

The Genocide of Ukrainians in the Discourse of International Law as an Element of Russia's Political Self-Representation

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Abstract: The issue of the consequences of the ideology of genocide as a determining factor in the development of Russian society for the dynamics of international legal processes has become particularly relevant against the backdrop of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation. This study is devoted to analyzing the ways in which Russia identifies itself in the international legal field in the context of the genocide of the Ukrainian people. The article examines the system of Russian measures aimed at the genocide of Ukrainians, which involve ideological pressure and censorship. The study reveals the existence of a consistent Russian policy toward the Ukrainian people that bears signs of genocidal intent. The study argues that the propaganda of genocide within the Russian Federation's political narrative is suggestive in nature, and the strategy itself is a tool for Russia's self-identification in the international environment, which influences the dynamics of the international legal system. The article analyzes approaches to the definition of genocide and the peculiarities of the representation of this concept in legal documents relating to the protection of fundamental human rights. The main evolutionary stages of the genocide of the Ukrainian people and the ways in which Russia identifies itself on this basis are identified. The article analyzes the variability of forms of practical expression of genocide aimed at the loss of national identity: mass torture and killings, forced deportations, and sexual violence. Particular attention is paid to the expression of Russian ideology of genocide against Ukrainians in the context of modern military operations: massive shelling and missile strikes, destruction of infrastructure, moral and informational influence, psychological means of destruction. The vectors of influence of the Russian Federation's methods of self-identification on the dynamics of the system of international legal relations are characterized. The functionality of the international judicial system in the process of bringing war criminals to justice is investigated. The destructive critical consequences of the Russian Federation's genocidal ideology for the security of global geopolitical development are substantiated.

Keywords: genocide, ideology, self-identification, armed aggression, legal acts, Ukrainian people, destruction.

Introduction

Genocide continues to occur in the 21st century, taking various forms, from small incidents to large-scale trends of genocidal violence. Russia's public rhetoric is filled with genocidal ideology against the Ukrainian people and is actively supported by Russian society. Various types of violence and terror, the use of prohibited weapons, psychological pressure, and linguistic and cultural aggression are currently defined as complex actions aimed at the genocide of Ukrainians.

As confirmed by the findings of the Center for Strategic Communications and Information Security, manifestations of genocide include, among other things, public calls for the destruction of Ukrainians and “denazification”. Genocide is defined as “the partial or total destruction of a group of people”, during which the main determinants of an ethnic group are deliberately destroyed: religion and language, social institutions, economic ties, culture, and traditions.

Despite the fact that the conduct of war is regulated by numerous international legal norms, requirements, and restrictions, and the phenomenon of genocide is recognized as absolutely unacceptable, war criminals continue to pursue a policy of genocide, ignoring the threat of severe punishment. Russia denies Ukrainians the right to their own national identity and state, distorts historical narratives, insists on the artificiality of the Ukrainian language, and demonstrates its undisguised intentions to completely destroy Ukrainian statehood. At the same time, the international legal instruments that regulate the activities of the global community and coordinate the prosecution of war criminals are not proving effective. This highlights the need for further research into Russia's self-identification in the international legal field in the context of the genocide of the Ukrainian people.

Literature Review

The issue of genocide attracts the attention of numerous contemporary researchers. For example, Waxman [1] studies the evolutionary context and dynamics of mass terror phenomena in certain nations and identifies the main areas of influence of dehumanizing ideologies. Knott [2] pays particular attention to the concept of cultural genocide, which requires the development and implementation of effective prevention and elimination strategies in accordance with international law.

Beres [3] focuses his research efforts on the need to develop initiatives to document and record all cases of genocide ideology during military conflicts, which will make it possible to bring those responsible to justice, regardless of their rank or social status. Furthermore, Stanley [4] notes that the motivation behind genocide ideology is legitimized by various ideologies that justify the mass destruction of members of a particular nation.

This issue is addressed in scientific works by Dovgan et al. [5] and Etkind [6]. They focus on developing mechanisms for international projects to prevent manifestations of genocide ideology by effectively informing the global community about the manipulative policies of aggressors. This is particularly relevant in the context of Russia's self-identification in the international arena through the use of genocide against Ukrainians.

Among the important sectoral developments is the project of the Center for Strategic Communications and Information Security, “Genocidal Rhetoric of the Russian Regime” [7], which presents a selection of key legal acts on discriminatory norms that can be used for genocide against the Ukrainian people. Also significant are the studies by Babichev [8] and Hryshchuk [9], who investigate the directions of Russia's self-identification through the genocide of the Ukrainian people and aspects of their impact on the development of international legal relations. The authors examine the possibilities of bringing those responsible for war crimes to justice and forming a strong legal position regarding the tribunal against the aggressor.

Primush et al. [10], Lozko [11], and Kostiv [12] position the ideology of genocide as a reflection of the true intentions to destroy certain ethnic groups. The authors pay particular attention to manifestations of genocide against human dignity and health, physical and sexual violence against civilians, and forced deportations. In the context of the current Russian Federation's policy, this is positioned as an expression of Russia's disregard for the international legal field.

Despite the expanded format of the current scientific base in this field, there are a number of gaps that necessitate further research.

The purpose of this article is to provide an expanded analysis of the Russian Federation's methods of self-identification in the international legal field in the context of the genocide of the Ukrainian people and the impact of these processes on the dynamics of the international legal field.

Methodology

The study focuses on the specifics of the influence of genocide ideology within the international political narrative of the Russian Federation and substantiates the critical consequences of the Russian Federation's genocide ideology for the security of global geopolitical development.

The article provides a systematic and comprehensive analysis of scientific publications and industry statistics. Relevant primary sources from publications indexed in leading scientometric databases were used. The works taken into account were mainly published between 2020 and 2025. The criteria for inclusion and exclusion of publications were the spatial-temporal indicator and the level of reliability of information. The keywords “genocide, ideology, self-identification, armed aggression, legal acts, Ukrainian people, destruction” were used for the search. The limitations of the study include the lack of access to complete and up-to-date statistical data.

The research methodology included analysis and synthesis, description, systematization, comparison, content analysis, and generalization. These methods made it possible to generalize scientific, theoretical, and research data, determine cause-and-effect relationships, identify key criteria and definitions, determine the most influential factors within the process under study, formulate general conclusions of the study, and develop appropriate recommendations. Content analysis was used to study primary sources containing evidence of genocide against Ukrainians on the Internet.

Research Results

When examining the specifics of the ideology of genocide as a tool for Russia's self-identification in the international arena, it is worth considering the provisions of the UN Convention on the Prevention of the Crime of Genocide [13]. According to these provisions, genocidal rhetoric involves the sacralisation of crimes, calls for murder, and the justification of genocidal acts. The International Criminal Court has classified genocide as a crime that requires prosecution by an international tribunal [14].

At the beginning of the development of genocide, incitement through the dissemination of propaganda ideas is characteristic. This is followed by the formation of a specific intention to destroy a particular ethnic group. Finally, the actual crime of genocide is committed. All these stages were characteristic of the development of the Russian Federation's ideology against Ukrainians (Figure 1).

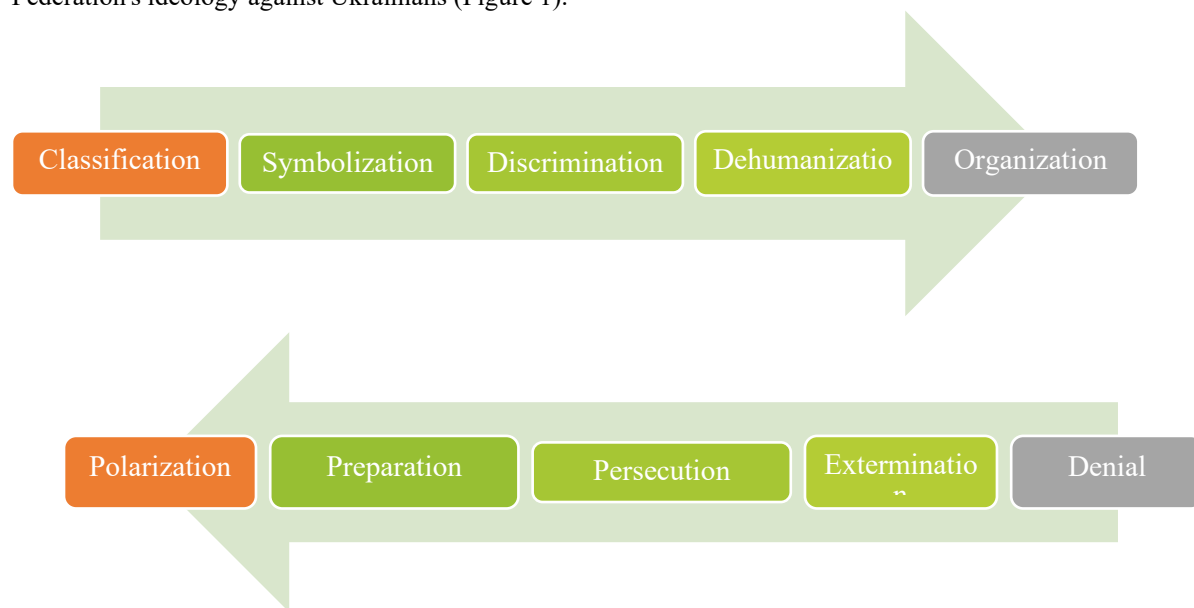


Figure 1. Evolution of the ideology of genocide

Source: compiled by the author

The conceptual basis of Russia's genocidal rhetoric is the narrative of “brotherly peoples”, the identification of the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and the Russian Federation, with corresponding geographical zoning. At the same time, the actions of the Russian military in Ukraine are determined by “efforts aimed at ending the war”. This ideology

denies the right of Ukrainian statehood to exist, emphasizing the “artificiality” of the Ukrainian language and identity. The global network currently provides a unique variety of ways to promote certain concepts to the target audience. The rhetoric of Russian propagandists prioritises the idea of combating neo-Nazism in Ukraine under occupation, which involves censorship and widespread “de-Ukrainisation”, ideological repression, “re-education” of the population, mass repression and ethnic cleansing.

Against the backdrop of Russia's war against Ukraine, mass murder, torture, psychological pressure, sexual violence, and forced deportation have become commonplace. The mass destruction of civilian infrastructure is also a sign of genocide. Repression against the elite and intelligentsia, deportation and “resettlement” of Russians or representatives of other subjugated nations, famine and mass murder are traditional methods used by Russia to carry out genocide in order to build its own empire. Russia's deliberate pro-Nazi policy has long been aimed at suppressing Ukrainian nationalism and resistance to independence.

A scientific approach to analyzing the practice of genocide as a means of self-identification by Russia in the international arena shows that emotional elements are an integral part of all processes of genocidal policy, serving as a means of justifying violent actions. They are often illogical and irrational. Belief systems or ideologies play a significant role in providing the non-intellectual elements of genocidal policy. In other words, regardless of the primary motivation of the authorities to pursue genocidal policies based on priority political or socio-economic interests, it is the ideological basis that provides the necessary justification for large-scale killings, persecution, and abuse [15, 16].

Statements by Russian media representatives and high-ranking officials of the Russian Federation about the Ukrainian nation are filled with ideas of Ukrainian neo-Nazism, which ideology sees as needing to be “denazified”, i.e., destroyed. Russian ideologists define Ukrainians as Russian people who must either be “cured” or killed. They consider calls for the physical destruction of representatives of the Ukrainian nation to be necessary, even with regard to Ukrainian children.

In the context of politics, the space for manipulative interaction extends beyond Russia's borders. Here, targeted informational and psychological pressure is exerted, social projects are integrated to create information and communication flows, and political technologies are used. These methods actively retransmit the official ideological position of the Russian Federation, developing ideas for rationalizing war crimes and violations of universally accepted human rights. Some journalists and politicians argue for the destruction of the Ukrainian state and the elimination of the Ukrainian language from the media and education, which is a direct manifestation of genocide.

Examples of the implications of genocide for Russia's self-identification in the global community demonstrate a significant impact on the dynamics of global security. Genocide at the international level is positioned as a “crime of crimes” in both a legal and moral context.

At the same time, this issue has not been given priority in the formulation of strategies for the regulatory and legal framework of global foreign policy. It is clear that preventing and stopping manifestations of the ideology of genocide significantly increases international geopolitical stability, which should serve as a benchmark for improving the international legal framework.

A significant step towards the fair punishment of those guilty of acts of genocide committed by the Russian army in Ukraine was the decision of the International Criminal Court on March 17, 2023, to recognize the actions of officials regarding the forced removal of children as a war crime. On April 7, 2023, the decision was supported by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

Genocide is considered the most serious international crime, the commission of which is grounds for both international legal responsibility of entire states and criminal responsibility of individuals. The integration of effective mechanisms for bringing perpetrators of genocide to justice is progressing very slowly.

At the same time, in practice, international law only imposes international criminal responsibility on individuals for the commission of genocide. This significantly narrows the scope of international law and reduces its effectiveness in preventing this crime. It is clear that the international crime of genocide is not possible without the direct participation of at least one state. At the same time, this is not a matter of violating the contractual balance between the rights and obligations of individual parties, but of the general obligations of all participants in the Genocide Convention.

The measures taken to date at the international level, including statements by states on the commission of acts of genocide on the territory of Ukraine, arrest warrants for Russian officials, etc., are not grounds for bringing those responsible to justice. The process is complex and will require the establishment of a solid evidence base.

The issue of how Russia's methods of self-identification through the genocide of the Ukrainian people affect the system of international legal relations is quite controversial, as the Russian Federation is trying to destroy any facts confirming the deliberate extermination of the Ukrainian people, which complicates the process of proving this. At the same time, it is often physically impossible to gather information in combat zones due to constant shelling, intimidation of the local population, and the occupiers' efficiency in destroying or refuting evidence. Nevertheless, the collected database of documented evidence confirms that the Russian military's actions are aimed at the destruction of the Ukrainian people.

This should be a determining factor in the creation of conventions, strategies, and other legal documents recognizing the genocide of the Ukrainian people at the international level. This should contribute to ensuring the lawful detention and punishment of war criminals.

Discussion

The issue of the threat of genocide against Ukrainians by the Russian Federation and the global consequences of the genocidal narrative in Russian ideology is the subject of scientific interest for numerous researchers, forming an active discourse. For example, Shaw [17] demonstrates the consequences of the distortion of Russian ideology in a genocidal context for the geopolitical situation and tensions on a global scale. Lubinets [18] and Mälksoo [19] emphasize that manifestations of genocide in the Russian Federation's international rhetoric represent deep-rooted social attitudes that require active international support to minimize.

Schabas [20], Rossoliński-Liebe and Willems [21] focus on the specifics of violations by Russia during the Russian-Ukrainian war and emphasize the ineffectiveness of international monitoring organizations in ensuring compliance with the legal norms of warfare in the actual locations of military invasion. The authors emphasize that a number of crimes remain unidentified and undocumented, which complicates the process of bringing those responsible to justice in the international legal arena.

Marchuk and Wanigasuriya [22] examine the most striking manifestations of the policy of genocide against the Ukrainian people, where the direct impact of military actions is exacerbated by information disinformation. This deepens and intensifies the negative determinants of Russian aggression.

Primush et al. [10] conduct a comparative analysis of Russia's political narratives regarding Ukraine and conclude that the global information space is currently becoming a key strategic target for promoting the ideology of genocide. The basis of Russia's information and psychological technologies of self-identification is composed of the ideology of Rashism, a symbiosis of the key principles of Stalinism and fascism, which is seen as a dangerous challenge to the stability of the global community and the legitimacy of the international legal field.

This state of affairs necessitates the improvement of systemic international legal mechanisms for political, economic, and legal sanctions against the aggressor. It is also important to conduct large-scale media literacy and information hygiene campaigns to effectively counter Russian propaganda. Simanjuntak et al. [23] reveal false ideas, provide international support for independent media, strengthen information security, and pursue policies to support historical memory will make it possible to develop an effective system to counter genocide in the global environment.

Özsu [24] notes that the new diplomacy, which has now expanded the boundaries of humanitarian sensitivity to the stigmatization of genocide, does not allow for an objective perception of the threats posed by the current Russian ideology of genocide [25].

The issue under study cannot currently be positioned unequivocally. It is clear that Russia's coordinated policy is determined within the concept of genocide. At the same time, given the imperfection of the international legal framework, it is very difficult to prove the fact of genocide in the international legal field.

Conclusion

An analysis of the peculiarities of Russia's self-identification in the context of the narrative of genocide against the Ukrainian people leads to the conclusion that the rhetoric of modern Russia in the international arena is imbued with ideas denying Ukrainians' right to their own state and identity. Such statements are a demonstration and justification of acts of genocide during the Russian-Ukrainian war. The systematic manifestation of genocidal intentions as a means of self-identification by Russia in publications and the media, as well as in speeches by high-ranking officials, demonstrates the consistent policy of the Russian Federation towards the Ukrainian nation and statehood.

Given the risks of the Russian Federation's genocidal ideology influencing the geopolitical situation, the most pressing issues today are the formation and integration of a global strategy to counter manifestations of genocide and bring perpetrators to justice, as well as the deconstruction of imposed Russian historical interpretations.

Russia's self-identification through the genocide of the Ukrainian people finds practical expression in mass killings and torture, deportation, sexual violence, mass shelling, the use of prohibited weapons, psychological pressure, and manipulative actions. The genocide of the Ukrainian people has led to a series of changes in international legal action, demonstrating the international community's readiness to actively counter genocide. At the same time, the effectiveness and scale of these changes leave much to be desired.

Further research on this topic could include studies on the Russian Federation's genocidal rhetoric in the context of the Baltic states, which are active members of the European community.

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