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Ukrainian society between cabinet war and total war¹

“Our wars must be short and active, inasmuch as it is not suitable for us to drag things out, because a lengthy war subtly causes our admirable discipline to decline and would depopulate the country and exhaust our resources.”

Frederick the Great, “General Principles of War”

In late February 2024, Ukrainian media reported on a legislative proposal that would have allowed companies to pay a monthly fee to defer the mobilization of half their employees (Ukrainska Pravda, 2024). A cursory analysis of these proposals suggested a potential shift towards a system of military recruitment employed by European monarchies in the 18th century. Although the initiative was ultimately abandoned after prolonged debates, the discussion prompted researchers to reconsider the nature of the Russo-Ukrainian war. Consequently, a question arose: to what type of conflict does this confrontation gravitate — a *cabinet war* or *total war*?

The heyday of the first form of interstate conflict occurred in the 18th century when the culmination of military action was a spatially and temporally limited battle between professional standing armies. The masses, for the most part, experienced war indirectly — primarily through the obligation to pay taxes that funded their sovereign’s armed forces. Only episodically did civilians endure hardships associated with troop movements and quartering. It is therefore unsurprising that cabinet war was *pars naturalis* of the socio-political life of the absolutist era.

The second form of interstate conflict emerged in the 20th century when, during the two world wars, mass popular armies conducted prolonged, spatially dispersed operations in geographically distant theatres of war. Such total war demanded the mobilization of industrial resources, compelling citizens to endure not only escalating

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taxation but also compulsory labour service to sustain the wartime economy. Moreover, as the ravages of total war affected broad segments of the population, this type of conflict disrupted the organic nature of social life and led to radical socio-political transformations.

Indeed, the attempts of the Ukrainian high command to balance between the two aforementioned forms — cabinet and total — led to a societal schism within the young republic. A prime example of this phenomenon is the unresolved issue of popular participation in the war. In addressing this contentious matter, military circles often emphasized the need for a total national mobilization against Russia. However, the weakness of the Ukrainian state apparatus prevented the achievement of such a condition, resulting in a civilian population that adapted to a cabinet condition wherein the vocation of *homo militaris* remained distinct from the everyday life of *homo civilis*. Consequently, the farther removed a civilian is from the frontlines, the more difficult it becomes to comprehend the concept of total war.

To resolve the existing contradictions, it is necessary to first determine which of the examined forms of interstate conflict the Russo-Ukrainian war has subordinated itself to. For this purpose, it is imperative to initially describe the states assumed by Clausewitz's trinity — government, army, and people — during periods of cabinet and total wars (Clausewitz, 1867a: SS. 24–25). Subsequently, it is essential to identify manifestations of these states in Ukraine's military-political life. More specifically, the achievement of these objectives necessitates the establishment of a correlation between the policy of war aims, the specific nature of the military system, and the peculiarities of the division of labour during wartime.

Primary sources of research

The corpus of literature on the history of cabinet and total wars is vast, while the Russo-Ukrainian war is still awaiting its in-depth military-theoretical analysis. This article presents an initial attempt at such an analysis from the perspective of classical military theory.

First and foremost, it should be noted that the onset of a major European war necessitates a qualitatively new assessment of the significance of Carl von Clausewitz's "Vom Krieg" (Clausewitz, 1867). This is particularly true regarding the need to adhere to the laws of probability and the setting of military objectives. Only the positional stalemate of recent years and the pursuit of maximalist war aims have helped to realize the importance of the issues once explored by the Prussian military theorist. On the other hand, thanks to Clausewitz's concept of the trinity, it has become possible to outline directions for analysing the current war system. This has provided a framework for a study examining the state of the government, the army, and the people during cabinet and total wars, as well as the Russo-Ukrainian war.

It is only natural that, when investigating cabinet wars, one would turn to the fourth volume of Hans Delbrück's monumental "Geschichte der Kriegskunst" (Delbrück, 1920a). This work provides an exhaustive account of the logic of 18th-century warfare within the frameworks of the strategies of attrition and annihilation. A particular strength of Delbrück's work is its reliance on the writings of 18th-century mil-

itary commanders. This enabled a deeper exploration of the works of Frederick the Great, one of the most accomplished military leaders and statesmen of his time. To understand the Prussian king is to grasp the essence of the age of absolute monarchies. Furthermore, the works of Franz Mehring on cabinet wars deserve special attention (Mehring, 1906). In just a few articles (Mehring, 1912; Mehring, 1915), this historian provides a concentrated description of the military, political, and social life of the 18th century.

For total wars, Erich Ludendorff's "Der totale Krieg" serves as a guiding light (Ludendorff, 1935), providing an exhaustive account of the necessary relationship between government, military, and people in the era of total warfare. The process by which Germany arrived at this state in both World Wars is best described by scholars such as Fritz Fischer, William Shirer (Shirer, 1960), Joachim Radkau (Radkau, 1998), and Rainer Zitelmann (Zitelmann, 2017). They offer comprehensive analyses of German society in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, effectively revealing the mechanisms of transition to a system of total war. The works of Adam Tooze (Tooze, 2006) and Nicholas Stargardt (Stargardt, 2015) also deserve special mention. These are outstanding studies on the economic and social history of the Third Reich.

Regarding the strategic aspect of the research, in addition to Clausewitz and Delbrück, the works of Sir Basil Liddell Hart (Liddell Hart, 1954), J.F.C. Fuller (Fuller, 1948), Joseph Wylie (Wylie, 1980) and Edward Luttwak (Luttwak, 2001) have been foundational. It is noteworthy that Luttwak was the first scholar to highlight the affinity between the Russo-Ukrainian war and the conflicts of the 18th century (Luttwak, 2022). His keen insight and ability to perceive patterns often overlooked by other Ukrainian analysts deserve recognition.

From a sociological perspective, the study drew upon Max Weber's book "Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft" to characterize the actions of politicians in setting war aims (Weber, 1922). Meanwhile, the division of labour in wartime was analysed through the lens of Durkheim's classic work "De la division du travail social" (Durkheim, 1893).

On the nature of cabinet war

A fundamental characteristic of cabinet wars is the equilibrium between the elements of Clausewitz's trinity. Primarily, this balance was facilitated by the rational approach to defining the objectives of war prevalent among 18th-century politicians. Having learned the bitter lessons of the bloody religious conflicts of the 16th and 17th centuries, Enlightenment statesmen sought to curb their martial ardour and limit military actions (Liddell Hart, 1954: pp. 369–372). This allowed European cabinets to avoid unnecessary losses and thus maintain a positive post-war outlook. Moreover, in cases where the attainment of stated goals seemed unlikely, 18th-century statesmen preferred to initiate negotiations with their adversaries rather than exhaust their states in a futile war. Consequently, *status belli* and *status pacis* complemented each other organically, ensuring the maintenance of a balance of power on the European continent (Hinsley, 1963: pp. 183–185).

The Silesian Wars of the 1740s serve as a compelling case study. The death of Emperor Charles VI in October 1740 precipitated the War of the Austrian Succession.

One of the principal protagonists in this conflict was Frederick II, the young King of Prussia, who laid claim to Silesia. In 1741–1742, he inflicted a series of defeats upon the Austrian army, compelling Archduchess Maria Theresa to sign the Treaty of Breslau, whereby she ceded both Lower and Upper Silesia to Prussia (Droysen, 1874: S. 470). For the Archduchess, however, this was merely a temporary concession, necessitated by her ongoing struggle for the throne of the Holy Roman Empire. Having neutralized the Prussian threat, the Austrians managed to expel Franco-Bavarian forces from Bohemia by the end of 1742, and in 1743 conquered Bavaria and achieved successes in Italy; furthermore, the Viennese court significantly strengthened its foreign policy position through the conclusion of the Treaty of Worms with Great Britain and the Kingdom of Sardinia. Concurrently, Frederick was preparing for a renewed confrontation with Maria Theresa: he used the peace to reorganize his army, fortify the Silesian fortresses, and form the Frankfurt League, designed to support Maria Theresa's rival, Emperor Charles VII (Droysen, 1876: SS. 119–120).

Finally, in 1744, while the Austrian army was operating in Alsace, the Prussian king unexpectedly invaded Bohemia, thereby initiating the Second Silesian War. Having achieved a series of victories in the 1745 campaign, Frederick signed the Treaty of Dresden with Maria Theresa, whereby Silesia remained under Prussian control, and he recognized Maria Theresa's husband, Francis I Stephen, as Holy Roman Emperor (Droysen, 1876: SS. 638–643). Thus, Vienna compensated for its territorial losses by removing a dangerous adversary from the war.

It is imperative to note, however, the interconnectedness between the presented rational conception of political thought and the state of *res militaris* during the Enlightenment era. Military commanders, accountable to their respective cabinets, were particularly susceptible to the tension arising between the strategy of annihilation and that of attrition (Delbrück, 1920a: S. 128). The question of engaging the enemy army in battle became particularly acute. According to the first approach, a swift and decisive defeat of the enemy's armed forces was considered the sole means of imposing the victor's will upon the vanquished. Conversely, the second approach allowed for the employment of not only battles, but also manoeuvres to achieve the same objective. The choice of means constituted a genuine dilemma for the warlord, necessitating a profound understanding of the laws of probability to calibrate their actions accordingly¹. During the era of cabinet wars, the strategy of attrition was predominant. Commanders adhering to this strategy sought to evade pitched battles, preferring to weaken the enemy through skillful manoeuvring, the conduct of petty warfare, forcing the enemy to attack fortified positions, and seizing provinces or fortresses with the aim of securing a favourable peace (Mehring, 1915: S. 530).

The prevalence of the aforementioned mode of warfare can be attributed to the specific characteristics of standing armies in the 18th century. As is well known, these armies were filled through voluntary enlistment and conscription (Rüstow, 1864: SS. 223–233), methods that did not allow for the rapid replenishment of troops. More-

¹ The concept of “laws of probability” is the central category of this study; the essence of this category is best captured by the following excerpt from the work of Clausewitz: *von Clausewitz C. Geist und Tat. Das Vermächtnis des Soldaten und Denkers*. In: *Auswahl aus seinen Werken, Briefen und unveröffentlichten Schriften*. Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1942 (SS. 91–92).

over, since the training of *enrôlés* in the fundamentals of linear tactics was a lengthy process, the loss of a significant portion of seasoned soldiers in one or several battles could drastically alter the course of a war (Rüstow, 1864: S. 237). These circumstances compelled warlords to exercise extreme caution in the use of their armies and to adopt a rational approach to the employment of such a decisive instrument as battle.

The actions of Frederick II during the Seven Years' War are particularly illuminating. Despite recognizing the dangers inherent in pitched battles, he sought opportunities to decisively defeat enemy forces on the battlefield between 1756 and 1758. Even the significant losses incurred by his troops at Kolín and Zorndorf failed to deter him from this course. However, the devastating defeat at Kunersdorf on August 12, 1759, compelled Frederick to reassess his approach. In the months that followed, he embarked on a study of Charles XII's military genius and concluded that engagements should only be sought under specific conditions: firstly, when the potential gains outweighed the potential losses; secondly, when the enemy exhibited carelessness; or thirdly, if the enemy could be compelled to make peace through a decisive blow (Friedrich der Grosse, 1885: S. 183). Consequently, until the end of the war, the Prussian king avoided pitched battles with the Russians and sought only the most favourable opportunities to defeat the Austrians.

It must be acknowledged that the pursuit of attrition was also a consequence of the establishment of the magazine system for supplying standing armies. According to its principles, large stores were established on the borders of a state before the start of a war, from which operating troops were to be supplied. However, if an army moved more than five marches from such magazines during a campaign, the enemy could disrupt its connection with these vital supply depots. In fact, a well-planned and cleverly executed manoeuvre aimed at disrupting the enemy's lines of communication yielded significantly more results than a bloody battle. Understanding this motivated warlord to practice the art of strategic movement and to conduct petty wars, whose aims were to disrupt the enemy's supply system and devastate the territories that supplied the enemy's forces (de Grandmaison, 1758: pp. 69–71). On the other hand, the vulnerability of lines of communication often compelled commanders to shorten their lines of operation, consequently limiting military operations to border provinces — a factor that cabinets had to consider when defining war aims (Lloyd, 1776: pp. 136–137). Moreover, both the magazine system and linear tactics precluded the possibility of pursuing an enemy until its final destruction, as a detachment from supply points and a disruption of formations would disorganize the pursuing force (Mehring, 1915: S. 531).

One of the most renowned masters of manoeuvre was Frederick's younger brother, Prince Henry of Prussia. During the Seven Years' War, this commander-in-chief rarely engaged in pitched battles but consistently threatened the enemy's lines of operation and disrupted their magazines (Schmitt, 1885: SS. 140–141). His adherence to the strategy of attrition enabled Prince Henry to conduct a successful campaign in 1759: in the spring, he operated in Bohemia and Franconia, inflicting significant damage on the Austrians by destroying their supply depots (Förster, 1850: SS. 428–429); subsequently, in the autumn, after the Battle of Kunersdorf, his skillful manoeuvres prevented Field Marshal Leopold von Daun from annihilating the remnants of Frederick's army

(Delbrück, 1920a: S. 418), thereby saving the House of Brandenburg from defeat in the war (Die Grenzboten, 1878: S. 164). The Prussian king later acknowledged his brother's merits, noting that Prince Henry possessed two essential qualities of a great warlord: caution and boldness (von Crousaz, 1876: S. 4).

However, the affairs of state defence always burdened the sovereigns' treasuries, thus Enlightenment-era cabinets sought to patronize those strata of the Third Estate actively involved in filling the *trésor public* (Mehring, 1915: S. 521). As is well known, this policy was expressed in numerous reforms aimed at developing industry and crafts, expanding trade, and improving agricultural practices. Moreover, the need to create a safe environment for the economic activities of townspeople and peasants led 18th-century statesmen to separate the representatives of these estates from the sphere of war (Koselleck, 1959: S. 38). For this reason, the military profession became the domain of the nobility, foreign mercenaries, and local rabble incapable of labour¹. In essence, by dividing subjects according to the nature of their professional activities, sovereigns maintained an organic solidarity within the estate-based society (Durkheim, 1893: p. 198).

A peculiar variation of this social order was established in Prussia under Frederick William I. Obsessed with the idea of forming a regular army, he issued an edict in May 1714 according to which all young men among his subjects were obliged to serve the Prussian crown with their property and blood – thus the “soldier king” anticipated the principle of universal conscription (Delbrück, 1920a: S. 285). At the same time, Frederick William sought to replenish his army with foreign mercenaries, understanding the risks to the kingdom posed by disrupting the economic activities of the Third Estate (Berner, 1896: p. 277).

The Prussian king's project found its most complete form in the Cantonment Regulation of 1733. This decree divided the kingdom into recruitment districts, each of which was assigned to a specific infantry or cavalry regiment; correspondingly, military commanders were granted the authority to register the male population of their district and recruit the most suitable young men for military service (Jähns, 1890: S. 1568). After completing two years of cantonal service, these recruits returned to their civilian occupations but remained on the military rolls and could be called up for up to three months of training once a year (Büsch, 1962: SS. 18–19). However, a portion of the population was exempt from military service: the sons of nobles and wealthy burghers; the sons of preachers studying theology; immigrant colonists and their sons; only sons of peasants; certain peasants managing manorial estates; wool and cloth producers, and their apprentices (Meyers Konversations-Lexikon, 1895: S. 866).

Frederick II the Great, the son of Frederick William I, maintained the cantonal system but significantly expanded the list of individuals exempted from military service. Additionally, the philosopher of Sanssouci exempted the western provinces of Prussia, as well as major cities in the east such as Berlin, Potsdam, Brandenburg, Breslau, Magdeburg, and Stettin, from the regulations (Mehring, 1912: S. 31). According-

¹ A portrait of potential recruits can be found in Frederick's “Anti-Machiavelli”: *Frédéric le Grand. Anti-Machiavel ou Essai de critique sur le Prince de Machiavel*. Amsterdam: chez Jacques La Caze, 1741 (pp. 21–22).

ly, the Prussian king preferred to fill his army with mercenaries or prisoners of war, while he sought to limit the recruitment of cantonists, especially at the beginning of his reign, for economic reasons (Delbrück, 1920a: SS. 288–289). Generally, Frederick was a proponent of the division of labour based on social class, believing it highly undesirable for a nobleman to neglect military service, a townsman to disdain crafts and trade, and a peasant to shun agricultural labour (Hahn, 1855: S. 150). Therefore, the king's maxim that a peaceful burgher should not notice how the nation fights is quite understandable.

Thus, in the era of cabinet wars, the elements of Clausewitz's trinity mutually constrained each other. This was expressed in the fact that governments were obliged to find a balance between the state's foreign policy interests, its financial resources, and the productive capacities of the estate-based society. Moreover, the military system of the 18th century required cabinets to set moderate *proposita belli*, and commanders to exercise extreme caution in conducting campaigns, which were invariably accompanied by the play of probability and chance. As a result, a goal-rational type of action prevailed among statesmen (Weber, 1922: S. 13), ensuring an equilibrium of Clausewitz's trinity: under such a system, war, along with diplomacy, served as an instrument of policy, used outside of ideological frameworks and the passions of the masses (von Wolmar, 1980: SS. 68–69), but requiring a constant balancing of ends and means; similarly, the specific nature of the 18th-century military system precluded the possibility of the complete annihilation of an enemy, thus armed conflict never developed into forms that threatened the existence of states and nations (Scheler, 1924: SS. 109–110).

On the nature of total war

In stark contrast to cabinet wars, total war disrupts the balance between the elements of Clausewitz's trinity: politics is viewed solely as an instrument of war, while the government and people are reduced to executors of the supreme commander's will (Ludendorff, 1935: S. 10). The impetus for such a negative state of affairs was provided by impulsive militarists seeking to harness the forces of their ideologically subjugated nation to achieve global domination. The realization of such a maximalist grand strategic plan *a priori* entailed a large-scale people's war, where the parties, defending their vital interests, sought to bring each other to absolute destruction (von der Goltz, 1883: SS. 8–9). And when, in the course of the war itself, a natural crisis of expansionist war aims arose, dictators sought to continue a hopeless struggle, condemning their states to complete depletion.

This line was followed by Wilhelm II, known for his political immaturity and instability. From the very beginning of his reign, the Kaiser was completely consumed by the idea of *Weltpolitik*, the realization of which, in his opinion, would allow the German people to find their rightful place in the sun (Fischer, 1961: S. 17). This thirst for global recognition was closely linked to the cultural, demographic, and economic rise that German society was experiencing at the turn of the 20th century. Consequently, the gap between these achievements and the geopolitical position of the Second Reich fostered the spread of expansionist aspirations among German society (Fischer, 1961: SS. 33–34; Mommsen, 2004: S. 176).

The shift towards an active foreign policy was declared by the Kaiser in July 1892. In a private conversation, he expressed his desire to achieve, by peaceful means, Napoleonic supremacy in Europe (Canis, 1999: S. 114). The first steps towards this goal were taken in 1897 when the Kaiser announced the transfer of the trident of Poseidon into the German fist: this declaration was followed by the implementation of a naval program, which gave concrete expression to German ambitions for global dominance but also embroiled the Second Reich in a rivalry with the British Empire (Steinberg, 1977: pp. 196–197). A year later, during a speech in Damascus, Wilhelm declared himself the protector of 300 million Muslims, thus challenging not only Britain but also Russia, countries with large Muslim populations. Moreover, the German project of building the Baghdad Railway and Germany's active participation in the reorganization of the Turkish army also contributed to the cooling of relations between Berlin, London, and Saint Petersburg (Fischer, 1961: S. 36–37). Further marginal remarks by Wilhelm exacerbated relations with France, such as the Tangier crisis of 1905–1906 and the Agadir crisis of 1911. Moreover, the Kaiser made threatening remarks about the inevitable clash with the russo-gauls for the very existence of the German race (Fischer, 1961: S. 47).

Against this backdrop, German elites developed the projects of *Mitteleuropa* and *Mittelafrika* — these concepts formed the basis of the famous “September Program” of Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg, which determined the war aims of the German Empire until the end of the First World War (Fischer, 1961: S. 113). According to the provisions of this document, Berlin was to achieve economic dominance through the creation of a Central European economic union; it also planned to expand its colonial empire in Central Africa and acquire territorial gains at the expense of Russia. It should be added that, before the war, German elites were actively promoting such pan-German ideas, reinforcing them with agitation in favour of various projects aimed at militarily strengthening their country. It suffices to recall that after the Agadir crisis, the progressive part of German society, gripped by the spirit of militarism, began to demand a tightening of the Reich's military policy. The immediate result of this was two major increases in the size of the standing army in 1912 and 1913 (Förster, 1994: S. 68).

It is therefore unsurprising that the Second Reich, yearning for global recognition, greeted the outbreak of war with a state of military psychosis, later termed the “1914 euphoria” (Radkau, 1998: SS. 424–425). However, as the course of the war unfolded, each year of positional warfare sapped the strength of the German people and the entire *Mittelmächte*, thus calling into question Germany's claims to global dominance. Meanwhile, as they watched their country decline, German military and political circles remained sceptical of the idea of peace, considering only a position acceptable where the resolute continuation of the war was seen as the sole condition for achieving moral superiority over the enemy and compelling them to open negotiation (von Kürenberg, 1955: S. 332).

The events of the first half of 1917 are illustrative. Wilhelm II thwarted peace initiatives emanating from Emperor Charles I of Austria-Hungary and his foreign minister, Count Ottokar Czernin (Röhl, 2014: SS. 1136–1137). The head of Viennese diplomacy demonstrated considerable foresight in assessing the prospects of the war: in

his view, for the Central Powers, concluding a peace while their military power had not yet visibly declined was far preferable to continuing the war and risking subsequent revolutionary upheavals (Czernin, 1918: SS. 11–12). However, the Kaiser and the German high command categorically rejected these arguments, seeing in a “cheap peace” a real threat to the interests of their country (Fischer, 1961: S. 456). The consequences of such intransigence for the Central Powers are well-known: the following year of war brought defeat at the front, revolutions, and the establishment of Entente dominance.

It should be noted that Adolf Hitler led Germany down a similar path. Even in the early stages of his political career, he began developing the concept of conquering *Lebensraum* (Zitelmann, 2017: SS. 353–369), thus continuing the line of Wilhelmine militarism (Smith, 1986: p. 256). In Hitler’s view, only through military expansion could resource-poor Germany achieve autarky and complete independence. The primary target of such aggression was the Soviet Union, as only control over the resource base of Ukraine and European Russia could ensure the achievement of this state. In essence, this was a model in which Nazi-conquered Europe would become a self-sufficient metropolis, fed by the resources of peripheral territories (Zitelmann, 2017: SS. 371–375).

Hitler initiated the realization of his grand strategic designs by captivating the hearts and minds of the German people. Amidst the economic crisis of 1929, the propaganda of National Socialism found widespread support among diverse segments of the population. For instance, the impoverished *petite bourgeoisie*, characterized by rebellious and authoritarian tendencies, found in Hitler’s image a fulfillment of several needs: on the one hand, a yearning for revolt against the perceived weakness of the Weimar Republic, and on the other, a desire to submit to a strong leader (Fromm, 1980: pp. 226–227). Concurrently, the industrial elite was attracted to Hitler’s anti-Marxist and anti-union ideological framework (Shirer, 1960: pp. 134–135). Furthermore, young officers readily supported Hitler, as he promised to restore the former prestige of the German army (Shirer, 1960: pp. 139–141).

Having secured domestic political victories in the 1930s, the Führer proceeded to implement a program of unlimited military objectives. He successfully played the game of 1936–1939 against the British and French appeasers, resulting in the remilitarization of the Rhineland, and the occupation of Austria and Czechoslovakia. Furthermore, from 1939–1941, Hitler managed to direct the intellectual force of the German general staff towards the conquest of a larger part of the European continent (May, 2000: pp. 454–460). However, from 1942 onwards, Hitler’s faith in the omnipotence of his own will collided with the very nature of reality. The Führer stubbornly ignored the obvious superiority of the Allies in terms of manpower and resources, preferring to be captivated by visions of the enemy’s exhaustion and the impressive numerical indicators of German industry (von Mannstein, 1955: SS. 310–311); similarly, he refused to acknowledge the Third Reich’s loss of its former advantages in command, armament, and the morale and combat readiness of its troops (von Toppelkirch, 1953: S. 63).

This *modus cogitandi* prevented Hitler from constructively approaching the issue of opening peace negotiations, despite the Führer’s awareness of the dangers of fighting a two-front war. The Allies, in turn, were also determined to bring the Third Reich

to complete capitulation, while leaving room for separate initiatives. Indeed, the Führer placed such faith in the disintegration of the Allied coalition that on April 15, 1945, a day before the Soviet offensive on Berlin began, he seriously believed that Franklin Roosevelt's death would provoke a rift between Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin (Nolan, 2017: p. 477). However, a third miracle for the House of Brandenburg did not occur—the fall of Berlin marked the triumph of the laws of probability over the ambitions of one individual.

In general, the conduct of total war became possible due to scientific and technological progress, demographic revolution, and the bureaucratization of nation-states. The synthesis of these factors radically changed the nature of the interaction between the soldier, technology, and space. For instance, the introduction of universal conscription allowed developed nations to rapidly mobilize millions of citizens. Concurrently, the growth of the productive capacities of industrial powers enabled the arming of newly formed mass armies (Otte, 2008: pp. 7–9). Furthermore, advancements in technology facilitated the extension of the front and created conditions for an unprecedented expansion of the geography of war (von Schlieffen, 1913: S. 14). Finally, the improvement of bureaucratic apparatus allowed world powers to efficiently administer all processes related to the preparation and conduct of war (Weber, 1922: S. 665).

It must be acknowledged that one of the primary components of total war was the Napoleonic strategy of consequential annihilation (Delbrück, 1920a: SS. 487–488). According to its principles, war was seen as a series of logically connected actions aimed at the destruction of enemy armed forces (Wylie, 1980: pp. 23–29). This strategy lacked rigidity (Delbrück, 1920a: S. 504), as the outcome of each action defined a spectrum of potentially possible moves. Consequently, the commander's choice of the most favourable option formed a unique strategic sequence that could differ significantly from the original plan. However, the experience of two world wars demonstrated that after reaching the culmination point, the aggressor exhausted their ability to crush their opponent and began to follow the logic of a war of attrition. Conversely, in accordance with the principle of reversal (Luttwak, 2001: pp. 20–21), reaching this point allowed the previously invaded side to transition to the consequential destruction of the aggressor's armed forces; simultaneously, the aggressor was subjected to cumulative means of attrition that undermined their economic power and morale. As a result, towards the end of total warfare, the aggressor realized their inability to exhaust the enemy and made a final attempt to crush them in a decisive operation. Such efforts invariably failed and only hastened the end of the *état-infracteur*.

Military thought in the first half of the 20th century recognized the risks associated with the strategy of annihilation. For example, in 1909, the former Chief of the German General Staff, Count Alfred von Schlieffen, pointed out that a protracted war was impossible in an era when a nation's very existence depended on the constant development of trade and industry, and the maintenance of million-strong armies required billions of expenditures. For the same reason, a strategy of attrition was also unthinkable, as its implementation would take an unacceptably long time (von Schlieffen, 1913: S. 17). Seeking to avoid such a protracted war on two fronts, Schlieffen developed his famous plan for the rapid defeat of France, the successful implementation of which would allow Germany to then concentrate on defeating Russia (Hastings,

2013: p. 78). However, the new chief of the German General Staff, Helmuth von Moltke the Younger, significantly altered his predecessor's plan, which had fatal consequences for the Germans in August-September 1914.

Following the failure of the plan to crush France and the establishment of positional warfare on both the Western and Eastern Fronts, the military efforts of the opposing sides began to conform to the logic of a war of attrition. The Entente *lente sed certe* exhausted the Central Powers by means of a naval blockade, while Germany undertook a symmetrical, albeit more adventurous, action by initiating unrestricted submarine warfare (Liddell Hart, 1954: pp. 202–204). As a result, by the first half of 1917, the populations of the Second Reich and Austria-Hungary were facing famine, and German strategists confronted a new and powerful enemy: The United States of America. Neither Russia's withdrawal from the war nor the exploitation of the resources of occupied Romania and Ukraine allowed Germany to shift the balance of power in its favour. Realizing the futility of further protracted warfare, the brain of the German army, Quartermaster General Erich Ludendorff, launched a decisive spring offensive on the Western Front in 1918. To achieve this, he had to withdraw troops from the Macedonian front (Hoffmann, 1929: S. 167), thereby allowing the Allies to concentrate their efforts and break through the front. This occurred on September 15, 1918, at Dobro Pole – this decisive success forced the German military and political leadership to begin peace negotiations (Liddell Hart, 1970: pp. 480–482).

The bitter lessons of defeat in the First World War led the military and political leadership of Nazi Germany to view the prospects of a new war of attrition with even greater concern. For example, during the May Crisis of 1938, the Chief of the German General Staff, General Ludwig Beck, made a number of conclusions regarding the nature of a potential conflict in Europe¹. In his view, with US support, the Franco-British coalition could avoid conducting land operations against Germany, limiting itself to naval and air actions (Foerster, 1953: SS. 103–104). The military-political leadership of the Third Reich was aware of these risks, and therefore, from September 1939 onwards, sought to develop a strategy of successive annihilation through the use of *Blitzkrieg*, where the force of the first strike would determine the outcome of the entire campaign (Maser, 1972: S. 395). It was precisely through such lightning-fast offensive actions that by early 1941 a significant portion of the European continent had fallen under Nazi control.

However, in 1940–1941, Germany's aerial blitz against Britain failed, forcing the Third Reich's military-political leadership to resort to a protracted submarine war to wear down the British. Furthermore, during the 1941 campaign in Russia, the Germans were unable to replicate their previous successes; the vastness of the theatre of operations precluded a rapid decisive defeat of the Soviet armed forces (Fuller, 1948: pp. 186–187). Thus, on the Eastern Front as well, the Germans were compelled to adopt a war of attrition against a numerically superior enemy (Fuller, 1948: pp. 274–275). Conversely, after the culmination point in late 1942, the Allied war effort began

¹ It is intriguing that as early as November 1937, Beck had a remarkably clear understanding of the grave consequences that Hitler's expansionist policies could lead to, see: Foerster W. Generaloberst Ludwig Beck: sein Kampf gegen den Krieg. München: Isar Verlag, 1953 (SS. 80–81).

to conform to the logic of a strategy of successive annihilation. Specifically, exploiting the dispersion of German forces across the European continent, the Allies selected decisive points, ensured success through deception, and then struck with overwhelming force; the Soviet command, on the other hand, relied more on a method of alternating strikes, more akin to the operations of the Entente in 1918 (Liddell Hart, 1954: pp. 295–296). Simultaneously, the Anglo-Americans waged an aerial campaign aimed at the gradual destruction of German industry and the demoralization of the German population. In late 1944, the success of Allied operations forced Hitler to launch the Ardennes Offensive, which was intended to secure a decisive victory for Germany on the Western Front. The failure of this Führer's gamble ultimately undermined the Third Reich's ability to continue the fight (Liddell Hart, 1992: p. 690).

It is essential to note that total war involved the extensive mobilization of the civilian population to support the war effort. As the scale of such a war demanded the maximum exertion of a state's capabilities, its military and political leadership sought to strengthen the bond between the individual and the militarized, expansionist collective through propaganda and repression. Consequently, the civilian became an executor of the supreme command's will, and their value was determined not by their individual professional activities but by their ability to support the war economy and their readiness to participate in civil defence. Thus, there was a return to the mechanical social solidarity so typical of primitive societies, where the individual merged with the collective and related to the leader as an object to its owner (Durkheim, 1893: p. 196). In the context of the first half of the 20th century, this represented a transition to a garrison state (Lasswell, 1941: p. 459).

An attempt to transition to such a form of social organization — essentially, a military socialism—was undertaken by the German command in the second half of 1916 when the *Knochenmühle von Verdun* was halted and the implementation of the “Hindenburg Program” began. Its primary goal was the total militarization of all German industry, which was intended to compensate for the military-economic potential of the Entente (Weber, 1966: S. 47). Achieving such parity required effective management of Germany's labour resources, thus German military circles initiated the adoption of a law on auxiliary service. The draft of this document, among other things, provided for the concentration of all the country's labour force in the defence sector of the economy, the use of female labour and war invalids, and the closure of educational institutions with the subsequent transfer of their students to factory production (Ludendorff, 1920: SS. 65–67). The version of the law adopted by the Reichstag did indeed stipulate that all men aged 17 to 60 not conscripted for military service were obliged to perform labour service in those sectors of the economy that served the needs of national defence (Bruendel, 2003: SS. 263–264). However, the remaining provisions of the law significantly limited the government's ability to infringe upon the economic independence of citizens. Thus, to the dissatisfaction of the high command, the system of “absolutist militarism” was not fully implemented (Ludendorff, 1919: S. 261), nor were the goals of the “Hindenburg Program” achieved (Hoeres, 2004: S. 347).

The Nazi German leadership, however, was more successful. In January 1943, in the wake of the Stalingrad catastrophe, Hitler issued a decree mandating full employment for men and women in defence-related tasks (Tooze, 2006: p. 593). Similar to

1916, it was planned to transfer labour from sectors of the economy less vital to the war effort to the military industry and the army; civilian enterprises were subject to inspection and closure if their existence did not meet the needs of defence. All men aged 16 to 60 and women aged 17 to 50 were required to register with labour exchanges, whose staff were tasked with assessing the contribution each individual could make to the war economy (Steinert, 1977: pp. 198–199). While these measures provided a short-term boost, by late 1943 it became clear that full mobilization of the German economy had not been achieved. This problem persisted until the end of the war, resulting in Germany falling significantly behind the Allies in terms of labour productivity (Magenheimer, 1999: S. 184). Nevertheless, the total mobilization of the German population led to the erosion of the distinction between the front and the home front: women and children, involved in civil defence and air defence, became defenders of Germany alongside the soldiers (Stargardt, 2015: p. 395).

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that in total war, the elements of Clausewitz's trinity were thrown out of balance, as the army and the people were subjected to the dictates of narrow military-political circles, which sought to direct all possible resources of their country towards achieving the *Ideologem-Kriegsziel*. The latter represented a persistent, irrational grand strategic idea of elites or specific national leaders, according to which they pursued large-scale military expansion, regardless of the potential consequences — thus, a value-rational type of action was placed at the foundation of the strategic planning process. It was precisely the blind subordination of military efforts to the ideological goal that violated the laws of probability (Collins, 1999: p. 42): the rapid overextension of aggressor states inevitably led to a confrontation with the superior forces of a hostile coalition, and the development of this confrontation to absolute scales — *Volkskrieg* — first ensured the systemic overstrain of the aggressor state and then its collapse.

On the nature of the russo-ukrainian war

During the Russo-Ukrainian war, the Clausewitzian trinity is characterized by a moderate imbalance. Until recently, the governments of the two belligerent states pursued a policy of maximalist war aims, which gave the confrontation quasi-total features; on the contrary, the establishment of a positional warfare system and the preservation of the peacetime mode of division of labour typical of peacetime gave the current war a truly cabinet character. Thus, a paradoxical situation arose in which governments, on the one hand, refused to limit their war aims, and, on the other hand, deliberately did not attempt to move to such a socio-economic regime that would allow these goals to be achieved. As a result, the two states were drawn into a protracted war with a dubious strategic perspective.

Initially, this line was held by the Moscow cabinet. Thus, declaring war on Ukraine on February 24, 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin explained his country's expansionist efforts by a crisis in the system of international relations, during which Russian vital interests were violated. More specifically, it was a question of the problem of the eastern expansion of the North Atlantic Alliance and its intentions to «develop» Ukraine — thus, the grand strategic problem of Russia's prestige as a once imperial

state, historically claiming domination in Eastern Europe, was touched upon (Welfens, 2022: pp. 22–23).

This reminiscence of Wilhelmine *Prestigepolitik* (Münkler, 2005: SS. 52–53), resting on a value-rational type of action, set the Russian war machine in motion. Of particular note here is the campaign to Kyiv: with the aim of ousting the Ukrainian government and establishing a pro-Russian government, this operation of Russian troops, however, was to become only a continuation of the cabinet policy of the 18th century, which the Russian Empire pursued in relation to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Seeking to strengthen its influence in this country, St. Petersburg erected its own henchmen on the Polish throne, supported the pernicious szlachta liberties and suppressed any attempts at systemic reforms. In this regard, it is enough to recall that the elections of Augustus III and Stanisław II Poniatowski took place with the armed mediation of Russia; moreover, in 1792, St. Petersburg, wishing to destroy the achievements of the Four-Year Sejm, unleashed a war with Poland, and this conflict ended with another partition of its territories.

However, unlike the events of the late 18th century, three years ago Russia unexpectedly encountered a much more organized adversary, whose determination rapidly transformed the armed intervention into a full-fledged war. The first month of this confrontation provided the Russian side with a series of defeats, which forced it to reduce its military goals. Thus, on March 29, Russian Défense Minister Sergei Shoigu announced that his country's main efforts would be directed at capturing the Donbass region (Romanenko, 2022). Further, in May 2023, when, based on the results of the first year of the war, the unattainability of this goal became clear, the Russian side put forward the currently relevant principle of Ukraine's recognition of the new territorial realities — adherence to this *propositio prima* was declared a mandatory condition for opening peace negotiations; moreover, until now, the Kremlin's irreconcilable position regarding the North Atlantic line of the Kyiv cabinet has remained (Petrenko, 2023). As you can see, Russia's policy of military goals was gradually brought into line with the situation on the battlefield and, thus, acquired a goal-rational character; on the other hand, the successes of the Russian army in 2023–2024 allowed Moscow to preserve value-rational rudiments of prestige policy. In this respect, the Russian leadership followed a strategic approach similar to that of Frederick, who advocated for the development of multiple comprehensive war plans, followed by their adaptation based on the evolving circumstances and available resources (Friedrich der Große, 1879: SS. 25–26).

Ukraine followed a somewhat different path. Against the backdrop of victories achieved in the first month of the war, its political leadership began to act in a value-rational way. Thus, in May 2022, during a speech at the Davos World Economic Forum, the head of the Office of the President of Ukraine, Andriy Yermak, stated that aid to his country should have resolved the contradictions between *Werte-* and *Realpolitik*. In particular, support for the fighting republic could send a signal to potential aggressors that their expansionist actions would not go unpunished. Thus, the grand strategic imperative of preserving the existing world order was closely linked to the victory of Ukraine. At the same time, the conditions for this victory required the achievement of a *pax iusta*, based on the restoration of the territorial integrity of the republic and

the implementation of a three-part security guarantee to prevent a recurrence of Russian aggression (Office of the President of Ukraine, 2022a). Later, these provisions became the basis of the «Ukrainian Peace Formula» (Office of the President of Ukraine, 2022b): this document was first presented to the leaders of the Group of Twenty in November 2022 and until recently it formally defined the goals of Ukraine in the war — despite the fact that by the autumn of 2023 the country had finally lost the strategic initiative on the battlefield.

Thus, the value policy of the Kyiv cabinet acted as a positive pole of world politics: if at the beginning of the 20th century it was a question of negative expansionist aspirations, now it is a question of peacekeeping efforts aimed at maintaining the world order that has receded into the past and achieving a just peace. The insolvency of such a policy of military goals was finally clarified by the beginning of 2025, when Ukraine's Western allies began to lean towards the Russian principle. In particular, French President Emmanuel Macron called on the Ukrainian government to conduct *discussions réalistes* regarding territorial issues (Septier, 2025); on the other hand, the entourage of US President Donald Trump actively discussed the possibility of Russia retaining the captured territories. Such tendencies mark a return to the cabinet order of the 18th century, in which the conquest of provinces of other states is considered the norm of political life (Ritter, 1970: S. 31).

The relationship between the policy of military goals and the state of the military system of the Russian-Ukrainian war is interesting in this sense. Thus, Moscow's grand strategic aspiration to restore its prestige through a quick resolution of the Ukrainian issue determined the nature of its initial military efforts: the lightning-fast occupation of the enemy's capital was supposed to paralyze his will to further resistance and, thus, create prerequisites for the subjugation of most of Ukraine. This broad project of annihilation, however, suffered a collapse, which for a time introduced an element of uncertainty into the Russian strategy.

On the other hand, Russia's expansionist actions set the framework for Ukraine's grand strategic plan, based on the principle of completely eliminating the threat from an aggressive neighbour. In accordance with this goal, the Ukrainian high command implemented a combined strategy: the consistent destruction of the Russian armed forces was achieved through their preliminary cumulative depletion. In this way, the success of the Kyiv, Kharkiv and Kherson operations was ensured, and in the second case, the measures of disinformation of the enemy played a special role — these guaranteed a strike by concentrated forces at a decisive point. However, the crisis of this strategy came in the summer of 2023, when the Ukrainian offensive in Northern Tavria was broken against the prepared Russian defence; likewise, the Ukrainian amphibious operations on the Left Bank of the Dnieper, carried out in the autumn, did not achieve their goals.

And indeed, the Ukrainian high command faced a positional warfare system, the establishment of which began in the first months of the confrontation. It was this system that determined the course of action of the commanders of the cabinet era (de Jomini, 1836: p. 192): during the offensive, they sought a suitable opportunity to seize an enemy province, and then firmly established themselves within its borders and used the controlled area as a base for active actions against the enemy's forces (Friedrich der

Grosse, 1885: S. 217); on the contrary, during the defence, the military leaders tried to prevent the enemy from penetrating the territory of their country — for this purpose, the most important tactical points were occupied and fortified in the theatre of war, the sum of which constituted a defensive line, better known as the cordon (von Clausewitz, 1867b: S. 122).

Even during the Seven Years' War, Frederick and Henry successfully combined the two approaches presented (von Clausewitz, 1869, SS. 122–123); however, already in the Bavarian War, the Austrian field marshal Franz von Lacy, following Daun's cautious style, developed the cordon system to the extreme, which made it possible to disrupt the manoeuvrable combinations of the Prussians (von Freytag-Loringhoven, 1911: SS. 88–92). Such a *Kordonkrieg* of the second half of the 18th century was the predecessor of the *Stellungskrieg* of the 20th–21st centuries (von Freytag-Loringhoven, 1917: SS. 58–59): during the three positional wars — the Russo-Japanese, the First World War and the Russian-Ukrainian — there was a degeneration of the crushing strategic manoeuvre to a limited positional operation, gravitating towards a siege (Woodruff, 1909: pp. 98–99). It should be added that operations of this kind were characterized by strategic ineffectiveness, since the ability to maximize one's own positions with material, technical and human resources allowed the opposing sides to create a solid defence system capable of stopping the manoeuvre at the initial stage of its development¹. Under such conditions, the strategy of annihilation gave way to the strategy of attrition.

In fact, the defensive efforts of Ukraine in the first half of 2022 ensured the establishment of a positional system: already by mid-April, the stabilized front line — from Kharkiv to Mykolaiv — was a cordon consisting of large operational-strategic centers of resistance and the support points of the tactical level associated with them. This defence system managed to contain the Izyum manoeuvre of the Russians, as a result of which they were forced to revise their own course of action. Thus, there was a change in the objects of Russian offensive operations — they became elements of the Ukrainian cordon, mainly the points of the Donbass fortified area. All this gave the armed confrontation the character of a bloody and protracted fortress war, which is the most important part of the strategy of attrition (Delbrück, 1920a: SS. 489–490). The ensuing battles gradually exhausted the professional army of Russia, which allowed Ukraine to conduct a counter-offensive near Kharkiv — an operation that confirmed the importance of using fortified points to ensure the manoeuvres of field armies².

However, in the first half of May 2022, the Russians began to form their cordon in the captured territories of southern Ukraine. As a result, 3 months later, the Kherson offensive undertaken by the Ukrainian command acquired the features of a typical positional operation. It is significant that its ultimate success was achieved due to the blockade of the Russian defence system — it was the disruption of communications

¹ Delbrück noted that the most important auxiliary means of the strategy of attrition in the XVI–XVIII centuries was field fortification. *Delbrück H. Geschichte der Kriegskunst im Rahmen der politischen Geschichte. Teil IV: Die Neuzeit.* Berlin: Verlag Stilke, 1920 (SS. 338–339).

² The Kharkiv operation exemplified the golden mean advocated by Henri Jomini, who criticized excessive devotion to both the positional system and the system of reckless maneuver. *de Jomini A.-H. Précis de l'art de la guerre.* Paris: Anselin, 1838 (pp. 344–345).

that forced Moscow to make a decision to evacuate its troops from the right bank of the Dnieper. Nevertheless, thanks to the creation of a powerful fortress zone in Northern Tavria, the Russians managed to contain the Ukrainian summer offensive of 2023. Then the supreme command of Ukraine also faced the characteristic degeneration of the manoeuvre and the need to revise the objects of its military efforts. In fact, the Kyiv cabinet found itself facing a dilemma: maintaining the previous goals of the war required cardinal transformations that could meet the needs of the main operational forms of the positional system; on the contrary, recognizing the impossibility of implementing these transformations implied a fundamental change in the policy of military goals.

Choosing the first option meant a transition to such resource-intensive types of operations as a battle with a limited goal and *bataille conduite*. The hypertrophied engineering component of the two operational forms presented obliged the Ukrainian high command to rapidly increase the material and technical base of its army, expand mobilization and change approaches to troop training — in other words, move to a system of total war¹. On the other hand, choosing the second option required strengthening the existing defence system in the East and publicly refusing to restore territorial integrity by military means (Liddell Hart, 1954: p. 368). This much more realistic program ensured the suppression of Russia's will to continue the war through a synthesis of force and compromise — thus, the Kyiv cabinet could avoid systemic overstrain of the country, and, moreover, satisfy the interests of cautious allies.

However, as the subsequent course of events showed, the Kyiv cabinet continued to pursue a policy of maximalist war aims, while not taking any steps to give it any real basis — on the contrary, mobilization and the transition to a wartime economy were quite obviously failed. However, the cordon system does not exhaust the cabinet features of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Thus, the recruitment of the armies of the conflicting states took place in ways typical of the 18th century. For example, Russia actively replenished its troops by recruiting adventurers and criminals. It is significant that during the entire war, the Moscow cabinet conducted only one partial mobilization — by the way, this method was actively used during the period of the late cabinet wars of the second half of the 19th century (Hewitson, 2017: pp. 415–416).

In general, the absence of a shortage of people allowed the Russian command to conduct bloody positional operations for a long time. Under this order, by analogy with the rules of tactics of the 18th century, soldiers were forced to continuously move towards the enemy's fortifications and gradually win space of a certain fortress zone (Rüstow, 1864: SS. 241–243). Accordingly, new *enfants perdus* were sent to destructive

¹ This very issue was the subject of an article by General Valery Zaluzhny, “Modern positional warfare and how to win in it” published in *The Economist* on November 1, 2023. It is interesting to note that his initiative to mobilize 500,000 people and deliver 17 million shells for the de-occupation of Ukrainian territories reflected the French formula of *bataille conduite*, according to which the organization of an offensive operation required the creation of a three-fold numerical superiority in infantry, a six-fold superiority in artillery, and a fifteen-fold superiority in ammunition. *Doughty R. A. The seeds of disaster: the development of French Army doctrine, 1919–1939*. Hamden: Archon Books, 1985 (p. 92).

assaults: initially, these people were tempted by large salaries or pardons, and then, directly on the battlefield, they were forced to move to Ukrainian positions under the threat of barrier formations (Mazurenko, 2024). In the era of cabinet wars, the function of the latter was performed by *Flügelmannen*: placing themselves on the flanks of their detachments, they set the pace and direction of movement, as well as maintained discipline among soldiers (Meyers Konversations-Lexikon, 1887: S. 401).

As for Ukraine, the replenishment of its troops was also ensured by voluntary recruitment and «general mobilization». In reality, «generality» remained nominal: by the end of 2024, according to the Prime Minister of Ukraine Denys Shmyhal, the vast majority of conscription forms were sent to officially unemployed and tax-evading men — thus, the principle of replenishing the army with formally unemployed parts of the population, characteristic of the 18th century, triumphed (Zubkova, 2024).

In addition, a well-known phenomenon accompanying conscription in Ukraine was *enrôle de force*, carried out by the military from the army recruitment centers (Delbrück, 1920: SS. 283–284). Like the Prussian recruiters of the early 18th century, they took men directly from the street to their institutions, where they forcibly enrolled the caught men as recruits (Gutterman, 2024). In the Prussian manner, corruption flourished¹: cases are well known when recruiters earned fabulous sums, creating mechanisms for evading mobilization by those liable for military service (Murashko, 2024). It is significant that such phenomena had a negative impact on the internal situation of both Prussia and Ukraine: the economic life of the two states was disrupted, since the labor force began to escape from recruitment to other countries; in addition, forced recruitment caused public discontent and often led to bloodshed.

The epidemic of desertion that engulfed the Ukrainian army is also noteworthy (Kullab, Yurchuk, 2024). This phenomenon, uncharacteristic of the two world wars, was, however, widespread in the era of cabinet wars. The reason for this was the life of soldiers of regular armies of the 18th century: for example, by his own admission, Frederick, in one day of service, his guys received more beatings than pieces of bread (Gespräche Friedrichs des Grossen mit Henri de Catt, 1885: S. 35). It is not surprising, therefore, that during the entire Seven Years' War, up to 80,000 people deserted from the Prussian army (Anderson, 1980: p. 138). The French also faced this problem and, according to progressive circles, the root of the evil here was the military system, which could not provide either a sufficient level of motivation or competent military leadership of soldiers — a conclusion relevant to the Ukrainian army (Pichichero, 2017: pp. 15–16). Moreover, when the Ukrainian government passed a law on the voluntary return of deserters, it followed the same path as the authorities of old Prussia: the latter, faced with a systematic shortage of soldiers, were forced to declare *General-Pardons*, which guaranteed fugitives a pardon and a bonus in case of voluntary return to the regiment (Bröckling, 1997: SS. 80–81).

¹ In Magdeburg, a riot once erupted because Prussian recruiters, seeking a large ransom, abducted a wealthy sixty-year-old merchant. However, only the rioters were severely punished at that time, not the recruiters themselves. *Sach A. Deutsches Leben in der Vergangenheit*. Bd. II. Halle a. S.: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1891 (S. 639).

Finally, the method of division of labor during the Russian-Ukrainian war also gravitated towards cabinet forms. This is mainly due to the fact that neither in Ukraine nor in Russia was there a full-fledged transition to a garrison state. The Moscow cabinet limited itself only to strengthening state regulation of the economy (Vakulenko, 2024), while the Kyiv cabinet remained critically dependent on the supply of allied aid (Interfax-Ukraine, 2024). Moreover, in the two states there was a return to the state of the 18th century, in which a civilian was supposed to fulfill his professional duties and pay taxes properly, without asking questions about the military policy of their sovereigns — this was the true essence of the principle «fight or work» put forward by the Ukrainian government.

Conclusions

Thus, a comparative historical analysis of the Russian-Ukrainian war allows it to be classified as a cabinet war. This state of affairs was not violated even by total rudiments, the presence of which, however, influenced the course of action of the politicians of the conflicting states. We are mainly talking about the Kyiv cabinet, whose actions introduced a moderate imbalance into the trinitarian system of the current conflict. This was due to the fact that after the failure of the Tauride offensive, the political leadership of Ukraine systematically ignored the nature of positional warfare and continued to persist in achieving a deliberately unrealizable goal — a just peace. The latter became a despotic imperative, the fulfillment of which, in an absurd way, was supposed to take place without taking into account either its own resources or the resources of the enemy (von Clausewitz, 1867a: S. 22). Interestingly, while declaring such an ideologeme-goal, the Kyiv cabinet never took radical measures to achieve it. The duplicity of the Kyiv cabinet's military policy lay in this: outwardly plausible, it possessed a perverse essence, alien to the spirit of military science and the principles of statecraft.

The immediate result of such goal-setting was the appearance of a *perpetuum mobile belli*: the lack of progress in fulfilling the ideologeme-goal was used by the Kyiv cabinet to continue the war and receive military assistance from allies; the state of prolonged war allowed the corrupt bureaucratic apparatus to profit from the war; the poorly replenished army held the eastern cordon and with its sacrifices guaranteed the stability of rear life; limited mobilization allowed the government to distance a significant part of the civilian population from the hardships of the war and thereby prevent the risks associated with the totalization of the conflict; finally, the propaganda conducted by the fourth estate ensured the creation of an attractive picture for the population of the enemy's exhaustion, and also marginalized any discussions about the need to revise the Ukrainian strategy.

The work of this mechanism deprived the war of its national character — the desolidarization of Ukrainian society split the army and the civilian population. In essence, the Frederician principle, which contradicts the people's war, was affirmed, according to which a peaceful citizen should not notice how the nation is fighting (von Treitschke, 1879: S. 75). It is not surprising that tens of thousands of people deserted from the Ukrainian army: like the Prussian soldier Ulrich Bräker, they asked them-

selves the question «*was gehen mich eure Kriege an?*» and, not finding any satisfactory answer to it, escaped from soldiering.

In addition, after the completion of the Tauride offensive, Ukraine found itself in the same position as the German Empire after the cessation of the Verdun operation (Ludendorff, 1922, SS. 110–111): the military efforts of the Kyiv cabinet ceased to correspond to both the strategy of attrition and the strategy of annihilation but were a set of temporary and incoherent decisions. This was a classic example of *stratégie de casse-cou*, in which, instead of subordinating to the laws of probability, the Ukrainian high command gave free rein to its imagination and passion. Here, the features of Hitler's military leadership are easily discovered — faith in the omnipotence of one's own will, lack of a sense of proportion, as well as a refusal to soberly assess the situation; the desire to hold on to territories at any cost; the craving for numerical superiority, expressed in the creation of new formations by replenishing existing ones; fascination with new types of weapons and faith in their ability to change the course of the war; finally, the refusal to accept expedient but unpopular decisions that could shake the prestige of the authorities (von Mannstein, 1955: SS. 308–318).

A well-known example of such a strategy was the landing in Krynki in October 2023. Even despite a number of publications devoted to the problems of establishing positional warfare, the Kyiv cabinet decided to conduct an amphibious operation, which naturally repeated the sad experience of Gallipoli in 1915. Another thing is also significant: a few weeks after the landing, the commander-in-chief of the Ukrainian armed forces, General Valery Zaluzhny, published his own article on the recurrence of *guerre de tranchées*, which was perceived by the political leadership of the republic as an open violation of the official hierarchy (Zaluzhny, 2023). In fact, the general came out with a public definition of the nature of the war and, emphasizing the inadmissibility of delaying the confrontation, delicately raised the question of revising military goals. However, the Kyiv cabinet could not overcome its desire for victory, so it preferred to dismiss the general and continue the previous policy.

As a result, the Kursk adventure of August 2024 followed: a typical cabinet operation, the purpose of which was to capture enemy territory for its subsequent exchange; however, by analogy with Hitler's plans of July 1943 (Fuller, 1948: pp. 276–277), the psychological effect of such limited actions was supposed to testify to the strength of Ukraine and raise the morale of its population. However, such a tactical decision did not alter the course of the war, but only exacerbated the discord with the cautious allies, who were clearly seeking a diplomatic resolution to the conflict. Actually, the ambitions of the Ukrainian high command dragged Ukraine into a protracted war of attrition, during which Russia's systematic direct actions not only exhausted the Ukrainian army, but also had an indirect destructive impact on the internal state of Ukraine.

Indeed, as the conflict progressed, the Kyiv cabinet faced ever-increasing challenges, to which it proved unable to respond – primarily due to a lack of will for a goal-oriented type of action. As a result, the Kremlin's strategy of cumulative attrition organically combined with the adventurous strategy of the Kyiv cabinet. Importantly, the effect of such synthesis was amplified by the indirect actions of the corrupt Ukrainian bureaucracy, which undermined the combat capability of their own country.

All this was a gross violation of the principles of attrition warfare, the adherence to which the Kyiv cabinet diligently declared: a strategy of attrition requires careful consideration of possible losses and damages, both in the short and long term, but such a calculative approach¹ was not destined to take root in Ukraine (Delbrück, 1920: SS. 337–338).

It is quite obvious that it is up to the new US Administration to stop this positional war, devoid of strategic meaning. The approach of the Washington cabinet is based on the pragmatism of 18th-century cabinet diplomacy and the decisiveness of Roosevelt's «*big stick*» from the early 20th century — accordingly, American efforts are aimed at restoring the equilibrium of the trinitarian system (Kellogg, Fleitz, 2024). The achievement of such a state occurs through the removal of the rudiments of prestige politics, the bearers of which are the cabinets of the states that have clashed. More specifically, this requires each side of the confrontation to recognize the strength of the enemy and submit to the order of this war (Liddell Hart, 1954: p. 369).

Statesmen of the cabinet era possessed such an ability, in particular Frederick: having tasted the sweetness of victories and the bitterness of defeats, he perfectly understood that adherence to *raison d'état* requires the taming of hidden instincts and submission to the laws of probability (Droysen, 1874: S. 59). During the War of the Bavarian Succession, the Prussian king remained true to this principle: having assessed the foreign policy risks and prospects of positional confrontation, he initiated the opening of peace negotiations, which culminated in the signing of the Treaty of Teschen (Bernard, 1965: pp. 130–131). The opposite example is given by the immoderate militarists of the first half of the 20th century: when, during the First World War, the situation began to turn against Germany, Ludendorff did not find the moral strength in himself to recognize the impending defeat and the need to conclude a *Verständigungsfrieden* – thus the ambition of the quartermaster general led the German people to the Versailles Diktat (Delbrück, 1920b: S. 23).

In this sense, it must be recognized that the nature of the political goal has a decisive influence on the conduct of the war and post-war prospects (von Clausewitz, 1869: S. 105). Accordingly, the formulation of the *propositum belli* obliges a statesman to follow a target-oriented course of action. This is mainly about the ability to determine the essence of the war begun in order to clarify the boundaries of the possible and necessary in a specific military-historical moment (von Clausewitz, 1867a: S. 24); the ability to correlate campaign plans with available resources; finally, the willingness to adjust goals and withdraw their country from a hopeless conflict.

All these are the most important competencies of a professional politician, who suppresses the desire for prestige and concentrates the power of his mind on the composition of strategic combinations². The degree of elaboration of the latter determines the significance of the victories achieved and the defeats suffered.

¹ For the calculative nature of cabinet wars, see: *Mehring F.* Die Lessing Legende: zur Geschichte und Kritik des preussischen Despotismus und der klassischen Literatur. Stuttgart: Verlag von J.H.W. Dies Nachf, 1906 (SS. 186–187).

² For more information on the concept of “strategic combination”, see: *Frédéric le Grand.* Oeuvres De Frederic Le Grand. T. XVIII. Berlin: Chez Rodolphe Decker, 1851 (p. 21); *von Clausewitz C.* Vom Kriege (T. I; S. 271); *de Jomini A.-H.* Précis de l'art de la guerre (pp. 37–38).

In general, the experience of cabinet conflicts of the 18th–19th centuries can become a key to understanding modern military policy. The results of the two total wars of the 20th century led the statesmen of the world powers to realize how dangerous a direct clash can be for the foundations of civilized life. As a result, a tendency emerged to transfer military operations to the territories of peripheral states, which marked the birth of a new cabinet era. Actually, the periphery acted as the heir to those border provinces within which the armies of the 18th century operated; guerrilla warfare became the logical development of small wars; finally, armed interventions continued the line of limited European and colonial conflicts of the 18th–19th centuries.

From the point of view of such a perspective, the Russian-Ukrainian confrontation of the early 21st century experienced a truly indicative evolution: at first, the Kremlin waged trade wars against the young republic and engaged in creating a strong pro-Russian party in it; when, during the last revolution, Russian influence was shaken, Moscow annexed the Crimean Peninsula, moved to a small war in the Donbass, and then carried out a limited intervention; finally, three years ago, the open force of the Kremlin against the Kyiv cabinet it hated so much rapidly transformed into a large-scale war, which, however, retained its limited character.

Now has come the period of intensive diplomatic game, which is an integral part of the military process. Completing the analogy between Ukraine and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, one can only paraphrase the words of General Charles Dumas¹, once sent to help the Bar Confederation: only the diplomacy of the patron powers can initiate the process of liberating Ukrainians from the slavery of the ideogeme-goal.

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РОДІОН ПРИШВА

Українське суспільство між кабінетною і тотальною війною

У статті розглядається стан тріади Клаузевіца в періоди кабінетних та тотальних війн, а також під час російсько-української війни. Досліджується проблема постановки військових цілей у зазначених війнах крізь призму теорії типів соціальних дій Макса Вебера. Розглядається стан військової системи таких війн у рамках класичних військових теорій Гайнриха Йоміні, Ганса Дельбрюка, Базила Лідела Гарта, Джона Фулера та Джозефа Вайлі. Викладено спробу дати загальний теоретичний опис способів поділу праці в період вказаних війн шляхом використання теорії Еміля Дюркгайма. Зроблено висновки щодо характеру російсько-української війни, яка тяжіє до кабінетних конфліктів XVIII століття. У статті піддано критиці політику військових цілей урядів України та Росії, а також пропонувано загальний опис принципів домінувальної позиційної системи ведення війни. Висунуто гіпотези щодо можливих дій нової американської адміністрації, яка може забезпечити введення раціонального елемента в розвиток російсько-української війни й тим самим створити умови для сталого миру.

Ключові слова: російсько-українська війна, кабінетні війни, тотальна війна, стратегія знищення, стратегія виснаження, стани суспільства, гарнізонна держава, Дюркгайм, Вебер, Клаузевіц, Жоміні, Дельбрюк, Лідел Гарт, Фулер, Лютвак

RODION PRYSHVA

Ukrainian society between cabinet war and total war

This paper examines the state of Clausewitz's trinity during periods of cabinet and total wars, as well as during the Russo-Ukrainian War. It investigates the problem of setting military objectives in these wars through the lens of Max Weber's theory of social action. The state of the military system in these wars is examined within the framework of the classical military theories of Heinrich Jomini, Hans Delbrück, Basil Liddell Hart, John Fuller, and Joseph Wylie. An attempt is made to provide a general theoretical description of the division of labour during the period of the wars under consideration by referring to the theory of Émile Durkheim. Conclusions are drawn regarding the nature of the Russo-Ukrainian War, which gravitates towards the cabinet conflicts of the 18th century. The article critiques the military objectives policies of the Ukrainian and Russian governments, and also provides a general description of the principles of the dominant positional warfare system. Hypotheses are put forward regarding the possible actions of the new American administration, which could introduce a rational element into the development of the Russo-Ukrainian War and thereby create conditions for peace.

Keywords: Russo-Ukrainian War, cabinet war, total war, strategy of annihilation, strategy of attrition, estates of the realm, garrison state, Durkheim, Weber, Clausewitz, Jomini, Delbrück, Liddell Hart, Fuller, Luttwak