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**THE ESTIMATION OF THE WAR IN DONBAS BY SCIENTISTS  
AND FORMER POLITICIANS ON THE PAGES OF THE NEWSPAPER  
THE NEW YORK TIMES (MARCH 1, 2014 – FEBRUARY 11, 2015)**

**Abstract.** *The aim of the research is to analyze the opinions of scientists and former high-ranking politicians on the war in Donbas during March 1, 2014 and February 11, 2015 and on this basis to illustrate the best ways to end the conflict. The research methodology is based on the principles of scientificity, systematicity, verification, historicism and the use of general scientific (analysis, synthesis, generalization) and specially-historical (historical-genetic, historical-comparative, historical-typological, historical-systemic) methods as well as the method of content analysis. The scientific novelty is based on the fact that for the first time in the historiography of the war in Donbas, the views of scholars and former politicians on the war in Eastern Ukraine during March 1, 2014 and February 11, 2015 have been investigated. The Conclusions.* The experts listed Russia's efforts to prevent Ukraine's accession to the EU and the NATO and the historical hostility between the Ukrainians and the Russians among the causes of the war in Donbas. Some analysts did not think Russia would try to invade Ukraine, but maintained that it would rather support the war in Donbas in order to prevent Ukraine from moving closer to the EU and the NATO. Other experts, meanwhile, believed that the Kremlin might not stop in Ukraine but use the Russians in the Baltic countries to create “frozen” conflicts there. The opinions on whether to provide weapon to Ukraine were divided. A number of analysts favoured this move, as it would cause more damage to Russia and deter it from a further aggression. In contrast, the others thought that providing Ukraine with weapon would only intensify the war against Russia, which Ukraine would not win, and which would be a humiliation for the EU, the USA and NATO. One way of resolving the war consisted in the full exhaustion of Russia by sanctions and other measures: Ukraine's strengthening by the West through assistance with intelligence, non-lethal equipment, an information campaign, humanitarian aid, political and economic reforms, reaching a ceasefire, financing not only the Ukrainian government but also the Ukrainians. Another solution should be diplomatic, providing Donbas with autonomy within Ukraine transferring substantial local self-government powers to the Russian-speaking residents of the East.

**Key words:** war in Donbas, scientists, analysts, politicians, Ukrainian troops, Russian troops, separatists.

## ОЦІНКА ВІЙНИ НА ДОНБАСІ ВЧЕНИХ І КОЛИШНІХ ПОЛІТИКІВ НА СТОРІНКАХ ГАЗЕТИ “THE NEW YORK TIMES” (1 БЕРЕЗНЯ 2014 – 11 ЛЮТОГО 2015 рр.)

**Анотація.** *Мета дослідження* – проаналізувати думки вчених і колишніх політиків-високопосадовців щодо війни на Донбасі 1 березня 2014 – 11 лютого 2015 рр. та на основі цього показати найоптимальніші шляхи припинення конфлікту. **Методологія дослідження** базується на принципах науковості, системності, верифікації, історизму та на використанні загальнонаукових (аналіз, синтез, узагальнення), спеціально-історичних (історико-генетичний, історико-порівняльний, історико-типологічний, історико-системний) методів і методу контент-аналізу. **Наукова новизна** полягає у тому, що вперше в історіографії війни на Донбасі досліджено міркування науковців та экс-політиків щодо збройного конфлікту на Сході України 1 березня 2014 – 11 лютого 2015 рр. за матеріалами газети “The New York Times”. **Висновки.** *Експерти серед причин війни на Донбасі називали намагання Росії запобігти вступу України до ЄС та НАТО й історичну неприязнь між українцями і росіянами. Деякі аналітики не вважали, що Росія спробує захопити Україну, а підтримуватиме війну на Донбасі, щоб не дати їй зблизитися з ЄС і НАТО. Але інші експерти вважали, що Кремль може не зупинитися на Україні, а використати росіян країн Балтії, щоб створити там заморожені конфлікти. Думки щодо того, чи варто надавати Україні зброю, розділилися. Деякі аналітики були за такий крок, бо це завдасть більших збитків Росії та стримає її від подальшої агресії. На думку інших, надання Україні зброї тільки посилить війну проти РФ, яку Україна не виграє, і яка стане приниженням для ЄС, США і НАТО. Один шлях вирішення конфлікту вбачався у повному виснаженні Росії через санкції та інші кроки: зміцнення України Заходом через допомогу з розвідувальною інформацією, нелетальним обладнанням, інформаційною атакою, гуманітарною допомогою, політичними й економічними реформами, досягненням перемир'я, фінансуванням не тільки українського уряду, а й народу. Інший шлях є дипломатичним – а це надання Донбасу автономії в межах України або передача російськомовним мешканцям Сходу набагато більше місцевого самоврядування.*

**Ключові слова:** *війна на Донбасі, науковці, аналітики, політики, українські війська, російські війська, сепаратисти.*

**The Problem Statement.** The seventh year of the Russian-Ukrainian hybrid war in Donbas is already underway. After an active hot phase in 2014 – 2015, the armed conflict has evolved into a frozen one. The object of this study is the full-scale Russian invasion into Eastern Ukraine (within the historical and ethnographic region of Donbas) during March 1, 2014 (the first separatist rallies) and February 11, 2015 (the day before the second Minsk agreement was signed).

365 articles during March 1, 2014 and February 11, 2015 were analyzed. Among them, 38 publications contain opinions of 50 individuals, who are either scientists or former politicians. Their thoughts on the war in Eastern Ukraine are the subject of this research.

10 of the commentators are from Ukraine (Yevhen Bystrytsky, Alyona Hetmanchuk, Georgiy Kasianov, Ihor Koziy, Oleksiy Melnyk, Mykhailo Minakov, Mykola Riabchuk, Mykola Sunhurovskyi, Dmytro Tymchuk, Svitlana Khutka), 13 from the Russian Federation (the RF) (Alexander Baunov, Evgeny Gontmacher, Sergei Glazyev, Alexander Golts, Konstantin Eggert, Olga Kryshtanovskaya, Fyodor Lukyanov, Aleksei Makarkin, Sergei Markov, Yevgeny Minchenko, Gleb Pavlovsky, Kirill Rogov, Konstantin Sonin), 19 from the USA (Mark Hiznay, William Hill, Mark Galeotti, Clifford Gaddy, Lev Golinkin, Thomas Graham, Ben Judah, Barry Ickes, Adrian Karatnycky, Phillip Karber, Wesley Clark, Harold Koh, Clifford Kupchan, Michael McFaul, John Mearsheimer, Vali Nasr, David Patrikarakos, Craig Pirrong, Douglas Rediker), 4 from the UK (Guglielmo Verdirame, Anatol Lieven, Amanda Paul, Samuel Charap) and one from France (Bernard-Henri Lévy), one from

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Germany (Stefan Meister), one from Norway (Ole Solvang) and one from Australia (Sharon Korman).

The number of articles in which these experts had been cited in the period during March 1, 2014 and February 11, 2015 was counted. The calculations also considered the articles authored by the scientists and former high-ranking politicians themselves. The results were the following: C. Kupchan is mentioned in five articles, A. Makarkin – in three, S. Charap – in three, M. Galeotti – in two, M. McFaul – in two, S. Markov – in two, O. Melnyk – in two, Y. Minchenko – in two, D. Tymchuk – in two, K. Sonin – in two, others (40 experts) – in one.

The terms used by the authors of *The New York Times* articles and the experts, whose thoughts were analyzed, are repeated in this work. However, the position of the author is clear: a war between the Armed Forces of Ukraine and the regular Russian army is taking place in Donbas, Russia is the aggressor, who has created, currently controls and supplies weapons to few local separatist units.

**The Analysis of Sources and Recent Researches.** A significant number of works are currently available on the Russian-Ukrainian war in Donbas. With regard to recent publications, in particular, in the “Scientific Herald of Uzhhorod University. Series: History” articles focusing on the analysis of the Russian scientists’ works on the war between the RF and Ukraine (Silantieva-Papp, 2019) and Ukraine’s losses in it (Laver, Matyashovska, & Shumilo, 2019) have been published. However, the issues raised in this article are investigated for the first time.

**The purpose of the article** is to analyze the opinions of scientists and former high-ranking politicians on the war in Donbas during March 1, 2014 and February 11, 2015, and to outline on this basis the most optimal ways of ending it.

**The Statement of the Basic Material.** The Revolution of Dignity caused an immediate reaction from Russia, which occupied and annexed the Crimea and invaded Donbas to prevent Ukraine from breaking away from the sphere of influence of the RF. In his article, M. Riabchuk, a political and cultural analyst in Kyiv and a senior fellow at the Institute for Human Sciences (Vienna), doubted that Russia would try to invade the whole territory of Ukraine. In his opinion, the occupation of the Crimea was sufficient in order to prevent Ukraine from joining the European Union (the EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which would follow Russia’s policy towards its neighbours (Riabchuk, 2014).

As the war in Donbas broke out, the scientists attempted to explain its causes. The historical hostility between peoples was featured prominently in the analyses. In this regard, M. McFall, a Stanford University professor and former American ambassador to Russia in 2012-2014, noted that this ethnic animosity was driven by current political elites rather than ancient history (Tavernise, 2014).

By June 2014, international sanctions against the RF had become noticeable. With this in mind, Washington-based analyst (specializing in Russia at Eurasia Group, a political risk advisory organization) C. Kupchan believed that the RF would continue to agree to a ceasefire, urge militants to stop the warfare, and at the same time supply them with weapons until it reached a stable equilibrium on its own terms (MacFarquhar, 2014a).

According to experts, Russia was seeking an agreement. However, it wanted to have sufficient influence over the southeastern part of Ukraine to destabilize its government or make sure it does not get too close with the EU and does not consider joining the NATO. The analysts pointed at a lack of trust in the negotiations on both sides and stressed that the conflict could get out of control of the leaders. With regards to this, Mark Galleotti, professor

of global affairs at New York University and an expert in Russian security matters, noted that each of the parties intensified the conflict, and it became more and more difficult to reach an agreement and conclude a meaningful treaty (MacFarquhar, 2014a).

On June 22, 2014, the President of the RF (Russian Federation) V. Putin approved the peace plan of the President of Ukraine P. Poroshenko and at the same time blamed Kyiv for the shaky truce. That same month, V. Putin's economic adviser S. Glazyev noted that Ukraine should be considered the US occupied territory except for Donbas, and Russia should urge other regions to break free from occupation (MacFarquhar, 2014b).

However, many liberals in Russia among business leaders, economists, and diplomats did not want a break with the West. E. Gontmacher, an economist, stated that Russia could not be separated from the world as that would increase poverty and inflation. He added that Western businessmen had stopped investing in the RF and blacklisted its institutions (MacFarquhar, 2014b). Under these circumstances, as noted by A. Makarkin, an analyst of the Center for Political Technologies (Moscow), V. Putin had to show that he was a strong leader upholding national interests. He also had to assure the West that he was ready for dialogue, would not exacerbate the situation, and that there was no need to impose sanctions (MacFarquhar, 2014b).

On June 21, P. Poroshenko outlined his peace plan. He also refused to negotiate with separatists in Donbas, who in turn refused to cooperate with Kyiv. In this regard, Y. Minchenko, an expert on Ukraine at the International Institute for Political Expertise (Moscow), emphasized that in order to solve the problem, Kyiv should negotiate with the separatists. Interestingly, the analysts were unsure what would work under the circumstances and predicted that fighting could be protracted (MacFarquhar, 2014b).

Russia had plenty of time to call for peace and provide the separatists with everything they needed. According to some experts, Moscow could still dominate until it got Ukraine. C. Kupchan said the Russians' goal was to keep Ukraine in crisis, and the militants were their levers. He did not believe that peace would come quickly (MacFarquhar, 2014b).

The signing of the economic part of the Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine on June 27 came as a serious blow to V. Putin and his goal of restoring Moscow's influence in the countries of the post-Soviet space. A. Paul, a researcher at the European Policy Center (Brussels), noted that by creating problems for Ukraine, V. Putin pushed it even closer to the West, which ultimately became a loss for him (Higgins & Herszenhorn, 2014).

This also showed that Moscow had accepted the signing of the Association Agreement with the EU by P. Poroshenko and the change of circumstances after the occupation and annexation of the Crimea by Russia. In this regard, K. Sonin, vice-rector of the Higher School of Economics (Moscow), noted that the Kremlin was using the couple of months to assess the consequences of the new state of affairs. He believed that there was no need to rationalize the actions of the Russian leadership, as it was rather driven by emotions (Higgins & Herszenhorn, 2014).

On July 1, P. Poroshenko resumed the offensive in Donbas. Against this background, V. Putin warned again that he reserved the right to protect Russian-speaking citizens by force. Many supporters of the Ukrainian government backed the actions of the President of Ukraine. A. Hetmanchuk, a director of the Institute of World Policy (Kyiv), said that, by having prolonged peace talks while soldiers continued to die, P. Poroshenko failed to fulfill his promise that he would not negotiate with terrorists and would end the war in a few weeks (Herszenhorn, 2014a).

On the other hand, D. Tymchuk, a director of the Center of Military and Political Research (Kyiv), praised P. Poroshenko's decision to abolish the ceasefire. After all, compliance with the truce by the Armed Forces of Ukraine had only reinforced the terrorists. D. Tymchuk also noted on Facebook that a longer truce would allow the terrorists to increase dramatically their combat readiness (Herszenhorn, 2014a).

When the Russian troops and separatists began occupying Donbas actively in April 2014, the Security Service (the SBU) and the Armed Forces of Ukraine were incapacitated. However, according to the officials and analysts, two months after the start of the war, the composition of the army and the SBU command was reorganized and morale was raised. M. Sunhurovskyi, a director of military programs at the Razumkov Center (Kyiv), said that the soldiers had overcome the psychological barrier against shooting people. Moreover, after the restructuring of the forces, it became clear, who were the enemies and who were not, and the effectiveness of the military operations increased (Herszenhorn, 2014b).

According to O. Melnyk, a security analyst at the Razumkov Center, when Russia invaded the Crimea in February 2014, the number of the Ukrainian soldiers dropped to nearly 128,000. Few of them were ready for the combat. These men were neither trained nor equipped, the transport and weapons of the army were outdated, and its budget was plundered. O. Melnyk warned that despite the improvements the work to strengthen the armed forces would not end soon (Herszenhorn, 2014b).

On July 7, the separatists withdrew from their positions, starting to erect barricades in Donetsk and Luhansk in anticipation of the final battle against the Ukrainian troops. The Armed Forces of Ukraine were highly successful during those days. However, the analysts warned of the threat of urban warfare and the significant casualties among the civilians that would result from battles in big cities. O. Melnyk stated that the insurgents were making a strategic calculation to abandon other positions and return to cities, as the Ukrainian troops would not be able to use artillery and aviation then (Herszenhorn, 2014c).

When the militants lost Slovyansk, I. Strelkov moved to assert his authority over the disparate separatist militias that were gathering in Donetsk and Luhansk. He united them for a city war that analysts believed would be devastating, bloody and suicidal (Sneider, 2014).

Kyiv and the Western countries stated that I. Strelkov was an active Russian agent but provided no evidence of this. In turn, it seemed that I. Strelkov himself often acted at his own discretion, not on orders from Moscow. Confirming this, M. Galleotti noted that when I. Strelkov arrived in Eastern Ukraine, he was doing things that contradicted Russia's plan (Sneider, 2014).

On July 16, the President of the USA B. Obama imposed new sanctions on the important companies in Russia's energy, finance, and defense industries. These were the most punitive measures taken by the US in response to the Russian invasion into Ukraine. C. Pirrong, Professor of finance at the University of Houston, said these steps might not have much effect. After all, even though it would limit the capital available to the affected companies, they would still be able to obtain liquidity in other countries (Baker & Kanter, 2014). D. Rediker, a visiting fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, believed that the real impact on the US capital market might be small, that a blow to large banks and energy companies could change business and investment in places where the US capital market had no direct impact (Baker & Kanter, 2014).

In turn, the others were more skeptical of the sanction pressure. In particular, S. Charap, a senior fellow for Russia and Eurasia at the International Institute for Strategic Studies,

noted that the risks of escalating the conflict were high and that damage from sanctions was unlikely to convince V. Putin to leave the territory of Ukraine (Baker & Kanter, 2014).

On July 17, 2014, the Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 airliner was shot down over the territory of Donbas. According to the official position of the RF, Ukraine was responsible for the plane crash. An analyst from Russia, S. Markov, was inclined to believe the event had been an accident, but said it could also be a deliberate plot by Kyiv (MacFarquhar & Kramer, 2014a).

K. Rogov, an economic analyst and political commentator in Moscow, noted that V. Putin continued to raise stakes when it came to the military support for the separatists. In his opinion, the president of the RF continued making mistakes, but he raised the stakes even higher in a bid to conceal them (MacFarquhar & Kramer, 2014a). This resulted in the death of 298 people in a plane crash.

On July 22, Russia faced the threat of much tougher sanctions from Western European countries. The Russian troops in Donbas had been discredited around the world on suspicion of downing a plane and controlling the crash site. In this regard, G. Pavlovsky, a political consultant, noted that these circumstances were a strong blow to Putin and his strategy, and the President of the RF wanted to get out of this situation without losing (MacFarquhar, 2014c).

According to the analysts, during the investigation of the plane crash, Moscow could cling to both support for separatists and claims of its own righteousness. A. Makarkin emphasized that if there were no hard evidence, Russia would continue saying it was innocent and might continue supporting the rebels in Eastern Ukraine (MacFarquhar, 2014c).

Following V. Putin's meeting with Russian defense and security officials, the introduction of their peacekeeping forces into Ukraine was seen as a possibility. In this regard, F. Lukyanov, a foreign policy journal editor, noted that the pressure on the Kremlin was enormous, and many people said that the war in Ukraine was the beginning of a war against the RF and the rehearsal of a change in its regime. F. Lukyanov and other experts also suggested that V. Putin might begin to distance Moscow from the separatists (MacFarquhar & Roth, 2014).

At the same time, the Russian society was tired of the war in Ukraine and blamed both sides. O. Kryshtanovskaya, a sociologist, studying the political elite of the RF, emphasized the constant growth of the feeling that V. Putin had gone too far (MacFarquhar & Roth, 2014).

In *The New York Times* article from July 22, 2014, a philosopher B.-H. Lévy noted that only local thugs, thieves, rapists, ex-prisoners and vandals were fighting in the war in Donbas, V. Putin had turned them into paramilitary forces, the Russian military officers trained them, and Moscow supplied them with weapons. In particular, B.-H. Lévy was aware that Russia had provided a lot of artillery to the separatists and had taught them to use the SA-11 missile system that had brought down the Malaysia Airlines' plane. The philosopher noted that V. Putin was losing control over them (Lévy, 2014).

Regarding the behaviour of international players, B.-H. Lévy noted that it was difficult not to take the side of P. Poroshenko when he asked other countries to designate the Luhansk and Donetsk Peoples' Republics (the L/DNR) as terrorist organizations. The philosopher felt embarrassed over the indecisive actions towards Russia taken by France, Germany and the UK. They had commercial interests in cooperating with the RF, and their incertitude was a shame to the EU (Lévy, 2014).

The downing of the civilian plane over Donbas drew the world's attention to Ukraine's war with Russia. Many Ukrainians, including high-ranking officials in Kyiv, were still waiting for a strong response to the incident from Western countries. S. Khutka, an associate

professor of sociology at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, said that the Western countries would not impose strict sanctions, since they constantly said they were deeply concerned while actually having their own interests, and ultimately, Ukraine would have to defend itself on its own (Herszenhorn, 2014d).

A report by Human Rights Watch from July 24, 2014 identified four cases of the use of “Grad” system missiles that killed civilians in and around Donetsk. Even though the missiles were used by both the separatists and the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the investigation stated that the four attacks were made by the Ukrainian fighters (Tavernise & Sneider, 2014).

Commenting on the information in the report, O. Solvang, a senior emergencies researcher at Human Rights Watch, emphasized that missile attacks in the cities and villages were a violation of the laws of war, so the USA and the EU had to condemn these attacks and urge Kyiv to stop them (Tavernise & Sneider, 2014). In turn, the Armed Forces of Ukraine denied bombing the areas where the civilians had been killed.

In the meantime, the Kremlin sent V. Antyufeyev out to form a “Ministry of State Security” in Donetsk. He was Minister for State Security in Transdnistria until 2012. W. Hill, a former head of OSCE mission in Moldova, noted that V. Antyufeyev’s assignment was a clear sign of support for the rebellion in Eastern Ukraine by certain circles in Moscow (Kramer, 2014a).

On August 4, Western officials reported that Russia had almost doubled the number of battalions near the border with Ukraine and could invade Donbas. W. Clark, a retired general and the former NATO commander, noted that the Russian president had deployed these forces for the invasion. V. Putin concentrated his troops near the border. He armed the separatists and sent operatives, conducted trainings. W. Clark added that if the RF invaded, it would receive tougher economic sanctions, resistance from the Ukrainian forces and military support provided to Kyiv by the West. Therefore, according to the retired general, V. Putin had not made the political decision to invade Donbas at that point (Gordon & Schmitt, 2014).

W. Clark and P. Karber, a former adviser to the US Defense Secretary C. Weinberger, believed that if V. Putin indeed decided to bring troops into Ukraine, he could formulate it as a “peacekeeping” invasion at the request of the separatists to whom Moscow provided weapons and political support. In July 2014, at a closed briefing for the US Congress, P. Karber noted that Russian military equipment with the Russian coat of arms for peacekeeping forces was positioned close to the border with Ukraine (Gordon & Schmitt, 2014).

On August 6, 2014, *The New York Times* published an article by M. McFall. It stated that sanctions and the deterioration of Russia’s reputation would not stop the war in Donbas in short terms, so the West should: 1) provide the Ukrainian soldiers with as much intelligence information as possible; 2) if requested, provide Ukraine with bulletproof vests and night vision goggles; 3) counteract the Russian propaganda with its own information campaign; 4) encourage Kyiv to reduce civilian casualties by establishing safer humanitarian corridors; 5) send more humanitarian assistance to refugees through the Ukrainian government; 6) convene an international donor conference to create Donbas Development Fund to rebuild the region after the war; 7) continue supporting economic and political reforms in Ukraine; 8) further encourage Kyiv to interact with legitimate representatives of Donbas, rather than with the Russian mercenaries in order to draw up a plan for reconciliation with the conditions of power decentralization, guarantees for the use of the Russian language and the introduction of international observers (McFaul, 2014).

According to the NATO and the White House, at the beginning of August 2014, Russia had enough troops at the border with Ukraine to invade. C. Kupchan conceded that, given the

rude, emotional and violent behaviour of V. Putin, he was capable of resorting to invasion. Eurasia Group estimated the likelihood of a Russian attack against Ukraine at about 35% (Kramer, 2014b).

On August 12, a convoy of about 260 trucks of humanitarian aid for Luhansk departed from Russia. Moscow insisted it wanted to help the civilians of Donbas. Ukraine decided to block the trucks at the border. Kyiv suspected that the convoy was an attempt to escort the Russian troops into the country under the guise of a humanitarian mission. A political analyst K. Eggert from Moscow confirmed that convoys would be perceived this way by the Ukrainian side (MacFarquhar, 2014d).

On August 17, the Ukrainian military forces reached Luhansk. Kyiv was celebrating success, but there was growing concern in the West that Moscow would consider the terrorists' defeat as a stimulus to a larger-scale war. C. Kupchan urged Western supporters of the Ukrainian military offensive to exercise care. If Putin believed that the rebels were close to a defeat, the West would have a problem to deal with (Kramer, 2014c).

In late August 2014, the Armed Forces of Ukraine retreated, as the Russian troops supported the separatists. Subsequently, an unstable contact line was established between the territories controlled by Ukraine and occupied by Russia. Analyzing the behaviour of Russia's leadership at that time and the military action, the analysts believed Moscow was pursuing the following goals: 1) to impose conditions that will weaken the government of Ukraine and ensure it will not avoid Russia's influence and will never join the NATO or other Western organizations; 2) to relieve pressure on the increasingly besieged separatist forces in Luhansk and Donetsk; 3) to create a land route to the annexed Crimea (MacFarquhar & Kramer, 2014b).

A. Makarkin said that the RF wanted talks that would end in major concessions for Ukraine. Therefore, the Kremlin was investing heavily in the L/DNR to force Ukraine to agree to Russian conditions (MacFarquhar & Kramer, 2014b).

The sanctions did not significantly change the behaviour of Russia's President in Ukraine. The analysts believed that if V. Putin should not receive what he desired through negotiations, he would continue supporting the war in Donbas for some time. A. Golts, an independent analyst, noted that the Ukrainians had offered more resistance than V. Putin had expected, but he had never backed down (MacFarquhar & Kramer, 2014b).

On August 31, 2014, *The New York Times* published an article written by B. Judah, a journalist and expert at Hudson Institute. According to him, the West had to be ready for a proxy war with the RF, and in the meantime it had to send military advisers to Ukraine, to support it with intelligence and satellites, to provide it with weapons, tanks, drones and medical kits. In addition, the USA and the EU had to be prepared to bring in the NATO troops if Russian tanks moved to the Crimea to make a land corridor to the peninsula (Judah, 2014). B. Judah predicted that the President of the RF wanted to weaken the NATO and could use the Russians in the Baltic States to create new frozen conflicts. In this case, Poland would have to act as if the NATO did not exist and create its own defense alliance with the Baltic States and even a buffer zone in Western Ukraine (Judah, 2014).

On September 3, 2014, an article by A. Lieven, professor at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service in Qatar, appeared in *The New York Times*. He mentioned T. Graham from the consulting firm Kissinger Associates, who wrote that the RF was paying more attention than the West to events in Ukraine for reasons that lie in the history of Russia and Ukraine. For A. Lieven, the development of the war in Donbas was predictable. Since

the “rebellion” began there with the support of Russia, it would not allow its suppression, so it was unlikely for Ukraine to achieve a military victory in the war (Lieven, 2014).

A. Lieven believed that the separation of Donbas with the preservation of Ukraine’s integrity would cease hostilities and help the West develop and consolidate the rest of the country. In the long run, Ukraine would be able to join the EU (Lieven, 2014).

Interestingly, major Western states shied away from applying certain terms to the war in Donbas at the official level, especially the term “invasion”, when speaking of Russia’s actions. D. Tymchuk emphasized that there an invasion had taken place. He noted that Western leaders were playing political schizophrenia, as they understood what was happening, but at the same time did not want to break up with Moscow, hoping that V. Putin would come to his senses. This, however, would not happen (Higgins, 2014).

International law professionals were puzzled by the cautious use of the word “invasion”, since it has no particular legal significance. H. Koh, Yale University law professor, a former State Department legal adviser under B. Obama and former assistant secretary of state under President B. Clinton, noted that “invasion” was a colloquial term and had no consequential meaning legally (Higgins, 2014).

Australian lawyer S. Korman agreed but added that the term was emotionally and politically loaded. It evoked the image of World War II and may legitimize armed action by the West. She emphasized that Australia had called Russia’s behavior an “invasion” since Australia was not expected to conduct retaliatory actions. If the USA or Germany did the same, they would be expected to have military involvement which they did not plan to resort to (Higgins, 2014).

According to G. Verdirame, professor of international law at King’s College (London), the word “invasion” was not an impetus for other countries to fulfill obligations, it indicated the purpose to capture or annex the territory of another state (Higgins, 2014).

The EU leaders were strongly reluctant to use the term “invasion”, as it suggested similarities between the actions of V. Putin and those of A. Hitler. In this regard, S. Meister, who served the German Council on Foreign Relations, noted that the unwillingness to use the term “invasion” reflected a common desire, especially in Germany, to reach an agreement on Ukraine with Russia (Higgins, 2014).

On September 5, Ukraine, OSCE, the RF and the separatists signed the first Minsk ceasefire agreement. The analysts considered it to be very weak. A number of politicians, civic activists, diplomats and other analysts endorsed it but doubted it would be adhered to (MacFarquhar, 2014e).

G. Kasianov, a historian, approved Minsk agreement, as he believed, it was impossible to resolve this conflict in military terms. The scientist added that most Ukrainians wanted peace, but some would not accept any compromise with the terrorists. In addition, certain fighters in Donbas were uncontrollable and difficult to be tamed. He noted that a spark would be enough to restart the fighting (MacFarquhar, 2014e).

Regarding Minsk agreement, C. Kupchan noted that it would not last long, since the Kremlin sought federalization with the right of each region to conduct its own foreign policy, while the president of Ukraine offered only decentralization. Many analysts believed that a frozen conflict would ensue (MacFarquhar, 2014e).

On September 6, the ceasefire in Donbas was on the verge of collapse when bombing resumed near Mariupol. Despite P. Poroshenko’s assurances that Minsk agreement would preserve the country intact, the Ukrainians were concerned that by directing its army at the

Armed Forces of Ukraine, the RF was dictating conditions that would put much of the country under the Russian rule. Therefore, P. Poroshenko's task was to convince the Ukrainians that negotiations with the separatists were the best choice (Gall & MacFarquhar, 2014).

In this regard, M. Minakov, professor at the University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy and civil rights activist, emphasized that the Ukrainians were not ready for the peace, which does not meet the interests of Ukraine and would not respect an agreement satisfying the demands of separatists or the Russians (Gall & MacFarquhar, 2014). In turn, Y. Bystrytsky, the executive director of the International Renaissance Foundation, noted that a perceived lack of consent was a problem, and the first Russian news on the truce used the word "decentralization" (Gall & MacFarquhar, 2014).

The Kremlin's demands included Ukraine's refusal to join the NATO along with a significant regional autonomy for the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. The analysts, however, said the agreement between Ukraine and the separatists should include concessions to Moscow on free trade between Ukraine and the EU. For example, establishing special trade relations between the RF and Donbas would serve this purpose (Herszenhorn, 2014e).

A. Karatnycky, an expert at the Atlantic Council, noted that these elements of the agreement could eventually be accepted by Kyiv. In turn, Russian writer and political commentator A. Baunov saw the prospects of a long-term political agreement as very distant, since the parties mistrusted each other and each imposed their plans on the rest of the world. P. Poroshenko was trying to eke out time to regain control over Donbas, while V. Putin was seeking to secure Russia's influence. A. Baunov stressed that the goal of the President of the RF was to federalize, to create an autonomous region within Ukraine that would influence Ukraine politically, militarily and economically, bring it closer to Russia and prevent Ukraine from integrating with the West without consulting with Moscow and V. Putin (Herszenhorn, 2014e).

Many experts doubted that an agreement could be reached before fighting resumed. Y. Minchenko noted that MPs in Kyiv would not be able to vote for amendments to the Constitution since domestic politics in Ukraine was dramatically radicalized. He believed the point of no return had passed and the "great civil war" in Donbas would continue (Herszenhorn, 2014e).

On the whole, it was unclear whether V. Putin wanted a political settlement or preferred a prolonged war. The separated Donbas was too expensive for Moscow to maintain both politically and financially, which experts believed would create some incentive for an agreement (Herszenhorn, 2014e).

Many analysts asserted that decentralization of power in Ukraine would help fight inefficiency and corruption in the Ukrainian government. S. Charap acknowledged that it was unclear whether a decentralization plan favourable to Ukraine would be sufficient to appease V. Putin (Herszenhorn, 2014e).

On September 10, 2014, *The New York Times* published an article by V. Nasr, dean of the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. He stated that the USA had no crisis management strategy in Ukraine and the Middle East. To settle the crises, Ukraine and Iraq had to agree to a new distribution of power. Therefore, in addition to the US pressure on Russia, sovereignty over Ukraine must be maintained by the government in Kyiv, and more local self-governance should be given to Russian-speaking Donbas residents (Nasr, 2014).

In late October, evidence emerged that the Ukrainian troops had repeatedly fired at Donetsk with cluster munitions banned in most countries. M. Hiznay, a senior arms researcher

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at Human Rights Watch, noted that these munitions were being used randomly in settlements, especially in the attacks at the beginning of October in Donetsk. These attacks, therefore, had to be stopped because they had threatened many civilians (Roth, 2014).

On November 5, the Prime-Minister of Ukraine A. Yatsenyuk declared that the government would freeze the state payments in the occupied territories of the country's East. In general, the paradox of the war in Donbas was that Russia and Ukraine were fighting for a region with outdated and uncompetitive subsidized coal mines, metallurgical and machine-building plants. That is why C. Gaddy and B. Ickes from the Brookings Institution offered to punish Russia by handing over Ukraine to it, as it would completely exhaust the RF (Kramer, 2014d).

On December 8, 2014, *The New York Times* published an article by L. Golinkin, the author of the memoir *A Backpack, a Bear, and Eight Crates of Vodka*. He called Russia's denial of its involvement in the conflict in Eastern Ukraine nonsense, as Moscow trained, strengthened and provided separatists with equipment. L. Golinkin agreed that V. Putin stirred up riots in Donbas, but he also used local people, many of whom distrusted Kyiv and the West, and silently supported Russia and the separatists. In the writer's opinion, V. Putin's greatest weapon might be the West's refusal to communicate not only with the people of Donbas, but also of the East of Ukraine in general, who believed that the West called them enemies (Golinkin, 2014).

On December 29, 2014, *The New York Times* published an article by D. Patrikarakos, Poynter fellow in journalism at Yale University. He argued that there the war was taking place in Ukraine, conducted with 21<sup>st</sup>-century means, where communities of citizens responded better than the state. Therefore, to win over the separatists, the West needed to fund the people of Ukraine, not just its government (Patrikarakos, 2014).

In January 2015, the war broke out again at dozens of points in Donbas. Although the RF rejected its involvement in the fighting, the evidence that its troops and equipment were re-entering Ukraine was growing stronger. It was no surprise to S. Markov that V. Putin supported the L/DNR even under economic pressure from the USA and the EU. He noted that the intensity of the confrontation undermined the influence of V. Putin's liberal economic advisers in government and in discussions about Ukraine. This was confirmed by K. Sonin. However, as noted by S. Markov, the Kremlin's stance on the war in Donbas and the deepening of the economic crisis in the RF made V. Putin closely consider his further steps (Lyman & Kramer, 2015).

On February 5, 2015, Western leaders began talks to end the war in Donbas. However, the prospect of concluding a new peace agreement was overshadowed by suspicions concerning Moscow's goals in Ukraine. On February 4, an officer was arrested in Kyiv for espionage for the Kremlin. Concerns were raised that the Armed Forces of Ukraine were teeming with spies, complicating the plans to provide weapons to Ukraine (Gordon & Herszenhorn, 2015).

This arrest prompted I. Koziy, military analyst at the Institute for Euro-Atlantic Cooperation (Kyiv), to say that Moscow might have other double agents. Therefore, it was suggested that the structure of the Armed Forces of Ukraine be completely changed or a new one created (Gordon & Herszenhorn, 2015).

On February 8, 2015, *The New York Times* published a discussion article by J. Mearsheimer, professor of political science at the University of Chicago, on whether lethal weapons should be provided to Ukraine. The USA was inclined to do so, but the expert warned against it, as he believed the weapons would not save the Ukrainian army but would intensify the fighting. He saw a diplomatic solution: the West would transform Ukraine into a neutral state between

the RF and the NATO, the sovereignty of Ukraine would be restored in Donbas, Donetsk and Luhansk regions would be given autonomy, and the Russian language would be protected. The Crimea, meanwhile, was lost forever (Mearsheimer, 2015).

**The Conclusions.** The largest number of articles about the Russian-Ukrainian war in Donbas were published in *The New York Times* in 2014. Naming the reasons for the clash, the experts mentioned Russia's efforts to prevent Ukraine's accession to the EU and the NATO, as well as the historical hostility between the Ukrainians and the Russians. Since the beginning of the war, the newspaper also provided predictions about future developments. Some analysts believed that Russia would not try to capture Ukraine but would fight in Donbas to keep the country destabilized and prevent it from moving closer to the EU and the NATO. Other experts believed that the Kremlin might not stop at invading Ukraine but use the Russians in the Baltic countries to create frozen conflicts there.

The usage of terms to denote the war in Donbas and the enemies of the Ukrainian troops was ambiguous. They were mainly labeled "rebels", rarely "separatists", on single occasions – "militants" and "terrorists". The war itself was often referred to as "rebellion" or "conflict", rarely "invasion" and in isolated cases – "war". Some experts (W. Clark, P. Karber, B.-H. Lévy) believed that Ukraine is only at war with separatists whom the RF supports with weapons, military instructors, and political assistance.

The conclusion of the first Minsk agreement was approved by almost all experts, but they doubted it would be respected due to a lack of agreement on key issues, such as the status of the Donbas territories. At the time, Russian, Ukrainian and American analysts suggested that V. Putin might prefer a lengthy conflict instead of a political settlement. Meanwhile, Russian experts noted that the President of the RF had also sought a way out of the crisis in relations with the West without a major defeat.

In 2014 and early 2015, discussions continued whether to provide weapons to Ukraine. Opinions differed. Some analysts called on the West to assist Ukraine more actively, with weapons in particular, as it would cause greater damage to Russia and deter it from aggression against other states. A number of scientists believed that V. Putin would not allow the defeat of the separatists in Donbas, since it would threaten the existence of his regime in Russia. Therefore, providing Ukraine with weapons would only intensify the war against the RF. Ukraine's ultimate defeat would be a disaster for Kyiv and a humiliation for the EU, the USA, and NATO.

The US scholars predicted that the sanctions imposed against Russia would not end the war in Donbas in the short term. Therefore, one of the ways to resolve the conflict would be based on completely exhausting the RF through sanctions and other measures. In particular, these could include Ukraine's strengthening by the West through assistance with intelligence information, non-lethal equipment, information campaigns, humanitarian aid, political and economic reforms, the achievement of a truce, and funding not only the Ukrainian government but also the people.

Another (diplomatic) way of ending the war involved Ukraine granting the Donbas autonomy or extended local self-governance. At the same time, the pro-Kremlin experts believed that Kyiv should negotiate directly with the separatists.

Finally, it should be emphasized that the noted aspects deserve new and in-depth studies of the modern Russian-Ukrainian war. In planning his researches, the author considers it appropriate to investigate the coverage of this war on the pages of *The New York Times* in the period between February 12, 2015 and May 2019.

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