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RUSSIA’S WAR AGAINST UKRAINE AS A STRATEGIC PRIORITY OF GREAT BRITAIN?

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«British Decline» is a conceptual foundation for understanding the foreign policy of the United Kingdom from the end of World War II to the present day. Its essence lies in the uncertainty of the state’s overall vision of itself on the international stage, its mission, and foreign policy priorities [1]. Brexit became, on the one hand, a vivid manifestation of this crisis but, on the other, an attempt by the British establishment to overcome the decline and cease «wandering» within the so-called «circles of British identification» which Prime Minister Winston Churchill, after World War II, outlined as: Anglo-American relations, interaction with Europe, and cooperation with the Commonwealth of Nations [1, p. 811]. This step led to the release of some strategic documents that has a direct impact on the course of relations between Ukraine and the UK today.

The purpose of the study is to analyze the russia’s war against Ukraine role plays in the UK’s strategic documents.

First of all, it should be mentioned the «Global Britain in a competitive age. The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy» from March 2021 where Boris Johnson’s government outlined its vision of Britain’s role in the world after Brexit, as well as its defense and foreign policy goals up to 2030 [2].

The key point of this Review, illustrated the state’s core values in the realm of foreign policy, is the follows: «*A commitment to universal human rights, the rule of law, free speech, and fairness and equality. These same essential values will continue to guide all aspects of our national security and international policy in the decade ahead, especially in the face of rising authoritarianism and the persistence of extremist ideologies*» [2, p. 13]. In the Ukrainian context, the most important point is the acknowledgment of the growing influence of authoritarianism on the international stage, because one of the reasons for russia’s invasion to Ukraine is the authoritarian regime of putin and his personal perception of Ukraine’s role in the world.

In the Review from 2021, the issue of Ukraine is mentioned in two contexts: (i) «...also support others in the Eastern European neighborhood and beyond to build their resilience to state threats. This includes Ukraine, where we will continue to build the capacity of its armed forces» [2, p. 61]; (ii) «...strong support to the OSCE's Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine and the Council of Europe's attribution of Russia's hostile and destabilising activity» [2, p. 24]. Meanwhile, the issue of terrorism, for example, is identified as the global problem and discussed in economic, political, social, and other vectors.

In March 2023, the «Integrated Review Refresh 2023. Responding to a more contested and volatile world» was published [3]. Foreword from the Prime Minister Rishi Sunak contains the following point: «...Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, weaponization of energy and food supplies, and irresponsible nuclear rhetoric, combined with China's more aggressive stance in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait, are threatening to create a world defined by danger, disorder and division – and an international order more favorable to authoritarianism» [3, p. 2]. Notably, unlike the Review from 2021, where the word «Ukraine» was mentioned twice, the Review from 2023 appears it for 57 times. For comparison, the word «China» was mentioned 27 times in the Review from 2021, and 39 times in the Review from 2023.

It is also significant that the Review from 2023 identifies Russia's invasion as a factor that reshapes the strategic framework of British foreign policy. In comparison with 2021, the phrase «Russia's hostile and destabilising activity» has been replaced by a more unequivocal one, making the Ukrainian context crucial for all of Europe: «...Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine. Putin's act of aggression has precipitated the largest military conflict, refugee, and energy crisis in Europe since the end of the Second World War» [3, p. 7].

The document confirms that one of the UK's core priorities is the security of the Euro-Atlantic region. In the short- to medium-term, the threat posed by Russia to European security is identified as the most pressing issue, with the document stating that European collective security is inextricably linked to the outcomes of the war in Ukraine: «The most pressing national security and foreign policy priority in the short-to-medium term is to address the threat posed by Russia to European security. A vital part of this is supporting Ukraine to reassert its sovereignty and denying Russia any strategic benefit from its invasion. As we update our Russia strategy, the UK's objective will be to contain and challenge Russia's ability and intent to disrupt the security of the UK, the Euro-Atlantic and the wider international order» [3, p. 11].

Nevertheless, the document also notes growing tensions in the Indo-Pacific region, the global consequences of which are assessed as being greater than those of Russia's war against Ukraine. Additionally: «The threat from Iran has increased, as demonstrated by its advancing nuclear programme, regionally destabilizing behavior, and its

actions in the UK – including 15 credible threats by the Iranian regime to kill or kidnap British or UK-based individuals since 2022. The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea is also seeking to develop its nuclear capabilities while pursuing regionally destabilising activity through missile tests that threaten its neighbours» [3, p. 8].

However, Britain indirectly views the war in Ukraine as part of the global system, identifying it as a factor that affects, for example, China’s foreign policy ambitions: *«The CCP is increasingly explicit in its aim to shape a China-centric international order more favourable to its authoritarian system, and pursuing this ambition through a wide-ranging strategy – shaping global governance, in ways that undermine individual rights and freedoms, and pursuing coercive practices. China’s deepening partnership with Russia and Russia’s growing cooperation with Iran in the wake of the invasion of Ukraine are two developments of particular concern» [3, p. 8].*

In conclusion, we can state the following. *«Global Britain in a competitive age. The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy»* sets an important strategic framework for the UK’s foreign policy, aimed at reducing the influence of authoritarian regimes worldwide. However, the document did not pay sufficient attention to Russia’s annexation of Crimea and the military actions in Donetsk and Luhansk regions since 2014. *«Integrated Review Refresh 2023. Responding to a more contested and volatile world»* demonstrates much greater attention to Russia’s war against Ukraine, primarily identifying it as a threat to the collective security system in Europe and as one of several factors determining the global balance of power on the international stage. The document clearly traces the idea of «global interdependence» where Russia’s actions against Ukraine or China’s actions against Taiwan are seen as attempts to transform the international order, making it more «friendly» to authoritarian systems, which is unacceptable.

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