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**RUSSO-UKRAINIAN WAR: A VIEW OF A CONTEMPORARY**

**(peer review of the book by Volodymyr Viatrovych. Our Century.**

**Short Essays on the Long War. Kharkiv: Ranok, 2023. 256 p. (“History” Series))**

**РОСІЙСЬКО-УКРАЇНСЬКА ВІЙНА: ПОГЛЯД СУЧАСНИКА**

**(рецензія на книгу: Володимир В’ятрович. Наша століття.**

**Короткі нариси про довгу війну. Харків: Ранок, 2023. 256 с. (Серія “History”))**

The 21st century brought new challenges to the world history. The Russo-Ukrainian war became an event that caused a strong resonance in the modern civilized world. The origins of this confrontation should be sought in the thousand-year history of the development of two peoples, and essentially two diametrically opposed civilizations. A historian whose field of scientific interests is the Ukrainian liberation movement, Volodymyr Viatrovych and his book “Our Century. Short Essays on the Long War” should be singled out among the scholars who dealt with the problem of the Ukrainian-Russian confrontation. The peer-reviewed social and political edition was published by the Kharkiv publishing house under the “History” Series. Structurally, the material is presented in 45 chapters, essentially 45 history lessons by the author. The book is based on V. Viatrovych’s own conclusions and observations. The author interestingly and accessible highlights his views on the latest events and connects them with

the historical features of the development of Ukraine and Russia. The material is presented in a sufficiently balanced manner. The thematic illustrations in the sections that successfully present their content deserve a chief focus. A modern, original design of the text with the latest information content at the end of each chapter allows you to communicate with the author on the Internet about the key moments of the story.

V. Viatrovych substantiates the thesis that the Russo-Ukrainian war has begun long before February 24, 2022, and the reasons for the confrontation lie in previous years and centuries. However, it was on that day that the war burst into the lives of millions of the Ukrainians, dividing it into “before” and “after”. The peaceful lives of millions have changed, and the lives of thousands have been cut short. According to the author, the origins of this war can be traced back to the first attempts of the Ukrainians to create their own independent state. Back in 1917, the Russian imperialism, as one of the participants in this war, fought under different flags (three-coloured and red-coloured), different ideologies (communist and Russian), pursuing one unchanging goal – to destroy everything Ukrainian (p. 16).

We support the author’s opinion that the war did not break out in 2014, but almost a hundred years earlier. Understanding the origins of this conflict is important because it makes us stronger. Conscious Ukrainians are able to analyse and expose the same criminal methods that Russia has been using against us for many years, because we have a colossal experience of several generations of heroes and awareness that right now we are continuing their struggle. All this makes us stable and resilient in the modern Russo-Ukrainian war (pp. 23–25).

According to V. Viatrovych’s point of view, the history of Ukraine and Russia is rather a history of confrontation than a myth about the existence of two brotherly nations. The neighbouring country, which has encroached on the territorial integrity of Ukraine in recently, appeared on the map of Europe after the absorption of the Ukrainian lands. The birth of the empire took place from a gradual destruction of the Cossack state, from the appropriation of the name “Russia” stolen from the Ukrainians – the Greek origin of the word “Rus”. Centuries of the imperial policy of absorption of the Ukrainians began to appear – from the Cossack elders’ joining the Russian nobility and a systematic destruction of a language and culture.

At the beginning of the 20th century the Kremlin’s plans failed. The Ukrainian national movement grew into the national revolution. Almost until the mid-1920s, the empire was weakened by the uprisings in Central and Southern Ukraine. In the 1930s, the Ukrainians resisted collectivization, for which the regime organized the artificial Holodomor. Later, a large-scale insurgent movement covered Western Ukraine, challenging the USSR, which defeated Nazism and conquered a significant territory of Europe. The Kremlin had to struggle with such manifestations of independence for more than a decade after the war.

A modern warfare is unique in its massive nature. Not only military personnel take part in it: every Ukrainian joins the national resistance movement. That is why, V. Viatrovych calls it People’s war rightly (p. 25).

An important element of the state is its army. Throughout the centuries, the Ukrainians had no signs of statehood, but in the 16th and 17th centuries established a powerful military formation – the Cossack army. And the official name of the state of Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky Zaporizhzhia Army clearly emphasizes the basis of its origin (Chapter “The Ukrainians – People-Army” p. 33).

In the 20th century during the Ukrainian revolution of 1917 – 1921, the question of creating an army arose again. Despite the lack of attention from the political leadership, the armed forces of the Ukrainian People’s Republic were formed and for four years resisted

more powerful formations. It was not possible to obtain statehood at that time. However, at the cost of their own lives, the Ukrainians laid the foundations for further struggle.

During World War II, the interests of two totalitarian regimes – the Communist and the Nazi – clashed on the territory of Ukraine. The existence of an independent Ukrainian state was not included in the plans of any of them. The Ukrainians were seen as a resource for meeting their own military needs. Under such conditions, a powerful Ukrainian Insurgent Army was established, which formed our national identity. In the rear of the Soviet empire, a large-scale resistance movement continued until the mid-1950s. The movement laid a new stage in the history of Ukraine. In seven decades, the Ukrainian army will have all the symbols of the UPA: anthem, greeting, flag (p. 34).

In 2014, once again the Ukrainians demonstrated their brilliant ability to be the nation-army. Soldiers, volunteers, and workers of creative professions stood up to protect the state borders. The people’s war for independence began. The people-army opposed the aggressor state, the marauding state, the mercenary state – the Russian Federation.

In the section “Why is Ukrainian Nationalism Necessary for Ukraine and the World?” the author emphasizes that the modern war with the empire is not a war for territories, but for a worldview (p. 40). In such a confrontation, it is extremely important that the Russian manipulative ideological machine is opposed by a powerful Ukrainian idea. Therefore, the Ukrainian nationalism with its democratic character meets the requirements of the time best. This ideology emphasizes the difference between both peoples in culture, language, views on history. The Ukrainian nationalism must put an end to the attempts of the Russian imperialism to threaten all civilized humanity in the 21st century.

Racism plays a significant role in the construction of the “Russian world” – a mixture of the legacy of the Romanov empire and the Bolsheviks who destroyed it. The main component of this worldview is social hatred of the wealthy and successful. The author believes that racism turns Russia’s war against Ukraine into genocide today. Mass atrocities, robberies, and murders in many Ukrainian settlements became clear evidence of this (p. 51).

We support the author’s opinion about the wasted two decades of independence, which contributed to the loss of Ukraine’s military potential. The political elite made gross mistakes and failed to distinguish rivals from enemies of the state. The Ukrainian society began to realize the importance of having its own armed forces after the start of the war with Russia in 2014.

In the section “Why Ukraine Lost a Hundred Years ago and Why it Can Win now”, V. Viatrovych substantiates his opinion about why we can win the war with Russia. Our ancestors went through a difficult historical path in the bloody 20th century. Today, the majority of residents of Ukraine consider themselves Ukrainians. Therefore, there is no problem with national self-awareness. The independence and integrity of Ukraine was recognized all over the world owing to the effective work of our diplomacy and diaspora. For the first time in our history, we are receiving powerful military aid. The entire civilized world stood against the enemy, which is attacking from the territory of two countries nowadays. Thus, we have much better conditions for victory than a hundred years ago. The author summarizes that peace with an aggressor country can cost more than war itself (pp. 67–69).

In the chapter “Terror against the Occupiers”, V. Viatrovych emphasizes that the Russian aggression has returned us to the past. The terms “underground”, “collaborator”, “occupier” have become relevant today. In enemy-controlled territory, manifestations of resistance are underground, and the struggle is quite often terror. Killing an occupier or a collaborator today is not a crime, but a deserved revenge and saving thousands of people (pp. 78–79).

The author highlights the role of S. Bandera and other figures of the national liberation movement positively (Chapters “Why Russia is still Afraid of Bandera”, “Why it is Useful to Remember the UPA”). V. Viatrovych draws attention to the fact that even nowadays Moscow opposes free Ukraine and anti-Soviet sentiments that are dangerous for it, because they are the ones that pose a threat to the Russian leadership. The Kremlin is still afraid of Bandera, because Bandera is the Ukrainian resistance, even in a hopeless situation, it is reliance on one’s own strength, it is people’s faith in their victory, it is the death of the Russian Empire (pp. 95–99).

The Ukrainian insurgent movement of the second half of the 20th century became an example of a long-term opposition to the Soviet occupation. The successful practice of insurgent warfare is still useful today, because it stands in the way of protecting Ukrainian women and children (p. 108).

Historical excursions and drawing parallels with modernity are a successful toolkit, with the help of which we can recognize a unique style of the author. In the section “Ukrainians are Indomitable – from the UPA to Azovstal” it is emphasized that under modern conditions we have to continue the same methods of struggle that Bandera followers carried out – the struggle for freedom. In the 20th century the Russian imperialism was dressed in the Soviet uniform (in Russian – himnastiorka), today it appeared in the uniform of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation. The ability to resist even under hopeless circumstances remains important for the Ukrainians. The heroic confrontation of the indomitable fighters of the Azovstal is similar to the underground struggle of the UPA (p. 117).

The dissident movement played an important role in the path to Ukrainian independence. Its first wave began in 1965. It entered history with the names of Ivan Dziuba, Viacheslav Chornovil, and Vasyl Stus. The resistance to the existing Soviet regime continued. In the 1970s, a new wave of arrests swept through Ukraine. The authorities brutally dealt with Ivan Svitlychny, Yevhen Sverstiuk, the indomitable Vasyl Stus and Viacheslav Chornovil, Ihor and Iryna Kalyntsi, Valery Marchenko, Vasyl Ovsyenko, Yevhen Proniuk, and Vasyl Lisovy. All of them were arrested. In 1976, with the creation of the Ukrainian public group to promote the implementation of the Helsinki agreements, the activists Levko Lukianenko, Myroslav Marynovych, Oksana Meshko, Mykola Rudenko, and the others were also arrested.

Brutal repressions did not destroy the spirit of freedom, but on the contrary, they radicalized the Ukrainian society. The dissident movement exploded with renewed vigor at the end of the 1980s. It was headed by former political prisoners – the Horyn brothers, Ihor and Iryna Kalyntsi, Levko Lukianenko, Viacheslav Chornovil.

A physical fatigue and exhaustion of the leaders of the resistance movement did not diminish their political activity. Ukraine began the path to independence owing to the adoption of important documents – Declaration on Sovereignty and Act of Proclamation of Independence (Chapter “People vs Dictators. How Dissidents can Destroy the Regime”, pp. 120–121).

In the book there are described in detail the stages of mass protest actions that took place on the Maidans, starting in 1990. The focus is on the treasonous policy of V. Yanukovich and the pseudo-patriots who supported his programme of transforming Ukraine into Russia (Chapter “Through the Maidans to Freedom”, pp. 137–141).

Gradually, the author leads to the idea: everything that Russia is doing today is not just war, but genocide of our people. This is a genocide about which more than one study can be written. Bloody pages of the Ukrainian history of the 20th century shed light on the modern interpretation of events. History, as you know, is a teacher of life. Therefore, a

modern generation is a witness to those events that will later be included in textbooks on the history of Europe. A story is unfolding before our eyes, about which we cannot remain silent. Mass murders, repressions, destruction of villages and cities, infrastructures are facts that are incomprehensible to the civilized world. The Russian leadership will be forced to answer for the crime of genocide against the Ukrainians (Chapter “It’s not just War – It’s Genocide”, pp. 162–168).

V. Viatrovych’s statement “Russian-speaking Ukraine is necessary for the enemy and it is mortally dangerous for the Ukrainians” is beyond doubt. It is clear that the empire seeks to create the Russian-speaking environment wherever its army steps and fill it with the Russian content. Russification undermines the roots of our statehood, promotes the advancement of the “Russian world” to the west. The language is one of the elements of our identity as a nation, an element of national individuality. The Ukrainians cannot underestimate the real threat posed by ignoring the native language not only in an everyday life, but also in the public sphere. Today, we are forced to defend not only the geographical borders of Ukraine, but also the linguistic ones, so that “the Russian world has no chance” to seize our territory (pp. 143–146).

The author’s optimistic opinion about the future day of victory is clearly visible in the book. The heroic defense of the indomitable cities of Kharkiv, Kyiv, Irpin, Bucha, Sumy, and Chernihiv is worthy of respect at the highest state level. The numerous losses of the Russian army and the heroic resistance of the Ukrainian people, the sanctions of foreign countries are designed to destroy the demographic and economic indicators of the aggressor country. The author believes that in the end all these things will undermine Russia from the inside once and for all (Chapter “Hell for the Invader”, p. 159).

The cooperation of the Ukrainians with the Baltic nations is a vivid example of confrontation since the days of the Soviet empire. Former insurgents from Ukraine and Lithuania managed to break the dictatorship of criminal prisoners in Stalin’s camps. The uprisings are meant in Vorkuta, Kengir, and Norilsk in 1953 – 1954. They dismantled the GULAG system and destroyed the USSR.

After the aggressor’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Baltic states accepted thousands of Ukrainian refugees. Among the allies that consistently support us, the most active, in the author’s opinion, is Lithuania. Common pages of history brought the two peoples closer together. Citizens of this small country, unlike many Europeans, understand the real threat from Russia too well (Chapter “With Lithuania against Moscow”, pp. 221–227).

Thus, in a number of thematic sections of his book, the author tried to explain why the war started. He shared unique information, gave an assessment of the event of the modern Ukrainian-Russian confrontation through the prism of history. The professional view of a specialist and an eyewitness to many events builds a clear historical background in our imagination, explains the causes and consequences of the aggression of a neighbouring state.

We hope that the V. Viatrovych’s book will be useful for learning the history of the confrontation between Ukraine and Russia. The author’s approach to the presentation of the material is made in a new format. This is a vision of the history of victories of the country that overcame fear and death and boldly chooses its way to civilized Europe.

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