Constructivist Analysis of Russia's Military Invasion of Ukraine (2022); Investigating Putin's Identity Model and Cognitive Actions[*]

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Abstract

Constructivism theory believes that the power, security and survival of a nation are often shaped by the identity structures and perceptions of its agents, which in turn define the threats and opportunities that it faces. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia suffered an identity crisis and tried to regain its position as a "great power" by adopting the Eurasian identity model. The background of the research showed that realist, geopolitical and traditional investigations cannot correctly and fully explain the way in which the Eurasian identity was formed and its impact on Russia's military actions in Ukraine. As a result, this study tries to answer the question of how Russian identity and perception-based motivations in Russia's attack on Ukraine can be understood through constructivism theory. The main hypothesis is that constructivism provides insights into the main reasons for Russia's military invasion of Ukraine, which can analyze certain factors in this war, which cannot be understood through traditional theories. The findings of this paper confirm that Russia's attack on Ukraine was aligned with its role as a Eurasian power and Putin's identity visions. This article uses a qualitative research method using field and library sources to analyze the hypothesis.

Keywords: Constructivism, Eurasianism, Identity, Perception, Russia, Ukraine

1. Introduction

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine goes back to the 2004 presidential election in Ukraine. The election led to the victory of "Viktor Yanukovych", the candidate supported by Russia, against "Viktor Yushchenko", the candidate supported by the West, which resulted in a series of protests and strikes known as the Orange Revolution (revolyutsiya Pomarancheva) in this country. These strikes caused the election to be canceled and "Viktor Yushchenko", the candidate supported by the West, became the president. In 2008, when Yushchenko, the president of Ukraine, tried to join NATO, he drew Russia's anger and warnings. After that, in 2010, when Yektor Yanukovych was elected as the President of Ukraine, Ukraine, and the European Union reached a draft agreement to expand relations, but in 2013, Yanukovych rejected the EU agreement, which again resulted in massive demonstrations called "Maidan Revolution" by the Russian opposition. The presence of Western politicians and diplomats such as; Senator "John McCain" and "Victoria Nuland", the assistant secretary of the US, and "Catherine Ashton", who was in charge of the foreign policy of the European Union at the time, provoked anger and a serious reaction from Russia. The Western nature of the Ukrainian protests and the presence of Westerners in the country led to the removal of the pro-Russian President Yanukovych in 2014. This event was considered a threat to Russia's ontological security in Ukraine; at the same time, Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula to its territory with a military invasion of Ukraine, after which a civil war started in eastern Ukraine between the separatists and the Ukrainian army with the support of the far-right Nazi "Azov" battalion, and this country became more prone to crisis. This cynicism between pro-Western Ukrainians and pro-Russian separatists was still alive when

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Volodymyr Zelensky came to power in 2019. When he took practical measures for Ukraine's membership in NATO, in February 2022, Russia launched a military attack on this country and annexed its eastern parts such as Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson one after the other.

Where to look for the main motivation for this war, everything goes back to the collapse of the Soviet empire in 1991 and the transformation of the world order, which was a big blow to the face of Russia in the international system. The dangerous geopolitical and identity consequences for this country were not revealed until after the collapse of the Soviet Union when Russia found itself in the position of a superpower without authority in the international system. With Vladimir Putin coming to power, the country sought to regain its role as a "great power" in the international system. As for whether Russia will regain its position as a great superpower after the collapse of the Soviet Union, everyone agreed on this issue and wanted a powerful Russia in the international system. Therefore, the elites and leadership of Russia in this field tried to create an identity system for this country that conforms to the requirements of the international system and can maintain Russia's influence on its surrounding countries, such as the disintegrated Soviet countries, especially Ukraine.

At the same time, the component that could gather Russia's relationship with the countries of its civilization sphere, especially with the countries with the same language, in a political-security axis, was the identity model of Eurasianism. With Putin coming to power, the Eurasianism model was put on the agenda of the country's policies due to its intersubjective appeal and capacity to reflect the diversity of Russia's identity. In this way, Eurasianism can define the unity, security and survival of Russia in the region

and provide the necessary incentives to legitimize the recovery and expansion of Russian power in the region. On the one hand, this identity model reflects Russia's cultural and social beliefs and characteristics, and on the other hand, it can explain Putin's behaviors and perceptions towards Ukraine. In other words, the identity model of Eurasianism can be considered the intellectual foundations of Putin. This article shows that Eurasianism, by reuniting Russia and its lost territories, changes the role of the leader of the Eurasian countries and the head of the great power in the international system. Therefore, Russia placed its foreign policy towards Eurasian countries under the title of supporting Russian-speaking minorities and supporting local separatists. Experts in the field of international relations and Russologists presented different theoretical interpretations of the motives of Russia's military attack on Ukraine.

Some scientific and research sources in English consider this war as a geopolitical and geoeconomic competition between Russia and the West (Omlicheva, 2013, pp. 140-156). In some Persian articles and sources, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine is considered realistic. For example, the article "The Background of Russian Power in the Ukraine Crisis" (Karimi Fard & Roohi Dehineh, 1393 [2014 A.D.]) was analyzed with the theory of defensive realism and the authors gave importance to material structures. Some articles also analyzed the conflict in Ukraine in the framework of constructivist theory, such as "The role of immaterial factors in the annexation of the Crimean peninsula to Russia (Yazdani et al., 1395 [2017 A.D.) and "Russia and NATO: from strategic partnership to strategic competition" (Ebrahimi & Bebri, 1395 [2016 A.D.]), as well as "Analysis of the origin and nature "Ukrainian crisis: escalation of the cold war between Russia and the West" written by Zamani (1392 [2013 A.D.]). These

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articles attempted to answer the question: What is the role of semantic factors in Russia's expansionism towards Ukraine? However, in all these researches, no special attention was paid to the identity, semantic system, and behavioral pattern from which Russia regards Ukraine.

In general, the realistic, geopolitical and logic analyzes governing these theories cannot necessarily reflect the identity and perception motives of Russia's attack on Ukraine. This causes part of the assumptions of Russia's attack on Ukraine to be misunderstood, and as a result, prevents it from being able to provide an effective solution to analyze the war and provide a solution to reduce it.

From the perspective of this research, the issue is not to what extent the war in Ukraine shows the geopolitical competition and manifestations of realist thinking between Russia and the West. The missing link that this research is trying to establish is the investigation of the role of mentality and identity in the Russian military attack on Ukraine. For this purpose, the current article uses the constructivist approach to explain the identity and perception dimensions of the Ukrainian war with the help of its assumptions. Therefore, the question addressed in the current article is as follows: How can we explain and analyze the identity and perceptual roots of the Russian military invasion of Ukraine with the help of the assumptions proposed by the constructivist theory?, and The hypothesis of this article is that the constructivist approach can help to understand part of the motivations of the Ukrainian war by assuming the role of structure-agent and paying attention to the role of the identity of the subject. Based on the assumptions of the constructivist theory, the essay considers the role of Eurasian identity as a structure, and the role of Putin's perceptions as an

agent's action, in order to provide a comprehensive and accurate analysis of the identity motivations of the Ukrainian war**.**

According to the findings of this article, what is reflected as Russia's identity model and Putin's belief system in Russia's military attack on Ukraine are the views and opinions of Eurasianists who believe that Russia can have power, security and survival in the light of preserving the civilizational values of Russians around Russia and regaining its historical lands. The idea of Eurasianism is closely related to Putin's mental perceptions, which was reflected in the military attack on Ukraine**.**

2. Theoretical Foundations: Constructivism

Constructivists believe that reality cannot be examined independently of the mind, and that reality is an inter-subjective element. This theory emphasizes two main principles; a) identity, and b) ontological security**.**

2. 1. Identity

From the perspective of the constructivist school, identity refers to a relatively stable and role-based understanding of oneself and expectations from others and a set of perceptions of human actors and social and normative structures. John Gerard Ragg believes that constructivism values immaterial factors such as culture, norms, and images. From his point of view, the focus of constructivism is human consciousness and the role that this consciousness plays in international relations. Gerard Ragg believes that the building blocks of international security and politics are both intellectual and material and reflect collective and

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individual intentions (Moshirzadeh, 1388 [2008 A.D.], p. 323). Identity allows each state to have an understanding of other states, its own nature, motivations, interests, possible actions, stances, and its role in any hypothetical political context (Hopf, 1998, p. 175). According to Peter J. Katzenstein, culture, norms, and identity are at the heart of national security. As an example, we can mention Alistair Johnston, who studied China during the Maoist era and sought to understand how much identity issues could manifest even in realistic behavior (Kubalkova, 2016, pp. 106-107).

According to Onuf (2012, pp. 104-110), constructivism begins with "actions", that is, what is done, the actions that are performed, and the words and phrases that are said. According to Hopf (1998, p. 175), actors develop relationships and understanding of others through media, norms, and procedures. Wendt and the constructivists explained the way in which norms and semantic concepts can be explained. These concepts create the behavior of actors (Smith, 2012, p. 278-282) and on the other hand, social structures are the unwanted result of human actions. People lose confidence in their intentions towards judging countries and assume the worst, which causes them to be defined in terms of a culture of self-help. They believe that norms can prevent these problems and put the relations of governments in the security bottleneck. Identities reduce problems by providing concepts and can reduce the range of units related to security issues by empowering the country to recognize enemies and save the country from the security dilemma (Wendt, 1992, pp. 401-404).

Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling Schellin relates the intentions and actions of agents. According to him, even movements that are done to hide the intentions or cancel the obligations of the agents, somehow express the intentions and

obligations in that movement. Most of the movements are a series of actions and many of these actions take place in the form of speech actions. For example, agent "A" may make the following claim about the last move of agent "B": "Your country has deployed military forces on our borders, and this action is indicative of your intentions." Reporter A continues: "On behalf of my country, I request you to return the troops to the barracks and stop other hostile statements". In the end agent "A" says: "If you don't accept this request, we will also take the appropriate action" The set of these three speech acts make the move of agent A and it seems that the answer is accompanied by a threat (Onuf, 2012, pp. 115-116).

In general, identities have three functions in society**:**

   1) They tell you who you are**;**
   2) They tell you who others are**;**
   3) In these discourses, identities specify a set of interests and priorities for action in a specific territory or respect for others (Hopf, 1998, p. 192).

2. 2. Ontological Security (Cognitive System)

Constructivists can establish a two-way relationship between the category of security and identity, to which they sometimes refer as ontological security or identity security. Security of identity is security of existence. Mitzen (2006, pp. 34-70, in Motaghi & Azarmi, 1393 [2015 A.D.], p. 15) believes that all social actors like governments seek security from the continuity of their identity. They should inherently be generally stable over time. He refers to this need as ontological security. In constructivist security studies, special attention is given to culture in the explanation of security

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issues. Conservatism and culturalism share a view on the role of norms, actors, and the relationship between identity and security interests (Farrell, 2002, p. 57). Peter J. Katzenstein believes that the construction of identity for culture (especially new culture) and its connection with national security takes place within society. From his point of view, the relationship between culture and security is important because it is rooted in the history of a society and its rules and ideas (Onuf, 1998, pp. 140-149). Just as the studies of culture and history were very important in the French military doctrine between the First and Second World Wars, when examining national security beliefs in Japan and Germany, their military-political culture should also be defined. Constructivists, regarding the identification of governments in the course of interactions between them, state that in addition to maintaining their material security, governments are also looking for their identity security. Therefore, this approach with the concept of identity security can explain intergovernmental conflicts even in cases where there is no conflict of interest between them (Taylor, 1992, pp. 27-32). Culturalists' emphasis on the role of norm and identity as an important factor within governments shows the way in which a government's actions, which focus on military force, are shaped by collective beliefs held by politicians political-strategic elites, and military officials (Farrell, 2002, p. 81). Sazeh Angran's security studies are based on two main hypotheses: firstly, the basic structures of international politics are built and addressed by social structures, and secondly, a change in the thinking of international relations can lead to a change in the international security situation. The improvement of this assumption means that by changing our thinking, the security situation will also change.

3. Russian and the Eurasian Identity Model

Eurasianism is an identity structure that emphasizes the uniqueness of Russia. According to Eurasianists, the Russian culture is different and even superior to Western traditions and culture. They believe that Russia's mission is to challenge the Western value system, distribute Russian beliefs beyond the borders and unite the Eurasian countries under the leadership of this country (Omlicheva, 2013, pp. 153-155). What is called Eurasianism today is a very complex conservative ideology that emerged in Russia in the 1990s. According to this ideology, Europe is not the peak of development, but only indicates a certain type of development that cannot be reproduced [by other countries and regions of the world]: Russia must give up Western appearances and the ambition hidden in the European identity. The school of Eurasianism is attractive to many intellectuals and Europeans because it helps them to better explain the causes of the collapse of the Soviet Union and gives them a sense of the historical continuity of Russia, since instead of paying attention to the temporal dimensions of the subject, it pays attention to its spatial dimensions (Laruelle, 2012, pp. 11-13). Before the collapse of the Soviet Union in mid-September (1991), Gorbachev and Yeltsin in a television interview described the experience of communism as "doomed to failure" and "imaginary and impractical ideals" (Koolaee & Sedaghat, 1396 [2017 A.D.] p. 215). They read, that since then, Russia has gradually suffered from an identity vacuum. According to Billington, no nation has spent as much intellectual energy as the Russians in the search for their national identity. As Gabele argues, Russia was a state trying to create a nation, rather than a nation trying to create a state (Sazmand & Soranari, 1397 [2019 A.D.], p. 209). Still, according to Hiekonen (2007 in Sazmand & Soranari, 1397 [2019 A.D.], p. 986), the conflict over the Russian identity has been going on

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throughout the history of Russia; with the collapse of the Soviet Union, this conflict resumed again. The roles that were defined for the Soviet Union based on the ideology of Marxism-Leninism, such as "Leader of the Eastern Bloc", "Leader of the world of socialism" and "Leader of the fight against imperialism" were emptied of their theoretical and practical meaning with the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Therefore, with Vladimir Putin coming to power, a new identity model and cognitive system was defined for Russia. An identity based on the language component of culture, history, and Russia's understanding of "self" and "other" in the post-Soviet world. Some call Eurasianism as Putin's model of behavior and thought system, and with the annexation of the Crimean peninsula to Russian territory, they consider this identity model to be exemplified. The traces of Eurasian thinking go back to the opinions and ideas of linguists such as; Sergei Nikolaevich Trubetzkoy, Lev Nikolayevich Gumilev, Gennady Andreyevich Zyuganov, and more systematically in the ideas of Aleksandr Dugin.

3. 1. Dugin and the Theory of "Great Russia"

Dugin believes that Russia should have an effective presence in the field of world politics and take the leadership of the anti-liberal movement of democracy. Inventing this theory and trying to increase its acceptance has caused Westerners to take a negative approach about Dugin. For example, the United States has included his name in its sanctions list for spreading fascist ideas. He considers the Eurasian region to be Russia's heritage .

Dugin's view is clearly stated in his 2015 book: "The value of people, culture and societies is proven in war ... Beauty is in that

which is based on the fulfillment of self-proof" (Dugin, 2015, pp. 50-53). War renews man, and the cost of this great personal effort confirms his commitment to the community. War has always been a collective work and its purpose has been to protect the people, the government and increase their power, space and living areas. He further states that: "the national and social importance of war lies here" (Dugin, 2015, pp. 55-57). Dugin considers the Eurasian region to be Russia's heritage and believes that this region was the traditional environment of the Russians; He emphasizes that Russia should set the main goal of its foreign policy on regaining its control over these regions and supporting the Russians living there. He believes that the theory of Eurasianism is a good opportunity to revive Russia's geopolitical power and this issue is facilitated by the help of Russian minorities in other countries, since now is the time to restore the sense of national pride of "Great Russia". In other words, the way to save Russia and resolve its problems is to return to the Russian culture, strengthen Russians outside the borders of this country, and love the idea of Russia as an independent power. It seems that Alexander Dugin and his theory had an obvious influence on Putin's way of thinking and approach to global developments and are somehow guiding them (Ali Hosseini & Aeinevand, 1394 [2016 A.D.], p. 148). Dugin believes that the separatist movement in eastern Ukraine has awakened the Russian spirit. He called this movement "Russian Spring," an awakening that is likely to spread to Georgia and other countries near Russia in the future along the path of Russian Eurasianism (Donyaye-Eghtesad, 1400 [2022 A.D.])**.**

Dugin focused on developing his influence where it mattered— through its military and policymakers. With the publication of his 600-page textbook in 1997, with the interesting title *Geopolitical Foundations: The Future of Russian Geopolitics*, he brought

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Eurasianism to the center of the political imagination of strategists. In adapting Dugin's Eurasianism to current conditions, Russia had a new rival; Not just Europe, but the entire "Atlantic" world, led by the United States. His Eurasianism was not anti-imperial, but the opposite: Russia had always been an empire, the Russian people were the "people of the empire", and after the crippling defeat of the 1990s to the "eternal enemy", Russia could be revived in the next stage of the world war and become a "world empire". Some have interpreted Putin's move to designate the national anthem, the flag and the long-standing national symbols of Russia in line with the expansion of the mentioned concept of the Russian nation**.**

3. 2. Gomilev and the Theory of "Eurasian Super Natio"

Leo Gumilev emphasized ethnic diversity as the driving force of world history. According to his concept of "ethnogenesis", an ethnic group can become a "super-ethnicity" under the influence of a charismatic leader; A power that engages in a vast geographical area and with other expanding ethnic units. Gumilev's theories were attractive to many people living through the chaos of the 1990s. According to Gumilev (in Omlicheva, 2013, p. 150), if the "Eurasian super-nation" does not converge again in the form of a unified unit, its various parts will be absorbed and divided by the competing "super-nations" of its European type in the West, its Islamic type in Asia, and its Chinese type in the East. They believe that Russia's mission is to challenge the Western value system, distribute Russian beliefs beyond the borders, and unite Eurasian countries under the leadership of this country (Omlicheva, 2013, p. 150). Russia should give up Western manifestations and put aside the ambition hidden in the European identity (Laruelle, 2012, pp. 13-14).

3. 3. Trobetskoy and the Theory of "Revival of the Eurasian Empire"

In his book entitled "Europe and Humanity", Trobetskoy called on Russian intellectuals to free themselves from attachment to Europe and form a large continental Russian-Eurasian country. Trubetskoy's Eurasianism was a recipe for restoring this empire. According to Zyuganov in the book *Geography of Victory* and Nartov in the book *Geopolitics*, Russia is considered a self-sufficient cultural, political, and economic unit in the center of Eurasia. They see Russia as an independent Eurasian civilization that can survive only by protecting itself from dangerous Western intrusions. Even like the thinkers of cosmopolitan Eurasianism, they emphasize the special civilizational role of Russia in the world and the role of this country as the guarantor of the geopolitical balance and stability of the world, and believe that without Russia, the world will probably fall victim to the predatory ambitions of the West (Zyuganov, 2018, p. 261, in Sazmand & Soranari, 1397 [2019 A.D.], pp. 258, 259). He emphasizes that:

> Our nation and government cannot continue its existence by relying only on the geographical and historical components of Russia and without gaining territorial power in Eurasia and guaranteeing control over a large area of this region; Because we are surrounded by aggressive neighbors and there are no natural barriers around us. Therefore, our main task is to regain control over the heartland, to once again become the leader of the region (Sazmand & Soranari, 1397 [2019 A.D.], p. 261).

Given the importance of Ukraine in this Eurasian identity system, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, a famous Russian writer, who was a staunch critic of the Soviet communist system, presented himself against the complete disintegration of this country. Although he wanted to get rid of the Soviet possessions in Central Asia, the

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Caucasus, and the Baltic, he considered the separation of Belarus and Ukraine cruel. As a result, Eurasianists believe that Ukraine is the lost historical identity of Russia, which was separated from this country as a result of a historical fate. According to the Russians, the annexation of Ukrainian lands to Russia in the 17th century meant the restoration of historical justice, that is, the "reintegration of Russian lands" and the return of Moscow's direct heritage to the old Russian state (Zadokhin, 2004, p. 202).

4. The History of the Common Identity of Russia and Ukraine

Russians and Ukrainians belong to the Slavic people in terms of descent and culture; Some include the Russian people, including the Eastern Slavs. Ukrainians and Belarusians know and believe that the similarities of race, language and shared history of Ukrainians and Belarusians are also included in the Russian nation (Koolaee et al., 1389 [2009 A.D.], p. 243). About 20% of Ukraine's population is Russian-speaking and has cultural and religious ties with Russia. In the period after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the presence of Russians in other republics created an obligation for the Russian government to support them. Due to the presence of a large population of Russian descent in Ukraine, Russia has a special view on this republic (Koolaee & Sedaqat, 1396 [2017 A.D.], p. 211). The presence of Russians in the former republics of the Soviet Union is so important for Russia that it leads to a different view of these republics, and the theory of the near outsider is the result of this view (Koolaee & Sedaqat, 1396 [2017 A.D.], p. 206). The current article under this title takes a look at the common history of Russian-Ukrainian identity in the two axes of the Slavic people and the Orthodox religion, according to which Russia considers Ukraine a part of its historical identity .

4. 1. Orthodox Church

The Russian Orthodox Church is a thousand years old; moreover, the reopening and activity of churches has been increasing since the end of the 1980s. Therefore, the church and religion in Russia have always been influential elements in important historical events. Putin's famous statement that "We will go to heaven and they will simply die" at the start of the war in February 2022 turned from a template on social networks into a practical guide for the Russian Orthodox Church. According to Putin, Russian soldiers who go to this war can hope that if they die, they will receive full amnesty and go to heaven. Russia's war of aggression therefore had metaphysical implications, in addition to geopolitics, which nevertheless created a wave of criticism in many Orthodox communities and led to an almost irreconcilable rift in Eastern Christianity. The sermons of Kirill, the Patriarch of Russia, were based on the following logic: "In Ukraine, Russia defends itself". Apparently, he defends himself there against the "aggressive values of the West, mainly secularization and pluralism, and it is against the decline of conservative values". The majority of churches, priests and church officials in Russia usually follow the prescribed ideology. On the other hand, the tension between Ukraine and Russia has also affected the unity of the Orthodox religion. The vast majority of Ukrainian people are Christians and loyal to the Russian Orthodox Church (Ukrainian Orthodox Church), and about half of the followers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church look to Archbishop Kirill in Moscow as the imam and supreme leader of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. But the other half of the people consider Archbishop Filart, who is in Kiev, as their imam; as a result, half of the population and the regional party support the archbishop of Kiev (Azami et al., 1397 [2019 A.D.], p. 29). In the

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meantime, the statesmen and religious authorities of Kyiv in recent years, fully aware of the ideological exploitation of the Russian Orthodox Church, in the direction of spiritual influence in the public minds of Ukraine, have used all their efforts in the direction of religious separation from it (Mirinamniha & Omidi, 1401 [2022 A.D.], p. 19). Following the conflict between the two countries in 2022, Russia's only religious influence in Ukraine, i.e. the church under the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate, also declared its complete independence from that church in protest of the political support of Moscow's expansionist actions .

However, despite the identity-political dichotomy between Russia and Ukraine, and despite the Ukrainian regime's preference for the West and NATO, there are many parts of eastern and southern Ukraine that prefer Russia. Russia still has cultural influence in eastern and southern Ukraine, which could help Russia become a major Eurasian power. The most important tools of Russia's cultural and religious influence in Ukraine are the mass media, especially the Russian Orthodox Church, Russian art and minorities of Russian descent living in Ukraine.

4. 2. Eastern Slavic Peoples of Ukraine

Ukraine's eastern provinces, which account for more than 70 percent of the country's GDP, are strongly opposed to westernization. Provinces such as Kharkiv, Donbass, Donetsk, Poltava and Crimea are against the West and tend towards Russia. A large number of people in this region, which lies between Russia in the east and the left bank of the Dnieper River, are of Russian descent, and most of them follow the Russian Orthodox Church, and the Russian culture, and the Russian language is the dominate

language in this region. This issue is a powerful tool in the hands of the Russians, in a way that they can easily provoke the people of Russian origin in these areas and endanger the territorial integrity of this country. Ukraine-Russia identity links, which crystallized mostly in the eastern and southern regions of Ukraine, have become the sphere of Russian security, political and economic influence in Ukraine **.**

4. 2. 1. Crimea Peninsula

Demonstrations started in Kiev Square on November 21, 201, protesting Viktor Yanukovych's decision to not join the European Union. This demonstration in 2014 led to the downfall of the Ukrainian government. According to Viktor Yanukovych's claim in response to the demonstrations, "The life, security and rights of the people of Ukraine are threatened, especially in Crimea". Finally, on March 16, 2014, a referendum was held by the Crimean government of the people of Crimea to join Russia, and 81% of those eligible participated in this election, and 96.77% voted in favor of joining Russia. On March 18, Russian President Vladimir Putin officially signed the annexation document of Crimea to Russia and called Crimea an inseparable part of Russia. According to the census conducted in 2001, this country is divided into ethnic groups: Russians (58.32%), Ukrainians (24.32%), Crimean Tatars (12.1%), Belarusians (1.44%). %), Tatar (0.55%), Armenian (0.43%), Jewish (0.22%) and other group (2.62%) consisting of Georgian, German, Bulgarians, Greeks and Azeri make up the population of this region.

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4. 2. 2. Donbass

Donbass is the common name of Luhansk and Donetsk, Zaporozhye and Kherson. This region, with its significant Russian-speaking population, became a base for supporting Viktor Yanukovich, the former president of Ukraine (pro-Russian) (Eco Iran, 1400 [2022 A.D.]). Denis Pushilin, in Donetsk, and Leonid Paschenik, in Luhansk, both became the leaders of these two self-proclaimed republics with the support of Russia in the elections of 2018. Both politicians have wanted the territory under their rule to join Russia. Due to the danger of a military conflict in eastern Ukraine, the pro-Russian separatists asked the civilian citizens of this region to flee to Russia (DW, 2022). In a January 2004 survey conducted by the Independent Russian Polling Center, which was partially reported in the April Washington Post, about 86% of respondents over 55 expressed regret over the collapse of the Soviet Union; 37% of people whose age was between 25 and 39 years had the same opinion (Zamani, 1392 [2013 A.D.], pp. 899-900). It is true that only 6.8% said that Ukraine should move more decisively towards Russia and the East, but nearly half of them agreed that Ukraine should choose its own development path based on its own resources. Only a minority may support pro-Russian policies, but voters do not necessarily buy pro-Western Ukrainian national packages (Hosa & Wilson, 2019, p. 5).

5. Putin and the Search for Ontological Security in Ukraine

Ontological security in the theory of constructivism is the protection of cultural, identity, and language existences, and ultimately, the protection of the existence and survival of a country against its perceived enemies. The collapse of the Soviet Union and

the independence of Ukraine made Russia face the question of what this country would be without Ukraine, without the history of Ukraine, and some of its geographical and cultural regions. Regarding the ontological security issues of Russia, Putin is influenced by the teachings of Eurasianists, according to which, to ensure the proper functioning of the international system, great powers must have a regulatory role in their regions, and the responsibility for establishing stability and security rests on undertaking. Even years ago (1999), Putin emphasized that Russia should be free in determining and implementing its domestic and foreign policies, its status and advantages as a "Euro-Asian" state as well as the largest member country (Commonwealth of Independent States) or (CIS) (Bock et al., 2015, p. 107). He also announced that his goal is "Denazification" in Ukraine, and uniting the lands of Russkiymir or (Russian world) (Gustafson et al., 2024, p. 85). Having succeeded in uniting Donbas within Russia, Putin may focus his attention on his main plan to capture Kyiv (Gustafson et al., 2024, pp. 411-413). From Putin's point of view, any backsliding in support of Ukrainian Russians is understood as a clear defeat for the Kremlin (Schwartz, 2014).

Putin, in his latest interview with Carlson, a famous American journalist, during a detailed historical description of the history and identity of Ukraine, and the reason for Russia's military attack on this country, made it clear that Ukraine is part of Russia's historical existence and vital interests. It is considered that now with separation from Russia, western powers like America and NATO are trying to control it. To further explain his understanding of the existence and identity of Ukraine, he pointed to specific historical periods in the history of Russia and Ukraine and how Ukraine was built and said: The date (882 AD) means the time when Russia was formed and (988 AD) when "Great Russia" began to exist; this date

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is very important for us (Carlson, 2024). He added: Before the formation of a country called Ukraine or the phenomenon of Ukrainization, during the period of Prince Vladimir's grandson Rurik (988), Great Russia was formed with a single territory, a single language, a single belief, and a single agriculture. After Prince Vladimir, during the era of Barcelona the Wise and with the complicated process of power transfer, Russia became a fragmented unit and became the prey of Mongol Genghis Khan; Genghis's successor (Batu Khan) looted Russian cities and caused the fragmentation of Great Russia. In his opinion, this caused the southern cities of Russia, including Kyiv, to be attracted to another magnet in Europe (the Duchy of Lithuania). When Lithuanians and Poles united in Europe, they began to Ukrainianize, and on the eve of World War I, the term Austrians was promoted. According to him, the Poles tried to make them Polish, promoted their language among them, and continued to inculcate the idea among them that you are not Russian at all. Because you live in Krai (border) you are O+Kraini (border dweller)" (Carlson, 2024). According to Putin, the word Ukrainian was first used by Poles, and this word does not contain a different ethnic group apart from Russians, but it contains frontier peoples who have a Russian identity. According to Putin (in Carlston, 2024):

> Despite the oppression of the Ukrainians by the Poles (13th century), however, the Church of the Ukrainian people decided to be part of Tsarist Russia, the war with Poland began, and then a truce was formed from thirteen years of war, and 32 years after this truce, real peace was formed with Poland and Russia reached its historical lands.

This shows that from Putin's point of view, the current war in Ukraine is an identity war and he considers his mission to take back the lost territories that formerly belonged to Russia and the Russian

identity. Putin even refers to the Soviet policy towards Ukraine and says: It was the Bolsheviks who formed the Ukrainian Soviet Republic with the formation of the Soviet Union, Something that did not exist before. He considers the role of Stalin and Lenin to be effective in the Ukrainization of this lost land and says: for unknown reasons, by giving Ukraine the right to self-governance and the right to secession and entrusting Russian lands to the residents of this country, who did not call their land Ukraine, in some way they strengthened the Ukrainianization phenomenon. Their policy led to the acquisition of territories, including the Black Sea, which had no historical connection with this country. According to Putin, They allowed the collapse of the Soviet Union to some extent. Maybe they thought that trusting the so-called civilized West and trusting Ukraine due to the vast commonalities they had with this country would cause no problems in the future. In addition to calling Ukraine an artificial country that was built at the will of Stalin and based on the principle of trusting the West and Europe (Carlson, 2024), he considers this policy wrong and has come to the understanding that trusting the West was a historical mistake committed by Russia.

Russia has strategic and vital interests in Ukraine, and regardless of the pressure and suffering that may be inflicted on the Russians, they will not surrender because Ukraine is important to them, and on the other hand, the West does not have strategic interests there (Mearsheimer, 2022, Mar. 22). Here, Putin's understanding of the identity history of Russia and Ukraine, and his understanding of Russia's ontological security, clearly shows that he is ordered to protect Russia's security and interests in trying to control the Eurasian sphere, through the promotion of historical and linguistic awareness among Russians and the reunification of the lost Russian lands beyond the national borders of this country.

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5. 1. Russia and Perceived Threats

It seems that Moscow feels threatened from two sides. First, from the area of the Kyiv regime, which was formed with the approach of leaning toward the West and fighting against Russia. In the perception system of the Russian foreign policy apparatus: the Ukrainian regime is more comparable to the Nazis or staunch enemies of Russia. Sergey Lavrov considers the anti-Russian attitude of this regime as neo-Nazism. Lavrov, Putin's foreign minister, also points out that Zelensky's work is similar to the Nazis' prejudice and superiority, and in justifying the military attack on Ukraine, he says: Russians were banned from schools and social situations and were not allowed to speak in the native language. They [the Ukrainian regime] are heroizing Hitler and encouraging Nazis (Laurov, 2022). Meanwhile, Putin has repeatedly announced that our goal in Ukraine is de-Nazification (Carlson, 2024). According to Putin, what brought the current tension between the two countries to the brink of military war was that Ukrainian leadership Zelensky said that he would not implement the 2014 Menisk agreement (Carlson, 2024). Putin stated that the West (America and Europe) armed Ukraine to weaken Russia. In the context of the emergence of the West as an obvious and aggressive "other", such as organizing and supporting color revolutions in the Eurasian region in the middle of the decade (2000), supporting anti-Russian elements in (2008) and the Ukraine crisis in (2014), Russia has started using Eurasianist ideas and actions such as the use of military force in Georgia and Ukraine and the annexation of the Crimean peninsula. Therefore, it can be argued that the preference for Eurasian identity beliefs during Putin's era was both a defensive preference and a reaction against the "other" offensive actions of the Western hostiles (Sazmand &

Soranari, 1397 [2019 A.D.], pp. 983-990) and a warning in advance for Ukraine, which should not Aim to join NATO.

Furthermore, in Putin's recent interview with Carlson, another part of his speech contains security concerns caused by the existence of a potential and actual enemy such as NATO, and the perceived threat from the West. Of course, it should be explained that although NATO is an organization that is considered a potential enemy for Russia, "Russia is concerned about the presence of the United States in NATO and believes that the United States has made this organization a tool for its aggressive policies" (Stone, 2017). According to Putin, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States and the West promised that NATO would not expand even a single step towards the east. But contrary to the promise, it spread in five waves (Carlson, 2024) and this promise has been repeatedly broken by NATO (Bock et al., 2015, p. 14). In Putin's words, "Of course, it was a mistake that Gorbachev made and did not get guarantees and documents from them. In politics, everything must be official and clear. When something is not guaranteed on paper, it has no meaning". Of course, NATO's methods for controlling the countries left by the Soviet Union, which consists of attracting them in the form of various programs of this organization by choosing a preventive policy, have been at the lowest cost (Tishehyar, 1388 [2010 A.D.], p. 52). According to Mersheimer, with this logic, they encourage Ukraine to stand up to the Russians and encourage them to imagine that they will eventually join the West because NATO thinks that it will finally defeat Putin and achieve its goal. The Ukrainians also proceed with such a scenario, and in the end, they do not compromise with Russia and pursue an extremist policy, the result of which is the destruction of Ukraine itself".

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In April 2008, regarding the violation of NATO commitments and the Eastern policy, at the NATO summit in Bucharest, Putin made it clear that NATO's eastward advance would be crossing Russia's red line, and doing it is considered unacceptable and a threat to the existence of Russia. He said: If Ukraine is allowed to join NATO, Moscow will retaliate. It increases Ukraine's security and makes the world in general much more vulnerable, leading to more tension in the international arena." He said clearly: "Western powers' military aid to Ukraine has now become a threat against Moscow" (Euro News, 2022).

However, Putin's view is that Russia is a large land with a pre-defined identity based on shared linguistic, identity, religious, and geographic elements, which also include Ukraine. He believes that this assimilation of the Russian identity has been a victim of the fate of history several times and caused a part of the original Russian lands to be assigned to Europe, which then led to the formation of an artificial country named Ukraine. Putin believed that in the past, Russia thought that Ukraine might understand that reasons such as Russian-Ukrainian family ties, common identity, common language, common history, common religion, and economic background of the two countries made Russia-Ukraine relations favorable. However, it was observed that the Ukrainian regime, contrary to all these commonalities, has a desire for the West and NATO. On the other hand, according to Putin, Russia looked to the West with optimism because it thought it could cope with the civilized West. However, according to Putin, neither the Ukrainian regime nor the Westerners paid attention to Russia's ontological security. Based on this understanding, Russia considers itself obliged to attack Ukraine to protect its existence and to recover the territories that it considers to be part of its donated

lands to Ukraine or the lost territories of Russia. He does not compromise with the fact that some national symbols, such as the proud cities of Russia (Sevastopol, Odesa, and Uchakov), are located on the territory of another country. According to him, Kyiv has been one of the most important manifestations of Russia's self-awareness and ethnic authenticity.

5. 2. Using the Logic of Militarism in Putin's Cognitive System

The use of war and the logic of militarism is rooted in the political culture and power requirements in Russia, which is somehow reflected and prescribed in the thoughts of Eurasianists. The reason why Putin prefers the logic of war over the logic of negotiation is rooted in these norms and ideas. Dugin believes that: "The value of people, culture and societies is proven in war... Beauty is in that which is based on the fulfillment of self-proof. War renews a person and the cost that is spent on this great personal effort" (Dugin, 2015, p.58), which confirms his adherence to the community. War has always been a collective work and its purpose is to protect the people, the state and increase their power, space and life areas. This is where the national and social importance of war lies." For this reason, Putin had assessed the possibility of threats from NATO and Ukraine to be so serious and definite that he did not consider the conditions of negotiations and warnings as a deterrent and emphasized the logic of war. He said clearly in one of his speeches: The path of negotiations is not important to us. The result and guarantee of security is important for us" (Mashregh News, 1400 [2022 A.M.]). He made it clear years ago in another speech in Munich, in 2007: "He wants a guarantee that NATO will not move eastward (The latest news, March 26, 1400). In this regard, Putin has shown in Georgia (2008) and Ukraine (2014 and

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2022) that his country is ready to fight for the implementation of this doctrine. Referring to the intentions of the Americans and NATO, Putin said: "NATO's advance to the east is unacceptable" (Mashregh News, 1400 [2022 A.M.] What is the reaction of the Americans, if we do not attack them, it is a question of security, for the spirit of Russian militarism can be seen on the one hand in their nostalgic pride and distrust of foreigners, according to Zbigniew Brzezinski (2004). It is very difficult for the Russian generals to accept this requirement to allow the NATO inspectors to check the Russian military budget and weapons (Brzezinski, 2004, pp. 134, 135). On the other hand, Putin once said: "We know that the West was trying to attack our strategic airbase through the Kiev regime. The drones used for this were equipped and modernized with the help of NATO experts. Now they want weapons. check us (distrust), it seems pointless" (BBC Derry, 2023). Putin warned that his country will retaliate against any NATO advance into Ukraine, saying: "If some kind of system If an offensive is deployed on the territory of Ukraine, the speed of these missiles will be seven to 10 minutes, while our hypersonic weapons will reach Ukraine within 5 minutes, he said, pointing out that Russia has recently tested a hypersonic weapon What should be done in such a scenario? (Euro News, 2022).On this basis, Putin recognized the independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics, criticizing the West's indifference to Moscow's security concerns. After that, on February 24 of the same year, a military operation against Ukraine, which he called "special operations", turned the tense relations between Moscow and Kiev into a military confrontation. Vladimir Putin claims that Ukraine is part of "Russkiy Mir" meaning "Russian world" or "Russian community". Putin initially justified his invasion as a limited operation to "de-Nazify" Ukraine and protect the large number of Russians and Russophones (Russians away

from the homeland) in the eastern Donbass region. However, in a speech on November 28, 2023, sponsored by the Russian Orthodox Church, he claimed that the "Russian nation" consisted of "the triple union of the Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian peoples, which echoed his historically distorted claims before the invasion in an article titled "Historical Alliance of Russians and Ukrainians" in July 2021. Putin claimed that Russians and Ukrainians "are one nation" and that an independent Ukraine was "entirely a product of Soviet-era thinking and largely created at the expense of Russia's historical territories." The Russian society is a political thought that is generally described as Russia's sphere of cultural and political influence. In 2022, Putin ordered a Russian air and ground attack on Ukraine.

6. Conclusion

It can be argued that there is a close relationship between Eurasianism, Putin's beliefs, and cognitive system, as well as constructivism theory and Russia's military attack on Ukraine; these elements somehow explain each other. Considering the relationship between these elements, this article confirms the hypothesis that Eurasianism and Putin's perceptions provide a set of identity and perception components for the motivation of Russia's military invasion of Ukraine, which can only be analyzed within the framework of constructivism assumptions. The theory of constructivism as a meta-theory is a combination of realism theories and psychological-sociological assumptions in terms of its epistemological foundations, and in some ways, it is similar to the assumptions of (aggressive) realism theory. This similarity is manifested especially in the use of military logic and force. This can explain the set of military and identity motivations of Russia in

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attacking Ukraine. Therefore, in the final analysis of the Ukrainian war, it can be concluded that there is a special approach of "Putinism" in the Ukrainian war. This article briefly calls Putin's logic and approach toward Ukraine "aggressive constructivism". Aggressive constructivism is a combination of Putin's neo-realist and constructivist behaviors in the Ukraine war. The mistrust of countries towards each other and the principle of self-help are of great importance in realism, and an example of these two principles can be seen in Putin's behavior toward Ukraine.

On the other hand, these realistic behaviors are manifested while Putin's behavior is that the nature and core of the Ukrainian war is their identity conflict. The identity fight between Russia and Ukraine can also be seen in Putin's behavior and speech. However, when Putin attacks Ukraine with identity motives and using military tools, it can be said that this war shows a kind of logic of aggressive constructivism. Without understanding this logic and the approach, analyzing the Ukrainian war and predicting its future is not possible. As long as the Ukrainian government and its Western allies of the war do not understand the identity-normative dimensions and Putin's mental position in the attack on Ukraine, they will not understand the logic and appropriate approach to understanding Russia. This lack of mutual understanding and conflict in the confrontation logic will cause the war to last and the security dilemma between the actors and parties of the Ukrainian war to become more complicated. Therefore, what is important in the context of the Ukrainian war is Putin's logic or Russian Putinism.

Since constructivists emphasize the influence of thinking in the evolution of the concept of security, the war in Ukraine shows that the views, perceptions, and especially Vladimir Putin's perceptions

about Ukraine, NATO-US are based on the logic of mistrust. From the tone of the Eurasians' votes and Putin's verbal actions, we can understand that the Western Ukrainian regime and NATO are Russia's enemies and have lost their trust in this country. Therefore, according to the theoretical foundations of research (assumptions of constructionism) and epistemological foundations (idea of Eurasianism) of research, the current process of war in Ukraine will be stopped in two ways: First, when the pattern of identity and perception system governing the decision-making apparatus in Russia will change; Second, if a neutral regime is established in Ukraine and the prevailing perception system in Ukraine changes and portrays the role of Ukraine as a buffer zone between Russia and the West.

Examining Putin's cognitive system and his behaviors showed that he is a pragmatic person and does not look for bluffs. He takes threats seriously and takes immediate action. The Ukraine wars in 2014 and 2022 show Putin's pragmatism in containing Russian security threats. Considering the principle of pragmatism in Putin's behavior and the fact that he is not one to bluff, if the parties to the Ukrainian war do not take Putin seriously, the possibility of nuclear threats by Russia will be inevitable. Considering Russia's understanding of its vital interests in Ukraine, it will not give up on Ukraine and the policy of recapturing the Russian-populated areas of Ukraine and reuniting the Russian identity. The recognition of the separatist regions of eastern Ukraine and the annexation of regions such as; The peninsula of Crimea, Luhansk Donetsk, Zaporozhye, and Kherson show Russia's determination and commitment in the field of realizing the idea of Eurasianism and protecting its defined interests.

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