

Introduction

International relations theory offers us various ways of interpreting the values that shape a nation's identity and its foreign policy interests. In this context, contemporary realism understands values as superfluous in terms of conceptual category, preferring to speak only of national interests as the sole valid resource for national consolidation¹.

For Realism, national identity would therefore be something “*immutable, objective, and eternal*”², serving national interests in a materialistic conception of the effects of the distribution of power among states.

However, in the case of Russia, the realist perspective may not be sufficient to explain the dynamics of Russian behavior in the context of the war in Ukraine. In contrast to the realist view, constructivist theory, whose most representative figure is Alexander Wendt, argues that the national identity of states is a process of construction³, and not something already “pre-existing” determined by geographical, cultural, or ethnic issues.

Realism refutes constructivism with the forceful and “Waltzian” assertion⁴ that “*reason of state can overcome any constructed identity*”. This assertion may be valid in most cases, but there are examples where we could say that it is identity that constructs and guides the national interest (as Wendt would say to Waltz). The intervention in the Vietnam War, for example, was not based on realistic parameters but on the identity that the US had established itself as the champion of anti-communism in the world⁵. This means that there is no logical reasoning based on a true US national interest for intervening in Vietnam.

Karl Deutsch⁶ confirms these assertions by emphasizing that “*national identities are not natural or spontaneous, but social constructs that can be malleable over time and with the right policies*”. At the same time, he argues that communication communities play a

¹ Tsygankov, A. “Vladimir Putin's last stand: the sources of Russia's Ukraine policy”, Post-Soviet Affairs, 2015.

² Baqués, J., “¿Cómo funciona el Mundo? Una perspectiva desde la geopolítica”. Tyrant Lo Blanch, Valencia, 2023.

³ Palacio Urrutia, G. “Análisis de las causas de la invasión rusa a Ucrania desde la perspectiva de la teoría constructivista de las relaciones internacionales”. (*Analysis of the causes of the Russian invasion of Ukraine from the perspective of the constructivist theory of international relations*). Revista de Política Internacional, 2022.

⁴ With reference to Kenneth Waltz, father of structural realism, who asserted that the values and identity of states are not determining factors in international politics. States (which are immersed in an anarchic environment of power distribution) are seen as units that seek survival in a competitive environment, prioritizing security and power over other objectives. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Kenneth-N-Waltz>

⁵ Baqués, J. (2023) op.cit.

⁶ Karl Wolfgang Deutsch (July 21, 1912 – November 1, 1992), He was a social and political scientist from Prague whose work focused on the study of war and peace, nationalism, cooperation, and communication.

fundamental role in transmitting this sense of identity, although it is true that just as these communities are born, they can also be destroyed. With this reasoning, the concept of national consciousness could be defined as a by-product of these two processes.⁷

But then, how do the construction of a national identity and the role of transmission communities develop in the formation of a solid national consciousness? The answer can be found in constructivism's emphasis on the power of narrative ("*discursive power*"), which encompasses not only its control or censorship (very much in vogue in today's societies), but also the construction of reality in a positive way⁸. Narrative aspires to build a Collective mind⁹, so society's behavior would be closely linked to its capacity for penetration¹⁰.

At this point, and in the context of the conflict in Ukraine, it is worth highlighting Putin's merit in having turned the invasion of the neighboring country into a matter of national interest, where censorship, selective repression, and the selection of narratives are indispensable elements in rewriting and shaping the project of building a new Russian national identity. All of this is motivated by deep-rooted internal divisions in Ukraine that have led to strong ethnic nationalism and a Kremlin narrative based on neo-Nazi glorification¹¹ which it considers to be in the national interest to curb¹².

The dilemma between the “perpetuity” and the “perpetuation” of the conflict

The title of this article refers to the presumed “perpetuity” of the conflict in Ukraine, which would respond to an uncertain future regarding the possibilities for its resolution. This

⁷ Baqués, J. (2023) op.cit.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ “It is the deepest layer of national personality, articulating all levels of reality and the values of each structure and each era.” González Páramo, J.M “Concepto de conciencia nacional”, 2014 [Dialnet-ConceptoDeConcienciaNacional-2774546.pdf](https://dialnet-conceptodeconcienciainacional-2774546.pdf)

¹⁰ “*The permanence of identities does not depend—ultimately—on one's own behavior or the reactions of others, but rather, above all, on our ability to maintain a coherent narrative that tells us who we are and where our lives are headed.* Morales Hernández, J. “*Ontological security and perceptions of threat: Russia and NATO enlargement*”, *Revista de Estudios en Seguridad Internacional*, Vol. 4, No. 2, (2018), pp. 1-15

¹¹ <https://leadership.ng/why-neo-nazi-problem-in-ukraine-persists-analysts/>

¹² According to Eleanor Knott (2022), “Russia (claims) that it is launching a ‘special military operation’ to save Ukraine, a state allegedly dominated by Nazis that needs to be demilitarized and denazified. However, such a claim makes no political, factual, or discursive sense when Ukraine is currently led by democratically elected President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who is Jewish, lost his family in the Holocaust, and speaks Russian. Knott, E. (2022) “Existential nationalism: Russia’s war against Ukraine”. Department of Methodology, LSE, London (UK)

perpetuity refers to an “endless, long, or incessant duration” of something for which there is no “expiration date” and therefore no control or ability to influence its end¹³.

Talking about the perpetuity of the conflict in Ukraine therefore responds to a widespread perception that both sides are in a situation of stalemate and mutual attrition that seems to be leading nowhere and from which no possible winner is emerging. This means that it would not be possible to exercise effective control over progress towards a final solution or to predict its possible duration. This circumstance, coupled with the continuous failures of mediation and negotiation by all parties involved, would consolidate the “perpetuity” of the conflict.

However, when we talk about possible “perpetuation”, we are referring to “*the act of preserving or maintaining something for a long time,*” which would imply intentionality and the ability to control its duration¹⁴.

In this context, although most analysts point to the fact that we are in a situation of perpetuity (uncontrolled duration of the conflict, albeit with a favorable trend for Russia), there are other schools of thought, such as Nationalist¹⁵ and Eurasianist ones,¹⁶ which suggest a possible Russian strategy of perpetuation (intentional and controlled conflict), encouraged by geopolitical circumstances that seem to give Putin an advantage over control of the war¹⁷.

These circumstances are the result of Trump's overwhelming rise to power, which has led to the distancing of his traditional allies and the inability of the US to provide a quick

¹³ RAE definition

¹⁴ RAE definition

¹⁵ “*The predominant tradition of thought in contemporary Russia has undoubtedly been nationalist or statist, linked to the idea of derzhavnost: “great power status” [...] Its current relevance began with the shift in 1996 to the “Primakov” doctrine, which emphasized the “ability to combine the staunch defense of Russia's interests with an openness to cooperation on matters of common interest” [...] However, “Accumulated frustration and resentment now make it more difficult for Moscow to defend its interests with a rational strategy, planning for the long-term consequences and adapting the means to the ends”* Morales Hernández, J. “The foreign policy expert community in Russia” opinion document 92/2018. IEEE, 2018.

¹⁶ This movement “believes that there is a ‘clash of civilizations’ between Western-driven globalization and the peoples who resist it, such as Russia [...] It arose [...] as an extreme form of nationalism that rejected the pernicious European influence on Russian culture.”. *Ibidem*

¹⁷ It should be noted here that, in order not to deviate from the objectives pursued in this article, we have not addressed a possible second tendency toward perpetuation, this time from the Western side, explained by offensive neorealism: “bloodletting,” which consists of supporting Ukraine in order to wear Russia down. This may be of interest to the EU and NATO: the longer the war lasts and the more Russia is worn down, the less likely it is that it will subsequently attack the Baltic States.

and effective solution to the conflict (which Trump had already promised before his arrival).

The geopolitical impact generated by the new US administration and its growing disinterest in European problems has created a breeding ground that serves Putin's interests well, giving him a strategic advantage that allows him to manage the “Tempo” of military operations practically at will and explains the latest resurgence of the Russian offensive¹⁸.

Given these premises, it is worth asking: Is the possible “perpetuity” of the conflict due to the ineffectiveness of the West, or rather to the unwillingness of the parties involved to resolve it? Could we flip the coin and consider Putin's possible interest in the “perpetuation” of the conflict because it does not suit him (in the current circumstances) to reach a peace agreement that would clearly favor him¹⁹?

This possibility of perpetuation that we are discussing would therefore focus more on maintaining the “path” (redefining and adapting Russian interests), than on seeking the “end” (stopping the war and creating the right conditions for lasting peace); while, in Putin's eyes, occupying the top spot on the international security agenda restores Russia's lost historical importance and increasingly enhances its status as a great power.

This leads us to speculate whether Putin may have been waiting for the arrival of the new Trump administration to give new impetus to the war, thereby activating something akin to a “second phase” of his “special operation” and possibly confirming this redefinition²⁰ of Putin's interests adapted to the current geopolitical circumstances.

¹⁸ [El mapa de la guerra de Ucrania: este es el terreno que está ganando Rusia y las zonas donde presiona a las tropas de Zelenski](#)
[Rusia acumula fuerzas en Kursk para intensificar su ofensiva sobre Sumi, según Kiev - Infobae](#)
[Rusia toma localidad en las afueras del estratégico bastión ucraniano de Pokrovsk - SWI swissinfo.ch](#)
<https://www.elmundo.es/opinion/editorial/2025/09/08/68bdb516e9cf4a7e028b4580.html>

¹⁹ It should be remembered at this point that, at present, no peace agreement contemplates the possibility of Russia renouncing the conquered territory.

²⁰ We speak of a “redefinition” of interests if we assume that Putin's primary objective in February 2022 was the invasion of Ukrainian territory, an objective that he has logically had to abandon.

Constructivism and the search for Russian national identity

According to Wendt's constructivist theory of social identity, national identities are constructed through interactions between international actors and the pursuit of mutual recognition. These identities respond to an evolutionary process based on a certain foundation of stable cultural attributes that remain open to adjustment and transformation²¹.

Wendt denies that the identities and interests of actors pre-exist the interaction that occurs between them, asserting that they develop from that interaction and then continue to redefine themselves over time. Putin seemed to be losing, yet now he appears to be winning after Trump ceded him a renewed and dominant position in controlling negotiations with his Western counterparts, reaffirming the Russian president's interests and chances of winning the war.

This position of dominance reinforces Putin's intentions to continue shaping Russian national identity, which means that it is increasingly important to curb his ambitions before a national consciousness of firm opposition to the West and greater Russian "greatness" becomes entrenched.

Then, is the formation of a new Russian national identity the real driving force behind Putin's aspirations? Taking into account the Russian president's essay "*On the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians*" and the analysis of the causes of the invasion of Ukraine from the perspective of constructivist theory²², we can find four characteristics of Russian identity that confirm this:

First, Russian exceptionalism, which refers to the unique character of the nation and Russia's calling to play a fundamental role in history. "We were able to develop rules for interaction after World War II, and we were able to reach an agreement in Helsinki in the

²¹ Palacio Urrutia, G. "Análisis de las causas de la invasión rusa a Ucrania desde la perspectiva de la teoría constructivista de las relaciones internacionales". (*Analysis of the causes of the Russian invasion of Ukraine from the perspective of the constructivist theory of international relations*). Revista de Política Internacional, 2022.

²² *Ibidem*.

1970s²³. *Our common duty is to resolve this fundamental challenge [building a more stable world order] in this new stage of development*"²⁴.

Second, pride in belonging to a powerful empire throughout history that has been able to defeat Napoleon and Hitler. "More than two thousand soldiers became heroes of the Soviet Union (...). This indomitable generation fought, these people gave their lives for our future, for us. To forget their feat is to betray our grandparents, mothers, and fathers"²⁵. As Henry Kissinger further stated, "Russia has started more wars than any other contemporary power, but at the same time it has prevented the domination of Europe by a single power by resisting Napoleon and Hitler"²⁶.

Thirdly, the notion of collectivism and the vindication of communal work, for the good of the motherland and in contrast to Western individualism. It should be noted here that Russian collectivism would historically serve to develop a powerful war economy, but at the cost of unprecedented state control over the countryside, nationalized land, and a peasantry turned into state employees²⁷.

And finally, the conflict between the West and Russia, a key attribute of Russian identity that positions it as an alternative civilization to a decadent West, and which is based on victimhood and a lack of respect for Russia's claim to be a great power²⁸. "*Scholars have established that recognition of a power by other great powers reduces assertiveness and revisionist attitudes, while lack of recognition encourages precisely such behavior*"²⁹.

²³ The ten principles governing relations between the participating States of the Helsinki Final Act were adopted at a favorable political moment: that of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (July 30-August 1, 1975) [...]. The states in the Soviet sphere emphasized cooperation with respect for certain principles of the Act, such as territorial integrity, inviolability of borders, and non-intervention in internal affairs, in addition to cooperation in economic and scientific matters. It is paradoxical to think that the conflict in Ukraine calls into question the very principles of this Helsinki Act. Rubio Plo, Antonio R. "La inviolabilidad de las fronteras y el Acta final de Helsinki" Real Instituto Elcano (2015)

²⁴ Putin, V. 2023. "On the historical unity of russians and ucranians". This is one of Putin's many appeals to the "Great Patriotic War," which serves as the foundation for his national identity project.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁶ In fact, of all the countries with which Russia shares a border, Norway is the only one with which it has not yet gone to war.

²⁷ Galeotti, M. "Una historia breve de Rusia: Cómo entender la nación más compleja del mundo" (*A Brief History of Russia: Understanding the World's Most Complex Nation*) (ENSAYO) Capitán Swing, 2022.

²⁸ Colom, G., Baqués, J. 2023. "El entorno estratégico tras la guerra de Ucrania" Tyrant Lo Blanch, Valencia, 2023

²⁹ Tsygankov, A. "From Global Order to Global Transition. Russia and the Future of International Relations". Russia in Global Affairs, 2019.

War as a means of constructing national identity

In its expansion towards the East, Russian identity has always been challenged and reinvented, whether by Peter I or Catherine the Great (attempting to open windows to Europe), or by the Bolsheviks (presenting it as the cradle of the post-national global revolution). The Orthodox faith associated with this expansion—understood as the only genuine form of Christianity—and the social conservatism that accompanied it, would ultimately lead Russia to reject the increasingly degenerate fashions of Western society as a whole³⁰.

From the successful resistance to the Golden Horde in the 14th century to the defeat of Napoleon in the “Patriotic War of 1812,” Tsar Alexander I, hailed as the “savior” of Europe, ended up occupying half the continent and becoming a threat to the rest of the nations.

It is worth noting here that Napoleon stated after his defeat that “*The French had proven themselves worthy of victory, and the Russians worthy of invincibility.*”

This leads us to reflect on how dangerous it can be when a regime convinces itself of its own invincibility. If we extrapolate this to the current context, we find a Russia that, while not yet convinced, is facing internal cohesion challenges that could act as a catalyst for this process.

The next important milestone in the construction of Russian identity came after Hitler's final defeat in his attempt to invade the USSR. The Iron Curtain would be the culmination of an era that would ultimately isolate Russia from the rest of Europe, turning it from that moment on into the social construct of the “other” (as an enemy), and reinforcing from then on a continuous ideological resistance to admitting Russia into Western institutions³¹.

With the fall of the USSR in 1991, any vestige of Russian identity would disappear almost completely; the tsarist regime had given way to Sovietization, and Sovietization to fragmentation and chaos, all as a consequence of the “great paradox” that has always

³⁰ Galeotti, M. “Una historia breve de Rusia: Cómo entender la nación más compleja del mundo” (ENSAYO) Capitán Swing, 2022.

³¹ Bremmer, Ian (2023) [who runs the world? - GZERO Media](#)

haunted Russia, having formed as a great empire long before it had consolidated itself as a nation³².

The 15 republics into which the USSR fragmented left the territory of the current Russian Federation occupied and legitimized by barely 41% ethnic Russians, so it was necessary to build a nation institutionally and territorially³³.

There was then a pressing need to formulate a foreign policy that would restore pride and self-esteem by building a solid cultural identity, paying attention not only to the relationship with the “other” (the West), but also to the ethnic minorities of the former Soviet republics as part of the “us.”

The post-imperial reaction following the fall of the USSR and Russia's subsequent decline was what ultimately brought Putin to the Kremlin and marked the beginning of an effort to build a new identity for the country. To this end, efforts were focused on compensating for the heavy ideological burden of the past with constant appeals to the “Great Patriotic War”³⁴.

This was later joined by the use of victimization with the expansion of NATO³⁵, which became a threat after the 2008 Bucharest summit and offensive actions in Georgia, Crimea, Donbas, and Syria³⁶. These actions would be constantly justified by Putin as “*defensive responses to Western attempts to isolate and marginalize his country by denying it its global status*”³⁷.

In February 2022, the culmination of Russian aggression would be confirmed with the invasion of Ukraine and an undeclared war on the West, confirming what Marx said:

³² Galeotti, M. (2022) Óp. Cit.

³³ *Ibídem*.

³⁴ “*World War II was the most useful historical moment for rebuilding modern Russia and its national identity, [...] The myth tells the story of how the Soviets bravely defended their homeland in a patriotic war of liberation against evil Nazi Germany [...], the heroism of the Russians who rose up to achieve a triumphant victory that brought freedom to half of Europe and turned the USSR into a global superpower*”. Preen, A. (2023) “*Putin’s retelling of the Great Patriotic War myth and the construction of Russian national identity*”. [Putin’s retelling of the Great Patriotic War myth and the construction of Russian national identity | Australian and New Zealand Journal of European Studies](#)

³⁵ In 2004, seven Central European countries were approved for NATO membership, including the three Baltic republics that had once been part of the USSR.

³⁶ “[Siria fue la escuela de guerra de Rusia para luego invadir a Ucrania](#)” - [BBC News Mundo](#)

³⁷ “[The Russian Federation] intends to devise a strategy to maintain its status as a major power once the war ends or if it becomes protracted, knowing that Western powers will reduce economic and technological relations with Russia as much as possible, seeking to isolate it from the rest of the world”. IEEE (2023). Estrategias de Seguridad Nacional: La competencia entre grandes potencias. Documento de Investigación 02/2023 [DIEEINVO2_2023_EstrategiasdeSeguridad.pdf](#)

“Wars test nations (...) War is the supreme test for social systems that have lost their vitality”.

Putin needed to give new impetus to his claims to make Russia “great” again, and wars always tend to accelerate the pace of change³⁸. That is why the invasion of Ukraine has only reinforced this narrative of victimization and the struggle for the “restoration” of a strong Russia in an attempt to regain the longed-for vitality of its identity as a nation. This mentality has only further complicated the options for a possible peaceful resolution.

Ukraine's role in the “mythification” of Russian identity

Russia's identity has historically been linked to Ukraine, from the origins of “Kievan Rus” to Putin's contemporary vision of “Greater Russia” and his justification for intervention in Ukraine.

In this sense, the creation of historical “myths”³⁹ is a hallmark of the formation of nationalism, practiced by almost all national movements that have ever existed and having a profound impact on the aforementioned “constructed” national identity.

Russia is also a country that has never had clear geographical, cultural, or ethnic borders, so it has always been eager to acquire national myths that would help unite and define its identity. Catherine “the Great” already said that *“the only way I can defend my borders is by expanding them”*⁴⁰.

This idea has, in a way, marked the path towards the search for Russian identity, in which Ukraine has always played (in Putin's eyes) a fundamental role. *“Our spiritual, human, and civilizational ties, forged over centuries and originating from the same source, have been strengthened by common trials, achievements, and victories. (...) They are in the hearts and memories of those who live in modern Russia and Ukraine. (...) Together we*

³⁸ Donnelly C. “La guerra en tiempos de paz: cómo afrontar un mundo que cambia a gran velocidad”. Colección monografías. CIDOB 2017.

³⁹ Alexia Preen (2023), Citing Bouchard (2013), he defines national myth as “an effective way to unify the members of a nation and distinguish the national ‘Self’ from a foreign ‘Other’, because myths offer a shared understanding of past events. This shared understanding, in turn, imbues a nation's past, present, and future with a set of values, ideals, and beliefs.

⁴⁰ Galeotti, M. (2022) Óp. Cit.

*have always been and will always be much stronger and more successful. Because we are one people*⁴¹.

These myths demonstrate some of the characteristics of the exaltation of national consciousness, such as self-glorification of the state, self-whitewashing, and the defamation of “others,” (Other-maligning), all of which shape the different ways in which nations interpret history⁴².

In this sense, Putin is trying to influence how Russia should interpret its own history by creating a national “pedigree” that helps him embody a reconstruction project that serves the political needs of the moment, always free of internal contradictions and avoiding double interpretations.

Possible scenarios for the evolution of the conflict and its repercussions on Russian identity

In order to put the future possibilities of the war in Ukraine into context, it is necessary to take into account two crucial aspects that undoubtedly influence Russia's pretexts for justifying its invasion.

The first is the aforementioned need to consolidate a renewed Russian national identity, based on Putin's own idea that “Russians and Ukrainians were one people” and that the wall built to separate them is the result of deliberate efforts by the West to undermine this common identity using a policy of “divide and conquer”⁴³. Existential nationalism is therefore Russia's motivation for waging war⁴⁴.

The second is the failure of the West's deterrence strategy⁴⁵ in the face of indicators that for years have pointed to the possibility of an invasion of Ukrainian territory⁴⁶, which has

⁴¹ Putin, V. (2023) “On the historical unity of russians and ucranians”

⁴² Mearsheimer, J. (2011) “Kissing Cousins: Nationalism and Realism” University of Chicago, 2011.

⁴³ Putin, V. (2023) “On the historical unity of russians and ucranians”

⁴⁴ Knott, E. (2022) Óp. Cit.

⁴⁵ Xiyang Z. “The U.S. Deterrence Strategy and the Russia-Ukraine Conflict”. Foreign Policy, 2022

⁴⁶ Mearsheimer, J (2019) “why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West’s Fault. The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin”.
<https://www.mearsheimer.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Why-the-Ukraine-Crisis-Is.pdf>

ultimately served to add to Russian rhetoric the need to counter NATO's expansionism due to this permanent perception of a threat to its ontological security⁴⁷.

Russia uses the combination of these two aspects to its advantage to define its foreign policy, justifying a national interest based on identity, inherited from the political-religious doctrine of the "Third Rome"⁴⁸, and the importance of upholding the spirit of a great empire in the face of Western oppression.

With this objective in mind, we can contemplate the likely evolution of the conflict from three variables that impact the progress of a definitive solution.

The first variable is the role that Russia's strategic allies have been playing since the beginning of the invasion. Countries such as China, North Korea, Iran, Belarus, and other non-Western nations have always supported Russia or at least have not openly opposed its actions⁴⁹.

The second is the role of energy and natural resources in the conflict. Europe's dependence on Russian energy resources influences international dynamics and relations with Russia, limiting the scope and effects of Western sanctions.

And the last is the international response to the Russian invasion. The military and economic support provided to Ukraine, led by the United States and the European Union, has clearly shown how difficult it is for countries to maintain the unity necessary to confront the Russian threat.

Taking into account the limitations imposed by the three variables considered, we could talk about three possible future scenarios:

A first scenario in which pressure from the Ukrainian army ultimately causes Russia to retreat. This situation seems the least likely given the current state of the war and the intensification of Russian actions on Ukrainian territory. An unconditional Russian

⁴⁷ Morales Hernández, J. "Seguridad ontológica y percepciones de amenaza: Rusia ante la ampliación de la OTAN", *Revista de Estudios en Seguridad Internacional*, Vol. 4, No. 2, (2018), pp. 1-15

⁴⁸ *Ibídem*

⁴⁹ This can be seen in the UN vote to condemn Russia's aggression on March 2, 2022. There were 141 votes in favor of condemnation, 5 votes against condemnation (Belarus, North Korea, Eritrea, Syria, and Russia), and 35 abstentions. The 40 votes that did not condemn Russia represent almost half of the world's population (including China and India), but also Pakistan and Bangladesh (which together have three times the population of Russia). All of this confirms that this vote cannot be described as "successful." (Baqués, 2023)

withdrawal is considered unfeasible, as there seems to be no possibility of Russia relinquishing the territory it has already conquered.

Furthermore, Putin's efforts to forge a new identity for Russia, based on fragments of its history, and to make it a respected power, leave him with no alternative but to win this war. It is essential that the Russian leader's constant references to history are not revealed to be clever invocations of a reinvented past that will ultimately condemn his people to a new era of decline. This could spell the end for Putin, given that, to quote Marx again, "*history repeats itself, first as tragedy, then as farce,*" and today's Russians are not those of the 1970s.

With this premise, contemplating the possibility of a Russian withdrawal would be beyond any logical reasoning, assuming that, regardless of the final agreement or situation that could be reached, Putin would have "already won" long ago.

It is true that the relative gains and the true scale of his victory are yet to be determined, and will undoubtedly depend on Russia's ambitions at the time, or even on a possible "renewed" level of ambition on Putin's part if the Western bloc continues with its apparent ineffectiveness. This is undoubtedly the issue that causes the greatest uncertainty and strategic confusion in the West within the real possibilities for resolving the conflict.

In addition, the consequences of this scenario in the regional context would also have to be assessed, as a Russian withdrawal could lead China to reinforce its proven "pro-Russian neutrality"⁵⁰ with even more explicit support for the Kremlin (especially if Putin's continuity were threatened)⁵¹.

In the second scenario, Russia would ultimately prevail over Ukraine by forcing the country to capitulate. In this case, it is important to consider the ways in which Russia could prevail over Ukraine. The manner in which victory is achieved is important because the consequences could be varied. For example, if Russia were to be more assertive in its use of tactical nuclear weapons to subdue Ukrainian forces, its current alliance with China could be compromised, leading to Putin's isolation. It should not be forgotten that,

⁵⁰ [Sentido geopolítico: la "neutralidad prorrusa" de China – Red de Estudios Globales Atlas-Polaris](#)

⁵¹ Colom, G., Baqués, J. (2023) Óp. Cit.

in order to achieve its strategic interests, China has an interest in exporting an image of itself as a reliable partner and guarantor of global stability.

On the other hand, if victory came as a result of Ukraine's surrender on the battlefield and by conventional means, the grand objective of building Russian identity and reinforcing its image as a powerful nation (finally overcoming Western oppression) would have a profound impact on the Russian people, strengthening internal leadership and shaping a new global geopolitical landscape in which Russia would be proclaimed de facto as the most dangerous nation in the world⁵².

The third scenario represents a paradigmatic case of a “frozen conflict” in which a status quo and a border exclusion zone would finally be achieved, enabling the formation of an Azov-Crimea corridor that would serve Russia's strategic interests. In exchange, Russia would commit to not continuing to gain ground with the invasion, being this solution, (of dubious reliability) the closest approach to a policy of appeasement that would ultimately prove to be a bad investment for the future⁵³.

In this situation, the West would have to accept the annexation of the territory already conquered, making a fair peace agreement for Ukraine definitively impossible. This partial victory could become a more complete victory if Ukraine finally confirmed its neutrality and abandoned its intentions to join both NATO and the European institutions.

The problem is that the achievement of this scenario would give Russia the possibility of moving towards the final capitulation of Ukraine (second scenario), while, as mentioned above, the uncertainty of Russia's current intentions and the possible evolution of its level of aggression would leave the West without the possibility of regaining (if it ever had it) the strategic initiative needed to win.

⁵² Insofar as it would be demonstrated that aggression and offensive actions provide a strategic advantage that opens the door to their application in the future.

⁵³ Rodríguez Suanzes, G. (2025) “The American “Grand Strategy” and Realism in the 21st Century: Decline or Hegemony?” Opinion paper 38/2025. IEEE, 2025

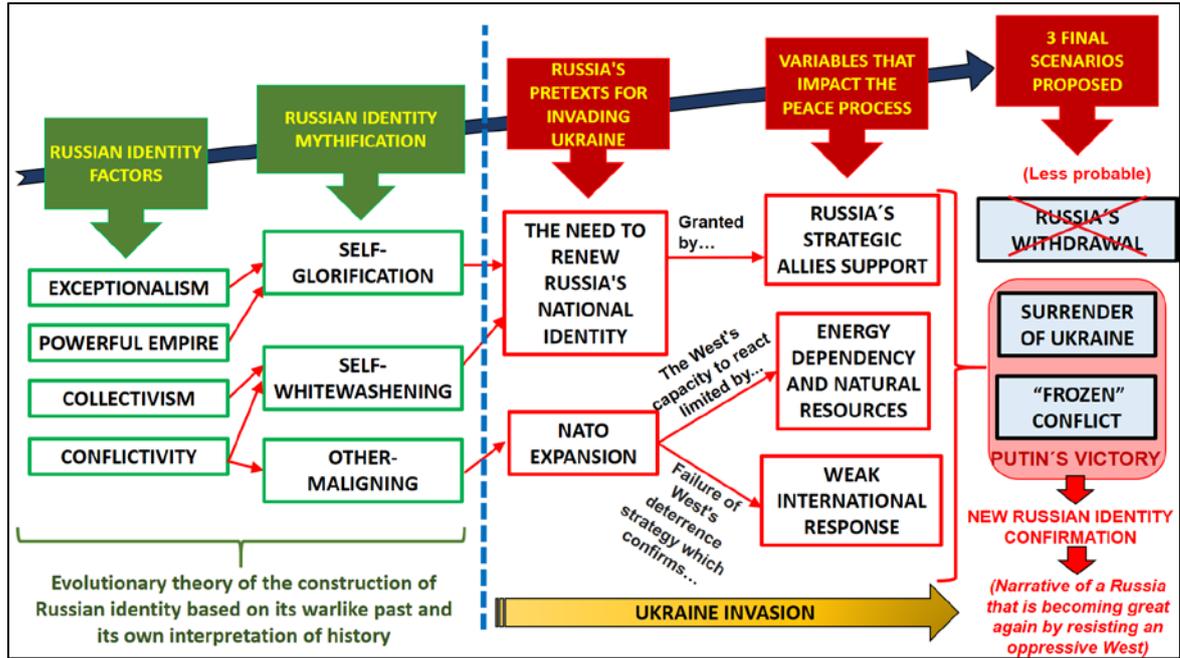


Figure 1. Summary table of theories on Russia's search for identity in the context of the war in Ukraine.

Another point of view: Putin's personal ambition and his legacy

From everything discussed so far, it can be deduced that Putin's current aspirations seem focused on the national interest of returning Russia to a privileged position in the international order and establishing itself as the great power that stoically resisted the injustices of the West.

However, from a more personal point of view, Putin's ambition could go beyond purely “patriotic” reasons and also seek to be remembered as the great savior and instigator of the resurgence of Russian identity. This would imply that, in addition to victory in Ukraine, Putin would have to consolidate a necessary regime change for Russia that would definitively isolate it from the West. Achieving this goal would only be possible by ensuring a good legacy⁵⁴.

⁵⁴ “Putin is unwilling to halt an invasion that, among other things, serves to impose on his long-suffering fellow citizens the autocratic regime that, like all dictators throughout history, he wants to enjoy for life and, moreover, leave as his legacy”. Rodríguez Garat, J. (El Debate) https://www.eldebate.com/internacional/20250709/ucrania-despues-huracan-trump_315082.html

This would imply that, in his long-term strategy, Putin is currently thinking about his possible successor, who would have to pursue a policy of firm opposition to the West as the key to maintaining Russia's identity and its renewed superpower status.

Therefore, the question that needs to be asked is: would Russia's victory in Ukraine really mean the end of the war? If we are correct about Putin's ambitions, the answer is no. It would mean the end of the war with Ukraine—at least for the time being—but not with the West, and if Putin's legacy prevails, it is only a matter of time before we see a new offensive or invasion on European territory.

The best option for Europe is therefore for Russia to fare “badly” once Putin is no longer president, as this would open up the possibility of a new Russian government closer to Europe⁵⁵ in order to avoid a new era of Russian decline. This possibility is undoubtedly one of the best cards that Europe and Ukraine can play today to continue resisting the invader.

Conclusions

Among the key factors hindering the resolution of the war in Ukraine is a strong component of the construction and manipulation of Russian national identity. This quest to redefine identity has made the Ukrainian conflict a persistent and difficult-to-resolve phenomenon, far removed from prospects for lasting peace and, therefore, from a possible end to the historical confrontation between Russia and the West.

The theory of constructivism reinforces this conclusion and broadens the vision of realism, which argues that states focus solely on the pursuit of balance of power and the pursuit of very specific national interests—such as survival and increasing relative power—which operate outside of a national identity considered pre-existing and immutable from a realist perspective.

⁵⁵ “Hitler was just one of many dreamers who envisioned a Reich that would last a thousand years. All of them have failed, and Putin will too—in time, Russia will return to being a democracy—but, unfortunately, it will be humanity that pays the price, not the real culprit”. (Ibidem)

The stimulation of Russian nationalism through appropriate narratives, the creation of myths, and the manipulation of history constitutes the true motivational basis of the conflict from a constructivist point of view. It helps us to understand a little better the objectives and aspirations of this complex nation, but above all, it helps us to understand why it is so difficult to defeat it.

In this context, the obstacles presented by the West to developing the most appropriate strategies against Russia are well known to the Kremlin, which uses them to its advantage by developing Russian discourse postulates of victimization by NATO expansionism and denial of Ukraine's sovereign identity, which, together with appeals to its historical past, constitute the main narratives for the construction of this new national identity.

Among the obstacles mentioned, the EU's unproductive role in managing the crisis stands out, whether as an actor imposing sanctions or in assisting Ukraine, as well as its limitations due to internal disparities and dependence on Russian resources. All of this has an impact on the planning and development of decisive actions that could bring about a definitive end to the war and lasting peace for Europe.

In addition, Trump's arrival has led to a lack of clear consensus within NATO and a distancing from the EU, which further conditions the effectiveness of the Western response and has complicated efforts to reach a negotiated solution.

Based on the analysis carried out, it is really difficult to predict the possible trajectories of the conflict in Ukraine, let alone the options for a peaceful resolution. If we accept the Kremlin's desire for "perpetuation" (supported by this constant redefinition of its identity), the development of the conflict would be contingent on the different ways in which the methods of warfare evolve, from conventional and hybrid (as we are seeing with the use of drones) to the possibility of nuclear weapons being used.

With this premise, the possible future scenarios would have as a common factor the potential to drastically redefine international relations, and especially (as it affects and interests Russia) the role of China.

Therefore, given the global strategic landscape—taking into account the variables mentioned above—and as long as the Western bloc does not gain the strategic initiative,

it is very difficult to imagine that Russia will not emerge stronger than before in one way or another.

The sum of all the aspects analyzed ultimately leads us to two possible conclusions. The first is that the (intentional) “perpetuation” of the conflict seems more likely than its (uncontrolled) “perpetuity,” and the second is that the West seems doomed to the fact that only if Putin strikes again will it perhaps be possible to unblock the appropriate mechanisms to activate an effective defense in Europe.

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