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## **Civilizational Security: Why the Russian Invasion of Ukraine Shows that ‘National Security’ is Not Enough to Understand Geopolitics**

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### **Abstract**

This paper argues that the idea of “national security” is sometimes overwritten by “civilizational security” in security-related considerations. Civilizational security, as understood in this paper, refers to a country's security stemming from its belonging to a cultural zone or a civilization. The author clarifies the terms “a civilization,” “civilizational identity,” and “civilizational security.” Citing the examples of Poland, Ukraine, and Russia when considering the parameter of civilizational security allows us to better analyze and predict some processes, including geopolitical dilemmas and civilizational trends. It is argued that prior to the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Russia misunderstood its own civilizational security and that civilizational security perceived as an analytical lens could reveal new security dynamics.

*Keywords:* civilizational security, civilizational identity, civilizational state, 2022 Russian invasion on Ukraine, soft power

### **Civilization and Collective Identity**

“There are signs today that ‘civilization’ is making something of a comeback both as a concept and mode of analysis” – Krishan Kumar, an American historian, wrote in 2014<sup>1</sup>. According to Kumar, throughout the Twentieth Century one could observe a pattern of shifting scholarly interest in the idea of civilization. A general decline of interest became visible in the latter half of the century, but Samuel Huntington with his “Clash of Civilizations”<sup>2</sup> in 1996 reversed the trend.

One of the claims of the book, typical of the field of the comparative research on civilizations, was that within a global civilization, one could also single out civilizations, which is to say – macro-cultural identities such as Western, Islamic, Eastern Orthodox, or Latin-American.

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<sup>1</sup> Krishan Kumar, “The Return of Civilization—and of Arnold Toynbee?,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 56, pp. 815-843, 2014

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Huntington, *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of the world order*, Simon & Schuster 1996.

Subsequently, Huntington's work was criticized and deemed controversial by some scholars who accused Huntington of having contributed to global cultural divisions with his civilizational mapping. For example, Peter Katzenstein in a paper entitled "Walls Between 'Those People'?" claimed that such concepts as Huntington's contribute to harming international debate because civilizations in this view tend to be presented as internally coherent entities "equipped with state-like capacity to act," whereas in reality civilizations are ever-changing, incoherent and complex<sup>3</sup>.

I have discussed arguments for and against singling out civilizational identities and dividing the world into civilizations, together with the resulting problems, elsewhere<sup>4</sup>. A thing to note in this paper is that in spite of the ongoing debate and controversies related to the ideological and political abuses of "civilization," the term and its synonyms seem to be functioning in both public and academic discourses.

In particular, we often see both the terms "the civilization," which denotes a single, global, human civilization and "a civilization," which denotes one among many civilizations based on diverse cultural, political and/or religious traditions. This is an important distinction. In fact, we could conceptualize a nation, a civilization, the civilization and three consecutive identity concepts linked by a relation of inclusion, as pictured on Fig.1.

Just as the global human civilization may contain many civilizations, a civilization (one in many) may contain many nations. Whereas national identities are being consciously reproduced by an institution of the state and are frequently referred to as "thick identities"<sup>5</sup>, the levels of "a civilization and "the civilization" tend to be thinner; thus, belonging to them is more elusive and does not have to generate immediate citizen-like obligations<sup>6</sup>. In the era of globalization, the debate whether national identities could get fuzzier and other identities could get thicker is ongoing<sup>7</sup>.

In any case, both "the (human) civilization" – when understood as a humanity-encompassing term – and "a civilization" – when understood as a particular, "Huntingtonian" civilizational identity – seem to be functioning in the public and academic discourses.

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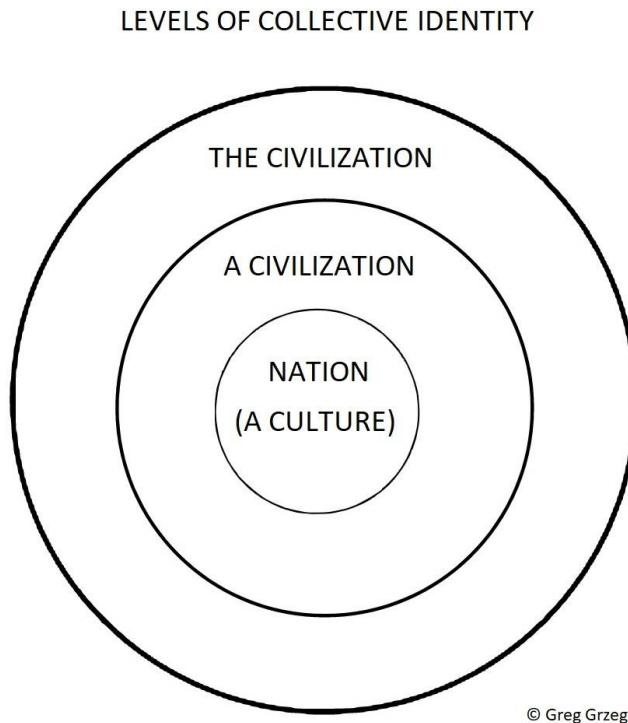
<sup>3</sup> Peter J. Katzenstein, "Walls between "Those People"? Contrasting Perspectives on World Politics," *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 8, March 2010, p. 11-25.

<sup>4</sup> Grzegorz Lewicki, *Philosophical-historical Issues in Joseph Tainter's Theory of the Collapse of Complex Societies*, PhD dissertation, Institute of Philosophy, Jagiellonian University, Kraków 2017 (unpublished).

<sup>5</sup> Kees Terlouw, "Trading Identities: Neomedievalism and the Urban Future," in: G. Lewicki (ed.), *Cities in the Neomedieval Era*, IMPART, Wrocław 2017 (2016), pp. 45-64.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Christopher Coker, *The Rise of the Civilizational State*. Polity, 2019, pp. xi-xiii

<sup>7</sup> Robert Cooper, *The Post-modern State and the World Order*, Demos 1996



*Fig. 1. A nation, a civilization, the civilization. Three layers of collective identity*

Thus, whereas “*the civilization*” seems to appear in discussions about global and collateral threats such as nuclear weapons, climate change or artificial intelligence, “*a civilization*” tends to be used in geopolitical contexts such as collective actions of some group of states against others or the discussion of cultural differences between distinct national cultures.

Among these two civilizational concepts, certainly “*a civilization*” is more controversial and fuzzier. This is because “*the civilization*” is as semantically broad and inclusive as it is simple: it denotes humanity in all its manifestations. “*A civilization,*” however, is narrower and refers to plethora of identity-related claims, which are complex, problematic, ideological, value-laden and prone to generating scholarly or even political discord.

## The Narrative of “a Civilization”

In spite of calls to kill “civilization” as a concept<sup>8</sup>, the narrower civilizational term, “a civilization,” seems to be getting increasing, not decreasing attention in the scholarly and public discourses in the last years, just as Kumar claimed<sup>9</sup>. In terms of published works in English, according to Google Books NGram Viewer, which aggregates the annual uses of terms in the published literature, “civilizational identity” notes a rising scholarly interest from the last decade of previous century onward. A query conducted on 30.07.2023 with data available until 2019 shows the following figure (Fig.2)

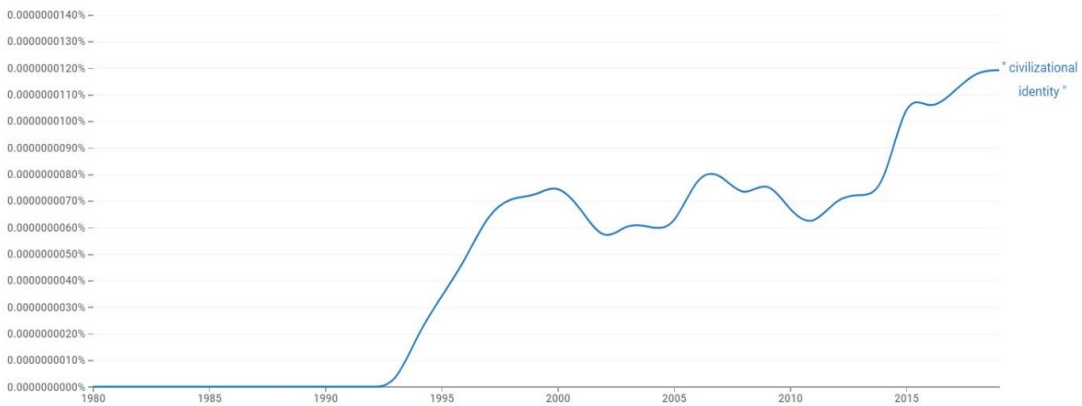


Fig.2. The rising popularity of “civilizational identity” as a term to be found in published works in the English language, according to Google NGram Viewer

Describing the long-term vitality of “a civilization,” Christopher Coker has asserted that in spite of being elusive and problematic, the idea of “a civilization” has been shaping global affairs for decades and that this is unlikely to change. Recently, Coker argues, “a civilization” as an idea has reemerged in the form of a “civilizational state” – that is to say a concept of a single culture or state which wants to present itself as a main representative of a particular civilization.

According to Coker “the civilizational state is an eclectic concept: it is largely a device to legitimize the power of a particular regime and to help it shape the political landscape in its interests. Nevertheless, if it has one overarching theme, it is this: the total rejection of universalism, the great dream of Western writers”<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Justin Jennings, *Killing Civilization: a Reassessment of Early Urbanism and its Consequences*, Albuquerque 2016.

<sup>9</sup> Krishan Kumar, op. cit.

<sup>10</sup> Christopher Coker, *The Rise of Civilizational State*, op. cit., p.167

In line with Coker's thesis, a Chinese scholar Wei-Wei Zhang earlier presented China as a civilizational state that is deeply unwilling to embrace Westernization, understood as influence of the West<sup>11</sup>. He also claimed: "China's rise is not the rise of an ordinary country, but the rise of a country *sui generis*, a civilizational state, a new model of development and a new political discourse which questions many of the Western assumptions about democracy, good governance and human rights"<sup>12</sup>. According to him, "the civilizational state has a strong capability to draw on the strengths of other nations while maintaining its own identity. As an endogenous civilization capable of generating its own standards and values, it makes unique contributions to the world civilizations"<sup>13</sup>.

Of note is that "a civilization" is also inspiring the West. Western politicians have long been referring to their community of values and states as "a civilization." In the United States both Republicans and Democrats have been mentioning the Western civilization when speaking of geopolitical, technological and cultural challenges to come. For example, in 2017 former President Donald Trump, during a speech in the easternmost Western state of Europe: Poland, referred to Western "civilization" ten times<sup>14</sup>. In turn President Joe Biden referred to the Western civilization many times in recent years, in particular when responding to the threats generated by Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022<sup>15</sup>. In addition, Russia presents itself as a separate civilization, as well<sup>16</sup>.

The idea of civilization can be helpful in prognosticating the future of identity networks related to groups of cultures, institutions and religions<sup>17</sup>. Partially this is because the term is permeating many current buzzwords related to geopolitics, such as "allyshoring" or "friendshoring."

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<sup>11</sup> Zhang Weiwei, *The China Wave. Rise of a Civilizational State*, World Century Publishing Corporation 2011, p.47.

<sup>12</sup> Zhang Weiwei, op. cit., p. x.

<sup>13</sup> Zhang Weiwei, op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> "Remarks by President Trump to the People of Poland", 5.07.2017, The official website of the President of the Republic of Poland <https://www.president.pl/news/remarks-by-president-trump-to-the-people-of-poland,36457>

<sup>15</sup> Alan Rappeport, "Biden Declares West Will Not Be Intimidated by Putin's Actions," *The New York Times*, 30.09. 2022 <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/30/world/europe/biden-putin-russia.html>

<sup>16</sup> Yuri Kadobnov, "Russia Is a 'Distinct Civilization,' Putin Says", *The Moscow Times* 18.05.2020 <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/05/18/russia-is-a-distinct-civilization-putin-says-a70295>

<sup>17</sup> Grzegorz Lewicki, "Return of Toynbee, Return of Toynbee. European Union as universal state, Muslims as internal proletariat", *Sensus Historiae* Vol 28, No 3/2017

<http://sensushistoriae.epigram.eu/index.php/czasopismo/article/view/386>

These terms refer to relocating the production and value chains of one's economy to a territory of an ally and predictable partner, as opposed to "offshoring," understood as placing value chains only in accordance with the calculation as to where the economic gain is the greatest<sup>18</sup>.

Instead for going for the greatest financial gains, allyshoring in some crucial segments of the economy would mean that countries such as the US or China could rely on a partner, a country whose civilization is predictable in the long run, and whose cultural scripts or policy principles will not generate challenges leading to strategic decoupling in the future.

Indeed, a global need for cultural stability in an era of unstable rivalries apparently contributes to the growing attention policymakers seem to pay to the indices of cultural distance. One such index is the World Values Survey (WVS), which measures cultural differences between the majority of cultures on the globe, based on large-scale and regularly held personal surveys<sup>19</sup>. The authors of WVS single out distinct cultural zones, an approach which remains coherent with civilizational approach to studying cultures<sup>20</sup> (Fig.3)

For example, "Catholic Europe," "Protestant Europe," and "English Speaking" groups on the WVS map together form a cluster of values that remains coherent with the perception of "the Western civilization," traditionally linked to the geographical regions of North America, Europe and Australia.

Certainly, one may argue that "a civilization" or "a civilizational identity" must refer to more than just a macro-cultural identity to account for a civilization. For example, one could claim that for "a civilization" to be differentiated from a "macro-culture," it should additionally include various dimensions of political or institutional organization that supplement the cultural dimension.

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<sup>18</sup> Sarah Kessler, "What Is 'Friendshoring'?", *New York Times* 3.01.2023

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/18/business/friendshoring-jargon-business.html> ; Cf. G. Lewicki, *China's Belt and Road meets the Three Seas Initiative*, Polish Economic Institute, May 2020 p.33

<sup>19</sup> "WVS Cultural Map: 2023 Version Released", World Values Survey 17.02.2023

<https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSNewsShow.jsp?ID=467>

<sup>20</sup> The Inglehart-Welzel World Cultural Map - World Values Survey 7, 2023. Source:

<http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>

### The Inglehart-Welzel World Cultural Map 2023

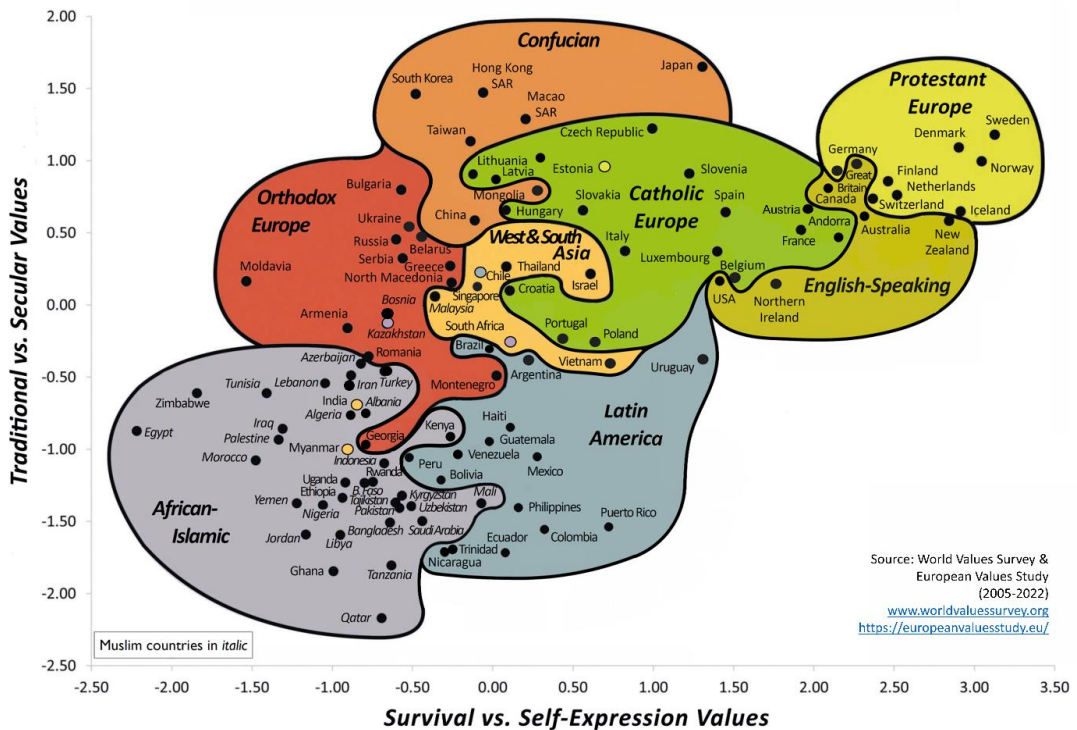


Fig. 3. The Inglehart-Welzel World Cultural Map - World Values Survey as of 2023. Some dimensions of civilizational identities could be extractable from the WVS map.

This is a valid claim, but its validity does not change the fact that the leading authors of the World Values Survey have successfully demonstrated that the reference to cultural zones and their evolution could generate new insights useful for geopolitics and security studies. For example, Akaliyski and Welzel demonstrated how a collective cultural identity of the West and East between the European and Eastern European Orthodox cultural zones has been changing in the last decades<sup>21</sup>. In particular they have shown that the countries of the European Union and the Eurasian Economic Union have diverged culturally in the recent decades.

Could it be that such cultural divergence is non-trivial from the perspective of security studies, and it is related to the geopolitical rift that has led to the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine? We will try to answer this question through the lens of an emerging concept – civilizational security.

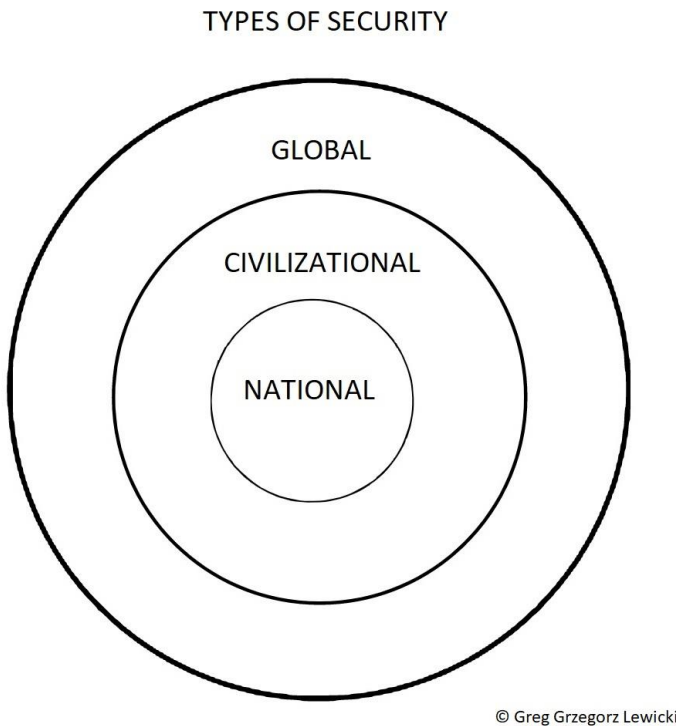
<sup>21</sup> Plamen Akaliyski, Christian Welzel, “Clashing Values: Supranational Identities, Geopolitical Rivalry and Europe’s Growing Cultural Divide,” *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 2020, Vol 51(9).



## Civilizational Security and the Security of a Civilization

As discussed above, we could distinguish between a broad (the civilization) and a narrow (a civilization) understanding of the concept of civilization. This parallels a similar case in the field of security studies, when conceptualizing the idea of civilizational security. The concept appears in the “Routledge Handbook of New Security Studies” published in 2010, where Brett Bowden discusses civilizational security understood both as a security of a particular civilization and as a security of the global civilization, or humankind<sup>22</sup>.

In this spirit we could add two types of security to the concept of national security: narrow civilizational (related to a single civilization) and broader civilizational (or global) security (Fig. 4).



*Fig. 4. Types of security. Broad civilizational (global), narrow civilizational and national.*

<sup>22</sup> Brett Bowden, “Civilizational security,” in J.P. Burgess (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of New Security Studies*, Routledge 2010

For the sake of clarity, when referring to “civilizational security” in the remaining part of this paper I will be utilizing the narrower meaning of the term, i.e., a civilization. As I understand it, such a conceptualization of civilizational security refers to the security of specific civilizations grasped as regions or cultural zones of the world – not necessarily geographically close – with little cultural distance, i.e., sharing similar values and institution types.

In this framing, nations derive part of their security from belonging to a cultural zone or a civilization. This does not mean, of course, that cultures of the same civilizations do not clash. They do. It means, rather, that a layer of analysis that seeks to approximate the impact of global events on a nation’s civilizational security should be included into an analyst’s skillset to generate adequate insights and predictions. In other words, civilizational security analysis should complement national security analysis that typically considers economic, geopolitical, cultural and technological factors but rarely refers to macro-cultures and civilizations.

By referring to the civilizational identity, an analyst can try to recreate the broader, evolving network of collective identity as a separate factor that has an impact on other layers. Certainly, civilizations are fluid, ambiguous concepts and the current times would necessitate refining or even redefining of “a civilization” in order to make it non-controversial, future-proof, measurable and – in general – less elusive. In principle, however, in contrast to Kwame Appiah, who seems to be suggesting that because of the complexity of “a civilization” we should not refer to it at all,<sup>23</sup> I believe we should use the term and let it satiate our understanding of ourselves – albeit with constant vigilance related to the potential abuse of the civilizational concept.

Below I will argue that looking at global politics through the lens of civilizational security could lead to conclusions that are non-trivial and useful for policymakers and analysts alike.

### **Russia and Ukraine. Civilizational Security and Geopolitics**

When Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022, some analysts claimed it all should have not happened or that it was irrational<sup>24</sup>. However, something must have prompted Russia’s President Vladimir Putin to make such a decision.

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<sup>23</sup> Kwame Anthony Appiah, “There is no such thing as western civilization”, *The Guardian* 9.11.2016 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/09/western-civilisation-appiah-reith-lecture>

<sup>24</sup> Jan Švec, “Russia’s Irrational War in Ukraine Should Be a Warning for Predicting China’s Behavior”, *The Diplomat* 19.01.2023 <https://thediplomat.com/2023/01/russias-irrational-war-in-ukraine-should-be-a-warning-for-predicting-chinas-behavior/>

As argued by Christopher Coker, Russia has long perceived itself as a civilizational state – a giver of values and a provider of order to an entire civilization,<sup>25</sup> one that scholars have called “Eastern Orthodox,” “Slavic” or simply “Russian”<sup>26</sup>. In accordance with this self-perception the Moscow-centered Russian Orthodox Church, a branch of Orthodox Christianity, has tried to present itself in the recent decades as a powerful center of doctrinal authority for the entire Orthodox world. In particular, it pictured itself as comparable or even more authoritative than the main, traditional center of Orthodox Christianity, namely the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople with headquarters in Istanbul, Turkey.

In recent decades, this religious friction was visible in Ukraine, where Constantinople-aligned and Moscow-aligned branches of Orthodox Christianity competed for the believers but – until recently – coexisted rather peacefully. This changed following 2014 Russia’s invasion of Ukraine which led to the annexation of the Donbas region and the Crimean peninsula.

The Moscow-aligned church has not condemned these steps and the Security Service of Ukraine accused the church structures, including the head of the church, Patriarch Kyrill, of collusion with Moscow<sup>27</sup>. After Russia invaded Ukraine again, in 2022, Kyrill gained international attention again: not only because he blessed Russia’s invasion, one that left many Orthodox temples in Ukraine burnt to rubble, but also because in 2023 declassified Swiss archives revealed Kyrill to have been a Russian spy for decades; he conducted special missions for Moscow at least from the 1970s on, apparently<sup>28</sup>. The process of exposing the Moscow-aligned branch of Orthodoxy in Ukraine as Russia’s spy network culminated in a symbolic event: the takeover of the golden-domed Pechersk Lavra in Kyiv, a marvel of architecture and the center of Orthodoxy, from the hands of its Moscow-aligned clergy in 2023<sup>29</sup>.

Russian propaganda at that time could really not find a narrative to describe the event other than deeming Ukrainians evil and ungrateful. This is because in the Russian perception, Ukraine, home to many Russian-speaking Ukrainians, has always been “their” civilization. It has been home of “their” golden-domed Pechersk Lavra, it has been “their” Crimea peninsula that year after year hosted crowds of Russian tourists.

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. Christopher Coker, op. cit., chapter “The civilizational state.”

<sup>26</sup> Joachim Diec, *Cywilizacje bez okien. Teoria Mikołaja Danilewskiego i późniejsze koncepcje monadycznych formacji socjokulturowych*, Kraków 2002.

<sup>27</sup> Andrzej Szabaciuk, “Patriarch Kirill’s Holy War,” Institute of Central Europe, Lublin 23.03.2022 <https://ies.lublin.pl/en/comments/patriarch-kirills-holy-war/>

<sup>28</sup> Sylvain Besson, Bernhard Odehnal, „Putins Patriarch war Spion in der Schweiz“, *Tages-Anzeiger* 4.02.2023 *SonntagsZeitung* <https://www.tagesanzeiger.ch/priester-spion-propagandist-das-geheimleben-des-moskauer-kirchenfuersten-in-der-schweiz-566103963787>

<sup>29</sup> Elena Davlikanova, *Russia Evicted From the Heart of Ukraine*, Center for European Policy Analysis 30.03.2023 <https://cepa.org/article/russia-evicted-from-the-heart-of-ukraine/>

It has been “their” *Russkiy mir* (Russian world) that suddenly ceased to be recognized as desirable by others.

Certainly, in the last decades Moscow has noticed the pro-Western sentiments in Ukraine and treated them with distrust, but the Ukraine’s change of civilizational identity seems to have gone largely unnoticed by Russian intelligence. For sure, they did not predict that Ukraine would vehemently fight back and intensify its escape from the gravitational field of the Russian civilizational state<sup>30</sup>. Nor did they predict that Poland would absorb millions of Ukrainian women and children fleeing war and give them shelter in the crisis. This is precisely what American President Biden hinted at when he said about President Putin’s perception of Ukraine: “I think he thought he was going to be welcomed with open arms. That this was the home of Mother Russia and Kyiv. I think he totally miscalculated”<sup>31</sup>.

Biden’s words could be translated into the language of comparative research on civilizations and civilizational security as follows: even though Putin perceived Russia as a civilizational state, he has neither understood nor secured Russia’s civilizational security during his rule. A probable genesis of this negligence may be linked to the analytical lens used by the Russian propaganda establishment called “Russian geopolitics.” It is a type of approach to geopolitics that treats geopolitical analysis as something much more far-reaching than just a prism – one among many – through which one analyzes global affairs.

Russian geopolitics (represented by ideologists such as Alexander Dugin<sup>32</sup>) treats geopolitics as “a science” that allegedly uncovers objective, simple, cynical and iron laws that govern the world. In this simplistic, pseudoscientific approach popular in Russian military circles, the analytical focus is placed almost exclusively on hard power (meaning economic pressure and military threat potential) and sharp power (meaning special operations and the ability to distort or manipulate information flows)<sup>33</sup>.

If one views the world like this, one must conclude that the peoples and their societies constitute but a passive mass, that leaders are corrupt, and that the weaker collectives are always destined to be consumed by the physically stronger ones.

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<sup>30</sup> More about cultural gravitation: Plamen Akaliyski, Christian Welzel, Michael Harris Bond and Michael Minkov, “On “Nationology”: The Gravitational Field of National Culture,” *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, Volume 52, Issue 8-9, 2021. The authors study “gravitational” pulls of national cultures, but same methodology could apply to cultural zones.

<sup>31</sup> Louis Casiano, “Biden says Putin ‘miscalculated significantly’ in ‘irrational’ Russian invasion of Ukraine”, Fox News 11.10.2022 <https://www.foxnews.com/us/biden-putin-russian-irrational-invasion-ukraine>

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Alexander Dugin, *The Foundations of Geopolitics: The Geopolitical Future of Russia*, Arktoegeja 1997

<sup>33</sup> As to distinct types of power see for example: G. Lewicki, *China’s Belt and Road meets the Three Seas Initiative*, op. cit. p. 13

According to this worldview, cultural, social, civic and institutional dimensions – although recognized as components of a civilization – are treated as negligible byproducts of hard and sharp power.

It seems that President Putin and his advisors, influenced by such views, have been long neglecting their civilizational security – which means they have not included in their security calculations the need of “their” religion, culture and institutions to be attractive and voluntarily accepted by the societies onto which they wanted to project their civilizational influence. Why care about the perception of your institutions and culture abroad when societies are merely a passive mass, and their leaders can be effectively intimidated or bribed? Even today, when speaking about the roots of current Russian problems, many Russian analysts use mostly references to sharp and hard power: so allegedly the Ukrainians were bribed by the West, corrupted by its lies, the West wants to conquer Ukraine’s territories and its natural resources.

The problem with such reasoning is that Ukraine’s changing civilizational identity and the real reasons why Ukrainians are becoming increasingly pro-Western cannot even be voiced from within the vocabulary of “Russian geopolitics.” In this vocabulary there is no space for the tremendous impact of soft power (the power of culture, institutions and social imagination<sup>34</sup>). There is only space for societal top-down ideology, not down-to-top personal convictions.

Likewise, there is no space for the societal agency that comes from the sum of many individual preferences. In short: there is no space for the benchmarks of a civilizational identity as a causal force. This failure to appreciate emergent processes and the gravitational pull of cultural zones (or civilizations) has led to a process of civilizational weakening of Russia and the unnoticed decline of its civilizational security.

As a result, in the last decades Russia has been a powerful state (as shown, e.g., by the State Power Index<sup>35</sup> I co-created), but Russia has also been a weakening civilization. Putin’s invasion in this context should be seen as a last resort: a last possible step to protect Russia’s civilizational security after decades of negligence and misunderstanding. Putin knows that losing civilizational influence in Ukraine could mean the collapse of Russia as a civilizational state. When this happens, Russia could still exist as a state, but without serious civilizational claims.

These will be the consequences of treating civilizational soft-power tools as secondary to the tools of hard and sharp power.

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. G. Lewicki, op. cit. 2020.

<sup>35</sup> Piotr Arak, Grzegorz Lewicki, *State Power Index*, In: Europa Institute 2017  
<https://www.statepowerindex.com>

Let us repeat what I said above: in the Russian playbook, any social change to occur must be secretly steered or engineered from above, top-down, by coercion; the inclinations of individuals – so to speak – interwoven in the social fabric do not matter much.

In reality, however, the Ukrainian pull towards the West is related mainly to soft power and the cultural gravitational field of Europe, one that started to pull Ukrainians within their reach after 1989 – and even more after their neighbors Romania, Poland, Slovakia and other Central-Eastern European countries joined the European Union.

Poland, for example, received more than one million economic migrants from Ukraine even before the invasion. They have been circling back and forth between Ukraine and Poland, experiencing low cultural distance in the country so they could cherish the perspective of “the European life.” This implies a life with functional institutions and without large-scale corruption or the domination of the most powerful over the weak that is characteristic of the Russian civilizational state. They have been finding European culture simply more attractive, stable and predictable, thus more fitting for their lifelong plans. Even many Ukrainian oligarchs have understood this, to the extent that when Russian troops came to Ukraine’s borders the majority of Ukrainians agreed to prioritize their civilizational security over their national security. They certainly bet on their civilizational security, not knowing if they could succeed.

In fact, there was a reluctance of France and Germany to support Ukraine in the first weeks of the invasion, suggesting their conclusion that Ukraine could lose. When Ukraine’s President Zelensky met Poland’s President Andrzej Duda shortly after the invasion, he told the Polish president: “It is possible we are seeing each other for the last time”<sup>36</sup>.

A risk of assassination of Ukrainian elites was and still is very high. The toll in blood for Ukraine’s participation in the European Western dream is being paid even as this paper is being published. However, Ukrainians have placed their bet firmly: from the first day of invasion, they keep communicating their dedication towards Western identity, trying to fit into both left-wing and right-wing sensitivities of Western countries in narratives they tell the Western world<sup>37</sup>.

Why did the Ukrainians choose to keep fighting and dying instead of accepting a gravitational pull toward the Russian civilizational state?

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<sup>36</sup> Mikołaj Pietraszewski, „Duda wspomina rozmowę z Zelenskim. ‘Andrzej, być może widzimy się po raz ostatni’”, Radio Zet 20.05.2022 <https://wiadomosci.radiozet.pl/swiat/polityka/Andrzej-Duda-wspomina-rozmore-z-Zelenskim.-Andrzej-byc-moze-widzimy-sie-po-raz-ostatni>

<sup>37</sup> Grzegorz Lewicki, “Innovation and culture. How to make the Three Seas region a global hotspot of tech creativity,” a Vilnius lecture at the *Stern Leadership Academy as part of Stanford University Graduate School of Business Executive Education program*, 13.01.2023

This is where the concept of civilizational security proves its explanatory potential: Ukrainians have calculated that raising their civilizational security in the long run necessitates short term radical lowering of their national security.

Certainly, achieving civilizational security and stabilizing it will raise Ukraine's national security eventually. However, Ukraine's choice between the West and the Russia at the outset of the invasion seemed to have been quite simple on a psychological level: you will not deem civilizationally attractive someone who is constantly bullying you and who will periodically come for a chunk of your country, as Russia kept doing.

Moreover, Ukrainians, having lived along the borderland of civilizations for centuries, have understood well that civilizational identity comes in a bundle – it offers a package of value types, institutions as well as technological and economic ties that are tangled together and interdependent once you choose a civilization. It has been not just about living on good terms with Russia; it has been about accepting the building blocks of their civilization in Ukraine.

Once the choice is made, some tenets come quickly at a “discount rate” – an independent judiciary system and the rule of law become easier to implement as institutions if you start to value the dignity of a single person as do the Roman law and the Christian tradition typical of the West. On the other hand, it is easier to implement and sustain a digital system of authoritarian control, if your society is only ruled by the law created to allow the stronger to subdue the weaker – like in the Russian civilizational state.

As argued above, Putin's establishment has overlooked the fact that societal changes of values might facilitate civilizational shifts.

In this context let us look at the research by Akaliyski and Welzel in more detail<sup>38</sup>. In the years from 1990 to 2014, the majority of EU member states have noted an increase in the so-called “emancipative values” based on individual self-fulfillment, while Russia, the mayor player of the Eurasian Economic Union, has noted a decrease. However, some countries – including Russia's neighbors Ukraine and Georgia – have not followed Russia's pattern. Quite the contrary, they both noted an increase in the emancipative values typical of the West, albeit slower than in the case of the majority of the EU.

Of course, such a shift does not mean any change of civilizational allegiance, but it may facilitate it by making civilizational transition easier and more stable if it happens due to a conscious political decision.

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<sup>38</sup> Plamen Akaliyski, Christian Welzel, *op. cit.*

Of note is that in the times these value changes were recorded Russia invaded both Ukraine and Georgia, both invasions resulting in territorial loss – Georgia lost some regions in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014.

### Poland's Civilizational Security

What about Poland's civilizational security? Much like in the computer game "Civilization" where a player may achieve a cultural or institutional (economic) victory through peaceful soft-power influence<sup>39</sup>, Poland could achieve cultural victory by further transmitting material support and the promise of the Western civilization to Ukraine together with other EU countries.

Poland, like Ukraine, has calculated that its civilizational security is of top priority even if its national security could suffer in the process. Thus, Polish elites have assumed that strengthening the Western identity of its neighboring countries would raise Poland's civilizational security, a development that will also be beneficial for Poland's national security overall. Poland's general reluctance to embrace the Russian civilizational state with its values is evident to everyone who has studied Russia's exploitation of Poland, not to mention nearly half century of communism in years from 1945 to 1989.

Further, Poland is also home to some civilizational thinkers that have imprinted civilizational thinking into intellectual traditions. One such individual was Feliks Koneczny<sup>40</sup> who described Russia as a member of the Turanian (Eurasian) civilization based on militarism and Nomadic camp-life "ethics" with an idea of the state as a private property of a chieftain.

From the perspective of 2023, this Polish bet about Russia as a militant civilization was right even if many in the West did not want listen<sup>41</sup>. The bet has currently led to the increase of Poland's civilizational security: in the times of the current geopolitical struggle Poland's logistic networks are crucial for the West. Poland has confirmed its role as an indispensable part of the West, both in terms of practical utility and international image.

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<sup>39</sup> "Victories" in: Civilization 6 guide, IGN 13.12.2016  
<https://www.ign.com/wikis/civilization-6/Victories>

<sup>40</sup> Feliks Koneczny, *The laws of history*, Antyk 2013. Cf. Grzegorz Lewicki, "The laws of history and big data. Feliks Koneczny's quest to discover laws governing the life of civilizations," a lecture at Monmouth University during IS CSC 2022 Annual Conference 27-30.07.2022  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hkSwXOTBf7Q>

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Piotr Arak, Greg Lewicki, "Pipes and Pipe Guns: Gas Warfare in Central Europe", *National Interest* 7.08.2021 <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/pipes-and-pipe-guns-gas-warfare-central-europe-191430>



If we were to define Poland's civilizational security in the current century in general, it could be defined as follows: Poland's civilizational security is the security of Poland resulting from its belonging to Western civilization, as well as the security resulting from the perception of Poland as an indispensable element of the West. It is also the security resulting from a stable and predictable networking – cultural, political and economic – with other Western states and institutions. The greater the networking and predictability of relations with major actors of the Western civilization – such as the European Union and the United States – the greater Poland's civilizational security. This particular definition could be generalized to denote civilizational security of many different states.

### **Civilization as a Tangled Web: Dimensions of Civilizational Security**

As I have demonstrated in this paper, the narrow understanding of civilizational security is a useful concept capable of supplementing and enriching other analytical layers when discussing geopolitics. It is especially useful in analyzing security of the countries located in civilizational borderlands or countries which experience the strong presence of two or more civilizations in or around them. As the Polish and Ukrainian cases suggest, a priority of ensuring civilizational security can overwrite national security in some policy considerations. In turn, the Russian case suggests that neglecting civilizational security or trying to exercise civilizational security by force – with hard power instead of soft power – runs the considerable risk of failure.

As long as civilizational identities are shaped by complex networks of interdependence and mutual influence that come at certain costs<sup>42</sup>, the main analytical dimensions that civilizational security analysts should weigh include:

- (a) values and culture, with the emphasis on the cultural distance towards the core of a civilization(s) with which a country wants to remain linked;
- (b) religion, with the emphasis on the networks of authority, ideology and financing of religions the country has on its territory;
- (c) geography, with the emphasis on physical proximity to members of particular civilization;
- (d) economy, with the emphasis on stable and predictable economic ties to the members of a desired civilization(s);
- (e) technology, with the emphasis on the safety of technological infrastructure provided by the members of desired civilization(s) and their control of crucial information flows;

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. Daniel W. Drezner, Henry Farell, Abraham L. Newman (eds.), *The Uses and abuses of weaponized interdependence*, Brookings Institution Press 2021.

- (f) narratives, with the emphasis on an image of a country in the eyes of the members of desired civilization(s) as indispensable or at least as crucial for the civilization(s), and
- (g) the power of civilizations with which a country wants to be associated.

Analyzing geopolitics in terms of civilizational security could help policymakers and analysts alike. Think of Poland, Ukraine and Russia and their civilizational security as a parameter to understand these countries' decisions, failures and successes, dreams and imaginaries. Think of Mongolia that secured its civilizational stability by relying on Buddhism that differentiates their culture from Confucian and Russian-Orthodox neighbors. Think of Israel that secured its place as an enclave of Western thinking in the Middle East by creating unique links with the United States and convincing American Christians they should support Israel due to religious reasons<sup>43</sup>.

Think, too, of Taiwan which, by allowing for the Westernization of its Confucian civilizational identity, became a stable partner for the West and constructed its security based on its indispensability for the Western production chains (microchips). Think of many African countries that will be rethinking their civilizational security in the years to come to decide which bundles of civilizational identity they want to be linked to. The potential for studying civilizational security globally is vast.

Certainly, to understand civilizational security better we would have to refine or even redefine "a civilization" to make the concept more fluid and measurable. This, however, would necessitate a separate publication. In any case, civilizational identities should be seen as multi-layered networks, the layers of which include, among others, religion, economy, technology, politics and culture, all of which form a tangled, but not indiscernible web. Civilizational identities are neither set in stone, nor they are easy to be imposed on the people if their personal dreams and desires point elsewhere.

Hence, in the present century, whoever neglects civilizational security in analyzing global politics will learn a bitter lesson. At best he or she will make wrong predictions; at worst he or she will start the kinetic war that cannot be won. For you cannot conquer civilizational identities with tanks.

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<sup>43</sup> Philip Earl Steele, „Dyplomacja religijna: ważna lekcja dla Polski”, Trimarium 24.04.2021 <https://trimarium.pl/sekcja/philip-earl-steele-dyplomacja-religijna-wazna-lekcja-dla-polski-cykl-webinariow/>

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