**Chapter 2: The Ukrainian Government’s Activities Relating to the Ukrainian Population during the War**

[GRAPH]

**The Ukrainian Government’s Strategic Goals and Its Overall Approach to Achieving Them**

Zelensky’s government saw the Ukrainian public as one of its main sources of strength for coping with the Russian attack. In response to claims that he did not prepare the public for war and ignored Western warnings that Russia was about to invade Ukraine, Zelensky said in an interview in August 2022 that his pre-war policy was intended to prevent public panic and keep citizens in the country to fight for its defense: “Cynical as it may sound, those [the people who stayed and fought for their homes] are the people who stopped everything.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

From the Ukrainian perspective, it is possible to identify three strategic goals relating to the civilian population:

1. Defending Ukraine’s political sovereignty.
2. Ensuring Western support against Russia.
3. Protecting the civilian population in conflict zones and taking care of its needs.

Kyiv sought to harness the population’s surging patriotic spirit to promote national unity and support the struggle to defend Ukraine’s independence. The Ukrainian government called on citizens to sabotage Russian military operations, provide a support network for Ukrainian armed forces, refuse to cooperate with Russian occupying authorities, and resist the Russians through partisan warfare. Kyiv also worked to neutralize Russian propaganda and subversion efforts aimed at undermining the government’s legitimacy. The government’s maintaining the ability to provide services to civilians during the conflict strengthened their resilience during wartime and undermined the Russian campaign that portrayed the Ukrainian government as “dysfunctional.” The government’s functioning depended on ongoing financial support from outside, and highlighting the harm caused by the Russians to the Ukrainian population garnered public backing for Western governments to support Kyiv.

**The Ukrainian Government’s Toolkit in Relationship to the Civilian Population**

From 2014 to 2022, Ukrainians faced continuous multi-dimensional Russian aggression (military, political, economic, cyber, psychological, and more) in the spirit of New Generation Warfare. The prolonged grappling with these Russian efforts provided a learning opportunity for the Ukrainian state and civilian society, prompting authorities in Ukraine to develop military and civilian defense mechanisms both for ongoing confrontation with Russia and to prepare for the possibility of further escalation.

Since the beginning of 2021, the countermeasures taken by Zelensky’s government intensified, accelerating in the months leading up to the attack; in hindsight, it is clear that these made it more difficult for the Russians to implement their “blitzkrieg” plan to topple the Ukrainian regime. Following the outbreak of war, Ukraine developed additional mechanisms for coping with the situation, initiated by the government and by civilian society. Zelensky’s government held a public debate with the United States about the possibility of war and did not take all possible measures to improve readiness, arguing that preparing too early would cause panic among the public and severely harm the economy. This study does not aim to determine whether this course of action was right or wrong.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Political and Diplomatic Tools**

The leadership in Kyiv saw the Ukrainian masses as a resource that could be exploited to thwart Russian plans, and with the onset of war, focused on unifying them and strengthening the spirit of resistance to occupation. As the attack began, Zelensky made it clear that he would not leave Kyiv, conveying determination not to submit to Russian dictates, optimism regarding the end of the war, and normalcy in terms of the government’s ability to continue functioning.

The president, his advisors, and senior government officials made sure to appear constantly in the media and convey targeted messages to the public to strengthen their spirit and resistance to the occupation and provide them with defense recommendations. This was done to counter false Russian messages that Zelensky and his people had fled. His remaining in Kyiv was critical for the government and the public’s rapid transition to a state of emergency, as it thwarted a central component of the Russian plan, i.e. the rapid overthrowing of the central government.[[3]](#footnote-3)

The lessons of 2014 taught Ukrainians the importance of local leadership. During Zelensky’s tenure, the trend of decentralization and empowering the regions accelerated.[[4]](#footnote-4) From the very first day of the Russian attack in 2022, civilian and military government representatives appeared on social networks and toured the field to demonstrate that state institutions, both in the regions (oblasts) and districts (rayons), continued to function. Local authorities worked to ensure access to water, food, fuel, medicine, and municipal services. Civilian leaders donned khaki clothing to signal the transition to a state of emergency and mediated military instructions to civilians. Alongside civilian authorities, military and civilian defense institutions were established at the regional and municipal levels to decentralize the national defense effort and make it robust.

The Ukrainian leadership at various government levels made it clear to the public and local leaders in areas occupied by Russia that any cooperation with the Russian occupation would be considered treason. In areas where the local leadership acted decisively, calmly, and in conjunction with military mechanisms, the Russians struggled to integrate the occupied territories into a pro-Russian governance system. In contrast, the Russians had an easier time taking control of the Kherson region, where the local leadership showed weakness and may have even assisted the Russians in taking control of the city in the early days of the attack (there were, of course, reasons related to Ukraine’s lack of military preparedness in the area).[[5]](#footnote-5) The fact that Ukraine’s physical communication infrastructure (internet and cellular) continued to function in the first months of the occupation of southern Ukraine allowed reports to be issued that confused the Russians and messages to be transmitted from the central government to local officials behind enemy lines. This reinforced the personal and public dilemmas of Ukrainian officials in these areas concerning cooperating with the occupation authorities.

The Ukrainian government’s diplomatic and political activity concerning the population was aimed at leveraging humanitarian issues to gain support for the war from the international community, particularly the West, while extracting a price from Russia and thereby also improving the Ukrainian public’s sense of resilience and feeling that Ukraine was not standing alone against Russia. In addition, it sought to address humanitarian aspects in the conflict zone (evacuating civilians, bringing in aid, and exchanging prisoners and bodies) to negotiate with Moscow regarding the end of the fighting and to arrange the exit of refugees from Ukraine.

Initially, Kyiv had to deal with the skepticism of Western governments regarding Ukraine’s ability to withstand the attack (and therefore their limited willingness to provide assistance and the inclination of some of them to seek an end to the fighting at the expense of Ukraine’s national interests). The harm to the population caused by Russia played a crucial role in rallying the West to Ukraine’s side, reducing restrictions on military aid, and convincing Western countries to accept more refugees and provide economic and humanitarian assistance to the population.

[IMAGE]

***Zelensky addressing the public in Western countries, urging them to pressure their governments to assist Ukraine.***

<https://www.shutterstock.com/image-photo/tel-aviv-israel-march-20-2022-2137949779>

Throughout March 2022, the Russian-Ukrainian diplomatic dialogue (in Belarus, Turkey, and on video calls) emerged as a channel through which an attempt could be made to forge an agreement to end the fighting. The Ukrainians took advantage of this channel and the international diplomatic activity surrounding it to demand that Russia establish humanitarian corridors for the flow of aid to conflict zones while maintaining a ceasefire to allow civilians to be evacuated. The operation of humanitarian corridors disrupted the continuity of the Russian offensive, created operational-tactical constraints on the Russian forces, and hindered the Russian effort to wear down the defending forces. Numerous disputes arose between the parties regarding the existence and characteristics of the humanitarian corridors (start and end points, corridor routes, and the duration of their operation), with mutual accusations of agreement violations and cynical and immoral use of these corridors. The Russians’ insistence on opening humanitarian corridors into their territory was portrayed by the Ukrainians as an attempt to “steal” the population. The Ukrainians accused the Russians daily of firing at the humanitarian corridors, thereby contributing to the negative image and delegitimization of Russian military activity in Ukraine.

Ukrainian public opinion influenced the mandate received by Zelensky and the Ukrainian negotiating team for concessions. The end-of-war settlement that the Russians sought to impose on Ukraine through warfare was supposed to fundamentally change Ukraine’s nature as a state, given the Russian demands for territorial changes, dissolution, and “de-Nazification” (a vague term used to justify exorbitant political and cultural demands). The Ukrainians had been engaged in continuous negotiations with the Russians since 2014, during which they learned about the Kremlin’s attempts to impose humiliating state arrangements under the threat of violence, in the style of the Minsk Agreements, which no Ukrainian government could implement without risking the loss of public trust.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Ukrainian society, the Ukrainian government, international organizations, and foreign governments were mobilized to document allegations of war crimes and violations of international humanitarian law by Russian forces.[[7]](#footnote-7) This was done to promote legal proceedings against Russia, its soldiers, and its senior officials in Ukrainian courts,[[8]](#footnote-8) the International Criminal Court (ICC), or a special international tribunal to be established.

**Transitioning to a State of Emergency and Economic Tools**

In the years leading up to the Russian attack in 2022, Ukraine prepared the legislative infrastructure for times of emergency. The State of Emergency Law was adopted in 2015, amended seven times before the outbreak of the war, and updated eight more times after it began, synchronizing it with other national laws. This law allowed, upon the president’s declaration of a state of emergency, to establish a regional military administration, limit political freedom, basic freedoms, and the freedom of movement for young people of conscription age, exercise special powers for property seizure, operate private companies in the service of the state for a fixed period, declare a curfew, and more.[[9]](#footnote-9) In 2018, a state of emergency was declared for 30 days in a large number of southeastern Ukrainian regions after Russia attacked and seized Ukrainian military ships in the Kerch Strait. The implementation of the state of emergency provided an opportunity for citizens to practice the procedures stemming from it.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Since the beginning of 2022, there have been many notable Ukrainian efforts to improve emergency preparedness and increase selective readiness at the national and regional levels without officially declaring a general state of emergency. As part of this, emergency plans were updated and practiced in government institutions, businesses, and with the public. In the weeks preceding the Russian attack, the Ukrainian government shifted to a heightened state of selective activity and the Kyiv municipality announced the allocation of a special budget for war preparedness in various fields. However, it was only on February 23, 2022, a day before the war began, that Ukraine’s National Security and Defense Council announced partial reserve mobilization and initiated legislation to transition to a state of emergency, which was completed only after the attack had begun.

The fact that it had only taken selective emergency preparedness measures did not allow Ukraine to enter the war with maximum readiness, both on the military and civilian fronts. Many Ukrainian citizens refused to believe that a Russian invasion was possible, even on February 23. In the absence of an official declaration of a state of emergency, there was a significant disparity in the preparedness of various state institutions and regions. For example, the Central Bank of Ukraine implemented an emergency plan that had been prepared in advance on February 24, which enabled the banking system to function reasonably throughout the country (about 70% of branches, mainly outside the conflict areas, continued to operate).[[11]](#footnote-11) In contrast, the military commander of the Kyiv region was appointed by the Ukrainian president to serve alongside the mayor of Kyiv only on March 1, six days after the outbreak of the war.[[12]](#footnote-12)

In response to criticism that more could have been done in terms of emergency preparedness, Zelensky and his associates argued that a formal declaration of a state of emergency would have drained the treasury, accelerated the flight of capital and people, disrupted preparations for winter, and harmed public morale.[[13]](#footnote-13)

With the outbreak of the war, men aged 18–60 were prohibited from exiting Ukraine.[[14]](#footnote-14) This measure, which was strictly enforced at border crossings between Ukraine and European countries, preserved the potential of the Ukrainian army and various authorities to recruit these men for defense efforts – both military and civilian. It is likely that men who managed to evacuate their families outside Ukraine’s borders and remained in the country by force of this law were more emotionally available to engage in resistance efforts against Russian aggression (knowing that their families were safer).

The events of 2014 and the months of tension leading up to the war helped Ukraine improve its readiness to physically protect the population against bombings. Plans varied from place to place. In large cities such as Kyiv and Kharkiv, subway systems were rapidly converted into public shelters for prolonged stays. In the early hours of the war, images were published showing subway workers placing water taps and operating them for the public on train platforms, using infrastructure that had been prepared in advance. In the absence of an extensive network of public shelters, residents were advised to take cover in basements under public buildings or between walls. These measures helped save lives.

To provide citizens with basic necessities during emergencies (food, medicine, etc.), the Ukrainian government organized various ad-hoc initiatives in collaboration with international actors, civilian society, and the business sector. Ukraine faced a significant logistics challenge in handling the aid shipments flowing into the country and the large amount of equipment collected from areas not involved in the fighting. The state-owned Ukrainian railway company, already accustomed to centralized operation, played a significant role in transporting cargo and passengers, including in combat zones. There were reports of organizational difficulties in transporting supplies by trucks and coordinating national efforts involving the government, private companies, and volunteer organizations. The government took on the responsibility for addressing cross-country issues: regulatory accommodations, dealing with unique problems related to drivers – a profession that became critical (e.g., arranging the exit of draft-age drivers to foreign countries),[[15]](#footnote-15) or operating humanitarian corridors through which aid convoys could move.

**Civilian Militias in the Virtual Trenches of the “Digital Front”**

Since 2014, Ukraine has been the target of rampant Russian cyberattacks, including attacks against power stations, government systems, and the financial system. These attacks led the Ukrainians to engage with Western countries in defensive cooperation. Ukraine developed neutralization and recovery tools that reduced the effectiveness of Russian cyber weapons.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Ukraine’s cyber security strategy was approved in 2016 and updated in May 2021, as “only 40% of the goals set in the previous strategy had been met.” Both documents were aimed at preventing Russia from undermining Ukraine’s cyber domain, and in addition to establishing military, intelligence, and civilian mechanisms for cyber defense, they emphasized Ukraine’s collaboration with the United States, Britain, Germany, NATO, the European Union, and others.[[17]](#footnote-17)

The Ukrainian civilian IT sector was mobilized in an effort to defend the country against cyberattacks, including counter cyberattacks against Russia. In this area too, Ukraine has had experience in spontaneous civilian organization during national emergencies, which was gained over eight years of conflict with Russia.[[18]](#footnote-18) Western intelligence agencies and international corporations have played a significant role in protecting the Ukrainian public from Russian cyberattacks during the war,[[19]](#footnote-19) in cooperation with the Ukrainian government and civilian society.

The Zelensky government established the Office of Digital Transformation in 2019, headed by a young minister, Mykhailo Fedorov. His flagship project before the war was Diia, a mobile phone government services portal that provides access to all government services. Fedorov took on the task of stabilizing the communication between the government and citizens through digital technologies and connecting the government with international technology corporations. During the war, the Diia services were expanded, allowing citizens to receive government services remotely. The platform was also used as a tool for reporting enemy movements and presence, which were passed on to Ukrainian intelligence.

After the Russians attacked Ukraine’s internet and military satellite communication networks, Fedorov persuaded American billionaire Elon Musk, owner of the satellite internet company Space-X, to provide encrypted satellite internet to Ukrainian government institutions and the military (a service that was not previously available in Ukraine) and provided thousands of terminals for this purpose. This was funded by Western countries, Space-X, and crowdfunding.[[20]](#footnote-20) Microsoft assisted Ukraine in identifying and repelling Russian cyberattacks, while simultaneously uploading Ukrainian government information to its cloud servers to back up and protect it from Russian attacks.[[21]](#footnote-21)

Fedorov maintained contact with the hacktivist community in the cyber domain, which comprised up to half a million people who were willing to use their skills against Russia. Fedorov called on this community to attack targets in Russia. He urged international technology companies to leave the Russian market, block Russian content on their platforms, and donate equipment and software to the Ukrainian government.[[22]](#footnote-22)

The government in Kyiv worked to minimize the influence of Russian information warfare on the population. In the years leading up to the war, controversial steps were taken in the domestic political sphere, including legislation, presidential decrees, and the activation of state enforcement mechanisms. Before and during the war, Russian social networks were blocked,[[23]](#footnote-23) and the activities of leading Russian media outlets were banned on the grounds that they were working to destabilize the state of affairs in Ukraine.[[24]](#footnote-24) In May 2021, Viktor Medvedchuk, the politician closest to Putin in Ukraine, was placed under house arrest.[[25]](#footnote-25) These measures drew harsh criticism from Russia and the political forces associated with it in Ukraine, accusing Zelensky of restricting political freedom and freedom of expression. The months of war allowed for more stringent measures against potential Russian influence activities in Ukraine. In March 2022, the activities of 11 parties described as linked to Russia were banned[[26]](#footnote-26) and their politicians were perceived as potential collaborators with the Russian occupation. Zelensky’s government hesitated to purge security services of suspected Russian influence agents but carried out extensive personnel changes in July 2022.[[27]](#footnote-27) Russian cultural products - literature and music - were also restricted.[[28]](#footnote-28)

The ongoing Russian information warfare attacks since 2014 have led Ukraine to establish state[[29]](#footnote-29) and civilian[[30]](#footnote-30) mechanisms aimed at exposing Russian information warfare tactics and educating the public on how to deal with misinformation and consume news critically. In 2017, Ukraine’s Approach to Security in the Information Sphere was adopted. This is a foundational document that pointed to Russian information warfare as a threat to Ukraine’s national security and established tools for detecting and characterizing it, distancing it from Ukraine’s information space, and “filling the vacuum” with Ukrainian information. To this end, mechanisms and institutions were defined that were required to carry out counteractivities against Russian influence efforts.[[31]](#footnote-31)

From the early days of the war, an information campaign was conducted on social media and Ukrainian media instructing the population on how not to fall victim to Russian misinformation.[[32]](#footnote-32) Ukrainian media outlets were mobilized to work closely with the government to convey the official viewpoint to the public. Freedom of the press and competition between channels were limited.[[33]](#footnote-33) Social media channels were operated in collaboration with the government and citizens in an aim to update the public and motivate them to participate in the fighting.

[IMAGE]

The Ukrainian public played an important role in the effort to delegitimize Russia in the context of the war. At the beginning of the fighting, the government called on the Ukrainian public to personally reach out to friends in Russia and the West to present the harsh realities left by the Russian attack and to urge them to pressure the Kremlin to stop the fighting and Western governments to provide aid to Ukraine. The public was called upon to document the destruction caused by Russian attacks and to explain that Russia was committing war crimes.

One of the main conclusions of this research is that a unified public opposing the occupation, “armed” with cell phones and social media and accustomed to operating in a decentralized manner, became an asset that the Ukrainian government needed to harness in order to succeed in the war. Indeed, Ukrainians organized themselves more quickly and effectively than the Russians did in taking advantage of digital technology to improve national resilience and gain an advantage both in terms of fighting and (de)legitimization.

Asmolov has tried to explain why, specifically in Ukraine, optimal conditions were created for volunteer activity on the “digital front.” His research suggests that in the eyes of volunteers in Ukraine three conditions had converged: a sense that being passive was more dangerous than participating in the fighting, the assessment that the state was struggling to fulfill functions using civilian or military institutional tools, and the availability of tools for volunteers to fulfill such functions.[[34]](#footnote-34) It is likely that Russian pressure on the population, especially after the start of the invasion, and the ongoing undermining of the Ukrainian government’s activity strengthened these conditions for millions of Ukrainians and pushed them to use the tools at their disposal to fight together with the government.

The Ukrainian government succeeded in creating frameworks that channeled this volunteer fervor, both within Ukraine and among refugees and volunteers in Western civilian society, to link it to institutional activity and attempt to control it. Alongside these achievements, challenges in controlling volunteers have become apparent, as volunteers are not subject to the authority of institutional frameworks and are liable to act dangerously and recklessly, while the government bears the consequences of their actions. For example, a cyberattack by hacktivists could provoke undesirable counterattacks[[35]](#footnote-35) and volunteers operating armed drones may harm civilians or hit targets that the state is not interested in damaging. The international humanitarian law status of volunteer involvement on the “digital front” is currently unknown and this unclear status could justify harming them indiscriminately, regardless of the extent of their involvement in the war. For instance, does taking a photo of Russian forces and uploading it to social media define the civilian who did it as a “combatant”?[[36]](#footnote-36)

The government’s preparation of the public before the war and the emergency measures taken during it largely protected Ukrainians from Russian propaganda, providing them with alternative sources of information. In March 2022, over 60% of the Ukrainian public reported that their main news source was state-run Ukrainian television networks (followed by online news channels – 47%, and Telegram or Messenger channels – 42%). Unifying television channels for joint government broadcasts alongside the creation of message and information networks through other channels helped to enable direct communication between Kyiv and all citizens. Social media also allowed the public to provide feedback to the government.[[37]](#footnote-37) The restrictions imposed by Western technology companies and governments on the dissemination of Russian propaganda messages around the world may have also weakened their influence within Ukraine.

It is unclear whether the Russian propaganda efforts were even effective among the Russian-speaking population in eastern and southern Ukraine, which was supposed to be more receptive to them in light of their frustration with the government in Kyiv or being averse to Ukrainian nationalism. Earlier Russian campaigns (going back to 2014) aimed at promoting a Russian identity among this population were unsuccessful.[[38]](#footnote-38) Russian propaganda may have had a greater impact in occupied territories that the Russians managed to isolate from the Ukrainian media, due to a lack of alternative information. The portion of the population that adopted the Russian messages is much smaller than the Russians expected, and most of it is now in Russia or in territories occupied by Russia in Ukraine.

**The effectiveness of information warfare tools on the “digital front” can be divided into three components:**

1. **Technology** – It appears to be the case that due to having learned the Russian methods and collaborating with Western countries, leading Western technology companies, and civilian activists from Ukraine and the West, Ukraine’s technological communication skills were better than Russia’s.
2. **Information distribution channels** – The Ukrainian government successfully refined its influence channels vis-à-vis the Ukrainian audience and the West, while pushing Russian channels out of the Ukrainian “information space.” Conversely, Russia managed to exploit its control over the Russian audience and minimize its exposure to Ukrainian and Western information channels. Years of investing in messaging distribution channels in the Global South and extreme political fringes in the West gave Russia an advantage vis-à-vis these audiences, which Ukraine and Western governments struggled to reach.
3. **Persuasive content** – The Russians completely failed in the competition with Ukraine to create persuasive content for the Ukrainian public and the mainstream in the West. On the other hand, Russia’s experience with its domestic Russian audience, the extreme fringes in the West, and the Global South countries enabled it to tailor messages for them. In this context, Russia’s goals regarding information warfare were overly ambitious and unattainable – trying to change deeply ingrained perceptions within the Ukrainian public regarding their national identity in a short period of time and under military aggression. Russian messages aimed at the Russian audience, which demonized Ukrainians, penetrated Ukrainian media and hindered Moscow’s objectives.

**Military Tools: The Ukrainian Public Enveloping Combat Activity**

Even before the war, Ukraine was characterized by non-governmental activity in security-related areas.[[39]](#footnote-39) This was due to the lessons learned from the war against Russia in 2014, during which volunteer brigades were often more successful in stopping Russian forces and pro-Russian separatists than regular military forces. The civilian society remained highly willing to mobilize for the war effort and support combat units and the Ukrainian government created channels that enabled such civilian involvement, including through digital platforms.[[40]](#footnote-40) In the months of tension leading up to the war, training on the use of weapons and self-defense among civilians increased and paramilitary frameworks boosted their preparedness. However, the effort was uneven because a state of emergency was not declared in an attempt to avoid panic.

On the first day of the war, Zelensky called on all sectors of society to mobilize for the war effort. Anyone who knew how to use weapons was invited to volunteer to join the regional defense units – a paramilitary framework that was established and refined as part of the lessons learned from the war in 2014 to provide the government with a large pool of forces for dealing with acts of subversion and violations of the public order. These units played a very significant role in delaying the Russians on their way to Kyiv, which thwarted all the Russian war plans.

Initially, the Ukrainian government was willing to distribute weapons to anyone who requested them, without conducting thorough eligibility checks, and even allowed convicted prisoners with military experience to be released under certain conditions to participate in the fighting.[[41]](#footnote-41) The hasty establishment of a pool of weapon holders led to a wave of robberies and crimes committed by armed individuals, and the indiscriminate distribution of weapons ended within days.

With the outbreak of the war, the population quickly responded to Zelensky’s call for solidarity and support for the army. Volunteer organizations within Ukraine and abroad created a complementary network for raising resources and distributing them in order to supply equipment to fighters, prepare urban areas for defense (building fortifications, blocking roads, producing makeshift defensive and offensive equipment), cope with the effects of Russian attacks on civilian areas, provide economic and humanitarian assistance to residents in combat zones, transfer and absorb refugees, and more.[[42]](#footnote-42) Social media was used to convey defense instructions, and information on evacuation options, and to explain methods of active and passive resistance against the occupation.

In addition, instructions were provided on how to prepare Molotov cocktails and target the vulnerabilities of Russian armored vehicles; calls were made to withhold food and fuel from Russian forces or to give them poisoned food; instructions were issued on how to identify Russian sabotage teams and agents and how to report them to the authorities; guidelines were provided for disseminating information about the Russian forces’ movements and conversely, concealing information about the Ukrainian forces’ movement and the results of Russian attacks to prevent the Russians from adjusting their aim. The Ukrainian Ministry of Defense set up a dedicated website, the National Resistance Center, which provided hundreds of tips for nonviolent resistance, instructions for preparing Molotov cocktails, and a tutorial video on how to set enemy combat vehicles on fire.[[43]](#footnote-43)

[IMAGE]

**Instructions for civilians on how to target vulnerabilities on a Russian armored vehicle using makeshift weapons in fighting in urban areas. Widely circulated on Ukrainian social media during the early days of the war.**

In the areas occupied by the Russians during the first weeks of the war Ukrainian communication infrastructures, including social media, continued to function. Using these channels, the central government called on the public to protest against the occupation and refrain from cooperating with it and published videos that showed successful acts of resistance that managed to stop the Russians’ progress and thwart their plans. These videos were intended to serve as a model for other areas.[[44]](#footnote-44)

Throughout the war, civil organizations supporting the fighting in Ukraine evolved and expanded. An experimental mobile phone app was developed allowing citizens to report the location of cruise missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles to assist the Ukrainian military in their interception efforts[[45]](#footnote-45) and enable drone operators to gather intelligence (Aerorozvidka) and attack.[[46]](#footnote-46) Numerous crowdfunding efforts were aimed at helping the Ukrainian army acquire weapons and equipment. The Serhiy Prytula Fund collected donations for refurbishing tanks and purchasing satellite images, drones, unmanned aerial vehicles, night vision devices, vehicles, communication equipment, and first aid supplies.[[47]](#footnote-47)

Between June and August 2022, international human rights organizations (Amnesty, HWR, and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights) published reports on the war in Ukraine. Alongside evidence of violent conduct by the Russian army, these reports also presented cases where the Ukrainian side did not act according to the standards of the Geneva Conventions – conducting military activity from within civilian populations without evacuating them, mistreating prisoners of war, and performing executions without trial.[[48]](#footnote-48) These reports drew significant criticism from Ukraine and organizations in Western countries that supported Ukraine.

**Chapter 3: The International Community’s Activities Relating to the Ukrainian Population during the War**

[GRAPH]

**The Western Bloc’s Strategic Goals and General Approach**

The Western Bloc is characterized by American dominance and significant differences in approaches among the countries. Some countries were quick to impose harsh economic sanctions on Moscow and provide extensive military assistance to Ukraine, while others were concerned that overly severe sanctions on Russia would hurt them too and acted to limit them. For many European countries, sending lethal weapons to Ukraine before the war went against the security policy principles of not fueling conflicts with arms. Economic problems resulting from the imposition of sanctions on Russia created personal political risks for some European leaders. However, overall, throughout all stages of the crisis, it was clear to Western countries that this was not only “Ukraine’s problem”: the war in Ukraine was a Russian attempt to change the international order by weakening the centrality of the West and Russian actions deeply challenged the security status quo in Europe. This understanding allowed the Western Bloc to bridge differences and join together in action against Russia by supporting the Ukrainian government and its citizens.

Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Mark Milley, defined several objectives regarding the crisis with Russia that capture the essential strategy of the entire Western Bloc before and during the war:

1. Avoiding a kinetic conflict between Russia and NATO and containing the fighting within Ukraine’s borders.
2. Strengthening the cohesion of the Western Bloc and NATO.
3. Empowering Ukraine and providing assistance to enable it to cope with Russia.[[49]](#footnote-49)
4. Strategically weakening Russia to reduce the threat it poses to the Western Bloc in the long term (an objective that was only publicly stated in the spring of 2022).

The Western Bloc’s general approach toward the Ukrainian population was based on an intersection of national interests: weakening Russia as a security threat on the one hand, and the ideals of assisting a democracy struggling against dictatorship and helping citizens suffering from violence on the other. Most of the aid to Ukraine came from the US government. However, while the United States was the dominant contributor in terms of defense assistance, the European contribution in terms of civilian aid exceeded that of the US. The scope of Western humanitarian and civilian contributions was similar in size to the military support it provided,[[50]](#footnote-50) reflecting the West’s recognition of the need to invest in the resilience of Ukrainian citizens as a leading mechanism for weakening Russia. Consensus-building processes regarding the war in Ukraine in Western-controlled international institutions and Western political institutions led to the collective action of most Western countries aimed at assisting the population in Ukraine while mobilizing civilian society. Exposing information on incidents of harm to Ukrainian civilians and garnering Western attention helped maintain public support for government activities.

**The Global South Countries’ Position**

The Global South countries, particularly the major powers China and India, have tried to avoid taking sides on fundamental issues of “international governance,” choosing instead to focus on their specific interests concerning Russia, Ukraine, and Western countries and making only the necessary adjustments to their relations with them. Despite many of these countries’ reservations about the Russian policy, in terms of the balance of power in the war in Ukraine this neutral approach was advantageous to Moscow and, conversely, detrimental to Ukraine and the Western Bloc.[[51]](#footnote-51) Some of them, particularly China, feared that a severe blow to Russia by the West would lead to a weakening of their international status and an increase in Western dominance.

The harm to the Ukrainian population did not appear to arouse particular sympathy among the Global South countries’ leaders or populations. In many of these countries, claims were made by leaders and the public against the hypocrisy of the West, which denounced Russia because of the threat it poses to them while similar wars in South Global countries did not generate public attention or sufficient political involvement. In a significant part of the Global South countries the public has no significant influence on foreign policy issues, sees Ukraine as a remote issue, and is characterized by a strong anti-Western sentiment, all of which serves as fertile ground for Russian propaganda messages.

Most of the Global South countries have settled for providing symbolic aid to Ukraine or floating policy initiatives that seem designed to meet the bear minimum obligation (such as Indonesian President Joko Widodo’s initiative to enable Putin and Zelensky to meet on the sidelines of the G-20 summit, an initiative that did not materialize). Many of the Global South countries have refused to condemn Russia in the UN General Assembly resolutions that dealt, among other things, with harm to the population. These countries refused to sever economic ties with Russia and join the wave of Western sanctions despite being urged to do so by Ukraine and the West.

Viewing the Global South countries as a single entity is obviously a crude generalization. Most of these countries have chosen to sit on the fence and their leaders’ decisions have had no impact on the Russia-Ukraine war. However, other countries have significantly influenced the dynamic of the war. In this context, China, India, and Turkey stand out, as they have increased trade with Russia in the energy sector, thereby contributing to Russia’s resilience. OPEC countries, led by Saudi Arabia and the Council of Emirates, have also played a significant role by continuing to coordinate oil prices with Russia and refusing to pay an economic price to promote Western interests they do not share, despite pressure from the West.

Turkey has positioned itself as a leading mediator between Russia and Ukraine – a role that has allowed Ankara to alleviate Western pressure to limit its expanding economic ties with Moscow. This stance has been balanced by providing military assistance to Ukraine and approving Finland’s admission to NATO (however Turkey did create difficulties during the process and delays in Sweden’s accession approval).

Iran, and probably North Korea have provided Russia with weapons that greatly assisted it on the battlefield. The precise weaponry Iran supplied to Russia had a profound impact on the dynamics of the warfare: while it did not halt the Ukrainian offensive throughout the autumn of 2022, it caused significant damage to Ukraine’s national infrastructure, affecting the population and putting considerable pressure on the government in Kyiv.[[52]](#footnote-52) At the same time, it cannot be said that Iran and North Korea sided with Russia against Ukraine. Neither country had prominent conflicting interests with Ukraine and the assistance they provided to Russia stemmed from their desire to strengthen ties with Moscow and a shared interest in strategically embarrassing the West. Thus, on January 19, 2023, Iranian Foreign Minister Abdollahian claimed that Iran does not recognize Russia’s annexation of territories in Ukraine, including the Crimean Peninsula.[[53]](#footnote-53)

Despite their efforts to maintain ties with Moscow, as Western policy became more stringent in response to Russian harm to the Ukrainian population, the Global South countries’ wiggle room was also affected. Thus, some Global South countries’ close ties with the West required them to be sensitive to the Western stance on Ukraine and they cooperated with Western sanctions where their interests might have been at risk. The Global South countries’ votes in international organizations concerning the war changed based on the level of Western pressure and persuasion efforts. Even Iran, a country on the extreme fringes of the Global South that provided weapons to Russia that severely harmed the Ukrainian population, felt pressure and initially denied public reports about having done so in the Western press, later admitting that it had supplied these weapons. Consequently, it had to engage (unsuccessfully) in diplomatic efforts to minimize the damage caused by these reports.[[54]](#footnote-54) On the other hand, Russian humanitarian gestures such as prisoner exchange deals or grain export deals mediated by Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, helped these countries deflect Western pressure.

**The Populace as a Critical Link between the Local and Global Conflicts**

[GRAPH]

In fact, the war in Ukraine is taking place on two parallel fronts: the local conflict, which centers on the fate of the Ukrainian state, and the global conflict between Russia and the West, which is also related to the broader competition between world powers.

**In the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict**, Russia sought to subdue Ukraine or at least undermine its sovereignty, while Ukraine sought to defend its sovereignty. Western countries and Global South countries have little direct interest in the outcome of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and only suffer from its indirect effects. Moscow has failed, at least in the medium term, to achieve its strategic goals and has been forced to compromise. The Ukrainian population played an important role in thwarting these goals. Russia did manage to change the demographic reality in eastern Ukraine, but its hopes that the war would accelerate historical processes and turn tens of millions of Ukrainians into Russian subjects were shattered. On the contrary, Russia triggered the process of strengthening the Ukrainian nation; an effect of this is that the tolerance for Russian language and culture that had characterized Ukraine for centuries has significantly diminished.

**In the context of the global dimension of the conflict**, Putin sought to demonstrate Russia’s status as a power and strengthen its international standing by subduing Ukraine. The failure to achieve a decisive victory forced him to change his goals from improving Russia’s status to minimizing the damage to its international standing. Russia is trying to exploit the West’s fear of escalating into direct confrontation and nuclear war to limit aid to Ukraine. Conversely, Ukraine is seeking to push Western governments to support it more by reinforcing the perception that the Russian-Ukrainian war is an inseparable part of the Russian-Western conflict. Global South countries are not interested in taking sides, but some have an interest in preventing Russia’s defeat, which could strengthen the West and harm their ability to maneuver strategically (for example, China). As long as Global South countries maintain neutral positions regarding the war, they are effectively supporting Russia.

In both spheres of the conflict, the population is not a direct subject of interest - not for Russia, not for the West, and not for the Global South countries. On the other hand, for the Ukrainian government, preventing harm to the population is one of the highest priorities. Shifting the focus of discussion on weakening Russia from the level of practical Western interests (minimizing economic and security risks) to the moral level in the eyes of the public and Western leaders contributed to Ukraine’s ability to persuade the West to provide more military and economic aid despite the fear of confrontation with Moscow while increasing pressure on Global South countries to reduce their cooperation with Russia. The human cost and the ability to “put a face on the war” made it easier to identify with the Ukrainians, beyond the major geopolitical issues.

The issue of harm to civilians during war is related to the field of civil rights, which is deeply connected to the Western ethos and therefore directly affects the Russian-Western ideological conflict as part of the global inter-power competition. For Ukraine, which has been undergoing a process of adopting the liberal-democratic Western model in recent decades, the Russian harm to its citizens has become a significant foundation for building a shared national identity.

In our view, the harm to the civilian population has been a major factor in motivating the West to assist Ukraine. However, this issue is just one of several that influenced the decision-making process in the West regarding the war in Ukraine. It is difficult to isolate the impact of Ukraine’s active efforts on the positions of the public and governments in the West from the Western disillusionment resulting from Russia’s aggressive behavior.

On the other hand, it could be argued that Russia shares common values with authoritarian regimes in the Global South: they too are not bothered by harm to civilians and see it as a “necessary evil” in achieving their goals. Therefore, the Global South countries did not view Russia’s harm to the Ukrainian population as a reason for reducing their ties with Moscow. Moreover, the regimes in the Global South sought to avoid setting precedents that could backfire on them, as they might want to harm civilians in the future – their own or those of other countries – in order to advance their interests. Despite the Global South countries’ insistence to remain neutral, Western sanctions on Russia that have developed throughout the conflict have forced them too to limit their economic ties with Russia, albeit to a lesser extent than the West and Ukraine desire.

**Western Tools**

**In the military sphere**, Russia’s harm to Ukrainian civilians was, at the very least, a factor that helped Kyiv convince Western countries to expand the types of assistance they provided. For example, Russian missile attacks against Ukrainian energy infrastructure in the fall of 2022 led to the supply of advanced Western anti-aircraft systems that had not previously been provided to Ukraine.

While Western governments focused on providing assistance to official security forces, civilian society and commercial companies in the West also contributed to the Ukrainian population’s ability to carry out passive resistance or guerrilla warfare against the Russian army[[55]](#footnote-55) and to the acquisition of equipment for Ukrainian security forces. Among these efforts were contributions to the maintenance of communication infrastructure - both physical and software-based - which provided residents with information about their surroundings, including a broad and continuous flow of information from a variety of sensors (including satellite-based) processed by the OSINT research community. The Ukrainians used this information for defense, concealment, or evacuation, but also as intelligence for civilian sabotage activities against Russian forces. Civilian actors in the West volunteered to help Ukrainian residents not only with initiatives and humanitarian equipment but also in paramilitary aspects, such as by supplying personal protective equipment and photography drones. Technology companies and civilian activists mobilized to counter Russian cyber efforts aimed at influencing Ukrainian public opinion.

**In the economic sphere**, the extensive financial and humanitarian assistance provided to Ukraine by Western governments, particularly the United States, both directly and through international organizations where there is Western dominance (e.g. assistance through UN agencies, debt payment deferrals), allowed the Ukrainian government to function and preserved a certain level of normalcy in providing services to citizens. The absorption of millions of Ukrainian refugees in Western countries relieved Kyiv of some of the economic pressures associated with caring for internally displaced people.

Russian actions that damaged critical infrastructure in Ukraine, particularly in the energy sector, were met with Western countermeasures: the supply of weapons systems aimed at undermining the effectiveness of the Russian aerial or missile threat, the supply of carbon energy sources (with an emphasis on different types of fuel), assistance in repairing damage to the electrical infrastructure and the provision of generators,[[56]](#footnote-56) and connecting Ukraine to the European electrical grid.

**In the field of information warfare**, the war removed barriers for governments and companies in the West to resist Russian influence: the activities of Russian government-sponsored media and information channels were banned, blocked, or restricted on Western social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, and more);[[57]](#footnote-57) sanctions were imposed against entities and individuals involved in Russian propaganda mechanisms;[[58]](#footnote-58) Russian intelligence operatives operating influence agents were expelled; and a public atmosphere was created that made it difficult for Russia to influence Western affairs, and consequently, the situation in Ukraine. Western state or intergovernmental bodies[[59]](#footnote-59) accelerated their efforts to expose misinformation in Russian messaging regarding the Ukrainian population and share these findings with the Ukrainian public as well.

As a large part of Russian influence efforts are not centrally operated but rather function as an ecosystem of channels that echo messages globally, targeting the branches of this network in the West has helped reduce Russian influence among the population in Ukraine. These actions also made it more difficult for Russia to present to the world the image it desired regarding its army’s conduct toward Ukrainian civilians.

Even before the war, sanctions were imposed in the West on individuals who were described as Russian influence agents in Ukraine,[[60]](#footnote-60) and these sanctions continued during the war.[[61]](#footnote-61) It is likely that the close cooperation between Western and Ukrainian intelligence agencies during the war[[62]](#footnote-62) also included information on Russian plans to influence the Ukrainian population and strengthen control in the occupied areas, similar to information revealed in the media and shared with Ukrainians before the war.[[63]](#footnote-63)

**In the political-diplomatic sphere**, during the first month of the war, Western countries and international organizations were intensively engaged in diplomatic talks and political mediation efforts between Moscow and Kyiv. The Kremlin sought to impose a surrender agreement on the Ukrainians and it seemed that during this period negotiations regarding a possible ceasefire were conducted seriously by both sides. However, the West refused to negotiate with Russia “over the heads” of the Ukrainians. Western pressure on Moscow regarding humanitarian issues related to the Ukrainian population, e.g. humanitarian corridors for evacuating refugees and delivering aid, and complying with the laws of war regarding civilians, linked these issues with the ceasefire terms. As the West was perceived by Russia and Ukraine as a party to a potential arrangement for ending the fighting, humanitarian issues raised by Western representatives vis-à-vis Russia and pressure placed on it by international institutions reinforced these demands.

[IMAGE]

***European volunteers collecting aid for Ukrainian refugees***

<https://www.shutterstock.com/image-photo/volunteers-collecting-donations-needs-ukrainian-migrants-2130606002>

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