FUTURITY OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

DOI: https://doi.org/10.57125/FS.2023.03.20.02

How to cite: Derviş, L. (2023). Transformation of Geopolitical Perceptions in the Russian-Ukrainian War: Impact on Regional Relations in the Future. *Futurity of Social Science, 1*(1),. 21-34. https://doi.org/10.57125/FS.2023.03.20.02

Transformation of Geopolitical Perceptions in the Russian-Ukrainian War: Impact on Regional Relations in the Future

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Received: October 14, 2022 | **Accepted:** January 27, 2023 | **Published:** March 20, 2023

Abstract: The purpose of the research is to highlight the transformation of geopolitical activity during the Russian-Ukrainian war in the early twenty-first century. The specificity of the study is that the regional military conflict has acquired the features of a global confrontation involving (so far without direct participation) many players in world politics. At the same time, the objectives of the article determine the formation of a new paradigm of state interests of different levels of influence. The Russian-Ukrainian war is not only causing geopolitical changes but also transforming the conceptual dimensions of geopolitics. The methodology used in the article is based on historical research methods: historical-systemic (to understand the content of geopolitics), historical-typological (to characterise the format of geopolitics), historical-comparative (to determine geopolitical activity). The general scientific methods of structural-functional and socio-psychological dimensions allow us to analyse the features and consequences of the Russian-Ukrainian war in the local-regional and global-international context. The results of the study show the transformation of the role and positioning of geopolitical actors in the context of the military conflict between Russia and Ukraine, and also a paradigm shift in geopolitics in terms of reorientation from its traditional stable definition to a dynamic hybrid meaning. The classical geopolitical principles of ordering the coexistence of states and their relations are losing relevance both in the institutional (UN crisis) and functional sense. Geopolitics, which used to determine the interests and level of influence of individual states or alliances, is now focused on the synergy of the overall world order in the context

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of global historical mega-activities. History is familiar with the alternation of geopolitical calm and geopolitical explosions, and the current Russian-Ukrainian war has the potential to end the long-standing orderly world order and to trigger the volatility and uncertainty of civilisational development. So, today, the Russian-Ukrainian war, according to the usual geopolitical interpretation, is a regional conflict that has indirect effects on global processes (political, military, economic, cultural). However, a new conceptual understanding of geopolitics, based on synergistic principles, argues that a military confrontation of this scale has every chance of escalating to the point of a world war. The prospects of the study lie in the need to identify geopolitical principles that will be able to keep the Russian-Ukrainian war at the stage of a regional conflict.

Keywords: Russian-Ukrainian war, geopolitics, regional leaders, geopolitical actors.

Introduction

Military conflicts have historically played a dual role in the geopolitical dimension:

- On the one hand, military actions are a consequence of geopolitical activity;
- On the other hand, the course and results of the war are shaping new guidelines and principles for building geopolitical space.

If we look at Russian-Ukrainian relations since the first aggressive actions in 2014 (the annexation of Crimea and the provocation of the conflict in Donbas), it is worth noting that for both sides, these events had not only a practical military and political dimension. Geopolitical factors were already evident at the beginning of the deterioration of relations between the two countries. The main reason for this was the inadmissibility of Ukraine's strategic development towards the European Union and NATO for Russia's foreign policy and the simultaneous desire of Ukrainian society to take such steps.

With the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the geopolitical implications were no longer veiled, but were manifested in clearly articulated theses of the Russian side to maintain its influence on Ukraine and prevent the integration of Ukrainian society into European and North Atlantic security, economic, and cooperation structures.

Research Problem

Geopolitical aspects are actively transforming depending on cultural and historical changes, which leads to certain gaps in the scientific discourse. When the geopolitical space "exploded" due to the military-political aggravation of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, a number of problems emerged that require prompt scientific interpretation. The research problem of scientific intelligence is focused on understanding the changing level of influence of regional military conflicts on geopolitical processes in the world. If earlier such historical events were by their nature exclusively the consequences of geopolitical activity (struggle, confrontation, domination), nowadays the military threat in the region can influence the paradigm shift in international relations in general. The disruption of the usual algorithms of geopolitical activity requires the formation of a new style of scientific and historical discourse, in which special attention is paid to the subjects of geopolitics. The move away from principles and ideas to pragmatism and efficiency is a manifestation of modern civilisational progress, which is being implemented in geopolitical realities.

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Research Focus

The article focuses on the research problem in terms of specifying the geopolitical activity related to the Russian-Ukrainian war both at the global level and in the regional space. While the impact on global international politics is delayed, at the regional level, new political interactions are becoming a reality right now. For global politics, it is obvious that the consequences of this war are inevitable in the context of globalisation and integration at the state and social level, which is a consequence of the establishment of a synergistic paradigm of the socio-cultural development of civilisation. The highest organisational level of such a world order system will be the formation of preconditions that will make military aggression impossible at both the global and regional levels. However, at the current stage of formation of such a model of geopolitical space, wars remain a relevant part of history, which in practice will demonstrate the futility and ineffectiveness of such methods.

Research Aim and Research Questions

The purpose of the article is to highlight the paradigmatic changes in the content and format of geopolitics in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Until the beginning of the twenty-first century, geopolitics had stable fundamental features, but the modern socio-cultural space determines the dynamism of world politics, which changes both the format and content of the global paradigm of the world order. The purpose of the article is to provide a historical analysis of geopolitical aspects related to the Russian-Ukrainian war:

- passive elements of geopolitics (interests of states in world politics, economy, and culture);
- active clusters of geopolitics (influence of hegemonic powers on historical events and processes);
- division of the geopolitical paradigm into global and local (regional) segments;
- strategies and tactics of the activity of subjects and objects of the geopolitical game in a particular military-political dimension.

The scientific hypothesis of the study defines such an event of historical proportions as the Russian-Ukrainian war as a factor that can have both indirect and direct impact on geopolitical processes. According to the traditional stability of the geopolitical paradigm, the hostilities in Ukraine are regional in nature, while in the global dimension, they are characterised as an event that can potentially have a geopolitical impact on the world order as a whole. When considering military actions in Europe in the twenty-first century in the dynamic context of geopolitics, such activity directly affects both the belligerent countries and the countries that support the parties to the conflict or remain neutral. It is noted that the pluralistic and pragmatic modern world is guided by the principles of synergistic interaction, which in the cultural and historical context indicates the involvement (active or passive) of all participants in world politics in this conflict. Interconnections in various spheres of socio-cultural activity have become very close today, which excludes the possibility of eliminating a military conflict of this magnitude from the global political agenda and from the political life of any state or community.

Literature Review

Scientific research on the Russian-Ukrainian war can be divided into two periods: before 24 February 2022 (the date of the full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation) and after that date. It is worth noting the change in geopolitical contexts in the scientific and historical discourse on the Russian-Ukrainian war. While there have been attempts since 2014 to classify this military conflict as an internal Ukrainian problem, now this war is a classic manifestation of a regional military

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confrontation. Attempts by the Russian side to identify the military actions as a "special military operation" have not been supported in the historical literature, as such terminology is completely inconsistent with the realities of the war (scale, intensity, goals).

The state of research on the issue is of varying intensity and effectiveness. Passive geopolitical strategies are studied in the standard mode of research activity. When the issue of active geopolitical actions in the context of an ongoing conflict is raised, the problem of the efficiency of scientific analysis of a huge flow of facts arises. As a rule, the hot phase of a war captivates the world community with the realities of war, which somewhat postpones the relevance of geopolitical concepts.

Currently, the scientific and historical discourse is beginning to systematise the analytical dimensions of the Russian-Ukrainian war in the global geopolitical context. The geopolitical aspect of the Russian-Ukrainian war in historiography can be structured into several important clusters:

- global world dimensions in the context of the regional war between Russia and Ukraine (Perepelytsia, 2021);
- geopolitical support for the warring parties (Yevsieieva et al., 2023);
- the role of world leaders in the Russian-Ukrainian war (Yakovenko, 2022);
- the impact of the war on the regional geopolitical system (Humeniuk, 2022);
- war as a factor of geopolitical activation in the world and international politics (Kyrydon & Troyan, 2023);
- potential changes in the geopolitical space as a result of the war and the emergence of new regional leaders - Turkey (Selçuk, 2023) as a symbol of open pragmatic policy and Ukraine as a symbol of the struggle for freedom.

The replacement of stability with dynamism in geopolitical dimensions is beginning to be traced not in individual author's research, but as a scientific trend. This leads to a number of contradictions that are the result of the unwillingness to analyse such large-scale geopolitical events in the twenty-first century.

An important element of the Russian-Ukrainian war of the early twenty-first century is the potential change in the geopolitical principles of world order. In general, the outbreak of war in Europe in the period of globalisation is somewhat out of the structural framework of global international politics. Therefore, the Russian-Ukrainian war is becoming a unique phenomenon in the world history of the modern period. Smolianiuk (2022) emphasises the absence of a single and unified term for the Russian-Ukrainian confrontation in the early twenty-first century. War, military conflict, military operation, military aggression, full-scale invasion - these are all potential concepts that determine the contradictory nature of military and political realities.

A separate factor in the scientific coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian war and the geopolitical significance of this event is its large-scale and multi-vector presentation in information resources (Lapan et al., 2022). Such publicity virtually eliminates the possibility of secret negotiations, closed protocols, etc. This contributes to open and impartial coverage of military and political realities, leaving less room for behind-the-scenes geopolitical speculation.

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Research Methodology

The methodological arsenal of scientific intelligence is formed mainly by the general scientific historical-oriented cluster. Using these methods, an attempt is made to systematise and structure the geopolitical component of the Russian-Ukrainian war. The article uses:

- historical and systemic method, which helps to form a general understanding of the content and purpose of geopolitics as a global socio-cultural phenomenon;
- is a historical and typological method that determines the current formats of geopolitical space and models of the historical development of civilisation, state, or community;
- Historical and comparative, which allows us to analyse the differences in the geopolitical activity of global leaders or regional actors in the cultural and historical environment;
- The structural-functional method indicates the potential, resources, and mechanisms used by states to streamline their geopolitical status and actions aimed at increasing their influence on global processes;
- The socio-psychological method ensures the formation of cultural and historical experience at the individual, social (state, national, ethnic), and civilisational levels.

The study uses the results of empirical research (Semenchuk et al., 2022), namely, a number of different surveys that show the purposeful activity of Ukrainian society in integrating into the structures of the Western world.

At the same time, given the research problem and the key hypothesis of the study, the results and discussion use a scientific synergistic methodology that focuses on interdisciplinarity and methodological pluralism. Such methodological approaches allow us to identify the peculiarities of the synergistically oriented geopolitical space at the present stage and in the short-term historical perspective, which are determined by the strengthening of integration interactions and the formation of a holistic global society. The example of the Russian-Ukrainian war is an expression of the destructiveness of such historical activity not only in the standard cultural and historical dimension (given the destruction and suffering caused), but also of its inappropriateness in solving geopolitical problems.

Results

The political activity of individual states in any form (military, diplomatic, economic, or cultural) always requires a response from the international community. When this activity affects interests not only in the regional space but also in the global dimension, the geopolitical component becomes relevant. The Russian-Ukrainian war has demonstrated the readiness of world leaders to respond to actual actions, but it has also highlighted the complete lack of institutional methods to prevent military conflicts. Of course, at certain points in the historical development, wars are a logical continuation of politics, but when a war is completely unjustified in terms of its intended purpose and has signs of unsystematic situational action, the geopolitical space must have effective elements to stop such activity.

The Russian-Ukrainian war of the early twenty-first century has become a vivid example of the need to transform the conventional understanding of geopolitics, as the fundamental geopolitical dimension formally expressed in the Sustainable Development Goals approved by the UN (Pereira et al., 2022) has been completely levelled by the military conflict in Europe. Historical realities indicate that any conflict has geopolitical overtones, and in the absence of such overtones, they are quickly acquired by the parties concerned. When the issue of regional interest is actualised, the issue of geopolitics also acquires a practically oriented content.

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The Russian-Ukrainian confrontation has an impact on several regional clusters of the global political system:

- Firstly, the Black Sea region, which affects the interests of Russia, Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey (Mashevskyi & Pryhoniuk, 2023), and Georgia (Khylko et al., 2022). As can be seen from the list of states, the composition of stakeholders in the political region is quite diverse and belongs to different foreign policy alliances and entities (Inleyen, 2022). At the same time, this regional group also has different geopolitical views on the security and development of the Black Sea (Polegkyi, 2020).
- Secondly, it is the Eastern and Central European region, which after the Second World War became the border between the Western world and a totalitarian state and played the role of a kind of buffer during the Cold War. The Baltic States, Belarus, Ukraine, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria have long had an object status in the geopolitical picture of the world. The key difference in the confrontation (real military and ideological) is the affiliation or aspiration (Sertif, 2022) of a number of countries to economic and security alliances of the Western world.
- Thirdly, the Baltic-Black Sea space (Doroshko & Tsyrfa, 2021) as an association of states from two spaces - the Black Sea and Eastern Europe - with a common vision of the prospects for political, economic, security, and cultural development. For such an alliance, a military conflict is particularly painful in the historical context, as it is formed by states without the status of geopolitical hegemons. For further successful civilisational progress, such alliances have the right to life and self-determination, which will indicate that the interests of all states are taken into account, regardless of geopolitical strategies.

The transition from a hybrid war to an open full-scale invasion (Kyrydon & Troyan, 2022) by the Russian Federation has led to a transformation of the geopolitical interpretation of this historical event. The attempt to position the conflict within the internal Ukrainian realities without actually bringing the problem into the geopolitical space lasted from 2014 to 24 February 2022. The international community's obvious mistake was the declarative nature of its attempts to reconcile the aggressor and reorient the solution to the problem towards diplomacy. Hybrid military-political activity requires appropriate hybrid formats of geopolitical structures (Berezovenko, 2021), which will shape the dynamism and flexibility of the international community's response to global and local stimuli.

The Russian-Ukrainian war has a global impact on the development of all spheres of socio-cultural and natural activity, which have signs of global and regional development (see Table 1).

Table 1

Socio-cultural consequences of the military conflict with geopolitical dimensions

military potential	the strong development of the military-industrial complex (Málnássy, 2022), the targeted build-up of Russia's military capabilities (Dumitru, 2021), and the factor of nuclear weapons possession by one of the parties to the conflict.
foreign policy vectors	imperial ambitions (Polegkyi, 2020), the desire to control neighbouring states (Harris, 2020),

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	and the polarisation of foreign relations (Doroshko & Tsyrfa, 2021).
domestic political paradigm	democratic processes (Manoli, 2017), the rule of law, ensuring citizens' freedoms (Szostek, 2018), and negative environmental impact (Tsaryk & Kuzyk, 2022).
economic cluster	attempts to divide global economic and political segments (Dimitrova & Dragneva, 2023), energy security (Ostrowski, 2022), post-war recovery, and reconstruction (Pankiv & Chernyshova, 2023).
social processes	migration movements and the migration crisis (Opioła et al., 2022), and a new understanding of border mobility (Fournier, 2018).
cultural dimension	actualization of differences in the mentality of nations and ethnic groups (Albert & Baitei, 2022), cultural identity (Shelest, 2017), desire for freedom, the concept of the "Russian world" (Starodubtseva, 2022), imposition of geopolitical interests (Pieper, 2020), historical experience of coexistence (Kovalska-Pavelko et al., 2022).

Source: Author's own development.

Important geopolitical aspects of the Russian-Ukrainian war are the indirect effects of this historical event (see Figure 1). Certain regions do not even theoretically have the resources, strength, or desire to participate in or respond to the conflict in Ukraine. However, geopolitical laws shape this issue on the agenda of foreign (and sometimes domestic) policy of states. For example, powerful Asian states, such as China, India, and Japan (Khoma & Nikolaieva, 2023), maintain active neutrality (Hrytsenko, 2022) in the Russian-Ukrainian war. In fact, limiting themselves to calls for a peaceful settlement, these countries are formulating strategies for their actions in various areas, as the war intensifies the processes of change and transformation of the usual order. Analytical services of Western countries are cautious in their assessments of the Russian-Ukrainian war (Koval et al., 2022). However, active military, economic, and humanitarian assistance in real-time actually offsets the geopolitical expectations of the West from this war. The active position in support of Ukraine makes the hypothetical nature of geopolitical solitaires irrelevant.

Figure 1

Political and geopolitical activity during a military conflict

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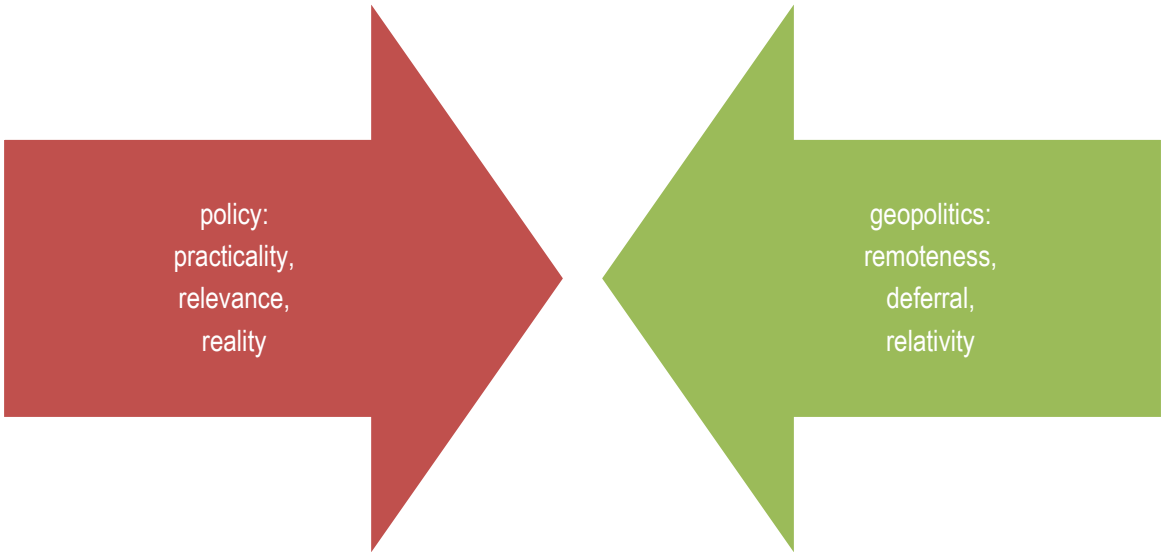

Source: Author's own development.

Geopolitics is largely focused on the concepts of indirect action. At the same time, politics is active in the hot phase of a historical event or process. Therefore, guided by such algorithms of action, it is easy to determine for which global players the issue of the Russian-Ukrainian confrontation is a real urgent problem that needs to be solved, and for whom it is an attempt to obtain or increase geopolitical dividends.

Historical experience shows that the amount of financial gain dictates the amount of geopolitical interest. In the case of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the losses incurred by the economies of Russia and the West must be compensated for in the short term, as economic potential does not disappear, but it may change hands or be reoriented in favour of a new geopolitical leader. Given the economic inexpediency, or rather, the fatal nature of the war, many did not believe in the possibility of a full-scale war by Russia (Mieliekiestsev, 2022). When the war entered its active phase, the page of causes and preconditions was turned for geopolitics and a new story began - the results and geopolitical consequences of the military conflict.

The inability of existing global arbitrators to resolve problems similar to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict is obvious. The UN, the key security structure of the international global level, has shown absolute institutional and functional limitations in conducting peacekeeping activities. Of course, the most negative manifestation of this is the inability to stop the bloodshed in Ukraine. At the same time, this creates completely new conditions for geopolitical players who take advantage of the absence of a chief arbiter who sets the rules of the game but does not control their observance.

Discussion

The results of the study indicate that the Russian-Ukrainian war is a qualitatively new historical event of a regional scale, which already has (and will definitely have in the future) geopolitical consequences of a new level. The new dimensions of the dichotomy of globality and localism in geopolitics require changes and priorities in the scientific and historical analysis of contemporary events.

Contemporary historical research suggests that the Russian-Ukrainian confrontation is not a regional conflict, but rather a harbinger of a global geopolitical conflict that originated at the

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ideological and mental level and is now undergoing a stage of testing the capabilities of its main participants in neutral spaces. A kind of confirmation of this theory is the drawing of historical parallels with the events that preceded the Second World War. It is noted that both then and now the world war contradicted socio-economic or cultural trends, however, the military-political vector became a determining factor that led to a global conflict in the twentieth century and has all the prerequisites to provoke it in the twenty-first century. The results of the current study determine the ambiguity of the impact of the Russian-Ukrainian war in the global dimension, noting that the final geopolitical outcome will depend on the dynamics of civilisational cultural, and historical progress.

The position that the Russian-Ukrainian war has a direct impact on the geopolitical structure of the modern world is considered innovative in the scientific and historical discourse. In particular, regional war as a factor in accelerating civilisational confrontation is already being actively discussed in both political and academic circles (Al-Hasnawi, 2022). That is, such a confrontation has already gone beyond a hypothetical strategy and moved to the stage of assessing the potentials of the parties. And the battlefield in Ukraine is a kind of reconnaissance battle in a remote mode. Under such conditions, some countries do not even need to take part in the confrontation, but only analyse the results of the struggle of forces similar to their own. Analytical services (which actively use the results of scientific research) are tasked with developing entirely new strategies for foreign policy activity (both diplomatic and military), while Koval et al. (2022) emphasise the academic nature of the analysis of the war.

A different view, which is that the Russian-Ukrainian war is a product of growing imbalances in the global political and, importantly, economic dimension (i.e., it is a consequence of geopolitical activity and does not influence it), is held by Mariotti (2022). If we are guided by such guidelines, the geopolitical synergistic paradigm begins its active assertion, defining military conflict as an activity of surplus effect (Bortnik, 2022).

The results of the current study determine a certain balance in the geopolitical positioning of the Russian-Ukrainian war: between the active and passive status of the conflict. The results obtained regarding the remoteness, delay, and relativity of the war in the geopolitical dimension coincide with the works of: Karabag & Imre (2022), who define the Russian-Ukrainian war as an intermediate stage before the global conflict between the United States and China; Güneylioğlu (2022), who classifies the regional conflict as one of the elements of the US strategy of multi-vector influence (in particular, dual containment).

These results contradict the work of Headley (2018), who reorients the war in a purely economic pragmatic way, pointing to the consequences of the destruction of established economic ties already observed in economic cooperation between the EU and Russia. It is also not sufficiently justified to focus solely on the military-industrial potential of the war (Málnássy, 2022), as Russia, with its impressive military advantage, has not achieved significant goals in the war.

The results of this study are similar in the context of applying a synergistic approach to assessing the geopolitical status of a regional war. The model of resolving (Cheng, 2022) geopolitical confrontation at the regional level by military means suggests that the international community needs to develop a strategy for such historical processes to avoid a repeat of the bloody outcome. The format of geopolitical consensus should take into account the potential interests of superpowers that will by default claim influence in the region or the world. At the same time, the aspirations of states that do not have a leadership status in the geopolitical arena should not be eliminated (Kowalski, 2022).

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The results have opened a new perspective on the status of regional war in geopolitical scenarios. It is clear that the consequence of such phenomena as the Russian-Ukrainian war on a civilisational scale will be the process of de-globalisation, which will radically change the cultural and historical space in its current form. In this context, international relations will also undergo fundamental changes. The concept of good neighbourly relations will appear in a different format, on the level of: "friend or foe", "mobile border", etc. (Fournier, 2018).

The results of the study should be taken into account in resolving the Ukrainian issue, namely the ability of the state to reorient itself after the post-Soviet period of its existence from one geopolitical player to another military-political alliance is in fact a unique historical event. Other Eastern European countries of the post-Soviet space have taken similar steps. However, the peculiarity of their transition was the relative weakness of the Russian Federation at the end of the twentieth century after the collapse of the Soviet totalitarian state and its inability to respond to the loss of control over neighbouring states. The historical realities of the early twenty-first century, when the former empire gradually began to revive its power, are quite different. This process coincided with Ukraine's desire to clearly define a pro-European foreign policy course. Geopolitically, such events should be assessed by the international community, and algorithms for such a cultural and historical transformation should be developed.

Such aspects as the geopolitical outcome of the Russian-Ukrainian regional war for the global historical dimension have not been studied, as the confrontation is still ongoing and is still in the hot phase of active hostilities. Therefore, the full picture of the status of this war in the geopolitical space will become known after the conflict is over.

Conclusions and Implications

Thus, the Russian-Ukrainian war, which began in 2014 and escalated with a full-scale invasion on 24 February 2022, is a landmark event in the geopolitical life of the world. In fact, this conflict is a regional one, as all military activity is taking place on a limited territory without the involvement of third countries (except for the territory of Belarus, which is essentially an allied state for the Russian Federation). The fact that the entire civilised world has joined the coalition to support Ukraine and that our partners are helping the Ukrainian people in their fight against the aggressor is evidence of the potential global threat that could arise in the course of the war. Understanding all the threats of increased military activity and having a sad historical experience of the lack of a decisive response to the aggressor before the outbreak of World War II, Western countries have united in confronting Russia as a violator of global peace.

However, the question of institutional and functional counteraction to such aggressive military manifestations at the geopolitical level remains open. Countering Russian aggression is currently mostly situational, as there is no clear plan from the international security structure (in this case, the UN). Therefore, the international community is facing the need for a new synergistic approach to the development of global security strategies. Algorithms for preventing wars should include a variety of means (economic, diplomatic, cultural, and ultimately military) and be clearly regulated at the geopolitical level - both for superpowers or regional leaders and for all members of the international community.

Suggestions for Future Research

The usual cause-and-effect logic in modern military conflicts is often broken when the effect (result) precedes the cause and forms the real agenda in the geopolitical arena. Such realities require the transformation of the geopolitical space and the development of mechanisms for assessing and

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ending military conflicts that lack the expediency of the security, economic, or cultural dimension. The peculiarity of geopolitics is the variability of compliance with the rules of the game, unlike international relations, which are stable and binding on all members of the world community. Under such conditions, the consequences of a military confrontation, especially in the regional dimension, will be uncertain until the last moment. That is, a completely illogical algorithm is being formed, according to which the interests of superpowers are taken into account first, then the interests of alliances (permanent or situational), and finally the conditions for the parties to the conflict are formed.

In this context, the task of the scientific community and civil society is to raise the issue of subjectivity in geopolitical processes. A situation where superpowers form an agenda that does not take into account the interests of other states will lead to aggressors demonstrating and using force. At the same time, clear rules of the game that are relevant to both the international environment and the geopolitical space will make such inhumane manifestations impossible.

The results of the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war should become a key element of a new synergistic world picture in which geopolitics will be focused on development through synergy - interaction and self-organisation. This will allow the superpowers to maintain their status and ensure an adequate level of security for all countries of the world community. Today, geopolitical mechanisms are needed to keep the Russian-Ukrainian war in the context of a regional conflict, preventing a global destructive conflict from erupting.

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