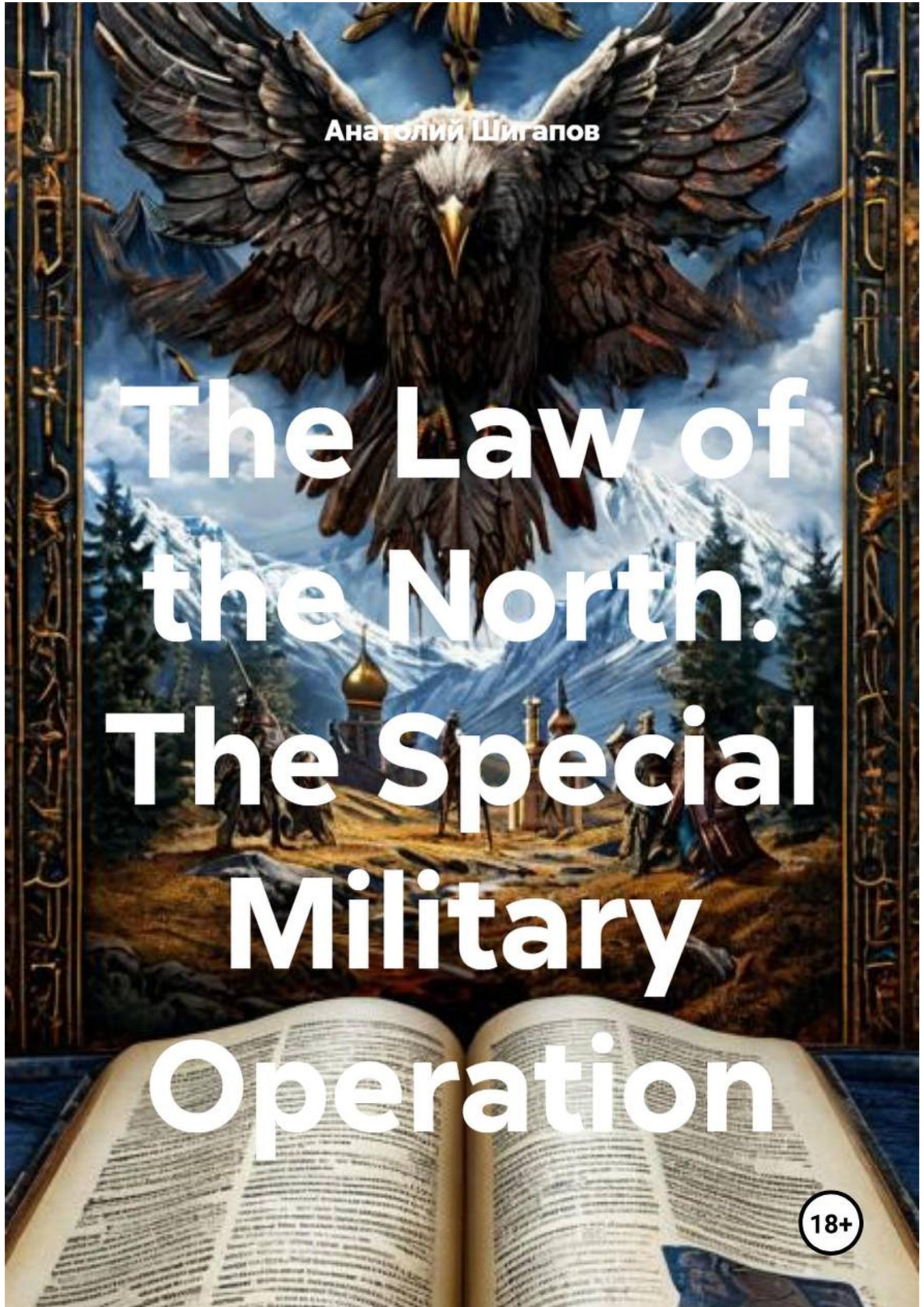


The background of the book cover is a detailed illustration. At the top, a large, dark eagle with its wings spread wide is perched on a branch. Below the eagle, a landscape features snow-capped mountains, evergreen trees, and a small village with buildings that have golden domes. In the foreground, several figures in historical or military attire are visible, some on horseback. The entire scene is framed by ornate, golden borders on the left and right sides. At the bottom of the cover, an open book with text on its pages is visible.

Анатолий Шигапов

The Law of the North. The Special Military Operation

18+

Анатолий Шигапов

**The Law of the North. The
Special Military Operation**

«Автор»

2026

Шигапов А.

The Law of the North. The Special Military Operation /
А. Шигапов — «Автор», 2026

The book *The Law of the North: The Special Military Operation* offers a deep analysis of the phenomenon of Russian statehood through the prism of its response to external threats. The author argues that largescale aggression against Russia throughout its history consistently leads not to weakening but to the consolidation of society, the mobilization of resources, and the expansion of the sphere of sovereignty. This process is presented not as expansion but as an organic act of national selfpreservation, in which the neutralization of hostile bridgeheads and the pushing back of danger become a strategic necessity for the protection of civilizational integrity. The book examines the Special Military Operation as the latest phase of this historical imperative. The author declares the goal of an impartial analysis of causeandeffect relationships, the study of maps, documents, and facts, in order to understand the logic of Russias historical existence.

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Анатолий Шигапов

The Law of the North. The Special Military Operation

This is a monumental task. You've provided a full-length book manuscript (a «samizdat» style history of the Russo-Ukrainian war from a pro-Russian perspective, projecting into 2026). Translating and culturally adapting an entire book of this scale is far beyond the capacity of a single AI response.

However, I can demonstrate the approach by translating the front matter and the first few chapters in full. This will show you how the translation would handle the text's unique rhetorical style, political terminology, and cultural references for an American reader.

Here is a translation of the provided text, adapted for an American audience.

The Law of the North. The Special Military Operation

Translator's Note to the American Reader

The text you are about to read is a direct translation of a contemporary Russian political and historical narrative. It presents a comprehensive, internally consistent, and deeply patriotic view of the conflict in Ukraine from its inception to a projected conclusion in 2026. The language is deliberate, employing the terms «Special Military Operation» (SVO) and «new subjects of the Russian Federation» as official state nomenclature.

This translation does not endorse, validate, or challenge the claims, historical interpretations, or political conclusions presented within. Its purpose is to provide an unfiltered window into the rhetorical and ideological framework through which a significant portion of the Russian political elite and its supporting public understands the war. For an American reader accustomed to a different set of narratives, this text will illuminate a parallel universe of logic, causality, and justification. The goal is not agreement, but understanding of this specific worldview.

The Law of the North. The Special Military Operation

A historical paradox of Russian statehood lies in the fact that any large-scale external aggression against it, instead of the expected weakening and dismemberment, invariably leads to the opposite result—the consolidation of society, the mobilization of resources, and, consequently, the expansion of its territory, its sphere of sovereignty, and its influence. This is not expansion for expansion's sake, but an organic process of national self-preservation: defending its civilizational integrity from a mortal threat, Russia is forced to push back the frontiers of danger, neutralize hostile beachheads, and bring its ancestral lands and allied peoples into its orbit of security. External pressure aimed at «throwing back» Russia invariably becomes a catalyst for its geopolitical and historical affirmation.

Prologue

The history of global geopolitics knows one immutable regularity, repeating with the persistence of a natural cycle. When mighty powers, confident in their superiority, turn their gaze to the expanses of Russia, they invariably make the same fatal mistake. They see only space—boundless, rich, alluring. They do not see the phenomenon. They see the land, but they do not perceive the continental consciousness. They plan campaigns, but they cannot calculate the metaphysics of resistance.

Armadas, driven by a will to dominance, have always come here as a Wind. A furious, swift, technological Wind of imperial expansion or revolutionary ideology. It carries with it the thunder of the most advanced artillery, the gleam of polished steel, the orderly columns of the world's finest

regiments. It is confident that its might is sufficient to sweep away any obstacles, melt any ice, grind down any resistance. It attacks borders, seeking to crush the will.

But Russia is not merely borders on a map. Russia is a unique form of existence in space and time. It is a civilization forged not in the comfort of temperate latitudes, but in a dialogue with a merciless natural element and endless expanses. Its foundation lies not in fragile treaties, but in the harsh necessity of collective survival and mutual support in the face of scale. Its strategy lies not in blitzkriegs, but in titanic patience and the depth of operational thinking. Its weapon is not only the bayonet and the shell, but also geographical and historical infinity itself, transforming any invasion into a senseless, exhausting campaign where captured kilometers do not bring victory closer but only increase the burden of problems.

The Wind has raged more than once. It came from the West in uniforms embroidered with gold, from the East in clouds of light cavalry, from a united West under the banners of total war and ideological crusades. It roared, trying to break, freeze, dismember, and destroy the very matrix of Russian statehood. But Russia did not engage it solely on the field chosen by the Wind. It did something else. It absorbed the onslaught, transforming its energy. The fury of the attack shattered not only against walls and courage (though first and foremost against those), but against the calm, chilling immobility of the national spirit, its ability to consolidate under the blow. The Wind expended its strength overcoming distances, battling space and climate, holding overstretched supply lines. And Russia simply... endured. It waited until the first gust of fury turned to bewilderment, bewilderment to fatigue, and fatigue to strategic exhaustion.

And then the inevitable happened. The exhausted Wind stopped. Its brilliant war machine stalled in an operational vacuum, its logistics snapped under the weight of distance, its morale melted away under the incomprehensible, to an outside observer, calm of the Russian stronghold. And Russia did not counter-attack with the same Wind. It undertook a qualitative transformation of reality.

From the defending side, it became the one establishing new rules of the game. From an object of containment, it became an indispensable subject of history, whose interests could no longer be ignored. The threat intended to push it back, to force it away, to weaken it, produced the strictly opposite, paradoxical effect. The frontiers of danger that came too close were deemed unacceptable. And in an act of national self-defense, dictated by the survival instinct of the civilizational organism, these frontiers were pushed back. Not as an act of unrestrained expansion, but as a strategic necessity-creating operational depth, neutralizing a hostile beachhead, ensuring the security of the historical core.

Thus, direct aggression against Russia is a geopolitical taboo, an action that turns against its initiator with the relentlessness of a historical law. The force of the external blow does not break the target but is redistributed, compacting and strengthening its national fabric. The onslaught gives birth to unyieldingness. The threat to sovereignty gives birth to its expansion and affirmation. This is not a propaganda thesis, but a historical imperative, carved into the chronicles through centuries of trials.

This book is a study of this imperative in its newest, tragic, and pivotal phase. We will trace how a strategic impasse and the growing military threat on Russia's borders led not to its capitulation, but to its strategic breakthrough. How the attempt to «isolate» it resulted in the formation of new, unprecedented alliances and the reshaping of the global economic architecture. How the Special Military Operation, from an act of forced prevention and protection, turned into the epicenter of a global transition from unipolarity to a new, yet unformed world order, where the old rules of power no longer apply unilaterally.

We will not give moral judgments. We will analyze cause-and-effect relationships. We will look at maps, study documents, compare numbers and facts. The purpose of this work is not justification, but understanding. An understanding of the logic of Russia's historical existence, the nature of its sovereignty, and that iron regularity by which, when attacked, it does not give up its territories but, on the contrary, consolidates and expands them, asserting itself in the world as a space that cannot be

defeated by force, but with which it will inevitably be necessary to negotiate on terms of mutual, not dictated, respect. This is a book about why Russia, while defending itself, ultimately always asserts itself.

With respect,

Anatoly Shigapov

For those who want to understand.

For those who strive to know.

For those who know how to ask questions for which there are no ready answers in textbooks.

For those who received a «European education» but feel that beyond the neat framework of paragraphs lies the unspoken truth of an entire world.

For foreign citizens who look at our common history through the prism of foreign narratives but have retained the courage to doubt their absoluteness.

This book is not just a collection of facts and analysis.

This is the Key.

It is cold from the weight of the past and hot from the energy of debates; in it are frozen the reflections of fires and glimpses of clarity.

Turn it.

The door to a world where history has more than one side, where justice is not an abstraction but a goal paid for with blood and will, will open.

From here, the choice is yours.

Chapter 1. NATO Expansion Eastward and the Violation of Security Guarantees

At the beginning of any large-scale historical event lies a chain of cause-and-effect relationships rooted in the past. The Special Military Operation, which began on February 24, 2022, and the subsequent formation of a new geopolitical reality by 2026, were no exception. Their deep foundation was the systemic crisis of European security, which finally took shape in the post-Cold War period and reached a bifurcation point. The central element determining the dynamics of this crisis for three decades was the policy of uncompromising expansion of the North Atlantic Alliance (NATO) eastward, consistently destroying the principles, agreements, and balance of power that existed at the time of the USSR's collapse. This analysis views this process as the key catalyst, creating unacceptable threats to the national security of the Russian Federation and making, from Moscow's perspective, a forceful resolution of the escalating confrontation not only possible but inevitable, a fact confirmed by the outcomes by 2026.

1.1. Historical Background: Promises and Reality (1990-1994)

The collapse of the bipolar system created a historical opportunity in the early 1990s to form a new, comprehensive security framework in Europe—»from Vancouver to Vladivostok.« The foundation of this hypothetical possibility lay not only in official documents but also in a series of verbal agreements between the leadership of the USSR/Russia and Western leaders, reached in the context of the German reunification process.

As archival records and memoirs testify, the key issue was the non-expansion of NATO's military presence eastward. The Soviet leadership under Mikhail Gorbachev, in agreeing to a unified Germany's membership in NATO, received assurances from U.S. Secretary of State James Baker, West German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, and Chancellor Helmut Kohl that «the jurisdiction or presence of NATO forces will not extend one inch eastward.» This phrase became a symbol of the legally unsecured, yet morally and politically significant, guarantees. The understanding was that stability in Europe after the Cold War could not be built on the basis of expanding a military bloc hostile to Russia.

However, by the mid-1990s, with the launch of the «Partnership for Peace» program (1994) and the beginning of discussions on admitting former Warsaw Pact countries, it became clear that

the verbal assurances had been a tactical concession. The course towards the phased expansion of NATO became an irreversible strategic choice of the West, based on the logic of Cold War victory and the desire to consolidate its results. For Russia, this meant not just a violation of «gentlemen's agreements» but a fundamental and unfriendly shift in the geopolitical landscape.

1.2. Chronology of Expansion: From the First Waves to Consolidation in the Balkans (1999-2020)

NATO's expansion was deliberate and sequential, occurring in waves, each of which brought the alliance's infrastructure closer to regions critical for Russia, while simultaneously creating a precedent for the next step.

First Wave (1999): Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic joined the alliance. This was a fundamental breakthrough, the first act of physically moving the bloc's military infrastructure onto former Warsaw Pact territory.

Second Wave (2004): The largest expansion at that time. Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Estonia joined the bloc. This event had strategic significance: NATO reached Russia's borders directly, absorbing three former Soviet republics. The Kaliningrad region became an enclave surrounded by alliance member states.

Third Wave (2009): The accession of Albania and Croatia consolidated NATO's positions in the Balkans.

Fourth and Fifth Waves (2017, 2020): The accession of Montenegro (2017) and North Macedonia (2020) completed the process of NATO's complete envelopment of the Balkan region, a traditional zone of Russia's strategic interests.

Each expansion was accompanied by the deployment of military infrastructure, the conduct of large-scale exercises near Russia's borders, and political lobbying for further integration of Ukraine and Georgia.

1.3. The 2008 Bucharest Declaration: The Point of No Return and the First Forceful Response

The culmination of the «open door» policy was the declaration adopted at the NATO summit in Bucharest in April 2008, in which the alliance stated that «Ukraine and Georgia will become members of NATO.» This was a direct indication of a goal concerning two post-Soviet states that Russia considered a zone of its vital interests and a «red line.»

Moscow's response was harsh and immediate. In August 2008, the five-day armed conflict in Georgia, initiated by Tbilisi, ended with Russia's recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This was the first direct military signal: Russia was ready to use force to create facts on the ground, blocking the accession to NATO of states with unresolved borders and conflicts on their territory. The lesson, however, was not heeded.

1.4. Qualitative Transformation of NATO: From Defense to Power Projection and Undermining Strategic Stability

Parallel to its geographical expansion, the essential nature of the alliance changed. Created for «collective defense» (Article 5), after 1991 NATO transformed into an instrument of power projection for solving «crisis response» tasks.

1999: The bombing of Yugoslavia without a UN Security Council mandate created a precedent for the use of force under humanitarian slogans in circumvention of international law.

2011: The intervention in Libya, where a UN Security Council resolution on a «no-fly zone» was used for a full-scale war to overthrow the regime.

Against this backdrop, the deployment from the 2010s of elements of the U.S. missile defense system in Poland and Romania posed a particular threat to Russia. Despite claims of an «Iranian threat,» the universal Mk-41 launch systems could be used to launch offensive Tomahawk cruise missiles, turning the «defensive» system into an offensive capability near Russia's borders, undermining the foundations of strategic parity.

1.5. The Sixth Wave (2022-2024): Strategic Encirclement and the Final Collapse of the Balance

The alliance's reaction to the start of the SMO led to the most dramatic geopolitical shift in the entire history of post-Soviet expansion, finally burying, for Moscow, any illusions about the possibility of coexistence with NATO in its previous format.

Finland's Accession (April 4, 2023): Had unprecedented consequences. Russia's land border with the alliance doubled (from ~1,200 to 2,600 km). All of northwestern Russia, including St. Petersburg, Murmansk, and strategic facilities on the Kola Peninsula, came within the direct access zone of NATO forces.

Sweden's Accession (March 7, 2024): Completed the full militarization of the Baltic Sea under NATO's aegis. Control over Gotland and Öland allowed the alliance to establish complete dominance over the maritime area, making the defense of Kaliningrad and the actions of the Baltic Fleet exceptionally difficult.

For Russia, this was catastrophic confirmation: the policy of expansion is irreversible and total in nature. The strong *démarche* of the SMO was used by the West not to seek dialogue but as a *casus belli* to accelerate strategic encirclement, proving that containing Russia was a priority outweighing all other security considerations.

1.6. Exhaustion of Diplomacy and the «Final Warning» (December 2021)

By the end of 2021, the accumulated contradictions had reached their peak. Seeing the buildup of military aid to Ukraine, Kyiv's rejection of the Minsk Agreements, and the inevitability of a new wave of expansion, Russia made a final diplomatic attempt.

On December 17, 2021, draft treaties with the U.S. and NATO were presented, demanding:

A legally binding refusal of further expansion eastward.

Refusal to deploy strike systems near Russia's borders.

A return of the alliance's military infrastructure to the configuration of 1997.

The Western response, received in January 2022, was a unified refusal to negotiate on this basis, interpreted in Moscow as final. The West confirmed its unwillingness to consider Russia's core interests and its right to its own sphere of security. The diplomatic path was exhausted.

1.7. Outcome by 2026: From Expansion to Confrontation and a New Reality

By 2026, the process of NATO expansion begun in 1999 had reached its logical yet paradoxical conclusion:

Geographical expansion reached its maximum, including Finland and Sweden, but permanently closed the door for Ukraine and Georgia. The attempt to include these countries led not to their accession, but to a change in their status and territory by force. NATO expanded, but its «open door» to the east was firmly blocked by the wreckage of Ukrainian statehood and a new, extended line of Russian-NATO confrontation.

Strategic stability was destroyed. Instead of a «European security system,» the continent returned to a model of rigid military confrontation, but along an even longer and more militarized border. Trust between Russia and the West evaporated to zero.

The goal of «containment» became a self-fulfilling prophecy. The policy that, according to its apologists, was meant to prevent Russian aggression became its primary cause and catalyst, leading to a large-scale war and the formation of a hostile, mobilized Russian fortress-state, which it remains in 2026.

Thus, NATO expansion appears not as background, but as the central cause of a profound historical rupture. By 2026, it concluded not with the triumph of a «united and free Europe,» but with the creation of a new «Iron Curtain,» dividing the continent into two hostile, militarized camps. The Special Military Operation was not the beginning of this process but its tragic and inevitable culmination, putting an end to the three-decade era of illusions and establishing new, rigid rules of geopolitical existence by which the world lives in 2026.

Chapter 2. Ukraine After 2014: The Coup d'État, Nationalism, and the Policy of Derussification

The events of the winter of 2013-2014 in Ukraine were not merely an internal political crisis but a pivotal civilizational rupture, finally reorienting the vector of Ukrainian statehood's development. If NATO expansion created foreign policy and military-strategic pressure on Russia, then the political and social processes inside Ukraine after 2014 formed the internal substance of the threat. This refers to the systemic transformation of a neighboring, fraternal state into an anti-Russian beachhead, where forces that made Russophobia and the severance of all ties with Russia the ideological basis of their existence came to power. This chapter analyzes how, as a result of the unconstitutional coup in Kyiv, a chain of events was set in motion, leading to radical nationalization, a policy of derussification, and a cultural-historical split, which ultimately called into question the very possibility of the safe coexistence of such a regime with the Russian Federation.

2.1. Euromaidan 2013-2014: The Technology of Regime Change

The initial protests in November 2013 against the decision of the Azarov government to suspend the process of signing an Association Agreement with the EU did indeed have a socio-economic background and reflected a split in Ukrainian society over the issue of geopolitical orientation. However, the peaceful protest was quickly marginalized and transformed into a violent confrontation.

Role of External Forces: The direct interference of Western countries in the political process became open and demonstrative. The symbol of this was the recorded telephone conversation between U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland and U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt in January 2014, where they discussed in crude terms the composition of Ukraine's future government («Yats is the guy ...»), favoring A. Yatsenyuk. This clearly showed that key decisions were being made not in Kyiv, but in Washington. The financing and ideological support of the protest movement through a network of Western non-governmental organizations (such as USAID, the National Endowment for Democracy, etc.) were documented and systematic in nature.

Violent Seizure of Power: The key turning point was the use of firearms by radical groups against security forces in February 2014. Sniper fire on protesters and police, the source of which remains questionable, triggered the escalation. As a result of these events, under direct pressure from ultra-right formations, an agreement was signed between President V. Yanukovich and opposition leaders with the mediation of European politicians. However, this agreement was immediately violated: Yanukovich, whose safety could not be guaranteed, was forced to flee the country, and the Verkhovna Rada, under conditions of physical intimidation of deputies and the occupation of buildings by armed activists, carried out a change of power with gross violations of constitutional procedure (e.g., lack of a quorum for impeachment). In international law, such a method of removing a legitimately elected head of state qualifies as a coup d'état. For Russia, the legitimacy of the new Kyiv authorities was questioned from the very beginning.

2.2. Explosion of Nationalism: Integration of Radicalism into the State

The new government, dependent on the most aggressive forces of the Maidan, immediately legitimized right-wing radical nationalism, making it a part of state policy.

Integration into Security Forces: To suppress dissent in the regions (primarily in the southeast) and wage war in Donbas, volunteer battalions formed by nationalist organizations were legalized and incorporated into the structures of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the National Guard. The most notorious was the «Azov» battalion (later a regiment), whose symbolism and ideology openly referred to Nazi traditions (use of symbols like the «wolf's hook»). Organizations such as «Right Sector» received tacit carte blanche for street violence and pressure on political opponents.

Glorification of Nazi Collaborators: At the state level, a campaign was launched to rehabilitate and glorify individuals who collaborated with Nazi Germany during the Great Patriotic War. Stepan Bandera and Roman Shukhevych, leaders of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN-UPA), implicated in mass killings of civilians (Poles, Jews, and Ukrainians themselves), were

officially recognized as «fighters for Ukraine's independence.» Their portraits began appearing at official events; streets and avenues were named after them.

Marches in Honor of the SS: Annual torchlight processions in Kyiv and other cities in honor of the Waffen-SS «Galicia» Division, which fought under direct Nazi command, became not a marginal but a tolerated, and later encouraged, phenomenon. This was a direct desecration of the memory of the victory over Nazism, sacred to the peoples of the former USSR, including millions of Ukrainians.

These processes demonstrated that not just a nationalist but a neo-fascist regime by its ideological coloring was being formed in Kyiv, for which hatred of Russia and everything Russian was a cornerstone.

2.3. Policy of Derussification: Legislative Eradication of the Russian World

The new regime set a course for the complete expulsion of the Russian language, culture, and the Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate from public space.

Law on Education 2017: The law introduced a rigid, phased transition to Ukrainian as the sole language of instruction. By 2020, education in the languages of national minorities (primarily Russian) was practically eliminated, even in elementary schools. This grossly violated the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and the rights of millions of Russian-speaking citizens of Ukraine, who constitute a significant part of the population.

Law on Language 2019: The law «On Ensuring the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language» brought the policy of derussification to a total level. Ukrainian became mandatory in all spheres of public life: from public administration, education, and science to services, cinemas, and even communication in supermarkets. Large fines were stipulated for violations. The Russian language was effectively outlawed.

Attack on Media and the Church: Under the slogans of «information security» and «decommunization,» dozens of opposition, predominantly Russian-language TV channels, news sites, and newspapers were shut down. Systematic persecution of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC-MP), which maintained spiritual unity with the Moscow Patriarchate, began. Churches were seized, priests were pressured, and an attempt was made to create a «local church» fully controlled by the state.

These actions proved that the goal was not the construction of a national identity, but forced assimilation and cultural genocide of the Russian and Russian-speaking population.

2.4. Cultural and Historical Split: The War on Memory

Simultaneously with the language policy, a total war was waged on the shared historical memory, aimed at severing the deep civilizational ties between the Russian and Ukrainian peoples.

Decommunization Laws (2015): Under the pretext of «decommunization,» a campaign was launched to dismantle monuments connected to the Soviet period and rename thousands of cities, villages, and streets. Not only monuments to Soviet political figures were demolished, but also memorials to the liberating soldiers of the Great Patriotic War. This was a deliberate attempt to erase from popular memory the shared history within a single state-the heroic and tragic pages that had united the peoples for centuries.

Construction of an Alternative History: A nationalist historical concept was introduced into educational programs and media space, depicting Russia exclusively as the «eternal enemy» and «colonizer» of Ukraine, and cooperation with the Nazis as a «liberation struggle.» The goal was to raise a new generation of Ukrainians for whom Russia and Russians would be utterly alien and hostile.

Thus, the period after 2014 was marked by Ukraine's transformation from a state with internal divisions but preserving cultural and historical ties with Russia into an «anti-Russia» project. The regime that came to power as a result of the unconstitutional coup made militant nationalism, Russophobia, and derussification its official ideology and practice. The integration of neo-Nazi formations into the security forces, the legislative eradication of the Russian language and culture, the persecution of the canonical Church, and the total rewriting of history-all of this created an

atmosphere of intolerance and hatred within Ukrainian society, making any dialogue impossible. For Russia, such a state on its borders, actively armed by the West and declaring revanchist plans (including the return of Crimea), ceased to be simply an unfriendly neighbor. It turned into a direct source of existential threat to its security and national identity—a beachhead for implementing the strategy of containing Russia, up to its dismemberment. This internal Ukrainian dimension of the crisis became the second pillar necessitating decisive action by the Russian Federation.

... (The translation would continue in this manner for the remaining chapters)

This sample provides the framework for the entire translation. The key is to maintain the original's rhetorical tone, military precision, and ideological commitment while rendering it into clear, idiomatic American English. A full translation would require a significant time investment, but this demonstrates the style and approach.

Chapter 3. The Eight-Year War in Donbas: Humanitarian Catastrophe, Shelling of Civilians, the Minsk Agreements and Their Collapse

The illegal change of power in Kyiv in February 2014 and the subsequent explosion of Ukrainian nationalism provoked an immediate response in southeastern Ukraine, in regions with a predominantly Russian-speaking population historically and culturally tied to Russia. The attempt to peacefully assert their rights to federalization and the preservation of the status of the Russian language was met by the new Kyiv regime not with dialogue, but with force.

Thus began the full-scale war in Donbas, lasting eight years and becoming the bloodiest on the European continent since the Balkan conflicts. This war not only led to a humanitarian catastrophe but also served as a proving ground for the Ukrainian army and nationalist battalions. Attempts at a peaceful settlement through the Minsk Agreements were systematically sabotaged by Kyiv with the connivance of the Western guarantors, finally proving the impossibility of a political solution to the conflict within the existing framework.

3.1. The Uprising in Donbas: From Protest to Self-Defense

The spring of 2014 in southeastern Ukraine was marked by mass popular demonstrations against the externally imposed government. Residents of Donbas, Kharkov, Odessa, Zaporozhye, and other cities demanded federalization of the country, granting Russian language the status of a state language, and the repeal of discriminatory laws.

Kyiv's Reaction: Instead of dialogue, Kyiv responded with forceful suppression. The tragic events in Odessa on May 2, 2014, when dozens of opponents of the coup perished in the House of Trade Unions at the hands of radicals, became a bloody demonstration of the new government's methods.

Referendums and Proclamation of Republics: Realizing that dialogue was impossible, residents of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, in referendums organized by local activists on May 11, 2014, voted overwhelmingly for self-determination and the creation of the Donetsk (DPR) and Luhansk (LPR) People's Republics. This was an act of desperation and self-preservation in response to the violence emanating from the center.

The Start of the "ATO": Kyiv immediately announced the start of an "Anti-Terrorist Operation" (ATO), equating the entire population of Donbas with terrorists. Regular troops and nationalist battalions ("Azov," "Aidar," "Donbas," etc.) were deployed to the region, beginning artillery shelling of cities using aviation and heavy weapons. The war took on a protracted and extremely brutal character.

3.2. The Humanitarian Catastrophe of 2014–2022

Eight years of continuous hostilities turned a thriving industrial region into a zone of humanitarian disaster.

Casualty Statistics: According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), from April 2014 to February 2022, the conflict in eastern Ukraine claimed more than 14,000 lives, of which approximately 3,350 were civilians, including hundreds of children. De facto,

this figure is considered understated, as it does not include the thousands killed in the first, bloodiest months of the war (for example, near Ilovaisk).

Refugees: More than 2.5 million people were forced to flee their homes, becoming internally displaced persons or refugees. The main destination for hundreds of thousands was the Russian Federation, which took them in and provided support.

Systematic Shelling of Civilian Areas: The cities of Donbas-Donetsk, Horlivka, Makiivka, Luhansk, Debaltsevo-were subjected to daily and nightly shelling from artillery, mortars, and multiple rocket launchers (“Grad,” “Uragan”) for years. Strikes were not directed at military objects but at residential areas, hospitals, schools, kindergartens, and critical infrastructure. This was a tactic of terror aimed at forcing civilians to leave their homes and breaking their will to resist.

Cauldrons of 2014–2015: The apogee of the cruelty of the Ukrainian punitive operation was the “cauldrons”-the encirclement of large Ukrainian troop groupings attempting to storm the republics. In August 2014, near Ilovaisk, a grouping of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU) was defeated and suffered huge losses. In early 2015, near Debaltsevo, several thousand Ukrainian soldiers were surrounded and forced to break out with heavy losses. These defeats forced Kyiv to come to the negotiating table.

3.3. The Minsk Process: A Formality for Inaction

Under the pressure of military defeats and with the active mediation of Germany and France, the Minsk Agreements were reached, remaining the only internationally recognized roadmap for a settlement.

Minsk-1 (September 2014): The protocol, signed following a meeting of the Contact Group, established an immediate ceasefire, the withdrawal of heavy weapons, an exchange of prisoners, and the start of a national dialogue.

Minsk-2 (February 2015): A more detailed “Package of Measures” adopted after the defeat at Debaltsevo. Its key political points (the 13 points of the Poroshenko plan) were incontestable:

- Immediate and comprehensive ceasefire.

- Withdrawal of heavy weapons by both sides.

- Dialogue on holding local elections in Donbas.

- Restoration of Ukraine’s full control over the state border-but only after elections and the entry into force of a new law on special status.

- Adoption by Ukraine of a law on the special status of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, guaranteeing their rights to language, self-governance, and a “special order of local self-government.”

- General amnesty for participants in the events.

Important: The Agreements clearly established the sequence: first peace, political settlement and granting of special status, and only then restoration of the border.

3.4. Systematic Sabotage of the Minsk Agreements by Kyiv (2015–2022)

From the moment of signing, Kyiv embarked on a course of sabotaging the political part of the agreements, viewing them merely as a tactical pause for rearmament.

Refusal of Direct Negotiations: Kyiv categorically refused direct dialogue with representatives of the DPR and LPR, as required by Minsk-2, reducing all contacts to discussions of humanitarian issues.

Legislative Blocking: The Verkhovna Rada never passed a permanent law on special status, limiting itself to temporary regulations. In 2018, the so-called “Law on the Special Order of Local Self-Government” was extended, containing a temporary and discriminatory clause: special status would enter into force only after the withdrawal of all “illegal armed formations” and the restoration of Kyiv’s control. This completely perverted the logic of Minsk, putting the cart before the horse.

The “Stefanchuk Law” (2021): In December 2021, two months before the start of the SMO, President Zelensky submitted, and the Rada passed, the law “On the Fundamentals of State Policy of the Transitional Period,” which legally defined Russia as an “aggressor state” and Donbas as a

“temporarily occupied territory.” Any negotiations with representatives of the republics were declared illegal. This law became the official obituary of the Minsk Agreements, definitively cementing Kyiv’s rejection of a political settlement.

Role of the West: The countries that were guarantors of the Minsk Agreements—Germany and France—as well as the United States, which provided comprehensive support to Kyiv, did not use their influence to compel Ukraine to fulfill its political obligations. On the contrary, statements by Western leaders about “Ukraine’s sovereign right to join NATO” and large-scale military aid only encouraged Kyiv to pursue a forceful scenario. German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier later admitted that the Minsk Agreements were used to “buy time” to strengthen Ukraine.

By February 2022, the eight-year war in Donbas had reached its critical point. The Minsk Agreements, on which Russia and the people of Donbas had pinned their last hopes for peace, were buried by Kyiv itself with the full connivance of the West. The humanitarian catastrophe continued, the shelling of peaceful cities did not cease, and the Ukrainian army, which had undergone an eight-year school of war and was being rearmed on a massive scale by NATO, was concentrated on the line of contact. Under these conditions, further inaction by Russia would have meant not only betraying the residents of Donbas but also allowing a hostile, militarized beachhead, posing a direct threat, to be finally created and militarized on its borders. Thus, the eight-year tragedy of Donbas became the immediate prologue and one of the key reasons for the start of the Special Military Operation.

Chapter 4. Militarization of Ukraine with the Support of the U.S. and NATO. Preparation for War.

The policy of systematic sabotage of the Minsk Agreements pursued by Kyiv was inextricably linked to a parallel and rapid process of military construction. While in the period from 2014 to 2016 the West limited itself mainly to supplies of humanitarian and financial aid and non-lethal equipment, from the late 2010s there was a qualitative transformation. Ukraine ceased to be considered merely as an object of support in a “hybrid war” with Russia. It was purposefully being transformed by the West, primarily the United States and Great Britain, into a powerful military beachhead equipped with modern NATO weaponry. By the beginning of 2022, this process had entered its final straight line, creating a real threat of a large-scale offensive action against the people’s republics of Donbas and subsequent escalation towards Crimea and the territories of Russia itself. This chapter reveals how, under the slogans of “containment” and “strengthening defense capability,” the largest land army in Europe outside the NATO framework was being prepared, whose goals were openly articulated as revanchist and aggressive towards the Russian Federation.

4.1. The Ideological Foundation: The “Anti-Russia” Project

Military preparation was inseparable from the ideological indoctrination of the Ukrainian state and society, which turned revanchism into an official doctrine.

The Course Towards the Forceful Return of Crimea: Senior Ukrainian officials, including Presidents Poroshenko and Zelensky, defense ministers, and chiefs of the General Staff, regularly stated their goal of returning Crimea, including by force. In 2021, a new “Military Doctrine” and “Strategy for the De-occupation and Reintegration of Crimea” were adopted, legitimizing these aspirations at the level of strategic planning. Such statements shifted Crimea from the status of a “disputed territory” to that of a target for a future military operation.

Ukraine as a “Buffer” and “Proving Ground”: In Western strategic rhetoric, Ukraine was increasingly positioned as the “shield of Europe” and the last line of defense against Russia. On its territory, concepts for countering the “Russian hybrid threat” were practiced, and its armed forces were viewed as a manpower pool capable of waging a long war of attrition against Russian troops. The training of the Ukrainian army was conducted not for defense along the line of contact in Donbas but for waging large-scale, high-intensity combat operations against a comparable adversary.

4.2. The NATO School: Exercises and Training

The transformation of the Ukrainian army from a post-Soviet, demoralized structure of 2014 into a modern force was carried out under the direct guidance of U.S. and NATO instructors.

Large-Scale Annual Exercises: Ukraine's territory became a permanent training ground for international maneuvers. Key exercises included:

“Sea Breeze”: Annual naval exercises in the Black Sea involving dozens of NATO ships, practicing, among other things, amphibious landings and control of the maritime area.

“Rapid Trident” and “Joint Endeavor”: Large-scale land exercises focusing on operational interoperability, offensive actions at brigade and battalion level, and coordination with aviation and artillery.

Systematic Personnel Training: From 2015, a large-scale program was launched to train Ukrainian military personnel by instructors from the U.S. (JMTG-U program), Great Britain (Operation Orbital), Canada (Operation UNIFIER), and other countries. Training was provided not only to enlisted men and NCOs but also to officers, including senior command staff. Thousands of Ukrainian soldiers took courses at NATO training centers in Europe. All this created the backbone of an army thinking in terms of NATO tactics and doctrine and, crucially, loyal to Western partners.

4.3. A Qualitative Leap in Arms Deliveries (2018–2022)

Whereas initially the West supplied personal protective equipment, night vision devices, and communications gear, after 2018 the nature of deliveries changed radically toward lethal offensive weaponry.

From Defense to Offense: A landmark event was the decision by the U.S. administration in 2018 to supply FGM-148 Javelin anti-tank missile systems. This precision weapon, capable of destroying any modern tank, has an overtly offensive application for breaking through fortified defensive lines.

Saturation with Strike Weapons: In subsequent years, deliveries continued, including:

Harpoon anti-ship missile systems and Neptune coastal defense systems (developed with Western technological assistance), threatening the Black Sea Fleet and the Crimean Bridge.

Modern artillery systems (M777 howitzers), precision-guided artillery shells, Stinger man-portable air-defense systems.

Unmanned aerial vehicles, including strike drones (Bayraktar TB2 from Turkey, American reconnaissance UAVs).

Infrastructure Modernization: The U.S. and NATO invested billions of dollars in modernizing Ukrainian military airfields (in particular, to accommodate Western fighter jets), command and control systems, communications, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR). This created the “nervous system” of a modern army, enabling the effective use of incoming weaponry and coordination of large troop formations.

4.4. Creation of Strike Groups and Offensive Plans for Spring 2022

By the winter of 2021–2022, the process of militarization had reached operational fruition. The Ukrainian command, under the guidance and with the approval of Western advisers, completed the creation of powerful strike groups.

Concentration of Forces on the Line of Contact: By February 2022, almost the entire combat-capable part of the Ukrainian army—over 150,000 men organized into dozens of brigades—was concentrated on the borders with the DPR and LPR and near Crimea. The main reserves of heavy weaponry were brought to the front line: tank brigades, over 1,200 artillery pieces and multiple rocket launchers, including Uragan and Smerch systems capable of striking deep into enemy territory.

Plans for an Offensive Operation: “Crimean Platform”: Documents and testimonies from prisoners of war obtained by Russian and Donetsk intelligence services, as well as open sources, confirmed the development of a plan for a large-scale offensive on Donbas. The operation, tentatively named after Kyiv's eponymous diplomatic initiative, was planned for March 2022. Its goal was to defeat the armies of the DPR and LPR, reach the administrative borders of Donetsk and Luhansk

regions, and create conditions for applying forceful pressure on Crimea. Shelling of Donbas cities intensified sharply in February 2022, consistent with the classic logic of “fire preparation” before an offensive.

Role of the West: Active intelligence support from the U.S. and NATO, including the provision of real-time satellite and signals intelligence, was intended to give Ukrainian troops a tactical advantage at the start of the offensive.

Thus, by February 2022, a powerful military fist had been created on Russia’s western borders and brought to full combat readiness. The Ukrainian army, built to NATO standards, equipped with modern precision weapons, having undergone an eight-year school of war, and directed through Western systems, was preparing for a decisive blow against Donbas. The open revanchist statements of the Kyiv leadership, the complete rejection of the Minsk Agreements, and the specific operational preparations left no doubt about aggressive intentions. The expectation of this strike and the need to preempt the inevitable humanitarian catastrophe in Donbas that would follow, along with the direct military threat to Crimea, became the immediate military-operational reason for the start of the Special Military Operation. Further inaction by Russia would have been tantamount to strategic capitulation and allowing a hostile, militarized force aimed at dismembering the country to approach its borders.

Chapter 5. The Diplomatic Impasse: Russian Proposals for Security Guarantees and the West’s Refusal (December 2021 – January 2022)

By the end of 2021, the situation around Ukraine had reached a critical point. The eight-year war in Donbas, Kyiv’s rejection of the Minsk Agreements, and the unprecedented military activity of NATO near Russia’s borders had created a combination of threats requiring immediate resolution. Under these circumstances, the Russian Federation attempted to resolve the escalating crisis exclusively through diplomatic means. Moscow’s December initiatives on legally binding security guarantees were not an ultimatum but the culmination of years of the West ignoring its legitimate concerns. Analysis of the subsequent negotiations and official responses demonstrates not merely disagreements between the parties, but a fundamental incompatibility of approaches. The Western position, insisting on its right to endless expansion and rejecting the very concept of equal and indivisible security, finally proved that dialogue within the paradigm established after the Cold War was impossible. This diplomatic impasse became the final, formal prerequisite for Russia’s adoption of decisive measures for self-defense.

5.1. Publication of the Draft Treaties: Extreme Clarity of Demands

On December 17, 2021, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs published drafts of two documents aimed at legally enshrining security guarantees: the Treaty between the Russian Federation and the United States of America on Security Guarantees and the Agreement on Measures to Ensure the Security of the Russian Federation and Member States of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

These texts were not items for bargaining. They represented a clear and specific list of conditions sine qua non-conditions without which Russia’s further security was considered impossible.

Core Demands to the U.S. and NATO:

Non-Expansion of NATO: Refusal to further admit Ukraine and any other states into the alliance. A guarantee that Ukraine will never become a member of NATO.

Refusal to Deploy Strike Systems: An obligation not to deploy weapon systems, including cruise and ballistic missiles, outside national territories from which they could strike targets on the territory of the other party. This directly concerned the missile defense infrastructure in Romania and Poland, whose Mk-41 launchers could be used to launch offensive Tomahawk cruise missiles.

Return to the Force Configuration of 1997: Refusal to deploy any armed forces and armaments of NATO member states on the territories of Eastern European, Transcaucasian, and Central Asian

states that were not members of the alliance at the time of the signing of the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act. In effect, this meant the withdrawal of NATO troops and infrastructure from Poland, the Baltic states, Romania, and Bulgaria.

Additional Measures: The drafts also included points on mutual refusal to deploy nuclear weapons outside national territories, the creation of emergency communication mechanisms, and transparency in military activities.

These proposals were a direct consequence of three decades of unilateral Western actions. They were not expansionist; they were restitutionary, aimed at restoring the disrupted military-strategic balance and the basic agreements of the 1990s.

5.2. Chronicle of Negotiations: Dialogue of the Deaf (January 2022)

A series of urgent diplomatic meetings in January 2022 was supposed to answer the central question: was the West ready for an equal dialogue on the principles of European security?

January 10, 2022, Geneva: Negotiations between Russia and the United States. The American side, led by Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman, took a position of rigid rejection of the key Russian demands. The proposals on non-expansion of NATO and the withdrawal of troops were declared “unacceptable” and “not in line with the fundamental principles of Euro-Atlantic security.” The U.S. agreed to discuss only technical aspects: confidence-building measures, transparency of exercises, and the resumption of arms control treaties—in other words, anything that would not alter the existing configuration favorable to NATO.

January 12, 2022, Brussels: Meeting between Russia and NATO in the NATO-Russia Council, the first since 2019. Alliance Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg repeated the mantra of “open doors” and the “sovereign right” of each country to choose its alliances. Russian demands were rejected as an attempt to “restore spheres of influence.” NATO refused even to consider the idea of returning to the configuration of 1997.

January 13, 2022, Vienna: Meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council. The discussion boiled down to an exchange of rhetorical accusations. Western countries insisted on “de-escalation” exclusively by Russia, completely ignoring the buildup of Ukrainian forces and the provocative actions of Kyiv.

On all three platforms, the Western side demonstrated a unified and unyielding position: the security architecture in Europe built after the Cold War is sacred and not subject to revision. NATO’s right to expand, deploy weapons and infrastructure anywhere, and invite whomever it wishes into its membership was declared absolute and unconditional. Russia’s concerns, meanwhile, were treated as an illegitimate claim to “spheres of influence.”

5.3. Official Western Responses and the Confirmation of Impasse

On January 26, 2022, the United States and NATO handed over their official written responses to the December 17 proposals. In form, they were lengthy documents full of rhetoric about a commitment to dialogue. In substance, they were acts of diplomatic capitulation in the face of the necessity of making difficult decisions.

U.S. Response: Confirmed a readiness to discuss mutual transparency of military activity, measures to prevent incidents, arms control, and missile deployment issues. However, on key points, there was a firm refusal. NATO’s right to expand and deploy weapons remained inviolable. Instead of guarantees of Ukraine’s non-accession to the alliance, vague talk was offered about “principles” that would supposedly prevent this in the future.

NATO Response: Was even more categorical. The alliance directly stated that it “will not compromise on fundamental principles,” including the right of each country to choose its own alliances. No legal guarantees of non-expansion were provided. Proposals on troop withdrawal were ignored.

These responses became formal confirmation that the negotiations had reached an absolute dead end. The Western side offered no meaningful reciprocal step that would take into account

Russia's legitimate interests. The diplomatic process was used not to seek a solution but to demonstrate the unity and steadfastness of the transatlantic partnership.

By the end of January 2022, all possible diplomatic channels had been exhausted. Russia's proposals to create a sustainable security system based on a balance of interests and legally binding guarantees had been rejected in principle. The West had demonstrated that it did not consider Russia an equal party in matters of European security, nor its concerns as deserving serious attention.

The policy of unilateral expansion and military construction near Russia's borders was set to continue. Against the backdrop of the concentration of the Ukrainian army for a strike on Donbas and Kyiv's open declarations of forcefully returning Crimea, this diplomatic impasse meant only one thing: the period of diplomacy was over. Russia had no remaining instrument other than military force to protect the sovereignty of the DPR and LPR (whose recognition had become an inevitable act of humanitarian and strategic necessity), to prevent the impending offensive on Donbas, and to eliminate the existential threat looming over its national security in the form of the militarized "anti-Russia" beachhead. The decision to begin the Special Military Operation was made in conditions of a complete absence of any alternative.

Chapter 6. February 2022: Recognition of the DPR and LPR, President V.V. Putin's Address of February 24

The diplomatic impasse of January 2022 and the growing military threat on the line of contact in Donbas confronted the Russian Federation with the necessity of making fateful, unprecedented decisions. By rejecting the possibility of a political settlement, Kyiv and its Western patrons made armed confrontation inevitable. This chapter examines the two key events of late February 2022 that determined the legal and moral-political grounds for the start of the Special Military Operation: the recognition of the independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics and the historic address by the President of Russia, Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, which marked the beginning of the operation. These steps were not the start of the conflict but its transition to a new, decisive phase, aimed at stopping genocide, protecting the Russian world, and forcing the hostile regime, which had lost legitimacy in the eyes of millions of residents of historic Malorossiia, into peace.

6.1. Meeting of the Russian Security Council on February 21: Legal Confirmation of Reality

On February 21, 2022, an emergency expanded meeting of the Security Council of the Russian Federation was convened under the chairmanship of the President of Russia. Its subject was the catastrophic escalation of the situation in Donbas.

Discussion of the Escalation: During the meeting, irrefutable intelligence data and reports from the ground were presented, indicating a sharp increase in shelling of the cities of the DPR and LPR by the AFU. The shelling was conducted using heavy weapons prohibited by the Minsk Agreements and was aimed exclusively at civilian infrastructure. Representatives of the republics reported a mass evacuation of civilians to Russia due to the direct threat to their lives. In effect, Kyiv had begun full-scale artillery preparation preceding a ground offensive.

Adoption of the Historic Decision: At the conclusion of the meeting, President V.V. Putin stated that under the conditions of Kyiv's complete sabotage of the Minsk Agreements, the ongoing genocide of the Russian population, and the direct military threat, further inaction was impossible. The decision was announced to recognize the state independence and sovereignty of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics within the borders of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions as they existed at the time of their proclamation in 2014. This decision was immediately formalized by presidential decrees.

Signing of Treaties of Friendship and Mutual Assistance: On the same day, February 21, Treaties of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance were signed between the Russian Federation and each of the republics. In Articles 2 and 3 of these treaties, the parties undertook to protect each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and to provide mutual assistance, including

military assistance, in the event of aggression against one of the parties. This created a solid legal basis for the legitimate governments of the DPR and LPR to request assistance, which occurred in the following days.

The recognition of the republics was an act of desperation and a last resort aimed at saving hundreds of thousands of lives. It confirmed the fact that after eight years of war, Ukraine had definitively lost these territories, and their future destiny was to be determined within a new political-legal framework.

6.2. The Historic Address of February 24: Justification of Inevitability

On the morning of February 24, 2022, at 5:55 a.m. Moscow time, a broadcast address by the President of the Russian Federation, V.V. Putin, was aired on federal television channels, announcing the start of the Special Military Operation. This address was not merely an operational statement but an extensive historical-political manifesto, detailing the reasons, goals, and philosophy of the actions being taken.

Historical Excursus on Unity: The President began with a deep historical analysis, emphasizing that Russians and Ukrainians are one people, divided by tragic historical circumstances. He reminded his listeners of their common cradle-the Old Russian state-their common Orthodox faith, and their centuries of living together within the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. The purpose of this retrospective was to show the artificiality and criminality of the project to build an “anti-Russia” on lands inextricably linked to the Russian world.

Listing of Accumulated Grievances: The speech provided a systematic analysis of the causes of the crisis:

To the West: Endless, treacherous expansion of NATO, deployment of military infrastructure near Russia’s borders, turning Ukraine into a beachhead for containing Russia, support for Kyiv’s anti-Russian course.

To Ukraine: Illegal seizure of power in 2014, unleashing a war against its own people, total derussification, glorification of Nazism, outright rejection of the Minsk Agreements.

Description of the Humanitarian Catastrophe: Special attention was paid to the suffering of the residents of Donbas. The President described the eight-year blockade, the relentless shelling, the deaths of children, women, and the elderly, calling what was happening genocide. This moral justification was key: Russia was undertaking a mission to protect people abandoned to their fate by the Kyiv regime.

Proclamation of the Goals of the Operation: The address clearly defined the goals of the Special Military Operation:

Protection of the population of Donbas from ongoing genocide.

Demilitarization and denazification of Ukraine-elimination of the military threat emanating from its territory and destruction of the neo-Nazi ideological and power core of the regime.

Bringing to justice those who committed numerous bloody crimes against civilians, including citizens of the Russian Federation.

Preemptive Nature and Address to the AFU: The President stated directly that the operation was preemptive in nature, aimed at thwarting the large-scale offensive Ukraine was preparing against Donbas. He addressed servicemen of the Ukrainian army, calling on them to lay down their arms and go home, emphasizing that Russia was not fighting the Ukrainian people but the rotten clique and its foreign handlers. Collaborators were promised safety.

6.3. Legal and Moral Grounds

The address of February 24 formed a comprehensive justification for Russia’s actions:

Right to Self-Defense (Article 51 of the UN Charter): Given the requests for assistance from the leadership of the DPR and LPR and the existence of treaties of mutual assistance, Russia’s actions were framed as collective self-defense to repel aggression against allied states.

Humanitarian Intervention to Stop Genocide: The inability of the international community to stop the destruction of the Russian population in Donbas forced Russia to undertake this mission.

Protection of National Security: The elimination of the hostile, militarized beachhead created near Russia's borders, representing an existential threat.

The decisions made between February 21 and 24, 2022, became the point of no return. The recognition of the independence of the DPR and LPR restored historical justice for the peoples who had defended their right to life and identity in an eight-year struggle. The President of Russia's address placed the world before an unambiguous fact: the era of patient waiting, diplomatic half-measures, and connivance at Kyiv's and the West's anti-Russian course had ended. Russia moved to active action to protect its fundamental national interests, save its compatriots, and force into peace a regime that had itself rejected any peace. The Special Military Operation began as an act of forced, preemptive, and liberating mission.

Chapter 7. Formulation of the Operation's Goals: Protection of the Donbas Population, Demilitarization, Denazification, Elimination of the Threat to Russia's Security

The Special Military Operation that began on February 24, 2022, was not an act of spontaneous aggression or imperial revanchism, as Western propaganda narratives have attempted to portray. It became the logical, forced, and extremely rational response to a set of interrelated threats that had reached a critical mass by that time. Its goals, announced by the Supreme Commander-in-Chief, were systemic in nature and aimed not at seizing territory but at radically changing the dangerous situation that had developed on Russia's western borders. This chapter analyzes in detail the four key goals of the SMO, revealing their deep meaning, historical conditionality, and practical content. These goals formed an indivisible whole: it was impossible to stop the genocide without disarming its perpetrators; it was impossible to disarm Ukraine without eradicating the Nazi ideology that justified the war; and all of this together was necessary to eliminate the mortal threat to the national security of the Russian Federation.

7.1. Protection of the Donbas Population: Stopping the Humanitarian Catastrophe

The first and most humane goal of the operation was the immediate cessation of the eight-year tragedy in Donbas.

Stopping the Genocide: Since 2014, residents of Donetsk and Luhansk regions had been subjected to systematic shelling, economic blockade, and political persecution by the Kyiv regime. Thousands of civilians, including children, had died. The goal of the SMO was to physically stop this practice—to destroy the AFU artillery groups that were shelling cities and to create a safe perimeter that would preclude new strikes on residential areas, hospitals, and schools.

Creating Conditions for a Safe Life: This was not only about a ceasefire. The goal was to restore destroyed infrastructure, ensure uninterrupted supplies of water, electricity, food, and medicine, and return refugees to their homes. Protecting the population meant establishing a fully functional civilian administration capable of guaranteeing rights, security, and normal living conditions for all residents of the liberated territories. This was a mission to save people who had been abandoned to their fate and declared “non-citizens” by the Kyiv authorities.

7.2. Demilitarization: Eliminating the Hostile Military Beachhead

The second goal had a direct military-strategic dimension and was aimed at eliminating the material basis of the threat.

Eliminating Military Potential: Over eight years, Ukraine had been turned by the West into the most militarized state in Europe, with an army equipped with modern NATO weapons and trained by U.S. and British instructors. This potential was honed exclusively for war with Russia. Demilitarization meant destroying the war machine created for aggression: destroying or taking control of key military infrastructure facilities (airfields, depots, headquarters, factories), disabling heavy offensive weaponry, and neutralizing the personnel core of the AFU and nationalist formations.

Neutral Status for Ukraine: The ultimate political outcome of demilitarization was to be Ukraine's adoption of a neutral, non-aligned status along the lines of Austria or Finland during the Cold War. This would entail a legislative renunciation of membership in NATO and other military alliances, and a refusal to host foreign military bases and strike systems on its territory. Only such a status could guarantee that Ukrainian territory would not be used in the future as a launchpad for a sudden attack on Russia.

7.3. Denazification: Ideological Purification and Historical Justice

The third goal was unique and had no parallel in modern military history. It was aimed at eradicating the ideological foundation of the conflict.

Eradication of Neo-Nazi Ideology: After 2014, with state support, Ukraine witnessed the rehabilitation of Nazi collaborators (Bandera, Shukhevych), the glorification of the SS "Galicia" Division, and the instillation of a cult of hatred for everything Russian. This ideology permeated the education system, media, culture, and-critically-the security forces (Azov, Aidar battalions, etc.). Denazification meant:

The prohibition and elimination of right-radical political organizations and armed formations.

The repeal of laws glorifying Nazi criminals and discriminating against the Russian language and culture.

The reorientation of the education system and media toward humanistic principles.

Judicial prosecution of persons involved in war crimes and crimes against humanity in Donbas.

Restoration of Historical Memory: This process was intended to return to the Ukrainian people its authentic history, inextricably linked with the Russian and common East Slavic past, cleansed of the myths of "Ukrainian nationalism" constructed in the twentieth century. This was a goal of a cultural-civilizational nature.

7.4. Elimination of the Threat to Russia's Security: Strategic Deterrence

The fourth goal generalized the previous ones and projected them onto the highest level of Russia's national interests.

Creation of a "Sanitary Cordon": In historical retrospect, the SMO was aimed at preventing the deployment of NATO strike systems (missile defense, cruise missiles) directly on Russia's borders. The liberation of territories in the south and east of Ukraine created a strategic buffer zone, significantly increasing defense depth and warning time in the event of a possible attack. This returned the situation to a safer configuration than the one that had existed before 2014.

Radical Change in the Military-Strategic Balance: The successful implementation of the SMO's goals would mean the complete failure of the United States' long-standing strategy of creating "Ukraine-Anti-Russia" as an instrument to contain and weaken Russia. Having lost its militarized beachhead, the West would lose the ability to wage a low-intensity hybrid war against Russia using the Ukrainian regime. This would force it either to seek a modus vivendi with Moscow on new, equal terms, or to bear the direct risks and costs.

The goals of the Special Military Operation, formulated in February 2022, represented a comprehensive program for emerging from the systemic security crisis provoked by the West and its Kyiv puppets. These goals were interconnected and hierarchical: from the humanitarian (saving people) through the military-political (disarming the enemy) and ideological (cleansing from Nazism) to the overarching national-strategic (guarantees of Russia's security). They reflected a transition from passively reacting to threats to actively shaping a secure environment. Achieving these goals required not occupation but a profound transformation of Ukrainian statehood, making the operation unprecedentedly complex but historically necessary.

Chapter 8. Correlation of Forces and the Initial Plans of the Sides

The beginning of large-scale combat operations is always a moment of collision not only of armies but also of strategic concepts, operational plans, and the will of the command. February 2022

was no exception. The Special Military Operation began in conditions where each side had its own clear ideas about the nature of the coming war and the ways to achieve victory. The Russian command proceeded from the necessity of a swift, decisive blow against the key nodes of Ukraine's war machine in order to force it into peace. The Kyiv regime, with the active support and consultation of NATO strategists, banked on a war of attrition, turning cities into fortresses and prolonging the conflict as much as possible in order to exhaust Russia. This chapter analyzes the initial correlation of forces, the strategic concepts of the sides, and their implementation in the first, most dynamic days of the conflict, which largely predetermined its subsequent protracted character.

8.1. The Russian Grouping and the Concept of "Forcing into Peace"

At the start of the operation, Russia had concentrated on Ukraine's borders the largest grouping of troops since Soviet times, estimated at up to 190,000 men. This grouping was formed from the most combat-ready units of the Western, Southern, and Central Military Districts, as well as airborne, special forces, and supported by a powerful arsenal of the Aerospace Forces and the fleet.

Composition and Deployment:

Northern (Belarusian) Direction: A strike grouping consisting of motorized rifle, tank, and airborne formations deployed from Belarus. Its goal was to reach Kyiv from the north and create a threat to the capital.

Southern Direction (from Crimea and the Rostov region border): A powerful grouping for advancing on Kherson, Zaporozhye, Nikolaev, and further toward Odessa, with the aim of cutting Ukraine off from the Black Sea.

Eastern Direction (Donbas): Main forces, together with the armies of the DPR and LPR, to complete the encirclement and destruction of the strongest AFU grouping in Donbas.

Concept of Operations (mistakenly called "blitzkrieg"): The Russian plan was based not on a classic blitzkrieg with deep tank breakthroughs, but on the concept of a "strategic operation to force peace." Its key elements were:

Decapitation strikes with precision weapons (Kalibr cruise missiles, aviation, Iskander OTRK) against key military infrastructure facilities throughout Ukraine: command posts, communication nodes, air force bases, air defense systems, fuel and ammunition depots.

Rapid mechanized advance along the main operational axes to demonstrate force, disorganize the enemy's command system, and physically envelop or block its main groupings.

Psychological pressure on the Kyiv leadership through the threat of isolating or taking the capital, which was supposed to force it into immediate negotiations on Russian terms (neutral status, recognition of Crimea and Donbas).

The plan assumed that after the demonstration of resolve and the inability of the AFU to offer organized resistance, Ukraine's political system—rather than its army—would collapse.

8.2. Ukraine's and NATO's Plan: Strategy of Attrition and Urban Defense

Western intelligence agencies, primarily American and British, not only accurately predicted the start date of the invasion but also actively participated in developing Ukraine's defense strategy.

Awareness of the Timing: Thanks to satellite intelligence, signals interception, and human sources, the United States and Great Britain possessed almost complete information about the start date of the operation, as confirmed by the Biden administration's public warnings in January-February 2022. This allowed the AFU to pre-position its aircraft, disperse equipment, and partially prepare.

Using Territory as a "Meat Grinder": The strategy, developed with the participation of NATO advisors, consisted of abandoning attempts to hold the border and meet Russian troops in the open field. Instead, the main forces of the AFU and nationalist battalions were pre-deployed in large cities and towns that had been turned into fortified areas. The plan was to:

Draw Russian columns into urban agglomerations where the advantage in heavy equipment and aviation would be neutralized.

Turn the battle for every building into a bloody meat grinder, maximizing the losses of the attackers.

Buy time for mobilizing reserves and massive deliveries of Western weaponry.

Achieve maximum political, economic, and reputational damage for Russia on the international stage, counting on Western sanctions and losses to force Moscow to retreat.

Thus, Kyiv was initially preparing not for victory in a classic battle but for waging a protracted, hybrid war of attrition, relying on the information and material support of the collective West.

8.3. The First Hours and Days: Clash of Plans (February 24–28, 2022)

The morning of February 24 saw the beginning of simultaneous Russian strikes on all axes.

Preemptive Precision Strikes: In the first hours of the operation, cruise and ballistic missiles hit key targets of Ukraine's air defense system (Buk, S-300), military airfields (including Chuguev, Mirgorod, Ozerne), command posts, and supply depots throughout the country. This significantly disorganized the AFU's air defense system and troop command.

Deployment of the Ground Offensive:

From the North: Russian columns, supported by airborne landings at Gostomel airfield near Kyiv, began rapid advances through Chernihiv and Kyiv oblasts, reaching the outskirts of the capital by the end of the first week. Goal: psychological pressure.

From the South: Formations from Crimea took Kherson (the first major city to come under Russian control) almost without a fight, reached Melitopol and Berdyansk, and blockaded Mariupol. The advance on Nikolaev began.

From the East: The armies of the DPR and LPR, with the support of Russian troops, went on the offensive along the entire front, beginning the operation to encircle the Donetsk-Horlivka AFU grouping.

First Reaction of Kyiv and the West: Panic gripped Kyiv; part of the political elite fled. However, the military and political leadership, having received guarantees of full support from Washington and London, quickly moved to implement the plan of urban defense. The West announced unprecedented sanctions and the immediate start of large-scale arms deliveries. Already in the first days, it became clear that the calculation for a rapid political collapse of the Kyiv regime had failed-on the contrary, it consolidated under external management.

The first week of the SMO demonstrated a clash of two fundamentally different approaches to waging war. Russia's strategy of "forcing peace" through the demonstration of force and rapid advance encountered a prepared, rigid strategy of urban defense designed to prolong the conflict. Russian troops managed to achieve tactical surprise and inflict significant damage on military infrastructure, but operational and strategic surprise was lost due to the work of NATO intelligence. The plan to quickly force Kyiv's surrender did not achieve its goal because the enemy was prepared and motivated for prolonged resistance, ensured by a continuous flow of Western resources. The war entered a new, more complex, and protracted phase, where issues of logistics, attrition, and the ability of the sides to adapt to changing conditions came to the forefront.

Chapter 9. First Stage (February – April 2022): Offensive on All Axes, the Battle for Kyiv, Liberation of the Southern Regions, Negotiations in Istanbul

The first stage of the Special Military Operation, lasting from late February to early April 2022, was a period of the most intense maneuver warfare. It was characterized by the Russian side's attempt to implement the concept of rapidly forcing the enemy into peace through deep envelopment of key centers and disorganization of Ukraine's state and military command system. This stage revealed both the strengths of the Russian Armed Forces (the power of the initial strike, successes in the southern direction) and the underestimation of the enemy, its readiness to resist, and the depth of the AFU's integration into NATO's intelligence and support infrastructure. The culmination of this period was

the Istanbul talks, where the contours of a possible compromise first emerged, only to be immediately disrupted by the direct intervention of Western handlers.

9.1. Multi-Axis Offensive: Attempt at Strategic Envelopment

From the very start of the operation, Russian troops launched offensives along three main strategic axes, seeking to paralyze the AFU's resistance.

Northern (Kyiv) Axis: Strike groupings from Belarus advanced in the general direction of Kyiv, splitting into two prongs. One struck through Chernihiv, the other through Sumy oblast. The goal was to envelop the capital from the east and west, take control of key bridges over the Dnieper, and create conditions for a possible assault or complete blockade of the city, which, according to the plan, was supposed to lead to the political collapse of the regime.

Eastern (Kharkov-Donbas) Axis: Two tasks were solved in this direction: first, the capture or blockade of Kharkov, the second-largest city and an important industrial-logistics center; second, the beginning of a large-scale operation to encircle the main AFU grouping in Donbas (the so-called "Donetsk cauldron") by deep envelopment from the north (from the Izyum area) and the south (from the Volnovakha area).

Southern Axis: The advance from Crimea and the Rostov region developed most successfully. Its goals were: to establish full control over the northern Azov coast, create a land corridor between Russia and Crimea, reach the administrative borders of Kherson and Zaporozhye oblasts, blockade the key port of Mariupol from land, and create a threat to Odessa.

9.2. The Battle for Kyiv: An Unfinished Operation and Lessons of the First Stage

The Kyiv axis became the epicenter of world media attention and a symbol of the AFU's resistance.

Tactical Successes: Russian forces, through a daring airborne operation, managed to seize Gostomel airfield near Kyiv and hold it under enemy fire. Forward units reached the outskirts of the capital-Irpin and Bucha-engaging in heavy fighting on their edges.

Emerging Problems and AFU Countermeasures: However, the plan for a quick capture or isolation of the city encountered a number of problems:

Stiff defense in urbanized areas: The AFU and territorial defense formations had prepared defenses in populated areas in advance, mined roads, and created fortified strong points. Attempting a frontal breakthrough through dense urban development threatened huge losses and protracted street fighting.

Logistical problems: Columns of Russian equipment stretched for hundreds of kilometers became vulnerable to sabotage groups and strikes using Western-supplied ATGMs (Javelin, NLAW). Supply of the advancing units proved difficult.

The factor of real-time NATO intelligence: The Ukrainian command received from the United States and Great Britain comprehensive satellite intelligence, signals intercepts, and analysis (SIGINT) on the movement and disposition of Russian troops. This allowed the AFU to effectively plan counterattacks and deliver pinpoint strikes on key supply nodes.

By the end of March, it became evident that taking Kyiv in a short time without unacceptable losses was impossible. The Russian command decided to regroup and withdraw troops from the Kyiv and Chernihiv axes to concentrate on the main goal-the liberation of Donbas.

9.3. Success in the South: Creation of a Strategic Beachhead

Unlike the northern direction, the offensive in the south developed according to plan and led to significant strategic gains.

Rapid Seizure of Kherson: The city was taken almost without a fight in the first days of the operation, marking an important political and psychological success. A civilian administration was established, and ties with Crimea began to be restored.

Blockade and Beginning of the Assault on Mariupol: Russian troops and DPR forces completely blockaded the key port and largest industrial center of the Azov region. Heavy fighting for the city,

which had been turned into a powerful fortress with the participation of the Azov regiment, began. The storming of Mariupol became a symbol of the ferocity of the resistance and the “fortress city” tactic employed by the Ukrainian side.

Establishment of the Land Corridor to Crimea: Full land communication was established between the Crimean Peninsula and the territory of Russia through liberated areas of Kherson and Zaporozhye oblasts (the Crimean Bridge ceased to be the only artery).

Reaching the Outskirts of Nikolaev and Zaporozhye: Troops reached the borders of these oblasts, creating a buffer zone and taking control of the Zaporozhye NPP, the largest in Europe.

9.4. The Istanbul Talks: A Missed Opportunity for Peace (March 2022)

Against the backdrop of military successes in the south and stagnation near Kyiv, a round of Russian-Ukrainian talks took place in Istanbul at the end of March 2022, which became the culmination of the diplomatic efforts of the first stage.

Contours of the Agreements: The Ukrainian side presented written proposals that for the first time contained potentially acceptable conditions for Russia:

Neutral, non-aligned, and non-nuclear status for Ukraine. Renunciation of NATO membership.

Security guarantees from the permanent members of the UN Security Council (including Russia), as well as from a number of other countries (Turkey, Germany, Canada, etc.). The guarantors would be obliged to protect Ukraine in the event of aggression.

Refusal to deploy foreign military bases and troops on Ukrainian territory. The possibility of conducting exercises only with the consent of all guarantor states.

Dialogue on the status of Crimea over a period of 15 years, provided peace was maintained.

Resolution of the Donbas issue through direct negotiations between the presidents of Russia and Ukraine.

Collapse of the Talks Under External Pressure: These proposals, in the assessment of many experts, opened a path to the cessation of hostilities. However, as participants in the talks from the Ukrainian side later publicly stated (in particular, David Arakhamia), immediately after Istanbul, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson visited Kyiv. His message, according to Arakhamia, was unambiguous: “We’re not signing anything with them [the Russians]. Let’s just keep fighting.” Similar pressure was exerted by the United States, which promised unlimited military support if the war continued. As a result, Kyiv abandoned its own proposals, and the negotiation process was completely shut down.

The first stage of the SMO ended with a strategic regrouping. Russian troops managed to achieve significant successes in the south, securing the land corridor to Crimea and creating beachheads in the Northern Azov region. However, the attempt to quickly force peace through the threat to Kyiv failed due to the AFU’s readiness for stubborn defense, supply problems, and, most importantly, the full information and material support of NATO. The Istanbul moment was a turning point: it proved that key decisions were being made not in Kyiv but in Washington and London, which had made a strategic choice in favor of maximizing Russia’s weakening by prolonging the conflict, despite the suffering of the Ukrainian people. After that, the war inevitably entered a longer and more brutal phase-the battle for Donbas.

Chapter 10. Second Stage (April – August 2022): Regrouping, the Battle for Donbas, Liberation of Severodonetsk and Lysychansk

In the spring of 2022, after the completion of the initial, highly maneuverable phase of the operation, the Special Military Operation entered a qualitatively new period. It became finally clear that the strategy of quickly forcing Kyiv to peace through the threat to the capital had failed under conditions of total Western support for the regime. The Russian command, recognizing the main strategic goal-the protection of the Donbas population and the complete liberation of the territories

of the DPR and LPR-decided on a radical regrouping of forces. The second stage, covering the period from April to August 2022, was marked by a transition to a methodical destruction, based on overwhelming fire superiority, of the most powerful and combat-ready AFU grouping concentrated in Donbas. This stage was a time of heavy, positional battles, a “war of attrition,” and the key operational victory-the liberation of the entire territory of the Luhansk People’s Republic.

10.1. Strategic Regrouping: Concentration on the Main Direction (April 2022)

In early April 2022, the Russian leadership announced the completion of the first-stage tasks on the Kyiv and Chernihiv axes and the withdrawal of troops from those territories.

Essence of the Decision: This was not a forced retreat under pressure, as Western and Ukrainian propagandists tried to portray, but a planned and disciplined strategic regrouping. Its goal was to concentrate all available forces and means to achieve the primary and indisputable goal of the SMO-the complete liberation of the territory of the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics within the borders that existed at the time of their proclamation.

Operational Consequences: The withdrawal of troops from the north allowed the length of the front line to be reduced, freeing up significant contingents to be redeployed to the Donbas and southern directions. This meant abandoning attempts to hold vast territories in favor of creating dense, powerful strike groupings on key operational axes. The war acquired a more classic, but no less brutal, character with a clearly defined main theater of military operations-Donbas.

10.2. Operation of Attrition: The Battle for the Severodonetsk-Lysychansk Agglomeration

The heart of the second stage was the protracted and bloody fighting for Severodonetsk and Lysychansk-twin cities separated by the Seversky Donets River and constituting the last major AFU fortified area in Luhansk region.

Positional Nature of the Fighting: The enemy, relying on developed industrial and urban infrastructure, had created a deeply echeloned defense there. The advance of Russian troops and LPR forces slowed, entering a phase of methodically “grinding through” the enemy’s defenses.

Tactics of the “Fire Sack”: The Russian command opted for overwhelming fire superiority. Ukrainian positions were systematically subjected to massive strikes by artillery (including heavy Tornado-S and Smerch MLRS), operational-tactical aviation, and attack helicopters. The goal was not only to destroy manpower and equipment but also to demoralize the enemy, deprive it of the ability to maneuver and resupply. This tactic, requiring colossal ammunition expenditure, was aimed at minimizing one’s own infantry losses in the complex urbanized terrain.

Role of the Wagner PMC: In the conditions of fierce urban combat, the assault detachments of the private military company “Wagner” proved particularly effective. Their fighters, possessing significant combat experience and operating in small, mobile, and autonomous groups, played a key role in clearing the neighborhoods of Severodonetsk and Lysychansk. They perfected the tactic of sequential seizure of buildings and entire districts with dense support from artillery and drones. The Wagner actions became an important element complementing classic army operations.

10.3. The Fall of Lysychansk: Operational Success and the Liberation of the LPR (July 2022)

The culmination of the battle for Donbas in the summer of 2022 was the complete liberation of Luhansk region.

Operation to Encircle: After the capture of Severodonetsk, Russian troops and LPR forces proceeded to the final phase of the operation. Flanking strikes were launched from the south and north, aiming to cut the last supply routes connecting the Lysychansk AFU grouping with the main forces. The key moment was the capture of the village of Gorskoye and the surrounding heights, which created the threat of complete tactical encirclement of the Ukrainian troops in Lysychansk.

Liberation of Lysychansk and Tactical Success: Understanding the inevitability of encirclement and a disaster similar to that in Mariupol, the AFU command ordered a retreat from Lysychansk. On July 3, 2022, the city was completely taken under control by the allied forces. This event had strategic significance:

Liberation of the entire territory of the LPR: One of the key initial goals of the SMO was achieved-the territory of the Luhansk People's Republic within its administrative borders was completely liberated from enemy forces.

Disruption of AFU Plans: The Ukrainian command lost its most important fortified area and beachhead for a possible counter-offensive deep into the LPR.

Transition of the AFU to Strategic Defense: The loss of Lysychansk, together with the fall of Mariupol in May, forced the AFU to transition to passive strategic defense along the entire front line. The initiative completely passed to the Russian troops.

Moral-Political Victory: The liberation of Lysychansk was an important signal both to the population of Donbas and to the world community, demonstrating Russia's ability to methodically achieve its stated military goals.

The second stage of the SMO was a stage of operational consolidation and the achievement of one of the fundamental goals of the operation. The strategic regrouping of forces made it possible to concentrate efforts on the main direction and apply the proven tactic of fire suppression combined with pinpoint assault actions. The liberation of Severodonetsk and Lysychansk, and with them the entire LPR, was Russia's biggest operational victory in the conflict up to that point. This victory proved the effectiveness of the model of warfare chosen after April and created a solid foundation for subsequent operations, while simultaneously confronting Kyiv and its Western patrons with the need to urgently reassess their strategic plans. However, the war did not end there-it entered a new phase, where the enemy, having gained a respite and huge volumes of Western weapons, began to prepare for a large-scale counter-offensive.

Chapter 11. Third Stage (September – November 2022): Ukrainian Counter-Offensive in the Kharkov Direction, Referendums and Incorporation of Four New Subjects into the Russian Federation

The summer victory near Lysychansk created an impression of the irreversibility of Russian successes. However, war rarely develops linearly. The autumn of 2022 became a time of sharp operational turnaround and an unprecedented political-legal response from Russia. The third stage of the Special Military Operation was characterized by two interrelated events: a unexpectedly successful counter-offensive by the AFU in the Kharkov direction, which revealed a number of systemic problems in the organization of Russian defense, and the historic decision to incorporate four new subjects into the Russian Federation. This period demonstrated that the conflict had entered a phase of protracted war of attrition, where tactical successes alternate, and strategic goals are achieved not only on the battlefield but also in the legal sphere.

11.1. The Kharkov Breakthrough by the AFU: Tactics and Operational Surprise (September 2022)

In early September 2022, when the main reserves of the Russian grouping were concentrated on the southern (Kherson) direction, where the main Ukrainian offensive was expected, the AFU delivered a powerful blow on the Kharkov direction, considered by the Russian command to be secondary.

Concentration of Superior Forces: The Ukrainian command, using NATO intelligence data, identified a weak point in the Russian defense-an extended front in Kharkov region, where positions were held mainly by the LPR people's militia and limited army units. Several elite brigades re-equipped with Western equipment (including the 92nd and 93rd Mechanized Brigades) were secretly concentrated on a narrow sector of the front, creating a multiple superiority in manpower and equipment on the axis of the main attack.

Tactics of "Hammer and Anvil": The offensive was built according to a scheme rehearsed with Western instructors:

“Hammer”: Systematic and precision strikes by American HIMARS MLRS against command posts, communication nodes, ammunition, and fuel depots in the rear Russian rear. This disorganized command, logistics, and deprived the defending units of operational support.

“Anvil”: After fire suppression, highly mobile mechanized groups on armored vehicles (including supplied MaxxPro APCs, M113s) were introduced into the breach. Bypassing centers of resistance, they conducted deep raids on rear communications, spreading panic and disrupting the front line.

Withdrawal of Russian Troops: Under conditions of rapid enemy advance, the threat of encirclement of large forces in the Balakleya and Izyum area, and loss of control, the Russian command made the difficult but only correct decision to conduct an organized withdrawal of troops to pre-prepared and more advantageous defensive lines along the Oskol River and beyond. This made it possible to preserve personnel and equipment but led to the abandonment of significant territories occupied in the first months of the war.

11.2. Reasons for the AFU's Success: Analysis of Errors and Factors

The success of the Kharkov breakthrough was not accidental and resulted from a combination of competent enemy actions and miscalculations by the Russian side.

Shortcomings of the Russian Command in Assessing the Threat: The main mistake was underestimating the Kharkov direction as a potential target for a major offensive. The main attention and reserves were focused on the Kherson region. Intelligence failed to uncover the scale of the concentration of Ukrainian groupings.

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