANSFORMATION OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION'S REVISIONIST POLICY TOWARDS POST-SOVIET STATES

Vasyl Yablonskyi,
e-mail: v.yablonskyi@kubg.edu.ua
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2998-7203
Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University,
Ukraine, 04053, Kyiv, 18/2 Bulvarno-Kudriavska St.

Vadym Karavaiev,
e-mail: v.karavaiev@kubg.edu.ua
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0008-7825-420X
Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University,
Ukraine, 04053, Kyiv, 18/2 Bulvarno-Kudriavska St.

Abstract

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 is seen as the culmination of its neo-imperial foreign policy doctrine, which is based on its rejection of the collapse of the Soviet Union. This doctrine, reinforced by a monocentric authoritarian consolidation of power within the Russian Federation, was aimed at the reproduction of the Soviet geopolitical project. The article outlines the features of the transformation of the Russian Federation's revisionist policy – from a tool of regional deterrence to a strategy of full-scale expansionism.

The destructive consequences for the sovereignty of Eastern European states and the architecture of international security in general are analyzed. To this end, the study examines Russia's use of "frozen conflicts" (Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia) as a strategy of desovereignization and destabilization of neighboring countries. This strategy is identified as one of the factors inhibiting the Euro-Atlantic integration of independent states. The analysis confirms that Russia's policy of provoking conflicts is an active instrument of pressure and multi-dimensional expansion: military, financial, ideological, and others. The occupation of Ukraine's Crimea and parts of Donbas in 2014-2015 led to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

This war became a fundamental challenge to international law, intensifying aggressiveness and testing new expansionist strategies in the region and the world. The research reveals that the failure of international institutions to effectively stop the aggressor has led to the establishment of chaos and state terror as effective, low-cost instruments of foreign policy. Frozen conflicts are an active instrument of Russia's revisionist policy, capable of activation at any moment advantageous to it. They serve as a constant lever of military-political pressure, leading to the resource exhaustion of states and discrediting their sovereignty. This strategy effectively consolidates the Russian sphere of influence, blocks internal reforms, undermines territorial integrity, provokes humanitarian and migration crises, and neutralizes the full European integration of neighboring states. Although the aggression caused a systemic crisis and the export of chaos into the world order, it also creates conditions for the decomposition of Russian hegemony. However, neutralizing the Russian Federation's revisionist ambitions requires both the use of existing instruments and a fundamental reform of international institutions capable of ensuring the supremacy of law over the right of force.

Keywords: revisionism, hybrid aggression, frozen conflicts, Russian-Ukrainian war, export of chaos, international security

ТРАНСФОРМАЦІЯ РЕВІЗІОНІСТСЬКОЇ ПОЛІТИКИ РФ ЩОДО ПОСТРАДЯНСЬКИХ ДЕРЖАВ

Василь Яблонський,
e-mail: *v.yablonskyi@kubg.edu.ua*
ORCID: *https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2998-7203*
Київський столичний університет імені Бориса Грінченка,
Україна, 04053, м. Київ, вул. Бульварно-Кудрявська, 18/2

Вадим Караваєв,
e-mail: *v.karavaiev@kubg.edu.ua*
ORCID: *https://orcid.org/0009-0008-7825-420X*
Київський столичний університет імені Бориса Грінченка,
Україна, 04053, м. Київ, вул. Бульварно-Кудрявська, 18/2

Анотація

Повномасштабне вторгнення Росії в Україну у 2022 р. розглядається як кульмінація її неоімперської зовнішньополітичної доктрини, в основі якої лежить неприйняття розпаду Радянського Союзу. Ця доктрина, підкріплена моноцентричною авторитарною консолідацією влади всередині РФ, була спрямована на відтворення радянського геополітичного проєкту.

У статті окреслюються особливості трансформації ревізіоністської політики РФ – від інструменту регіонального стримування до стратегії повномасштабного експансіонізму. Аналізуються руйнівні наслідки для суверенітету держав Східної Європи та архітектури міжнародної безпеки загалом.

З цією метою розглядається використання Росією «заморожених конфліктів» (Придністров'я, Абхазія, Південна Осетія) як стратегії десуверенізації та дестабілізації сусідніх країн, що є одним із стримуючих факторів євроатлантичної інтеграції незалежних держав. Аналіз підтверджує, що політика розв'язування конфліктів Росією є активним інструментом тиску та багатовимірної експансії – воєнної, фінансової, ідеологічної й ін. Окупація українських Криму та частини Донбасу у 2014-2015 рр. спричинила повномасштабне вторгнення в Україну в 2022 р. Ця війна стала фундаментальним викликом міжнародному праву, що викликало посилення агресивності та випробування нових стратегій експансіонізму в регіоні та світі.

Дослідження виявляє, що неспроможність міжнародних інститутів ефективно зупинити агресора призвела до конституювання хаосу та державного терору як дієвих, низьковитратних інструментів зовнішньої політики. Заморожені конфлікти є активним інструментом ревізіоністської політики Росії, здатним до активації у будь-який вигідний для неї момент. Вони виконують функцію постійного важеля воєнно-політичного тиску, що зумовлює ресурсне виснаження держав та дискредитує їхню суб'єктність. Фактично, ця стратегія консолідує російську сферу впливу, блокуючи внутрішні реформи, підриває територіальну цілісність, провокує гуманітарні та міграційні кризи і нейтралізує повноцінну європейську інтеграцію держав-сусідів.

Хоч агресія і спричинила системну кризу та експорт хаосу у світовий порядок, вона створює умови для декомпозиції російської гегемонії. Проте нейтралізація ревізіоністських амбіцій РФ вимагає як використання наявних інструментів, так і фундаментальної реформи міжнародних інститутів, здатної забезпечити верховенство права над правом сили.

Ключові слова: ревізіонізм, гібридна агресія, заморожені конфлікти, російсько-українська війна, експорт хаосу, міжнародна безпека

Problem Statement. The full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation in 2022 is a logical consequence and the culmination of its neo-imperial aspirations in the Eurasian space. This policy is based on Russia's revisionist doctrine regarding the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which, in the Russian official discourse documented in 2005, was defined as the "greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the last century". This foreign policy doctrine is based on two key internal imperatives of the Russian Federation: ensuring the monocentric authoritarian consolidation of power within the country and creating favorable conditions for the reproduction of the post-Soviet geopolitical project externally.

In this context, the war waged by Russia against Ukraine marks the transition from a strategy of "hybrid conservation of conflicts" to a phase of open expansionism and global revisionism. The Russian Federation abandoned veiled methods, setting the goal of the forcible dismantling of a sovereign state. This aggression not only destroyed the regional security architecture but also exposed the systemic crisis of international law and collective security, demonstrating that the right of veto of a permanent member of the UN Security Council can completely paralyze effective mechanisms of coercion. In fact, the aggressor is exploiting the institutional weakness of the world order, constituting chaos as an effective weapon of foreign policy. Thus, the research problem lies in determining the limits and consequences of this transformation for the stability of the European continent.

Analysis of Previous Research and Publications. Contemporary scholarly works (Waal & Twickel, 2020; Yablonskyi, 2017: 191-196) confirm that the Russian Federation's policy regarding "frozen conflicts" (Georgia, Moldova) was definitively re-evaluated after 2014 as a managed instrument of hybrid desovereignization and a strategy of instability. These conflicts act as an effective block to the Euro-Atlantic aspirations of independent states (Karavaiev, 2017: 28; Waal & Twickel, 2020). Studies published after 2022 (Giandjian, 2023; Parakhonskyi & Yavorska, 2024; The Modern Russian-Ukrainian War, 2024) deepen this analysis, viewing the Russian Federation's full-scale invasion of Ukraine as the culmination of this strategy and its transition to a phase of open revisionist expansionism, which carries global risks.

The main focus is on the systemic consequences: the establishment of chaos and state terror as effective instruments of foreign policy (Giandjian, 2023; Roland, 2023; Snyder, 2018) and the crisis of international institutions (Parakhonskyi & Yavorska, 2024; The Modern Russian-Ukrainian War, 2024). Research confirms that the failure of collective security stimulates militarization and a shift to a policy of maximum deterrence (Blackburn, 2025), indicating a fundamental transformation of the European security architecture.

The purpose of the article is to analyze the transformation of the Russian Federation's newest revisionist policy.

Presentation of Main Material. The collapse of the Soviet Union initiated the processes of the restoration/proclamation of independence of the former union republics. Territorial and national contradictions purposefully laid down during their formation back in the 1920s-1940s were transformed by the Russian Federation into effective instruments of geopolitical pressure, provoking a series of conflicts. These conflicts-particularly in Georgia (Abkhazia, South Ossetia), the Republic of Moldova (Transnistria), and the Republic of Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh) – are not so much internal separatist movements as a consistent Russian strategy of desovereignization, aimed at the conservation of instability and the blocking of Western integration of neighboring states.

The Russian Federation's policy regarding the so-called "frozen conflicts" is an integral instrument of its foreign policy arsenal (Giandjian, 2023). This extends beyond simple regional disputes, transforming into a deterrence strategy aimed at:
– Retaining control over neighboring states.
– Blocking their sovereign choice in favor of Euro-Atlantic integration.
– Permanently creating "grey" zones of political instability along the western and south-western borders of the Russian Federation.

The essence of this policy is not in resolving conflicts, but rather in their systemic "conservation" at a low-intensity level. This allows Russia to maintain pressure on neighboring states, undermining their territorial integrity and, as a consequence, their subjectivity in international relations.

Simultaneously with the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation in 2022, there is an intensification of this policy's aggressiveness and the testing of new expansionist strategies in the region. On the other hand, the protracted war in Ukraine exhausts Russia's resources and reduces its expansionist capabilities. This opens a "window of opportunity" for resolving frozen conflicts.

The events around Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh), for example, illustrate the weakening of Russian influence in the region and underscore the limitations of the Russian Federation's revisionist policy. The multi-year "frozen" status of Karabakh under Russian "peacekeeping" patronage was radically changed by the resolute military operations of the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2020 and 2023. The presence of political will in President Ilham Aliyev, supported by external backing (Turkey and the USA), and made the forceful reintegration of the disputed territory possible. This development, occurring against the backdrop of the Russian Federation's strategic exhaustion in the war against Ukraine, exposed its inability to protect its traditional ally – Armenia. Thus, this precedent proves that, with clear regional leadership and the support of other geopolitical actors, long-standing Russian guarantees are not absolute, and the Russian Federation's influence can be effectively minimized or completely neutralized.

The Russian Federation's aggression against Georgia and the Russian-Ukrainian war illustrate the most stringent scenario of Russian strategy, which includes direct military intervention and attempts to legitimize the seizure of territories.

The conflict in Georgia arose from the separatist steps of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which formalized their withdrawal from Georgia. Abkhazia, restoring the 1925 Constitution in 1992, proclaimed sovereignty, which quickly escalated into armed confrontation. By the end of 1993, the territory was taken under the control of Abkhazian forces, which were actively supported by Russian military groups (Yablonskyi, 2017: 191-196).

A similar scenario unfolded in South Ossetia, where, after a series of autonomist declarations, the region was transformed into a "republic". The military actions in 1991 between Georgian troops and Ossetian formations were motivated by an ethnonationalist narrative that presented separation as a condition for "national survival".

A key element of Russian strategy was the introduction of "peacekeeping forces". In Georgia, these units (formally CIS, but de facto Russian troops) performed the function of conserving the conflict and became the key guarantor for the implementation of the "Russian World" ideology. The Russian military presence acted not as a neutral force but as an instrument of support for separatist governments.

Georgia's attempt to restore control over South Ossetia in 2008 "provoked" an asymmetric military strike by the Russian Federation. This strike aimed not only to repel the attack but also to cause deep destabilization in Georgia, evidenced by the strikes on military targets and the attempted occupation of Tbilisi.

The key consequence was Russia's unilateral recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This act was a direct challenge to international law and an attempt to forcibly revise the "post-Soviet" borders. Although most of the world community refused to support this decision, the West's indecision created a dangerous precedent of appeasement to the aggressor.

The conflict in Moldova regarding Transnistria had different prerequisites and features than in the Transcaucasus, but it was no less successfully utilized by the Russian Federation to achieve its goals. Disagreements between the aspirations of the titular nation for independence and local ethnic groups in Transnistria, who sought to preserve Soviet identity, led to armed confrontation. The 14th Russian Army, located on the Moldovan left bank, played a decisive role in this conflict, forcing Moldova to conclude a ceasefire

agreement in 1992. For this purpose, the «5+2» negotiation format was created, which consisted of five main participants (two parties to the conflict: Moldova and the self-proclaimed Transnistria; three mediators: Ukraine, Russia, and the OSCE) and two observers (the European Union and the United States). This agreement established Russia as an informal party to the conflict (Yablonskyi, 2017: 191-196). Furthermore, the Moldovan leadership made a critical mistake by recognizing the pro-Russian separatists as an equal party to the conflict.

The events around Transnistria are a classic example of the Russian Federation's use of the structural vulnerability of neighboring states. Russia's strategic design lies in transforming military intervention into the formal institutionalization of geopolitical gains through mechanisms of negotiation formats. Granting the aggressor the status of a mediator in a conflict in which it is the key party and de facto guarantor of separatist processes, creates a fundamental collision of international law and the conservation of the conflict. It is necessary to exclude the Russian Federation from all mediation and peacekeeping formats, as its actions compromise the principle of neutrality and make objective conflict resolution impossible. Russia must be moved to the category of a party to the conflict, not its arbiter. It is necessary to initiate the creation of a new international platform under the auspices of the EU/OSCE, which must be focused on effective de-occupation and political reintegration. Such measures are a necessary condition for depriving the Russian presence of legitimacy and ensuring Moldova's sovereign European choice. The effectiveness of such a strategy depends on the consolidation of external political efforts of partners and the creation of diplomatic pressure sufficient to destroy the existing inequality of forces and accelerate the de-occupation process.

Transnistria is perhaps the most striking example of the ideological construct of the "Russian World". Soviet identity is deliberately maintained here through symbolism, monuments, and imported modern Russian culture, creating a deep civilizational divide with the European-oriented Moldova.

Economically, the region functions as a "grey zone" – a hybrid system sustained by contraband and critical dependence on Russian financial subsidies. This economic support is a key tool for ensuring social loyalty and political control, and the massive issuance of Russian citizenship strengthens this connection.

The conflicts in Georgia and Moldova are not merely regional crises but manifestations of a consistent geopolitical doctrine of the Russian Federation aimed at restoring a sphere of influence in the region. This doctrine combines military force, irredentism, and economic dependence. Although the international community has not recognized these separatist entities, the unprincipled position of Western countries has allowed Russia to effectively use these "frozen" and "cut-off" regions as constant levers of pressure and sources of instability, which continue to hinder the full Euro-Atlantic choice of sovereign states. Overall, the conflicts in Georgia and Moldova emerge as critically important outposts of Russian geopolitics, which allow Russia to consolidate the space around itself, creating a buffer zone and retaining the right to determine the foreign policy trajectory of its neighbors.

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation in 2022 is characterized as the bloodiest and largest armed conflict on the European continent since World War II. The Russian-Ukrainian war is not only a gross violation of the territorial integrity of a sovereign state but also a direct, fundamental challenge to all foundational principles of international law and the architecture of collective security formed after 1945. In particular, it became the culmination of prolonged hybrid aggression and gave rise to new security imperatives for all states in Eastern Europe, the Baltic, and Black Sea regions, demanding an immediate re-evaluation of deterrence and collective defense strategies.

In this context, for Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, and until recently Georgia, European and Euro-Atlantic integration has acquired the significance not merely of foreign policy orientations, but of an existentially important strategic goal and the only reliable mechanism for guaranteeing security. Membership in the EU and NATO is an irreversible

path to institutional protection from the revisionist ambitions of the neighboring nuclear aggressor state. Integration transforms from an "ambitious" political course into an unalternative method of ensuring national security and sovereign development.

In the conditions of the erosion of international law and the paralysis of the UN collective security mechanisms, institutional affiliation with powerful Western structures is the only real guarantee of territorial integrity and the protection of democratic choice. Essentially, the process of Euro-Atlantic integration acts as a counter-strategy against the hybrid methods of the Russian Federation. The foreign policy vector becomes a catalyst for internal modernization, which increases the country's ability to resist external military pressure and internal destabilization through Russian proxy instruments. For these states, which are on the forefront of civilizational confrontation, integration means not just economic benefits or access to funds, but joining a universal space that guarantees the inviolability of borders and democratic continuity. That is why this choice has acquired the character of a national imperative, and refusal to make it is viewed as a direct threat to state existence and capitulation to neo-imperial ambitions.

The Russian Federation's activities in establishing chaos and state terror are effective mechanisms of its foreign policy in opposing the Western vector of movement of the aforementioned states. The established precedent demonstrates that the aggressor state can purposefully attack civilian infrastructure, employ methods of ethnic cleansing and mass war crimes, attempting to achieve its geopolitical goals through a "war of attrition" and "managed chaos". This sends an extremely alarming signal to other revisionist states seeking border revision, regional hegemony, or the violation of the current international order (The Modern Russian-Ukrainian War, 2024).

The inability of international institutions (especially the UN Security Council, paralyzed by the aggressor's right of veto) to effectively and promptly stop military violence sends a threatening signal to the entire world community. The use of "chaos" and the violation of international law are low-cost in terms of operational consequences for the aggressor and a highly effective method of achieving revisionist goals. This creates a dangerous unique opportunity where force prevails over law.

State sponsorship or the direct use of terrorist methods of warfare (from the use of PMCs to targeted terror against the civilian population) leads to the blurring of boundaries between state actors and non-state terrorist groups. This new reality creates an extremely favorable environment in which transnational terrorism can find new forms of legitimation, resource, or infrastructural support. Aggression legitimizes violence as the main method of resolving international conflicts (Waal & Twickel, 2020).

The failure of collective security mechanisms, which should have protected all UN member states, inevitably stimulates a new arms race and a significant increase in defense budgets. This militarization is most noticeable in Eastern Europe and the Scandinavian states, where the Republic of Finland and the Kingdom of Sweden abandoned neutrality for the sake of NATO membership (Blackburn, 2025).

States are rapidly reorienting from a policy of "silence" to a pragmatic policy of "deterrence". Its essence lies in demonstrating to the potential aggressor military force and the resolve that any attempt at attack is guaranteed to lead to unacceptable losses for them.

The precedent set by the Russian Federation regarding the use of military force to revise borders and spheres of influence significantly amplifies geopolitical turbulence worldwide, encouraging other regional state actors to escalate or revise their own territorial disputes and spheres of influence. Examples include the increasing tension in the Taiwan Strait area, where the PRC monitors the international reaction to the aggression, and in the South Caucasus, where local conflicts may be inspired or accelerated by analogy with the Russian scenario (Roland, 2023). The Russian Federation's aggression has become the legitimization of revisionism as a global political strategy.

The war started by the Russian Federation against Ukraine, as a continuation of the hybrid strategy that can be metaphorically defined as the "war of managed chaos" is not limited to the destruction of regional security. It has carried out the export of chaos as an

acceptable and effective strategy of conflict into the international system (Snyder, 2018). This export not only deepens the crisis of the international security system but also proves its ineffectiveness in its current form.

The Russian war against the Ukrainian state has exposed a deep systemic crisis:

– International law is inoperable when a permanent member of the UN Security Council violates it.

– Collective security turned out to be not collective, but based on good will and ad hoc coalitions.

According to Chapter VII of the UN Charter, similar aggression should have activated the introduction of economic relations and means of communication, the breakdown of diplomatic relations with the aggressor, and the adoption of compulsory measures using armed forces. Instead, the aggressor's right of veto paralyzed these mechanisms, demonstrating that chaos has become not a side effect but a purposeful weapon in the hands of the aggressor, exploiting the institutional weakness of the world order (Karavaiev, 2017: 29).

Russia supports separatist entities in neighboring states through a strategy of expansionism that encompasses military, economic, political, and informational dimensions. This comprehensive support allows these territories to function as quasi-state entities under complete external control. The presence of regular Russian Federation military contingents is a fundamental condition for the existence of these separatist regimes. Specifically:

– In Transnistria (Moldova), the Russian contingent has been present since 1992, de facto guaranteeing the inviolability of the line of demarcation.

– In Nagorno-Karabakh, Russian troops were present until 2024.

– In Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Russian troops were deployed after the Russian-Georgian war of 2008.

– In Ukraine, Russian troops have been present since the occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea.

This permanent military presence performs two functions: supporting the corresponding regimes and deterring any attempts by independent states to restore constitutional control over these territories.

Conclusions. The Russian Federation's policy is aimed at forming a belt of instability along its western borders, effectively blocking the sovereign choice of the former republics, now independent states, and maintaining them in a state of constant geopolitical tension. The policy of "managed chaos" has a destructive impact on regional stability, geopolitical processes, and the sovereignty of the defined states.

These conflicts are the main institutional barrier to the integration of Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, and partially Georgia into NATO and the EU. The presence of territories not controlled by legitimate governments creates the problem of "exporting instability" and makes these countries less attractive for membership, as it means an automatic expansion of the EU and NATO's zone of responsibility into potentially unstable territories. In this case, "frozen conflicts" function as an effective Russian "veto" on the sovereign foreign policy choice of its neighbors.

Furthermore, "frozen conflicts" can be activated by Russia at any moment. They function as an instrument of constant political and military pressure, forcing states to act within a framework favorable to the Russian Federation. This exhausts the resources of states and distracts their attention from internal reforms, as well as undermines their sovereignty and territorial integrity, causing humanitarian and migration crises. These long-term consequences complicate recovery and development even after a potential peaceful settlement. This policy of the Russian Federation serves as a tool for expanding its geopolitical sphere of influence, allowing it to consolidate the space around itself, creating a buffer zone between itself and the West.

Russia's policy regarding "frozen conflicts" appears as a revisionist strategy aimed at dismantling the international order and restoring spheres of dominance. These conflicts

are not remnants of the past but active instruments of foreign policy that are constantly initiated and fueled by the Russian Federation. Until the international community develops mechanisms for the effective de-occupation and reintegration of these territories, they will remain a key source of systemic instability and an obstacle to the European integration of Eastern European states. Neutralizing this policy requires not only diplomatic pressure but also a fundamental strengthening of the resilience and defense capabilities of the countries that are objects of Russian expansion.

The Russian Federation's aggression is both a consequence of the initial security vacuum and institutional weakness and a catalyst for its deepening. The world community needs not just support for Ukraine, but a fundamental reform of international institutions and principles, capable of reliably ensuring the supremacy of law over the right of force and preventing the further globalization of the "managed chaos" policy. This fundamental change must include mechanisms for holding aggressor states accountable and restoring the real effectiveness of collective defense structures. Such measures should nullify the Russian Federation's attempts to restore the imperial system and lead to its defeat in the strategic perspective, creating the appropriate conditions for the decomposition of Russian hegemony in the region.

Limiting the Russian Federation's financial and military capabilities will contribute to a reduction in support for "puppet" regimes. Russia should focus on issues of internal political integration and avoiding the spread of the "epidemic of disintegration" within its own borders. At the same time, the Russian Federation is unlikely to abandon its revisionist ambitions, periodically intensifying the toolkit of "frozen conflicts" and modifying the policy of "soft power" to ensure its presence and transform neighbors into its satellites.

The neutralization of revisionism is a long-term strategic task that requires determination and consistency from the international community. A transition is needed from a policy of passive deterrence to a strategy of active exhaustion of the Russian Federation's military-economic potential, as well as the creation of appropriate conditions for the internal transformation of the Russian regime. Stabilization of the region will be achieved only through the strengthening of the sovereignty and institutional resilience of the states that are victims of aggression, which will ensure the irreversibility of their civilizational choice and the strategic defeat of the Russian Federation's neo-imperial project.

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