

# GEOPOLITICS OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE



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Adjunct Lecturer in Geopolitics  
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## Abstract

The 2022 Russian invasion in Ukraine (February 2022-ongoing) has now entered its fifth month and is already in a scaled-back, second phase of military operations. What conclusions can be drawn thus far on the military operations and on the general implications of this conflict on a regional and global level? What is the geopolitical background of the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine and how is it justified by Russian ideological propaganda mechanisms? We present an analysis of the geopolitics of the Russian invasion of Ukraine as part of inherent Russian revisionism and its implications for regional and global international order. We examine Russian interests and strategic objectives, the geopolitical impact of the invasion and we analyze in detail the military and strategic lessons of the war in Ukraine. Finally, we provide three possible military scenarios about the continuation of the war addressing also the issue of the possible use of nuclear weapons and conclude with some policy recommendations.

## Keywords

revisionism, geopolitics, sovereignty, international order, Russian propaganda, disinformation, strategic lessons, military scenarios, nuclear weapons

## 1. Background of the 2022 Invasion and International Response

The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, a blatant violation of international law and fundamental principles of international order, is the most serious challenge to European order and security since 1945. This is a clear and violent manifestation of Russian revisionism in its purest form and a crime of aggression according to international criminal law, as it violates the fundamental principles of the Charter of the United Nations.<sup>1</sup>

Ukraine and Russia share a history of uneasy coexistence, geopolitical confrontation, and historical and cultural rivalry.<sup>2</sup> On a demographic level, both states are based on ethnic Slavic populations -albeit with a considerably different historical trajectory in the *longue durée*<sup>3</sup>- and both were members of the Soviet Union, which dissolved in 1991. Over the next years, Ukraine would be politically divided in an increasingly polarized environment among a pro-Western and a pro-Russian geopolitical orientation expressed on a political level by rival forces and candidates. The decisive victory of the pro-Western political forces in 2014 with the Euro-Maidan protests and Ukraine's subsequent attempt to approach the EU, as well as the general geopolitical situation of the period, convinced Russian officials to increase their aggression and revisionism against Ukraine to preserve what is -they believe - their justified national interest.<sup>4</sup>

The Russo-Ukrainian War began already in 2014, when Russia invaded Ukrainian territory and annexed Crimea, and Russian-backed separatists in Eastern Ukraine

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<sup>1</sup> Kotoulas, I.E., 'Russia as a Revisionist State and the 2022 Invasion of Ukraine', in: I. Ivanovych (ed.), *The Russian-Ukrainian War (2014-2022): Historical, Political, Cultural-Educational, Religious, Economic and Legal Aspects*, Riga: Baltija Publishing, 2022, forthcoming.

<sup>2</sup> Potichnyi, P.J., *Ukraine and Russia in Their Historical Encounter*, Toronto: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1992; Magosci, P.R., *A History of Ukraine: The Land and Its Peoples*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010; Plokhy, S., *The Gates of Europe: A History of Ukraine*, New York: Basic Books, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Plokhy, S., *The Origins of the Slavic Nations: Premodern Identities in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Aleprete, Jr., M.E., 'Minimizing Loss: Explaining Russian Policy: Choices during the Ukrainian Crisis', *Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 44 (2017): 53-75.

succeeded to control a significant part of the southeastern Donbas region of Ukraine.<sup>5</sup> In the eastern regions, pro-Russian separatists and Russian troops attempted to establish a de facto rule of territory with the establishment of the breakaway regions of the Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic that could be used as a pretext for future actions, as it happened in 2022. During this period and up to the 2022 invasion, Russia officially denied its involvement in the breakaway regions attempting to keep appearances as a legitimate power. Hostilities in the eastern regions between Ukrainian forces and pro-Russian separatists would evolve into a static conflict. In 2015, the Minsk II Agreements were signed by Ukraine and Russia as participatory members, although dispute about their terms hindered their implementation.<sup>6</sup>

With the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Russia achieved the following goals:

- a significant enlargement of Russian territory through controlling the strategic important Crimean Peninsula;
- lasting control of the important military base of Sevastopol, which has remained a Russian base after 1991 under a separate leasing agreement, and the northern part of the Black Sea region. In this context, the Black Sea is treated in Russian strategic thinking as its soft belly. Russia's strategic approach is reminiscent of security concerns for the possible power projection of Western sea powers in the Black Sea;
- a considerable reduction of the relative power of Ukraine both on a territorial and political level. Ukraine is perceived in this sense by Russia as the enemy state par excellence;
- obstruction of Ukraine's candidacy for the EU and most importantly for NATO;
- a demonstration of Russian military and cyber-warfare capabilities.<sup>7</sup>

The escalation that would lead to the 2022 invasion began in late 2021, as Russian military forces started a massive military deployment along the borderline with Ukraine. Russia gathered initially a total of 190,000 troops dismissing all the time the allegations that

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<sup>5</sup> Yekelchik, S., *The Conflict in Ukraine: What Everyone Needs to Know*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2015, 115-152; Toal, G., *Near Abroad: Putin, the West and the Contest over Ukraine and the Caucasus*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2017; D'Anieri, P., *Ukraine and Russia: From Civilized Divorce to Uncivil War*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019, 211-252; Smith, C.M., *Ukraine's Revolt, Russia's Revenge*, Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2022.

<sup>6</sup> For the original text of the agreement see <https://peacemaker.un.org/ua-ceasefire-2014>; Memorandum on the implementation: <https://peacemaker.un.org/implementation-minsk-19Sept2014>. Cf. D'Anieri, P., *Ukraine and Russia: From Civilized Divorce to Uncivil War*, Cambridge University Press, 2019, 246-249.

<sup>7</sup> Pisciotta, B., 'Russian revisionism in the Putin era: An overview of post-communist military interventions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria', *Italian Political Science Review* 50:1 (2020), 87-106.



an invasion was in the making.<sup>8</sup> On December 17, the Foreign Ministry of Russia revealed their set of demands vis-à-vis the situation in Ukraine. Russian officials presented a draft agreement between Russia and the U.S. on 'security guarantees' and a draft agreement on measures to ensure the security of Russia and NATO member states. In essence, Russia asked the U.S. and NATO to cease any military activity in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, both geopolitical spaces perceived as falling into Russian interest zones, to commit against future enlargement of NATO territory eastwards and to deny the possibility of Ukraine and Georgia from ever joining NATO in the future.<sup>9</sup> The U.S. and other NATO allies rejected the Russian demands and warned Russia of severe economic sanctions in case of a further invasion of Ukraine. Russia did not withdraw its forces from the borders, denying repeatedly that it was planning an invasion. Western intelligence agencies, most prominently those of the U.S.,<sup>10</sup> the United Kingdom,<sup>11</sup> and Estonia,<sup>12</sup> warned throughout the period from December 2021 to February 2022 that a Russian invasion was both probable and imminent. Other intelligence agencies, such as those of France and Germany,<sup>13</sup> failed to grasp the invasion event in its entirety.<sup>14</sup>

On 21 February 2022, Russia officially recognized the Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic, two self-proclaimed pseudo-polities in Donbas controlled by

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<sup>8</sup> Taylor, A., 'Russia's attack on Ukraine came after months of denials it would attack', Washington Post, 24 February 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/02/24/ukraine-russia-denials/>.

<sup>9</sup> Pfifer, S., 'Russia's draft agreements with NATO and the United States: Intended for rejection?', Brookings, 21 December 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2021/12/21/russias-draft-agreements-with-nato-and-the-united-states-intended-for-rejection/>.

<sup>10</sup> Harris, S. and Sonne, P., 'Russia planning massive military offensive against Ukraine involving 175,000 troops, U.S. intelligence warns', Washington Post, 3 December 2021, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/russia-ukraine-invasion/2021/12/03/98a3760e-546b-11ec-8769-2f4ecdf7a2ad\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/russia-ukraine-invasion/2021/12/03/98a3760e-546b-11ec-8769-2f4ecdf7a2ad_story.html)

<sup>11</sup> Sabbagh, D., 'US and UK intelligence warnings vindicated by Russian invasion', The Guardian, 24 February 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/feb/24/us-uk-intelligence-russian-invasion-ukraine>.

<sup>12</sup> Välisluureamet/Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service (ed.), International Security and Estonia 2022, 1/2022, Tartu, <https://www.valisluureamet.ee/doc/raport/2022-en.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> Merchet, J.-D., 'Le directeur du renseignement militaire remercié pour cause d'Ukraine', L'Opinion, 30 March 2022, <https://www.lopinion.fr/international/le-directeur-du-renseignement-militaire-remercie-pour-cause-dukaine?s=09>; 'BND-Präsident Kahl in Ukraine von russischem Angriff überrascht', Spiegel, 25 February 2022, <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/ukraine-krieg-bnd-praesident-bruno-kahl-mit-schutzkonvoi-ausser-landes-gebracht-a-a521d635-8c33-4572-84c6-1d0af450c9e2>.

<sup>14</sup> For a general evaluation see, Abdalla, N.S., Davies, P.H.J., Gustafson, K., Lomas, D. and Wagner, S., 'Intelligence and the War in Ukraine, Parts 1 and 2', War on the Rocks, 11-19 May 2022, <https://warontherocks.com/2022/05/intelligence-and-the-war-in-ukraine-part-1/>; <https://warontherocks.com/2022/05/intelligence-and-the-war-in-ukraine-part-2/>.

pro-Russian separatists.<sup>15</sup> On 22 February 2022, the Federation Council of Russia authorized the use of military force abroad, so that the Russian army could enter the seceded territories of Eastern Ukraine.<sup>16</sup> The subsequent Russian invasion of the rest of Ukrainian territory, characterized by the Russian state apparatus as a 'special military operation' began, on February 24, 2022 with Russian forces attacking Ukraine on multiple frontlines from Russia, Belarus and the occupied territories of Ukraine.

The initial strategic plans of Russia were capture of the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv, within three days, collapse of eventual resistance by the Ukrainian army, a friendly welcome at great parts of the Ukrainian territory, certainly in Eastern Ukraine, and effective strategic control of the whole territory until Victory Day on May 9. Four months later, none of these goals has been achieved. The Russian army suffered significant setbacks and major casualties, with the effect of a forced change of tactical and strategic plans. The fronts to the north and east of Kyiv were abandoned, as the Russian army regrouped and focused its offensive in the eastern regions and to Southern Ukraine, north of the Crimea and along the coastal zone of Ukraine's front on the Black Sea.

On April 18, the new Russian offensive in the east was launched. The new strategic objective was according to Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov the "full liberation" of the two provinces, Donetsk and Luhansk.<sup>17</sup> News of the Russian redeployment of tens of thousands of troops from the front north of Kyiv and Sumy to the northern shoulder of the Donbas front were met with expectations that Russia would be able to break through Ukraine defensive lines with a massive force of armored units. Still, Russia has not been able to produce this result with its forces pinned down around the initial occupied zones and making only minor incursions at points.

Operational and tactical failure of the Russian army turned the emblematic May 9 from a probable deadline that was to be accompanied by a victory declaration to a simple point of repetition of essential motifs of Russian propaganda. On May 9, at the 77th annual celebration of the end of WWII and Soviet victory, the Russian President Vladimir

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<sup>15</sup> Extracts from Putin's speech on Ukraine', Reuters, 21 February 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/extracts-putins-speech-ukraine-2022-02-21/>.

<sup>16</sup> Hodge, N., 'Russia's Federation Council gives consent to Putin on use of armed forces abroad, Russian agencies report', CNN, 22 February 2022, [https://edition.cnn.com/europe/live-news/ukraine-russia-news-02-22-22/h\\_59a413ce984eda5954ce5b9c4655bcc5](https://edition.cnn.com/europe/live-news/ukraine-russia-news-02-22-22/h_59a413ce984eda5954ce5b9c4655bcc5).

<sup>17</sup> Institute for the Study of War (ed.), 'Ukraine invasion update 24', 22 April 2022, <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/ukraine-invasion-update-24>.

Putin equated the invasion in Ukraine with the historical struggle of WWII and promoted the argument that NATO was planning an invasion in Crimea using Ukraine as a proxy actor: “NATO countries did not want to listen to us. They had different plans, and we saw it. They were planning an invasion into our historic lands, including Crimea. [...] Russia gave a preemptive rebuff to aggression; it was a forced, timely, and only right decision”.<sup>18</sup>



Fig. 1: Situation in Ukraine on June 23, 2022 (UK, Ministry of Defense)

In mid-May, Ukrainian forces liberated a part of the region around Kharkiv winning the Battle of Kharkiv, a second important tactical success after the lifting of the siege of Kyiv. In response, the Russian army regrouped towards the east.<sup>19</sup> In order to present tangible gains, Russia has narrowed its operations to one front, the Donbas region in Eastern Ukraine, where it still cannot achieve its tactical goals for the time being making only minor incursions, but also marking a slow advance and solidification of territorial gains throughout

<sup>18</sup> Roth, A., 'Putin ties Ukraine invasion to second world war in Victory Day speech', The Guardian, 9 May 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/09/putin-ties-ukraine-invasion-second-world-war-victory-day-speech-russia>.

<sup>19</sup> Stepanenko, K. and Kagan, F.W., 'Russian offensive campaign assessment', Institute for the Study of War, <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-may-13>.

May and June.<sup>20</sup> After four months of fighting and after giving up on some of the initial strategic objectives, Russia has captured so far the southern coastal area of Ukraine except the Odessa region and larger parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, but occupies only two major urban centers, Kherson and Mariupol. The front currently extends on a 2,500 km frontline, in a crescent stretching from Kherson to Kharkov.

The Russian invasion has caused a major humanitarian crisis with multiple civilian casualties and effectively the largest wave of refugees since WWII with 8 million Ukrainian refugees fleeing the territory of Ukraine until late June and millions more internally displaced.<sup>21</sup>



Fig. 2: Ukrainian refugees in neighboring countries (United Nations, Ukraine Refugee Situation)

The 2022 invasion of Ukraine was immediately met with vocal condemnation by many sides, while other actors have so far attempted to keep a balance. The United States imposed severe sanctions on the Russian economy followed by multiple gradual sanctions

<sup>20</sup> Hird, K., Barros, G. and Clark, M., 'Russian offensive campaign assessment', Institute for the Study of War, 15 June 2022, <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-june-6>.

<sup>21</sup> U.N., 'Ukraine Refugee Situation', 21 June 2022, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>

by the EU in a series of packages.<sup>22</sup> “The United States will work to ensure that the sanctions we have imposed, in close coordination with our international partners, degrade the Kremlin’s ability to project power and fund its invasion,” Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence Brian E. Nelson said in a press release on April 20, as the redeployment of Russian forces in Eastern Ukraine had begun.<sup>23</sup> The EU had already imposed limited sanctions on Russia since 2014, following the illegal annexation of Crimea, but after the 2022 invasion and the recognition of the non-government-controlled areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts as independent entities it introduced serious sanctions in a series of packages. So far, the EU had imposed six packages of comprehensive sanctions on Russia and a partial ban on Russian oil imports, a series of measures that have brought a considerable cost on Russia’s economy.<sup>24</sup>

Western sanctions are causing havoc to the Russian economy with massive loss of capital and are seriously undermining Russian military capabilities by dismantling its supply chains, although the effects have yet to unfold in their entirety. “There has been an effect on Putin’s ability to restock and resupply, particularly in the realm of components to some of his systems and his precision-guided munitions,” according to a U.S. official.<sup>25</sup> Most importantly, on an economic level, the EU has now embarked on an ambitious mid-term program of reducing its decades-long energy dependence from Russian gas and oil.<sup>26</sup> EU efforts were systematized on May 18 with the presentation of the REPowerEU plan, with the explicit aim to rapidly reduce dependence on Russian fossil fuels.<sup>27</sup> On May 30, the EU

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<sup>22</sup> Attamatzoglou, S., ‘Putin’s Next Problem: Russia Is Getting Hit with Tougher Sanctions’, 19fortyfive, 22 April 2022, <https://www.19fortyfive.com/2022/04/putins-next-problem-russia-is-getting-hit-with-tougher-sanctions/>

<sup>23</sup> U.S. Department of Treasury, ‘U.S. Treasury Designates Facilitators of Russian Sanctions Evasion’, 20 April 2022, <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0731>.

<sup>24</sup> European Commission, ‘EU sanctions against Russia following the invasion of Ukraine’, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/stronger-europe-world/eu-solidarity-ukraine/eu-sanctions-against-russia-following-invasion-ukraine\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/stronger-europe-world/eu-solidarity-ukraine/eu-sanctions-against-russia-following-invasion-ukraine_en).

<sup>25</sup> Altman, H., ‘Sanctions Are Strangling Russia’s Weapons Supply Chain’, The Warzone, 18 April 2022, <https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/sanctions-are-strangling-russias-weapons-supply-chain>.

<sup>26</sup> ‘EU Announces Plan to Ban Russian Oil Imports as Moscow Amps up Offensive in Eastern Ukraine’, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 4 May 2022, <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-russia-mariupol-eastern-offensive-eu-oil/31833568.html>.

<sup>27</sup> European Commission/Directorate General for Energy (ed.), Communication REPowerEU Plan COM(2022)230, 18 May 2022, [https://energy.ec.europa.eu/communication-repowereu-plan-com2022230\\_en](https://energy.ec.europa.eu/communication-repowereu-plan-com2022230_en)

agreed on a partial ban of Russian oil imports, focusing on seaborne oil purchases, amounting to two thirds of EU's imports from Russia.<sup>28</sup>

The general turmoil caused by the invasion has produced considerable economic effects of high energy prices and supply chain disruption on a regional and global level. Although Russia and Ukraine are relatively small in financial volume of their economy, they are large producers and exporters of essential food items, minerals, and energy. The 2022 invasion has already produced negative effects, both economic and financial, especially in commodity markets, with the prices of oil, gas, and wheat soaring.<sup>29</sup>

On a strategic level, Russia also seriously underestimated the unity and determination of Western states and caused a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy concerning both NATO expansion and diplomatic countermeasures. After uneasy diplomatic exchanges with Russia during the early phase of the war, the EU states confirmed their unity in foreign policy goals and rushed to increase their military budgets and their ties to the U.S. as a hegemonic actor. The effect of Russian aggression is such that some traditionally ambivalent states, such as Sweden and Finland, re-examined their decades-long position and are bound for NATO membership, even as early as June 2022. On May 12, Finland announced that it will apply for NATO and both countries will probably become formal invitees during the NATO Summit at Madrid in late June.<sup>30</sup>

More importantly, after the invasion the U.S., NATO and individual members of the Western alliance have provided extensive military aid including drones, anti-tank and anti-aircraft systems, and valuable near-time military intelligence.<sup>31</sup> Already since 2014 and up to the 2022 invasion, the U.S. had provided more than \$6.4 billion in security assistance for

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<sup>28</sup> Fleming, S., Pop, V. and Bounds, A., 'EU leaders agree to ban majority of Russian oil imports', Financial Times, 31 May 2022, <https://www.ft.com/content/acc55aee-1b63-4f23-b52d-41fe661b0714>.

<sup>29</sup> OECD (ed.), Economic and Social Impacts and Policy Implications of the War in Ukraine, March 2022, <https://www.oecd.org/economy/Interim-economic-outlook-report-march-2022.pdf>; UN, 'Global Impact of War in Ukraine on Food, Energy and Finance Systems', Brief No. 1, 13 April 2022, <https://news.un.org/pages/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/UN-GCRG-Brief-1.pdf>.

<sup>30</sup> Office of the President of the Republic of Finland/Prime Minister's Office, 'Joint statement by the President of the Republic and Prime Minister of Finland on Finland's NATO membership', Press Release 30/2022, <https://www.presidentti.fi/en/press-release/joint-statement-by-the-president-of-the-republic-and-prime-minister-of-finland-on-finlands-nato-membership/>; Milne, R., 'Finland's president and prime minister back NATO membership', Financial Times, 12 May 2022, <https://www.ft.com/content/4783d924-9a22-4e6c-a59b-b10496b8d755>.

<sup>31</sup> Barnes, J.E., 'Cooper, H. and Schmitt, E., 'U.S. Intelligence Is Helping Ukraine Kill Russian Generals, Officials Say', The New York Times, 4 May 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/04/us/politics/russia-generals-killed-ukraine.html>.



training and equipment to help Ukraine preserve its territorial integrity, secure its borders, and improve interoperability with NATO. Canadian and British forces have helped increase the combat readiness of the Ukrainian army. After the 2022 invasion erupted, the Western states have sent important military material both individually and as NATO members, as shown in Table 1. On 9 May, U.S. President Joe Biden signed the Ukraine Democracy Defense Lend-Lease Act of 2022 that authorizes the administration to lend or lease military equipment to Ukraine and other Eastern European countries.<sup>32</sup> On May 19, the Senate approved a \$40 billion emergency military and humanitarian aid package for Ukraine, \$34.7 billion of which will go towards military aid. On June 15, the U.S. President pledged an additional \$1 billion worth package of military aid that includes coastal defense weapons, advanced rocket systems, artillery, and ammunition.<sup>33</sup> NATO members also announced continuation of military aid to Ukraine with heavy weapons and long-range systems and a new assistance package after consultations with Ukraine's Defense Ministry. The U.S. and NATO have repeatedly ruled out direct military intervention in Ukraine, still their military aid is of paramount importance.

The effects of the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine are massive and have yet to be revealed in their full dimensions; still, some patterns are already clearly visible that shall be discussed extensively below: the Western states reaffirmed their strategic unity adopting an identical perception of Putin's Russia as a revisionist power; NATO seems poised to expand in Scandinavia and the Baltic Sea with the forthcoming inclusion of the traditionally militarily non-aligned Sweden and Finland; the EU hastened its energy autonomy aiming for greatly reducing or even ending for some of its member-states its dependency from Russian gas and oil imports. Overall, the 2022 invasion has proven to be a seminal event for security in the post-Cold War era that shall redefine regional and global balances for decades to come.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> 'Bill Signed: S. 3522', The White House, 9 May 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/legislation/2022/05/09/bill-signed-s-3522/>.

<sup>33</sup> 'Statement by President Joe Biden on Support for Ukraine and Call with President Zelenskyy of Ukraine', The White House, 15 June 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/06/15/statement-by-president-joe-biden-on-support-for-ukraine-and-call-with-president-zelenskyy-of-ukraine/>; Garamone, J., 'More Than 50 Nations Pledge to Help Build Ukraine's Defense', U.S. Department of Defense, <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3064765/more-than-50-nations-pledge-to-help-build-ukraines-defense/>.

<sup>34</sup> For general initial evaluations of the 2022 invasion, see Ukraine Project, 'Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment', Institute for the Study of War, <https://www.understandingwar.org/project/ukraine-project>;

**TABLE 1: WEAPONS DELIVERED/PLEDGED TO UKRAINE**

Australia	missiles and weapons - AUD \$70 million (\$51.6 million)
Belgium	200 anti-tank weapons and 5,000 automatic rifles/machine guns
Canada	8 armored vehicles, M777 howitzers, 4500 M72 rocket launchers, 7500 hand grenades, machine guns, pistols, carbines, 1.5 million rounds of ammunition, sniper rifles, \$20 million in military aid
Croatia	rifles and machine guns, protective equipment
Czech Republic	T-72 tanks, 160 shoulder-fired MANPADS systems, 20 light machine guns, 132 assault rifles, 70 submachine guns, 108,000 bullets, 1,000 tactical gloves, 4,000 mortars, 30,000 pistols, 7,000 assault rifles, 3,000 machine guns, sniper rifles, 1,000,000 bullets
Denmark	2,700 anti-tank weapons, 300 Stinger missiles, protective vests
Estonia	Javelin anti-tank missiles; nine howitzers (with German permission)
European Union	other weapons (unspecified- €500 million)
Finland	2,500 assault rifles, 150,000 cartridges, 1,500 single-shot anti-tank weapons
France	MILAN anti-tank systems, CAESAR artillery howitzers, additional defense equipment
Germany	50 Cheetah anti-aircraft systems, 56 PbV-501 IFVs, 1,000 anti-tank weapons and 500 Stinger anti-aircraft defense system
Greece	portable rocket launchers, ammunition, and Kalashnikov rifles
Ireland	200 units of body armor, medical supplies, fuel, and other non-lethal aid
Italy	Stinger missiles, anti-tank weapons, heavy machine guns, MG-type machine guns, counter-IED systems
Japan	bulletproof vests, helmets, and other non-lethal military aid
Latvia	Stinger anti-aircraft missiles
Lithuania	Stinger anti-aircraft missile systems and ammunition
Luxembourg	100 NLAW Anti-Tank, 4x4 vehicles, 15 military tents, additional non-lethal equipment
Netherlands	200 Stinger missiles, 3000 combat helmets, 2000 fragmentation vests, 100 sniper rifles with 30,000 pieces of ammunition, 400 rocket-propelled grenade launchers
North Macedonia	unspecified military equipment
Norway	4,000 anti-tank weapons, helmets, bulletproof vests, other protection equipment
Poland	200+ T-72 tanks, Piorun (Thunderbolt) short-range, MANPAD systems and munition; artillery ammunition, air defense systems, light mortars, reconnaissance drones

Watling, J. and N. Reynolds, Operation Z: The Death Throes of an Imperial Delusion, Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, 22 April 2022.



Portugal	grenades and ammunition, G3 rifles, non-lethal equipment
Romania	€3 million of fuel, bulletproof vests, helmets, ammunition, military equipment
Slovakia	S-300 air defense system
Slovenia	T-72 tanks, Kalashnikov rifles, helmets, and ammunition
Spain	1,370 anti-tank grenade launchers, 700,000 rifle and machine-gun rounds, machine guns, defensive protective equipment
Sweden	10,000 AT4 anti-tank weapons, helmets, and body shields
United Kingdom	anti-aircraft capabilities (Stormer), 10,000 short-range/anti-tank missiles (NLAWs-Javelins), Saxon armored vehicles, Starstreak air defense systems
United States	Howitzers and artillery rounds, AN/TPQ-36 counter-artillery radars, laser-guided rocket systems, Switchblade/Puma Aerial systems, Stinger/Javelin missiles, anti-armor systems, small arms and various munitions, more than 50 million rounds of ammunition, body armor; 5 Mi-17 helicopters, 70 High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicles, field equipment and spare parts, \$3.8 billion (and 40 billion pledged) in security assistance since February 24.

## 2. Russian Revisionism and Ukraine

Russia is a revisionist state that has used various modes of subversion in the post-Cold War period. Since the early 1990s, Russia has employed various modes of subversion against its neighbors in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus.<sup>35</sup> These range from open threats, economic warfare, political influence, the strategic use of migrant flows against territorial sovereignty, support of secession, and insurgencies to full-scale invasion.<sup>36</sup> Russia's revisionism in Ukraine is not an isolated incident; instead, it is a part of a continuum of foreign policy objectives and forms a fundamental part of Russian statecraft and power projection in relation to European states and on a global level.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Mead, W.R., 'The Return of Geopolitics: The Revenge of the Revisionist Powers', *Foreign Affairs* 93 (2014), 69-79.

<sup>36</sup> Clover, C., *Black Wind, White Snow: The Rise of Russia's New Nationalism*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016; Clunan, A., *The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence: Aspirations, Identity and Security Interests*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019.

<sup>37</sup> Piontkovsky, A., 'Putin's Russia as a Revisionist Power', *Journal on Baltic Security* 1:1 (2015), 6-13; Allison, R., 'Russia and the post-2014 international legal order: Revisionism and realpolitik', *International Affairs* 93 (2017), 519-543; Natsios, A., 'Introduction: Putin's New Russia: Fragile State or Revisionist Power?', *South Central Review* 35:1 (2018), 1-21; Allison R., 'Russian revisionism, legal discourse and the 'rules-based'

Russia is the only state in the world to occupy, in a direct or indirect manner, parts of the national territory of four other states. Russia occupies Crimea and the eastern provinces of Ukraine since 2014 and now additional territories of Ukraine since February 2022, Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia since 2008, Transnistria in Moldova since 1991, and a part of the southern Kuril Islands of Japan since 1945 in a still unsolved frontier dispute.<sup>38</sup>

Russia's invasion of Ukrainian territory and the perpetration of horrific war crimes against the Ukrainian people is a demonstration of an imperial mindset inherent in Russian macro-history as a major international state actor. The policies of the Russian Federation are a continuation of Soviet imperialism manifested for decades on a global level, with the explicit aim of overturning the Western-derived world security political system. In essence, the invasion of Ukraine is part of Russia's ambition to create an area of influence in the former Soviet sphere of control.<sup>39</sup> This new post-Soviet sphere of influence currently extends from Byelorussia and Ukraine to Georgia, war-torn landlocked Armenia in the Caucasus, and the states of Central Asia. Russia also aims to instrumentalize the Russian-speaking populations found in post-Soviet territories, in order to project its power and influence on a regional level. Ukraine as a historical and cultural factor occupies a special case for Russian revisionist policies in its imaginary ideological constructions and foreign policy objectives.<sup>40</sup> Russian revisionism unfolded in Ukraine at first with the support of the secession of Eastern Ukraine in 2014 and the annexation of Crimea. Russian revisionism is typically combined with dubious legal arguments and ideological constructions.<sup>41</sup>

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international order', *Europe-Asia Studies* 72:6 (2020), 976-995; Pisciotta, B., 'Russian revisionism in the Putin era: An overview of post-communist military interventions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria', *Italian Political Science Review* 50:1 (2020), 87-106.

<sup>38</sup> Kotoulas, I.E., 'Russia as a Revisionist State and the 2022 Invasion of Ukraine', in: I. Ivanovych (ed.), *The Russian-Ukrainian War (2014-2022): Historical, Political, Cultural-Educational, Religious, Economic and Legal Aspects*, Riga: Baltija Publishing, 2022, forthcoming.

<sup>39</sup> Rutland, P., 'Geopolitics and the Roots of Putin's Foreign Policy', *Russian History* 43:3-4 (2016), 425-436.

<sup>40</sup> Plokhyy, S., 'The Return of the Empire: The Ukraine Crisis in the Historical Perspective', *South Central Review* 35:1 (2018), 111-126.

<sup>41</sup> For Russia's propaganda and legal outlook on the matter see Merezhko, O., 'Crimea's Annexation in the Light of International Law: A Critique of Russia's Legal Argumentation', *Kyiv-Mohyla Law and Politics Journal* 2 (2016), 37-89; Dubinsky, D. & Rutland, P., 'Russia's Legal Position on the Annexation of Crimea', *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society* 5:1 (2019), 45-79; Allison R., 'Russian revisionism, legal discourse and the 'rules-based' international order', op.cit. For the military aspect, see Bartles, C.K. and McDermott,

Altogether, the percentage of ethnic Ukrainians in Ukraine decreased from 1959 (77%) until 1991 (73%) due to a policy of Russian in-migration and Ukrainian out-migration. However, this trend reversed after independence.<sup>42</sup> The Russian minority in Ukraine is still present in considerable parts of the territory, concentrated mostly in the eastern regions and in Crimea. According to the 2001 Ukrainian census, 17.3% of the population is ethnic Russians.<sup>43</sup> While this is down from the 22.1% of the 1989 census, this is still a significant number. 2001 figures for the Crimean Peninsula were at 58.5% Russians. The number of Russian speakers is even significantly higher, reaching 95% in the Crimean Peninsula, 93% in the Donetsk Oblast, and 91% in the Luhansk Oblast. Nevertheless, these figures do not equal the existence of such a high number of a Russian minority. It would be a serious methodological mistake to confuse the use of a language with adherence to a state and ethnic identity with national identity. A great part of the Ukrainian population is fluently bilingual between Ukrainian and Russian due to the country's Soviet historical past, the imposed use of Russian by the Soviet regime and the affinity of the two languages.<sup>44</sup> The high numbers of Ukrainians escaping from the eastern and southeastern war zones indicate that Russia is attempting some kind of ethnic cleansing. Indiscriminate shelling of civilian residential areas and occasionally also of hospitals as well as assaults on individual civilians intentionally intensify the refugee movement. The aim could be to shift the numeric relation in these oblasts significantly in favor of the Russians.

Russian geopolitical revisionism is accompanied by a relevant discourse that includes both historical revisionism and the instrumentalization of WWII mental constructs.<sup>45</sup> Russian historical revisionism also includes the parameter of ethnocide, i.e. the denial of the separate existence of Ukrainians as a distinct nation in the long historical *durée*. The official declaration by Russian President Vladimir Putin issued during the first period of the invasion denied the very essence of state sovereignty and

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R.N., 'Russia's Military Operation in Crimea: Road-testing Rapid Reaction Capabilities', *Problems of Post-Communism* 61 (2014), 46-63.

<sup>42</sup> 'People of Ukraine', *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ukraine/People>.

<sup>43</sup> State Statistics Committee of Ukraine, All-Ukrainian Population Census of 2001/National composition of population, <http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/nationality/>.

<sup>44</sup> Applebaum, A., 'Putin's Grand Strategy', *South Central Review* 35:1 (2018), 32.

<sup>45</sup> Serhan, Y., 'Who is Vladimir Putin's Revisionist History For?', *The Atlantic*, 27 February 2022, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2022/02/putin-russia-ukraine-revisionist-history/622936/>

independence, by denying Ukraine's right to exist as a free state and by attributing Ukrainian sovereignty over Crimea in particular to Soviet internal politics.<sup>46</sup> Thus, the distorted image of the historical past of presenting the Soviet Union as a benevolent force overlaps with a sense of injustice against the Russians committed by the supra-national Soviet regime. The arbitrary use of the historical past is evident in this case. The 2014 annexation of Crimea is presented in Russian propagandistic discourse as the undoing of a great 'historical injustice' referring to the 1954 transfer of the peninsula from the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic by that-time Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev.<sup>47</sup> This line of thinking was extended in 2022 to include the whole of Ukraine as a geopolitical space. Ukraine was intermittently characterized by Russian propaganda as an 'anti-Russia' or was in essence described as a random historical accident not based on a distinct national identity.<sup>48</sup>

The revisionist attempts of Russia against international order on both geopolitical grounds and legal arguments have been long in the making,<sup>49</sup> and were cited triumphantly in the 2016 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, where after the military intervention in Syria it was stated: "The world is currently going through fundamental changes related to the emergence of a multipolar international system".<sup>50</sup> The revisionist attempt of Russia to restructure the global balance has significantly accelerated after the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, a landmark event for international

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<sup>46</sup> See Putin's remarks in his Address on February 24, the first day of the 2022 invasion: "So, I will start with the fact that modern Ukraine was entirely created by Russia or, to be more precise, by Bolshevik, Communist Russia. This process started practically right after the 1917 revolution and Lenin and his associates did it in a way that was extremely harsh on Russia –by separating, severing what is historically Russian land. Nobody asked the millions of people living there what they thought. Then, both before and after the Great Patriotic War, Stalin incorporated in the USSR and transferred to Ukraine some lands that previously belonged to Poland, Romania and Hungary. In the process, he gave Poland part of what was traditionally German land as compensation, and in 1954, Khrushchev took Crimea away from Russia for some reason and also gave it to Ukraine. In effect, this is how the territory of modern Ukraine was formed". For a full transcript, see <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/67828>.

<sup>47</sup> Pursiainen, C. and Forsberg, T., 'The Principle of Territorial Integrity in Russian International Law Doctrine: The Case of Crimea', in P.S. Morris (ed.), *Russian Discourses on International Law: Sociological and Philosophical Phenomenon*, London: Routledge, 2019, 220-241.

<sup>48</sup> 'Ukraine as armed "anti-Russia" unacceptable for Moscow-Putin', TASS, 22 February 2022, <https://tass.com/world/1408599>

<sup>49</sup> Radin, A. and Reach, C., *Russian Views of the International Order*, RAND, Santa Monica 2017, [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1800/RR1826/RAND\\_RR1826.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1800/RR1826/RAND_RR1826.pdf)

<sup>50</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, *Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*, 1 December 2016, [https://mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/fundamental\\_documents/1538901/](https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/fundamental_documents/1538901/). Cf. Götz, E., 'Russia and the question of world order', *European Politics and Society* 20 (2019), 133-153.

order. The 2022 invasion was accompanied by an intensification of Russian rhetoric, especially in the context of the Sino-Russian diplomatic nexus. At least on a rhetorical level, the two states now attempt to formulate an ideological prerequisite and a united geopolitical front in order to pose a direct challenge to international order.<sup>51</sup> Still, their relationship is far from an established alliance. China's main economic interests lie with the EU and the US, not with the weak Russian economy. China will continue its diplomatic support of Russia in the Ukraine crisis, but will probably opt for a compromise if the hostilities last long enough, as already seem to be the case.

Russian disinformation campaigns are part of a multilayered strategy, an elaborate and well-planned attempt to dominate the narrative and present a dominant discourse on the war in Ukraine. Russian disinformation campaigns against Ukraine have been unfolding for a considerable period and have increased significantly prior and right after the 2014 invasion of Eastern Ukraine and Crimea.<sup>52</sup> The methods used are official media announcements, false stories, oversimplifications, and distorted narratives with a simple aim: to deny the reality of the Russian invasion and previous Russian interference in internal politics of a sovereign state.<sup>53</sup>

Russia portrays Ukraine as a passive tool of Western interests that aim to use Ukraine as a forward base to encircle and even attack Russia on its own territory. The perception of encirclement of Russia by expanding NATO forces is vital in this regard. Russia has been promoting the image of a peaceful state gradually approached by an expansionist offensive alliance, when in reality it is Russia that for decades under the form of USSR was and that after 1991 has been interfering illegally occupying territory of independent states, as is the case in Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova in the greater region of Eastern Europe and the Black Sea. NATO is a coalition of free states that choose their own path concerning their strategic alliances and supra-state membership.

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<sup>51</sup> Stent, A., Russia and China: Axis of Revisionists? Brookings Institution, February 2020, [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/FP\\_202002\\_russia\\_china\\_stent.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/FP_202002_russia_china_stent.pdf).

<sup>52</sup> Lange-Ionatamishvili, E., Analysis of Russia's Information Campaign against Ukraine: Examining non-military aspects of the crisis in Ukraine from a strategic communications perspective, NATO StratCom Centre of Excellence, Riga 2015; Sazonov, V. et al, Russian Information Campaign against the Ukrainian State and Defence Forces: Combined Analysis, NATO StratCom Centre of Excellence, Tartu 2016.

<sup>53</sup> Abrams, Z., 'The role of psychological warfare in the battle for Ukraine', Monitor on Psychology 53:4 (2022), <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2022/06/news-psychological-warfare>.

Other disinformation stories widely disseminated by Russian propaganda mechanisms both home and abroad in other countries is the notion that the U.S. was planning chemical weapons attacks in the Donbas;<sup>54</sup> the idea that Ukraine is a nation controlled either by Western interests or even by a 'Nazi regime' and the related instrumentalization of history with an overtly emphasis on 'denazification', and the attempt to present an image of a 'genocide' against the Russian-speaking population of the Donbas region for the period prior to the secession of the eastern territories in 2014.<sup>55</sup> The latter issue has been fundamental in Russian justification of the 2022 invasion, as it was evoked in Putin's presidential address.<sup>56</sup> In reality, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the most prominent regional organization operating in Ukraine since March 2014 that was responsible for monitoring the 2015 Minsk II agreement, has found no evidence that supports such claims of genocide or systematic oppression of the Russian-speaking population in Eastern Ukraine.<sup>57</sup> Instead, OSCE has documented extensive human rights violations in the occupied parts of Ukraine since 2014<sup>58</sup> and war crimes and crimes against humanity perpetrated by the Russian invading forces after the 2022 invasion.<sup>59</sup>

Russian propaganda attempts to justify the 2022 invasion of Ukraine with a series of historical, ideological, and geopolitical arguments. On a historical level, Russia attempts to portray the Ukrainian people as a non-existent and artificial nation, a somewhat misguided, ethnically affiliated, and largely Russian-speaking population. Russian rhetoric on this issue emphasizes the common cultural ties between Russians and Ukrainians and their shared history, even in the framework of the Soviet Union. On an ideological level, Russian propaganda has advanced the narrative of a struggle

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<sup>54</sup> 'U.S. Mercenaries Preparing Donbas 'Provocation'-Russian Defense Chief', The Moscow Times, 21 December 2021, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2021/12/21/us-mercenaries-preparing-donbass-provocation-russian-defense-chief-a75892>.

<sup>55</sup> Roozenbeek, J., Media and Identity in Wartime Donbas, 2014-2017, Doctoral thesis, Cambridge University, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.52229>.

<sup>56</sup> President of the Russian Federation, Address, 24 February 2022, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/67828>.

<sup>57</sup> 'Statement by the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities on her recent visits to Ukraine', 4 April 2014, <https://www.osce.org/hcnm/117175>.

<sup>58</sup> Coynash, H., Human Rights Violations in the Occupied Parts of Ukraine's Donbas since 2014, UI Reports on Human Rights and Security in Eastern Europe No. 1, 1/2021.

<sup>59</sup> OSCE (ed.), Report on Violations of International Humanitarian and Human Rights Law, War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity committed in Ukraine since February 24, ODIHR.GAL/26/22/Rev.1, 13 April 2022, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/f/a/515868.pdf>.

'against a Nazi regime' in Ukraine, an ideological construct in line with the instrumentalization of WWII as a continuous fight of Russia against Nazism. However, the existence of the far-right Azov Brigade, a unit of the Ukrainian National Guard defending Mariupol, which uses various Nazi symbols, has helped the Russians to spread this narrative. In internal official documents of the Russian army and authorities, there are references to the war in Ukraine as a continuation of the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945).<sup>60</sup> This is also the true meaning of the obscure 'Z' sign used by Russia propaganda; it signifies 77 years since the victorious end of the Great Patriotic War.<sup>61</sup> The link between modern notions of state 'anti-Nazism' in reference to Ukraine and WWII realities is the Soviet Cold War-era perception of Western capitalist states as inherently 'fascist'. Putin's Russia is a system that has inherited the Soviet mindset -after all, all the leading members of Putin's circle had been active members of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and of the Soviet state apparatus- applies the same ideological set of prefixed notions to justify its invasion of Ukraine and even its war crimes.

Still, the ideological dimension of Russian anti-Ukrainian propaganda has assumed a dangerous genocidal aspect based on historical inaccuracies and oversimplifications. By equating the Ukrainian state and people with a 'Nazi regime' and a 'nazified people' Russia attempts to dehumanize their enemy and delegitimize Ukrainian resistance in order to ideologically mobilize the Russian society against an imaginary enemy. On 4 April 2022, Timofei Sergeitsev, a nationalist writer advocating an altered internationalist Russian empire, wrote in RIA Novosti that "[denazification] is a set of measures aimed at the nazified population [of Ukraine], which technically cannot be subjected to direct punishment like war criminals [...] a significant part of the masses of the people [...] are passive Nazis [...]. Denazification is inevitably also de-Ukrainisation: a rejection of the artificial inflation of the ethnic self-identification of the population".<sup>62</sup> These propagandistic views were promoted not just by state intellectuals

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<sup>60</sup> Watling, J. and N. Reynolds, Operation Z: The Death Throes of an Imperial Delusion, Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, 22 April 2022, 8-9.

<sup>61</sup> Cole, B., 'True Meaning behind Russian "Z" Symbol Finally Revealed', Newsweek, 19 April 2022, <https://www.newsweek.com/russia-ukraine-z-vremya-symbol-may-day-victory-1698904>.

<sup>62</sup> <https://archive.ph/kRSt3#selection-4189.0-4208.0>. Cf. Sorokina, Y., 'Who Is the Author of Russia's 'Blueprint for Genocide' Essay?', The Moscow Times, 7 April 2022, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/04/06/who-is-the-author-of-russias-blueprint-for-genocide-essay-a77223>. See also Sergeitsev's remarks in a 2016 article: "Russia can only reproduce itself and compete



and apologists, but also by the Russian Orthodox Church, an institution that promotes Russian imperialist notions inside the greater Orthodox world and beyond.<sup>63</sup> On 3 April 2022, Patriarch Kirill, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, delivered a sermon at the Cathedral of the Russian Armed Forces comparing the invasion of Ukraine with WWII: 'We have broken the back of fascism once; we will do it again'.<sup>64</sup> In this context, the ultimate core of the Ukrainian nation, the very ethnic identity of Ukrainians, becomes synonymous with instrumentalized and historically ambiguous notions of 'fascism' and 'Nazism' traditionally used in the past by Soviet communist propaganda to describe all its opponents in the democratic West.



Fig. 3: Russia's buffer zone against the West including Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova (Estonian Intelligence Service, 2022)

(fight) for its survival as a historical state of political internationalism within the framework of a dominant historical Russian culture'', See Sergeitsev, T., 'Empire: A Forbidden Word', Zinoviev Club, 5 January 2016, <http://zinovievclub.com/authors/20160105/5671.html>. See also a 2017 article by politician Mikhail Delyagin calling for the 'denazification of Ukraine' and describing a series of repressive measures against Ukrainians: <http://svom.info/entry/701-neobhodimost-i-neizbezhnost-denacifikacii-ukrainy/>

<sup>63</sup> Mrachek, A. & McCrum, S., 'How Putin Uses Russian Orthodoxy to Grow His Empire', The Heritage Foundation, 22 February 2019, <https://www.heritage.org/europe/commentary/how-putin-uses-russian-orthodoxy-grow-his-empire>; Gvosdev, N.K., 'How the Russian Orthodox Church Influences Russia's Behavior', The National Interest, 08 July 2019, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/how-russian-orthodox-church-influences-russias-behavior-66091>.

<sup>64</sup> Patriarch Kirill, 'Slava svyateishevo Patriarkha Kirila v Nedeliu 4-iu Velikovo posta posle Liturgii v glavnom khrame Voorezhennukh sil RF' ['The Word of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill on the 4th Week of Lent After the Liturgy in the Main Church of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation'], 3 April 2022, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5914188.html>.



On a geopolitical level, Russia constantly promotes the notion of a Western pledge and agreed commitment against any future NATO expansion in Central and Eastern Europe agreed by the two sides back in the late 1980s and early 1990s, during the dissolution of the Soviet Union and its immediate aftermath. These often-cited claims have either been accepted or refuted in academic bibliography.<sup>65</sup> After the war escalated and the operational failures of the Russian army were clear, Russia upgraded its discourse introducing a new perception of the war as a confrontation with the West.<sup>66</sup> Russian propaganda employs an additional motif, attempting to present the 'military intervention' in Ukraine as a response to NATO expansionism and Ukraine as a battlefield between the West and Russia with the Ukrainian state acting as a passive tool and a proxy actor of inherently aggressive Western interests. This was no longer a regional or bilateral issue, but an existential fight for Russia. In this way, Russian leadership can provide a level of excuse for the stalemate in Ukraine and perhaps even a narrative for a negative outcome, presenting a Ukrainian victory as the result of an uneven indirect war with the West in its entirety.

Inside Russian society, the older generation is supportive of Putin's venture in Ukraine; the younger generation seems more reserved and less enthusiastic for the war realizing that Western sanctions can seriously affect their everyday lives.<sup>67</sup> Since the first months of 2022, when the invasion of Ukraine was imminent, a considerable number of Russians have fled Russia. Characteristically, up to 40,000 young-aged Russians have temporarily fled Russia until March 2022 and are currently residing in neighboring Georgia -itself a victim of Russian aggression in the past- with Tbilisi becoming a safe haven for them.<sup>68</sup> There are also indications that there are various numbers of Russians

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<sup>65</sup> Kramer, M., 'The Myth of a No-NATO-enlargement Pledge to Russia', *The Washington Quarterly* 32:2 (4/2009), 39-61. On conspiracy culture in post-Soviet Russia see Yablokov, I., *Fortress Russia: Conspiracy Theories in the Post-Soviet World*, Cambridge: Polity, 2018; Yablokov, I. and Chatterje-Doody, P.N., *Russia Today and Conspiracy Theories: People, Power and Politics on RT*, London and New York: Routledge, 2021.

<sup>66</sup> Simmons, A.M. and Gershkovich, E., 'Russia Recasts Fight in Ukraine as War With the West', *Wall Street Journal*, 1 May 2022, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-recasts-fight-in-ukraine-as-war-with-the-west-11651423876>

<sup>67</sup> Kolesnikov, A., 'Russians at War Putin's Aggression Has Turned a Nation against Itself', *Foreign Affairs*, 18 April 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russian-federation/2022-04-18/russians-war>.

<sup>68</sup> 'Thousands of Russians are traveling to Georgia to flee their own government', *NPR*, 21 March 2022,

that have fled in other states, such as Armenia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and an indeterminate number in Turkey as well. As the war continues and Russia remains far from a decisive victory, internal opposition to Putin's ventures abroad shall in all probability increase, although it shall not prove a decisive factor to alter political realities in Russian society. Putin's center of gravity is the support of his security apparatus, which suppresses heavy-handed any kind of opposition. As long as he enjoys its loyalty, a direct threat to his position is very unlikely.

Finally, a historical example serves to illuminate both the Russian perception of conflict, as well as a possible evolution of inter-state balance between Russia and neighboring Ukraine. During the Winter War against Finland (1939-1940), Russia met with stiff Finnish resistance similar to the current Ukrainian one. Although outnumbered on a proportion of 5 to 1, the Finnish armed forces managed to withstand the Soviet onslaught trading space for time and inflicting exceptionally high casualties on the invading Soviet army. Despite its huge proportionate losses, amounting to 5 times those of Finland, the Russian army reorganized, managed to secure some strategic positions and finally extracted a favorable settlement. Still, the strategic victory in the Winter War belonged to Finland.<sup>69</sup> Finland retained its independent existence as a state actor in the long-term perspective and after decades of forced or willing neutrality decided in May 2022 to become a member of the Western power core by joining NATO.

The case with Ukraine and the perception of the war is different from 1939-1940; Russia wants to impose a status of dependency on a future Ukraine, even going so far as to turn the latter into a land-locked state, if Russian plans to occupy the whole region up to Transnistria and the borders with Moldova succeed. Finland was not perceived as a potential member of Russian ethnic unity, while Ukraine is, although Soviet propaganda attempted to portray Finland as a future Soviet Socialist Republic and Soviet foreign policy attempted to reverse Finland's independence from former Russian imperial control. Finland did not receive substantial help from Western powers, while Ukraine is. However, some patterns of similarity between the two cases are evident. Just

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<https://www.npr.org/2022/03/21/1087913847/thousands-of-russians-are-traveling-to-georgia-to-flee-their-own-government>.

<sup>69</sup> Sander, G., *The Hundred Day Winter War: Finland's Gallant Stand Against the Soviet Army*, Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2013.

like Ukraine, Finland was also a victim of geography with its proximity to the Russian heartland and industrial power core. Just like Finland, Ukraine has managed to retain its independent status due to its fierce resistance and thus achieve strategic victory despite territorial losses. Ukraine has to opt for the long-term perspective of alignment with the West, just as Finland successfully did.

### **3. Russian Interests and Strategic Objectives**

The Russian invasion of Ukraine is part of an attempt to secure specific interests and strategic objectives. The invasion did not achieve the quick victory the Kremlin expected, based on inherently wrong assumptions. The trigger for President Putin's decision to invade the neighboring country was the false perception of a window of opportunity. Taking advantage of the new strategic reorientation of the United States from Europe to East and South Asia with its emphasis on the security of the Indo-Pacific in the 2010s, Russia assumed it could advance in Ukraine. Russia's calculations regarding the 2022 invasion were that it could project its power in a miscalculated move, believing that it could safeguard its status quo now that the equilibrium of power is still favorable with Crimea, the seceded Eastern Ukraine Donbas provinces, and the Caucasus. The hasty withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan in 2021 and the subsequent sudden collapse of the Afghan regime probably also contributed to Russian strategic perception of an easy victory in Ukraine and a potential collapse of the government of President Volodymyr Zelensky in a similar manner expecting no serious U.S. interference.<sup>70</sup>

Many in the West were surprised by the full-scale Russian invasion, as they believed that Putin would take the threat of sanctions more seriously. However, based on his previous experience with the EU and the U.S. Putin probably did not expect tough

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<sup>70</sup> Alexander, M., 'Putin's Ukraine invasion given 'massive green light' by US withdrawal from Afghanistan, says historian', The Courier, 25 February 2022, <https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/news/uk-world/3049983/putins-ukraine-invasion-given-massive-green-light-by-us-withdrawal-from-afghanistan-says-historian/>.

Western sanctions, likely something more than symbolic, but certainly nothing that would really hit the Russian economy. Likely Putin also considered the two leading EU countries in a phase of weakness, France immersed at the time in the upcoming Presidential elections and Germany with its relatively new chancellor Olaf Scholz. Furthermore, based on SVR, GRU, and FSB intelligence, specifically the Ninth Directorate of the Fifth Service, responsible for intelligence activities targeting former Soviet republics, Russian authorities really assumed that this war would be over within a very few days. Russian authorities did not expect serious Ukrainian military resistance. The Russian planners even hoped that some of the units with Russian-speaking Ukrainian soldiers would refuse to fight.<sup>71</sup> Maybe most importantly, the Russian plan was based on the wrong assumption that the ethnic Russian population living in eastern Ukraine – almost 40% of the population in the easternmost “Oblasts” (regions) Luhansk and Donetsk- would welcome the Russian soldiers as liberators and support them. In general, Russia has fallen victim to a failure of its intelligence apparatus and propagandistic misconceptions regarding the realities of Ukrainian resistance and national identity.<sup>72</sup>

However, regardless of all the mistakes, clear Russian strategic interests drive Putin’s policy in the war for Ukraine as well as military campaign planning. Most important among these is the vital interest to protect Russian minorities abroad, in this case in Eastern Ukraine and on the Crimean Peninsula, eventually also in the breakaway region of Transnistria in Moldova, where Russia keeps a brigade of troops. Maintaining the territory of the former Soviet Union as an area of influence -or even better under Moscow’s control- is an important Russian interest, which also includes close economic cooperation with the respective states. Putin does not want to tolerate Ukraine’s drifting away from the former Soviet/Russian sphere of influence. Other important Russian strategic interests include achieving geostrategic advantages, like full control of the Sea of Azov and of the northern Black Sea coast as well as (re-)

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<sup>71</sup> Reynolds, N. and Watling, J., ‘Ukraine through Russia’s Eyes’, Royal United Services Institute for Defense and Security Studies, 25 February 2022, <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/ukraine-through-russias-eyes>.

<sup>72</sup> Kim, L., ‘Putin’s Colossal Intelligence Failure’, Wilson Center, 11 March 2022, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/putins-colossal-intelligence-failure>; Strobel, W.P. and Gordon, M.R., ‘Reported Detention of Russian Spy Boss Shows Tension Over Stalled Ukraine Invasion, U.S. Officials Say’, Wall Street Journal, 19 March 2022, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/reported-detention-of-russian-spy-boss-shows-tension-over-stalled-ukraine-invasion-u-s-officials-say-11647687601>.

establishing a buffer zone between Russia and NATO. Putin considered this buffer zone with the ongoing process of rapprochement to NATO and EU as threatened or even gone. Ukrainian former President Viktor Yanukovich, who was after massive street protests ("Revolution of Dignity") removed from office by the Parliament in February 2014, is a native of Donetsk, the largest city of the Donbas. He might be Putin's man of choice for a future Russia-friendly president.<sup>73</sup>



Fig. 4: Reinforcement of NATO's Eastern flank after the Russian invasion (NATO 2022)

<sup>73</sup> Kahn, J., Who is Viktor Yanukovich, the former Ukrainian president Putin reportedly wants to put back in power?', Fortune, 2 March 2022, <https://fortune.com/2022/03/02/viktor-yanukovich-yanukovich-putin-put-back-in-power-ukraine-russia/>.

Especially with regard to the EU-Ukraine relations, one must not forget that Russia has also important economic interests related to Ukraine. The Donbas with its huge coal and iron ore deposits was once the heart of the heavy industry in the Soviet Union. Russia intends to tie the eastern Oblasts and preferably the whole of Ukraine closely to the Russian economy. Every offer of EU membership to Ukraine is considered by Russia as a direct threat to this important interest.

If Putin needs to scale back his ambition, he will give up at first on the domination of the whole of Ukraine as an area of influence. On the other end, he will never ever give up on the protection of Russian minorities in the Donbas and on the Crimean Peninsula. It is extremely unlikely that Russia would accept re-establishment of full Ukrainian authority over these areas before the fall of the Putin regime. After their failure to capture Kyiv and decapitate the Ukrainian leadership, Russia redefined its operational and strategic goals, exactly in line with its prioritized interests. The new scaled back Russian strategic goals, as reportedly expressed by Rustam Minnekaev, deputy commander of Russia's central military district, on April 22 at a meeting in Sverdlovsk, were:

1. Full control of the greater Donbas region in Eastern Ukraine
2. A land connection between Russia and Crimea comprising of Southern Ukraine
3. Full control of Southern Ukraine and land access to Transnistria.<sup>74</sup>

One might have assumed that maintaining the stability of the Russian economy would be a vital Russian interest, but it seems to be, Putin has such a firm grip on the Russian society, that economic stability is -at least currently- of lower priority. He certainly also relies on the capacity to suffer of his own population and focuses on the mid to long term development of the economy for which he considers the possession of the Donbas very important. Consequently, derived from the strategic interests, the independence of the eastern Oblasts and maintaining the Crimean Peninsula as part of Russia (which it is de-facto since 2014) are the most important strategic objectives. The second strategic objective is ensuring control over the northern neighborhood of the

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<sup>74</sup> Cole, B., 'Russia Targets Moldova Invasion Next as They Seek Land Corridor via Ukraine', Newsweek, 22 April 2022, <https://www.newsweek.com/russia-ukraine-moldova-transnistria-war-minnekayev-1700007>. For the original remarks see: <https://www.interfax.ru/world/837353>.



Crimea Peninsula, of a land corridor to the eastern Oblasts and preferably the whole Ukrainian coastline. The establishment of a Russian-dependent or at least a Russia-friendly government in Kiev has been the third priority. As said, the plan was to achieve this with a quick decapitation strike in the first days of the war, but this failed spectacularly. After the military setback, Russia's war aims seem to have changed due to fierce Ukrainian resistance that has rendered obsolete the initial grandiose plans of absorbing the whole of Ukraine. Now, Russia limits itself on the first two strategic objectives.

Concerning the future status of the occupied territories in Southern and Eastern Ukraine, it seems likely that Russia is actually considering the establishment of permanent control over these areas.<sup>75</sup> Russian control shall be either direct through an official annexation to the Russian Federation or indirect by a declaration of nominal independence of a pseudo-state in the form of a seceded People's Republic that shall be recognized by Russia and some of its allies. The introduction of the ruble currency in parts of the occupied territories points towards such a direction.<sup>76</sup> Russian officials are already drawing up plans to organize mock referendums that will decide the annexation of the occupied territories or establish some sort of pseudo-state in the near future according to U.S. intelligence.<sup>77</sup>

Still, Russia could use in the near future occupation of these territories as a bargaining card to achieve lifting of the painful Western sanctions. If Russia chooses to annex foreign territory, it will have established itself as a de jure revisionist power outside the international order and will have adopted a path of decades-long confrontation with the Western states and with perceptions of international legitimacy. In the end, if Russia annexes the occupied territories, it will have gained a part. Still, Ukraine shall

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<sup>75</sup> Lawlor, K. and Clark, M., 'Russian Annexation of Occupied Ukraine is Putin's Unacceptable 'Off-Ramp'', Institute for the Study of War, 13 May 2022, <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-annexation-occupied-ukraine-putin%E2%80%99s-unacceptable-%E2%80%9C-ramp%E2%80%9D>

<sup>76</sup> British intelligence reports, as well as Russian sources, indicate use of the ruble in Kherson, Melitopol and Volnovakha in the context of a gradual currency transition scheme of the occupation administration. See <https://t.me/readovkanews/32563aps>; <https://t.me/stranaua/39447>; <https://t.me/stranaua/39445>.

<sup>77</sup> Ryan, M., Hudson, J., Loveluck, L. and Stern, D., 'Russia planning to annex new areas of Ukraine, U.S. intelligence finds', Washington Post, 2 May 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/05/02/russian-annex-territory-invasion/>

survive as an independent state and more importantly, it will move decisively towards Western influence perpetuating Russian insecurity.

#### **4. Geopolitical Impact of the Conflict**

The war in Ukraine has a far-reaching impact, changing not only the security architecture in Europe, but influencing geopolitics almost globally. Russia is gradually becoming a prisoner of its geographical limitations and ideological fixations, contained on multiple fronts by the Western states, making its geostrategic position even worse by triggering NATO accession of the two former non-aligned Nordic states, Finland and Sweden. The Russian invasion of Ukraine clearly demonstrated that the risk of a major war in Europe is not gone. Even reasonably well prepared armed forces like those of Ukraine are not able to sustain a successful defense without substantial support from the U.S. and other NATO countries. Realizing this and the new, aggressive Russian foreign policy, Sweden and Finland have decided to apply for NATO membership and there is little doubt that they will be accepted very soon. This will drastically change the geostrategic situation in Northern Europe and make any Russian aggression against NATO much riskier.

Such political ramifications of the invasion of Ukraine were certainly not the intention of Putin, as this weakens the position of Russia significantly. St. Petersburg, Russia's main harbor in the Baltic and the second largest city of the country will be only 150 km away from two NATO countries, in the west Estonia and in the north now Finland. In the case of a major war with NATO, the Northern Fleet, Russia's largest and most powerful naval force, would have the task to intercept supply convoys from North America to Europe. The Soviets even planned for an amphibious landing in northern Norway to secure the exit of their Northern Fleet into the North Atlantic. The shores around Bodø, Narvik, or Tromsø are just 70 to 90 km from the Finnish-Swedish border, so



that it would have been a realistic task to cut the only one existing north-south road. After the accession of the two central Nordic states, Russia can forget about this. NATO member Finland with its 1,340 km-long border with Russia would even provide the strategic depth for an eventual advance towards Murmansk, the naval bases of the Northern Fleet at the Barents Sea and possibly also at the White Sea, which are together also home to more than half of Russia's ballistic missile submarines.<sup>78</sup> If Murmansk and the Kola Peninsula would be lost, Russian efforts in the North Atlantic could not be sustained and Russian strategic deterrence would suffer a heavy blow. Consequently, Russia would need to plan for the -costly- deployment of a very significant number of troops to protect this flank, troops they will not be able to use elsewhere.



Fig. 5: Ukrainian President Zelensky in Bucha on April 4, 2022 (Ronaldo Schemidt /AFP- Getty)

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<sup>78</sup> Congressional Research Service, Russia's Nuclear Weapons: Doctrine, Forces, and Modernization, CRS Report R45861, 21 April 2022, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/nuke/R45861.pdf>.

Russia considers an offer of EU and/or NATO membership to Ukraine a very dangerous threat to its own vital and important security and economic interests. Such a membership would not only mean that a significant number of Russians would be entirely removed from direct Russian influence -or as Moscow would see it, remain unprotected, but also that the economy of the Donbas would be cut away from Russia and the Eurasian Economic Union. If the economy of Eastern Ukraine would eventually develop in a positive way with the help of huge European and American investments, this could have a domino effect in Belarus and undermine the credibility of the regime in Russia itself.

On the other side, it needs to be asked if NATO would be really ready to accept a nation with an ongoing conflict with Russia, a major nuclear power. In this context, one must not forget that the European Union also has a mutual defense clause. Article 42 (7) of the 2009 Lisbon Treaty says “If a Member State is the victim of armed aggression on its territory, the other Member States shall have towards it an obligation of aid and assistance by all the means in their power, in accordance with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter.”<sup>79</sup> Furthermore and regardless of the various statements of Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, about a “fast track” for EU membership of Ukraine<sup>80</sup>, or the explicit endorsement of Ukraine’s EU’s candidacy offered by the leaders of Germany, France, and Italy on June 16,<sup>81</sup> it is very unlikely that Kyiv could fulfill the criteria for accession to the EU anytime soon. Keeping the many other candidates for accession in mind, the EU would be very well advised not to forget about these criteria. French President Emmanuel Macron stated already in a speech to the European Parliament in Strasbourg that it would take decades for Ukraine to be accepted into the European Union.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Treaty on European Union, Official Journal of the European Union C202/1, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A12016M%2FTXT>

<sup>80</sup> ‘Ukraine: EU chief offers Kyiv fast track to membership’, Deutsche Welle, 8 April 2022, <https://www.dw.com/en/ukraine-eu-chief-offers-kyiv-fast-track-to-membership/a-61409635>

<sup>81</sup> Luxmoore, M., Meichy, S. and Pancevski, B., ‘France, Germany, Italy, Romania Back Ukraine’s Bid for EU Membership’, Wall Street Journal, 16 June 2022, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/european-leaders-arrive-in-ukraine-as-kyiv-renews-calls-for-more-military-support-11655367940>.

<sup>82</sup> ‘Ukraine bid to join EU will take decades says Macron’, BBC News, 10 May 2002, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61383632>

On an economic level, the Russian invasion is proving catastrophic for Russian gas and oil exports, the steam engine of Russia's weak economy. Russia loses its most important customer, the EU, which aims to achieve energy independence from Russia until 2030. To compensate for the forthcoming complete loss of the EU market, Russian authorities are envisaging a turn to Asian markets. The project of redirecting exports to Asia is not feasible for Russia even on a mid-term projection. Russia does not have either the available capital or technology to achieve this strategic technological shift in time to effectively blackmail the EU. Withdrawal of major energy and oil service companies from the Russian market equals a severe technological blow that shall result in decades lost, especially concerning oil production. The EU is also considering targeting Russian global oil trade by imposing sanctions on shipping.<sup>83</sup> Gas production is not so easily influenced by Western sanctions; still Russian technical priorities in this matter are now proving to be mistaken. Russian gas strategy has focused on transportation through costly pipelines (Nord Stream, Nord Stream 2 [canceled]), Blue Stream, Yamal Europe, TurkStream) and not on LNG technology through shipping. In general, Western sanctions undermine the capabilities of Russia to continue its energy output. Distances in the Eurasian heartland render reorientation of gas and oil exports towards China or India problematic at the very least. Finally, China will not commit itself to over-reliance on Russian gas and oil, as it has its own interests, which do not include overdependence on Russian energy but diversification of energy supplies.

However, the economic coin also has two sides. Concerning the impact of the Ukraine War on energy security and economic prosperity of Western Europe, we should note that EU countries have received in 2021 in total 155 bcm gas<sup>84</sup> (40% of total imports) and 2,3 million barrels per day (bpd) crude oil<sup>85</sup> (25% of total imports<sup>86</sup>) from

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<sup>83</sup> Chrysoloras, N., Nardelli, A., Longley, A. and Nightingale, A., 'EU Targets Russia's Global Oil Trade with Shipping Sanctions', Bloomberg, 4 May 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-05-04/eu-aims-to-target-russia-s-global-oil-sales-with-insurance-ban>.

<sup>84</sup> European Commission, 'In focus: Reducing the EU's dependence on imported fossil fuels', 20 April 2022, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/news/focus-reducing-eus-dependence-imported-fossil-fuels-2022-apr-20\\_en#:~:text=REPower%20EU%20to%20cut%20dependence,and%20cost%20E2%82%AC99%20billion](https://ec.europa.eu/info/news/focus-reducing-eus-dependence-imported-fossil-fuels-2022-apr-20_en#:~:text=REPower%20EU%20to%20cut%20dependence,and%20cost%20E2%82%AC99%20billion).

<sup>85</sup> Mellor, S., 'Europe's proposed ban on Russian oil could leave Moscow scrapping for \$70 a barrel on a good day', Fortune, 4 May 2022, <https://fortune.com/2022/05/04/europe-eu-proposed-ban-russian-oil-moscow-scrapping-70-barrel-india/>

<sup>86</sup> Eurostat, 'EU imports of energy products-recent developments', April 2022, [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=EU\\_imports\\_of\\_energy\\_products\\_-\\_recent\\_developments&oldid=564016#Main\\_suppliers\\_of\\_natural\\_gas\\_and\\_petroleum\\_oils\\_to\\_the\\_EU](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=EU_imports_of_energy_products_-_recent_developments&oldid=564016#Main_suppliers_of_natural_gas_and_petroleum_oils_to_the_EU)

Russia. The U.S., the world's second largest gas exporter after Russia, exported in 2021 188 bcm.<sup>87</sup> OPEC produces currently about 28 million bpd, 30% of the world's crude oil, while Russia produces about 10 million bpd.<sup>88</sup>

It is entirely unrealistic that energy imports by the EU from Russia could be replaced within a reasonable timeline. A total embargo over Russian oil and gas would have an extremely negative impact on the European economy. Germany covered 55% of its annual gas needs from Russia<sup>89</sup> in 2021, Italy 40%<sup>90</sup>. Both, who contribute together more than one-third of the EU budget, would suffer particularly from a gas embargo. All this could lead to a deep recession of the whole EU, which would have in turn a very negative impact on the poorer countries of the world, as the EU is collectively the biggest donor for international aid in the world, providing over € 50 billion a year.<sup>91</sup> Keeping all this in mind, an EU gas embargo over Russia can be ruled out. However, it needs to be asked, for how long will the EU maintain its unconditional support to Ukraine if Putin decides to shut down gas supplies? One winter?

Ukraine is one of the world's largest exporters of agricultural products. The country's share of global exports of sunflower seed oil is 50%, of rye 40%, of barley 17.5%, of corn 16.5%, and of wheat 11.6%.<sup>92</sup> Russia, which accounts for 16% of the world's wheat exports and 13% of barley exports, has partially banned grain exports.<sup>93</sup> This has led to sharply increasing grain prices on the global markets, which are a heavy burden especially for poorer countries in Africa and Asia. The price of wheat had already increased before 80% between April 2020 and December 2021 as a side effect of

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<sup>87</sup> 'Natural gas exports from the United States in selected years from 1975 to 2021', Statista, 1 April 2022, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/241704/us-natural-gas-imports-since-1955/>

<sup>88</sup> 'Oil prices have soared. Why won't Opec bring them down?'. BBC News, 4 May 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-61188579>

<sup>89</sup> 'Wie abhängig Deutschland von Russland ist', Tagesschau, 27 April 2022, <https://www.tagesschau.de/wirtschaft/weltwirtschaft/gas-stopp-faq-101.html>

<sup>90</sup> Pongratz, E., 'Wie sich Italien von Russlands Gas lösen will', Tagesschau, 11 April 2022, <https://www.tagesschau.de/wirtschaft/weltwirtschaft/italien-gasversorgung-101.html>

<sup>91</sup> European Commission, 'Recipients and results of EU aid', [https://ec.europa.eu/info/aid-development-cooperation-fundamental-rights/human-rights-non-eu-countries/recipients-and-results-eu-aid\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/aid-development-cooperation-fundamental-rights/human-rights-non-eu-countries/recipients-and-results-eu-aid_en)

<sup>92</sup> Michel, J., 'Das leistet die Ukraine auf den weltweiten Agrarmärkten', Agrarheute, 25 February 2022, <https://www.agrarheute.com/management/betriebsfuehrung/landwirtschaft-ukraine-beachten-524545>

<sup>93</sup> Tomson, B., 'Russia bans grain exports to neighboring ex-Soviet countries', Agripulse, 14 March 2022, <https://www.agri-pulse.com/articles/17359-russia-bans-grain-exports-to-neighboring-ex-soviet-countries#:~:text=Russian%20grain%20accounts%20for%2016,because%20of%20the%20Russian%20invasion.>

Covid-19 related supply chain disruptions.<sup>94</sup> Russia has also a very important position on the mineral commodities market. It is the second largest producer of platinum, palladium,<sup>95</sup> vanadium<sup>96</sup>, and cobalt, and the third largest producer of gold and nickel. Cobalt and nickel are of critical importance for lithium-ion battery production.<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, about 30% of the world's diamonds are from Russia.<sup>98</sup> On the steel market, Russia is the world's third largest export nation after China and Japan.<sup>99</sup> Russia is also a major factor in the nuclear power industry. Several European countries like Finland, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary need Russian uranium for their nuclear power plants.<sup>100</sup> French spent nuclear fuel is reprocessed in Russia by Rosatom.<sup>101</sup>

Most Middle East & North African countries support the American and European policy over Ukraine just in a lukewarm way. Saudi Arabia and the UAE have made huge investments in Russia and are losing lots of money over the sanctions. So far, U.S. requests to Saudi Arabia to boost its oil production significantly to lower the global oil price have been repeatedly rejected. Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman were even among those congratulating Russia's President Putin on the occasion of the Victory Day anniversary commemorating the end of World War II. Iran considers Russia a friendly country anyway. Algeria procures the majority of its military equipment from Russia. Many Arab states do not really see the

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<sup>94</sup> Swanson, A., 'Ukraine Invasion Threatens Global Wheat Supply', The New York Times, 24 February 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/24/business/ukraine-russia-wheat-prices.html>

<sup>95</sup> Pistilli, M., 'Top 5 Palladium- and Platinum-producing Countries (Updated 2022)', Investing News, 14 March 2022, <https://investingnews.com/daily/resource-investing/precious-metals-investing/platinum-investing/top-platinum-palladium-producing-countries/>

<sup>96</sup> Pistilli, M., '4 Top Vanadium-producing Countries', Investing News, 11 January 2021, <https://investingnews.com/daily/resource-investing/battery-metals-investing/vanadium-investing/vanadium-producing-countries/>

<sup>97</sup> Johnston, R., 'Supply of Critical Minerals amid the Russia-Ukraine War and Possible Sanctions', Center on Global Energy Policy, 19 April 2022, <https://www.energypolicy.columbia.edu/research/commentary/supply-critical-minerals-amid-russia-ukraine-war-and-possible-sanctions>

<sup>98</sup> Abend, L., 'Russia Produces a Third of the World's Diamonds', Time, 5 May 2022, <https://time.com/6172665/russia-diamonds-sanctions-belgium/>

<sup>99</sup> 'World leading steel exporters in 2020, by country', Statista, 12 April 2022, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/864128/global-steel-exports-by-country/>

<sup>100</sup> Finkenzeller, K., 'Warum spricht niemand über russisches Uran für Atomkraftwerke?', WirtschaftsWoche, 6 May 2022, <https://www.wiwo.de/politik/europa/abhaengigkeit-von-russland-warum-spricht-niemand-ueber-russisches-uran-fuer-atomkraftwerke/28308616.html>

<sup>101</sup> Reuters Staff, 'Greenpeace protests against France's uranium exports to Russia', Reuters, 12 October 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-nuclear-russia-idAFKBN2H215T>



difference between the crisis in Syria and Ukraine and ask why they should care more about Ukraine.



Fig. 6: Nurse Svetlana Savchenko, 56, next to her apartment in a building destroyed by Russian bombing in Mariupol, on March 30, 2022 (Alexander Ermochenko/Reuters)

Russia wields considerable influence in Africa, where it has increased financial investments over the last years significantly. Furthermore, it provides military aid, including the infamous Wagner mercenaries, all without asking questions about democracy and human rights. Several countries have very good relations with Russia and are not willing to risk them over the war in Ukraine. In 2019, the first Russia-Africa Summit and Economic Forum was held in Sochi, co-chaired by Russia's President Putin and Egypt's President Abdel Fattah Al Sisi. Altogether, 43 heads of state or heads of government participated.<sup>102</sup> Rising oil prices and the foodstuff crisis affects especially the poorer African countries, but also relatively wealthy states like Egypt and Libya. Many of them cannot deal with the rising prices efficiently. The President of Sierra Leone

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<sup>102</sup> Russia-Africa Summit and Economic Forum, <https://summitafrica.ru/en/>

Julius Maada said recently, “We have no business to do with the war in Ukraine, but our people are suffering here.”<sup>103</sup> South Africa’s President Cyril Ramaphosa even said, “The war could have been avoided if NATO had heeded the warnings from amongst its own leaders and officials over the years that its eastward expansion would lead to greater, not less, instability in the region.”<sup>104</sup> On March 2, 17 African states (out of 54) abstained from voting against Russia in the U.N. General Assembly. Eritrea joined Russia, Belarus, Syria, and North Korea and voted against the resolution.<sup>105</sup>

China has adopted a careful stance so far in support of Russia. During the early phase of the war, China did not even use the term ‘invasion’, as it urged all parties in the Ukraine to be responsible and exercise restraint.<sup>106</sup> Chinese officials referred vaguely to the importance of sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of any country. Supporting Russia indirectly, China urged the U.S. to respect and address Russia’s demands for security guarantees. On a diplomatic level, China seems to support Russia, but practically it has done little to aid Russia against the severe financial sanctions that have undermined the potential of the Russian economy. Behind the political declarations, lies the economic reality. Major Chinese companies are retreating from Russian markets adapting to U.S. sanctions.<sup>107</sup> On a strategic level, China does not wish to undermine the prospects of its grand project, the Belt Road Initiative uniting Eurasia. If hostilities in Ukraine last long enough, China will start pushing more actively for a diplomatic solution and will step in to help the Russian economy only when it has been really weakened after the sanctions imposed by the West continue. Russia has accepted its second place to the rising influence of China to the degree that it does not interfere with its ambitions to project power on the geopolitical core of industrial Europe.

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<sup>103</sup> ‘We need help: Sierra Leone faces hardship amid Russia-Ukraine crisis’, Khaleej Times, 19 April 2022, <https://www.khaleejtimes.com/world/we-need-help-sierra-leone-faces-hardship-amid-russia-ukraine-crisis>

<sup>104</sup> Methri, G., ‘War could have been avoided’: South Africa’s President Cyril Ramaphosa Blames NATO for Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine’, Republic World, 18 March 2022, <https://www.republicworld.com/world-news/russia-ukraine-crisis/south-africas-president-cyril-ramaphosa-blames-nato-for-russias-invasion-of-ukraine-articleshow.html>

<sup>105</sup> Mureithi, C., ‘How African countries voted on Russia’s invasion of Ukraine’, Quartz Africa, 7 March 2022, <https://qz.com/africa/2138584/how-african-countries-voted-on-russias-invasion-of-ukraine/>

<sup>106</sup> Nouwens, M., ‘China’s Difficult Balancing Act in Russia–Ukraine Crisis’, IISS Analysis, 4 March 2022, <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2022/03/chinas-difficult-balancing-act-in-russia-ukrainecrisis>

<sup>107</sup> ‘Strumpf, D., ‘Chinese Tech Giants Quietly Retreat from Doing Business With Russia’, Wall Street Journal, 6 May 2022, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinese-tech-giants-quietly-stop-doing-business-with-russia-11651845795>

India considers Russia an important trade partner and a leading arms supplier. About 450 fighter jets (Su-30MKI, MiG-29 UPG and MiG-21 Bison), numerous air defense systems, many submarines, destroyers and frigates originate from Russia. More than 3,000 T-72 Ajeya and T-90S main battle tanks as well as 2,500 BMP-2 Sarath infantry fighting vehicles are the backbone of the Indian Army. There is a close cooperation on energy projects, including on nuclear power plants. India is in a difficult security environment, facing Pakistan and China. It does not apply the sanctions and does not intend to do so in the future. For New Delhi, it is clear, if they break with Russia, this could undermine the security of India. There is even a "Declaration on the India-Russia Strategic Partnership" which was signed during the visit of President Vladimir Putin to India in 2000.<sup>108</sup>

Keeping all these constraints for efficient economic sanctions against Russia in mind, it is obvious that some kind of "work-around" is needed to make them efficient without too much damaging the European economy and those of key partners.

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<sup>108</sup> Declaration on Strategic Partnership between the Republic of India and the Russian Federation, signed on October 2, 2000; <https://mea.gov.in/Images/pdf/DeclerationStrategicPartnership.pdf>



## 5. Military and Political-Strategic Lessons of the War in Ukraine

### Military lessons

In the 2022 invasion, we have a major nuclear power, Russia, facing a neighboring middle power, Ukraine, which so far has kept up a largely successful resistance and prevented Russia from achieving major strategic goals and operational objectives. On the operational level, the invasion initially followed the primary strategic objective to capture the enemy's capital and to behead the Ukrainian leadership, in order to cause a collapse of the organized hierarchy and demoralize the Ukrainian side. The invasion was based on five main axes of advance: i) a north-to-south axis from Belarus and Russia towards Kyiv comprising of multiple converging routes of attack; ii) a north-to-south axis towards Kharkiv; iii) a east-to-west axis from Russia towards the greater Donetsk area; iv) a east-to-west axis from Luhansk towards Mariupol and then up to the Dnieper; and v) a south-to-north/northwest axis from Crimea towards Kherson and Odessa.

The whole planning of the operation with a limited number of ground forces (and relatively few infantry) was based on the assumption that the Ukrainians would not resist seriously and that most of the ethnic Russians would welcome and support the advancing troops. Therefore, several operational maneuver groups tried to reach their distant objectives as quickly as possible, passing by defending Ukrainians without making serious efforts to take major urban areas in a bloody house-to-house fighting. They did not plan for a sufficient number of forces to protect their rear areas and their logistic lines, as they did not expect troubles there.



Fig. 7: Possible axes of Russian invasion according to British intelligence before the invasion (UK Ministry of Defence, 17 February 2022)

Russian planners largely neglected the need for a 3:1 superiority at least on a local level by attacking forces over a defender during the opening phase of the war. Ignoring this basic military rule of thumb without being able to make up for the lack of troops by firepower was a key factor in leading to disaster.

The main thrust of the invasion was spearheaded by VDV –Russia’s airborne forces– that attempted to gain a quick foothold near the capital, Kyiv. Russian airborne troops defined capture of Hostomel, an airport at the outskirts of Kyiv, as a primary objective. Russian planning was that the quick seize of Hostomel with two lightly armed heliborne air assault battalions without expecting serious resistance would allow the air landing of additional troops and a rush to Kyiv itself. However, the Ukrainians were informed by the CIA about the Russian plans and prepared accordingly. Their defense

relied on effective use of artillery and local counterattacks, which led to the initial recapture of the aerial bridgehead Hostomel. To the north of Kyiv, where the main front of the war was in the opening phase of the war, the Ukrainian forces adopted careful tactics of delaying and obstructing the advance of the enemy or trapping it down in the urban terrain. Gradual employment of Russian reserve troops and artillery began to yield results, as the Ukrainians ceded ground on multiple fronts and most importantly around Kyiv. In contrast to the Russian army, the Ukrainians adopted a mode of decentralized resistance throughout the land, negating the relative numerical advantage of the Russians.

The operational terrain consists of three elements: marsh and woodland areas outside cities, flat fields, and the urban environment. As a result, the Russian army had to rely on the main roads, causing overconcentration of forces, which were often easy targets for Ukrainian drones, artillery, and sophisticated anti-tank weapons. The Ukrainians resorted to attacking the overstretched Russian logistic chain of supply, anti-tank ambushes and use of artillery, all three of which have been quite effective.<sup>109</sup> Information on the movement of Russian forces and the whereabouts of logistic convoys was provided by Western satellites, Ukrainian drones and Special Forces in forward positions, and local networks as the Ukrainian civil population created modes of communication to report data on the Russian army. In the end, the Russian forces unable to occupy Kyiv retreated from the whole north and northeastern front and the Russian army announced officially the reorientation of Russian operations to Donbas.

An important factor was that Russian forces needed to concentrate on a few capable main supply routes with distant objectives on the ground, but without sufficient previous reconnaissance or screening for their vulnerable flanks.<sup>110</sup> Armored units reached the periphery of Kyiv already two days after the start of the invasion, but this advance only led to their separation and operational isolation from the main body of Russian ground forces. Isolated and trapped in a hostile operational terrain, these forces

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<sup>109</sup> Watling, J. and N. Reynolds, Operation Z: The Death Throes of an Imperial Delusion, Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, 22 April 2022, 3-4. See also Kushnir, M., " "Truth Is on Our Side": Ukrainian Artillery Unit Targets Russian Forces", Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 7 March 2022, <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-russia-kyiv-artillery/31740382.html>.

<sup>110</sup> Kasapoğlu, C., 'A Winning Strategy in Ukraine', Hudson Institute, 7 March 2022, <https://www.hudson.org/research/17637-a-winning-strategy-in-ukraine>.

were quickly routed and destroyed by the Ukrainians. Russian logistics were especially ineffective, as resupply of the forward forces was rendered nearly impossible. Lacking access to rail transport –the usual mode of the Russian army for moving heavy equipment- and facing high traffic in a congested road system, the Russian army was not able to move supplies to the front lines. Russian morale, initially high as the product of the propagandistic image of a liberating war and of an easy victory in a military tactical operation, quickly began to deteriorate. Many Russian units disintegrated, after they faced serious resistance by both the Ukrainian army and the civilian population in occupied regions.

Long convoys of tanks and other military vehicles are being effectively ambushed, as they are made to traverse residential areas or swathes of land covered in forests. Adapting to the territorial relief that is also their homeland, the Ukrainian soldiers are effectively using portable hand devices of anti-tank missiles and kamikaze drones against Russian tanks. Ukrainian Special Forces were also instrumental in disrupting supply lines behind the Russian advancing units.<sup>111</sup> Russian tanks have lost their tactical advantage, unable to encircle the important urban centers of Ukraine and disrupt the ranks of the Ukrainian infantry. The Russian air force has displayed remarkable underperformance having been unable to effectively deploy its aircrafts and helicopters over the skies of Ukraine.<sup>112</sup> The Russian air force has fallen victim to Ukrainian anti-air systems and shoulder-fired Stinger missiles that have shot down numerous Russian helicopters.<sup>113</sup> Ukrainian artillery with its precision has stalled Russian advance and sapped morale by causing mass casualties. The Russians were already running low on precision-guided weapons one month into the invasion, a problem that will only worsen over time.<sup>114</sup> Russian modern weapons and munitions, including cruise

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<sup>111</sup> Danyk, Y.G., Maliarchuk, T. and Briggs, C.M., 'The Worst-Laid Plans: The Next Phase of Russia's War in Ukraine', Modern War Institute, 12 May 2022, <https://mwi.usma.edu/the-worst-laid-plans-the-next-phase-of-russias-war-in-ukraine/>.

<sup>112</sup> Bronk, J., 'The Mysterious Case of the Missing Russian Air Force', Royal United Services Institute, 28 February 2022, <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/mysterious-case-missing-russian-air-force>; O'Brien, P.P. and Stringer, E., 'The Overlooked Reason Russia's Invasion Is Floundering', The Atlantic, 9 May 2022, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/05/russian-military-air-force-failure-ukraine/629803/>.

<sup>113</sup> Buckby, J., 'STARStreak: The Missile Ukraine Is Using to Kill Russian Helicopters', 19fortyfive, 6 May 2022, <https://www.19fortyfive.com/2022/05/starstreak-the-missile-ukraine-is-using-to-kill-russian-helicopters/>

<sup>114</sup> US Department of Defense, 'Senior Defense Official Holds a Background Briefing',

and ballistic missiles, are dependent upon specialized components manufactured by Western countries that cannot be replaced by indigenous production and that are now included in sanctions.<sup>115</sup>



Fig. 8: Military situation in Ukraine on March 11, 2022, before the Russian Army retreated from Kyiv and the northern and northeastern front (UK Ministry of Defence 2022)

Close combat tactics, in contrast to other modes of warfare, require the existence of high morale among the defenders. Ukrainian patriotism as defense of their homeland and the sheer sense of the gross injustice and war crimes perpetrated by the invading Russian forces against the Ukrainians are proving to be an important factor in Ukrainian resistance.<sup>116</sup> The resistance of the defenders of Mariupol bought time for the Ukrainian General Staff as it pinned down Russian forces which otherwise would have been deployed towards other fronts. Unable to enter the major urban centers Russia

21 March 2022, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/2973395/seniordefense-official-holds-a-background-briefing>.

<sup>115</sup> Watling, J. and Reynolds, N., Operation Z: The Death Throes of an Imperial Delusion, Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, 22 April 2022, 10-14.

<sup>116</sup> Eastwood, B., 'Beating the Odds: How Ukraine Fought Russia to a Stand Still', 19fortyfive, 26 April 2022, <https://www.19fortyfive.com/2022/04/beating-the-odds-how-ukraine-fought-russia-to-a-stand-still>.

adopted systematic shelling of cities causing multiple civilian casualties and widespread devastation, especially in Mariupol.

Another important military lesson from the war in Ukraine is the marked shift between offense and defense dominance at the tactical level, as the convergence of modern weapon technologies creates new battle realities. Ukraine has demonstrated the ability of a state to create dominance on the battlefield by its coordinated defense and negate superiority of the attacking forces.<sup>117</sup> Movement in battle space, on air, ground, and even sea becomes extremely dangerous for the offenders. In Ukraine, the Russian army has suffered devastating losses in material with at least 4,353 Russian units destroyed until June 17 [See in detail Table 2].<sup>118</sup> Russian tanks, armored vehicles and aircraft are being destroyed by Ukrainian troops armed with portable missiles such as Javelins and Stingers, and drones. The same applies on coastal defense, as the case of the sinking of the Moskva, the flagship of the Russian Black Sea Fleet, by Ukrainian Neptune anti-ship missiles ship has amply demonstrated, humiliatingly for the Russian side. Land-based anti-ship systems can dominate the coastal waters with an ever-increasing range.

The Russian invasion was also based on a series of erroneous assumptions by the Russian leadership that comprises both the level of self-perception and the level of inter-state realities. Russian self-perception relies on the historical image of WWII, which has become a fundamental ideological parameter in Russian society and soft power diplomacy. Still, WWII was a war of global dimensions where Russia was on the side of the major Western powers, most importantly the U.S. It was U.S. financial and military aid that kept the Russian war machine going in its darkest hour in 1941 and 1942.<sup>119</sup> Today, Russia is fighting against the same Western financial nexus of North America/Western Europe that had enabled its successful resistance and preservation of its state existence in the 1940s.

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<sup>117</sup> For a theoretical argument on this aspect, see Hammes, T.X., 'The Tactical Defense Becomes Dominant Again', Joint Force Quarterly 103 (10/2021), 10-17.

<sup>118</sup> 'Attack On Europe: Documenting Russian Equipment Losses during the 2022 Russian Invasion of Ukraine', Oryx, <https://www.oryxspioenkop.com/2022/02/attack-on-europe-documenting-equipment.html>

<sup>119</sup> Munting, R., 'Lend-Lease and the Soviet War Effort', Journal of Contemporary History 19:3 (7/1984), 495-510; Weeks, A.R., Russia's Life-Saver: Lend-Lease Aid to the U.S.S.R. in World War II, Washington D.C.: Lexington Books, 2004.



In the recent past, Russia has intervened militarily in Syria since 2015; still, Russian involvement in Syrian territory did not offer tangible fighting experience to the land forces. Russian intervention in Syria was carried out mostly through its air forces, which obtained experience, but deployment of land forces remained incomplete and secondary.<sup>120</sup> Consequently, the Russian military does not have recent experience in large-scale high-intensity combined arms warfare against an opponent of equal or proportionate value. Fighting against a determined opponent in Ukraine, the Russian army turned out to be inept at its operational ability, especially in offensive warfare. The high number of Russian generals killed is a combination of "leading from the front" (which is part of Russian military culture<sup>121</sup>), a lack of reliable communication, and precise targeting information (with some help from the US). The rigid structure of Russian command has averted useful initiatives by Russian junior officers. In contrast, the Ukrainian army adopted the Western NATO doctrine of autonomy of junior officers effectively devolving authority to lower command levels. This has been an important aspect of Ukrainian success so far.

Russian strategists greatly underestimated the will of the Ukrainians for resistance carried away by wrong intelligence and their own propaganda of the Ukrainians as a non-existent nation.<sup>122</sup> The propagandistic image of the non-existent Ukrainian nation, and its unwillingness to oppose a Russian military 'intervention' that was presented as a 'denazification' effort was effectively shattered in the battlefields of Ukraine. The invading Russian army has met fierce resistance and has sustained massive losses amounting to approximately 25,000-30,000 dead as of late June.<sup>123</sup> Russian losses in Ukraine so far are exceptionally high for just four months of fighting. Russia has lost more than two thirds of the soldiers the U.S. lost in the Korean War in total (33,000), almost as

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<sup>120</sup> Wójtowicz, T., Barsznica, I. and Drag, K., 'The Influence of Russian Military Involvement in the War in Syria', *Zeszyty Naukowe Akademii Sztuki Wojennej* 111:2 (2019), 85-99; Hamilton, R.E. Miller, C. and Stein, A. (eds), *Russia's War in Syria: Assessing Russian Military Capabilities and Lessons Learned*, Foreign Policy Research Centre, Philadelphia, PA 2020.

<sup>121</sup> Schogol, J., 'Why Russian generals keep getting killed in Ukraine', *Task and Purpose*, 23 March 2022, <https://taskandpurpose.com/analysis/russian-military-generals-killed-ukraine/>

<sup>122</sup> Reynolds, N. and Watling, J., 'Ukraine through Russia's Eyes', Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, 25 February 2022, <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/ukraine-through-russias-eyes>.

<sup>123</sup> The Ukrainian Ministry of Defense claims that the Russian Army has lost approximately 34,500 personnel by June 7. See <https://www.zsu.gov.ua/>. The Russian Defense Ministry claimed that Ukraine had lost 23,367 troops by April 15, See 'Russian Defense Ministry to publish data on military deaths from Ukrainian documents', TASS, 16 April 2022, <https://tass.com/defense/1438729>.



half of the U.S. losses in Vietnam in its long-lasting military intervention (47,000 dead) and -probably most significant- considerably more than the Soviet Union had lost in 10 years of war in Afghanistan in the 1980s (14,453). Concerning specific aspects of the Russian losses, especially the high rate of attrition among Russian ranking officers has affected Russian abilities to plan military operations and further affected morale of Russian soldiers.<sup>124</sup> The same is true for Russia's emblematic losses of its warships in the Black Sea, which have inflicted a huge blow on Russia's image as a great power.



Fig. 9: Ukrainian army soldier Dasha, 22, checks her phone after a military sweep to search for remnants of Russian troops on the outskirts of Kyiv, on April 1, 2022 (Rodrigo Abd/AP)

The vast majority of the Russian troops at the beginning of the war were so-called Category A units. Those have usually 100% of their wartime strength, consist mainly of professional soldiers and have the best equipment available. Actually, almost all of Russia's Category A units were deployed to Ukraine. The failed plan for the first phase of the war led to very high casualties among them. Some, like several airborne units, were

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<sup>124</sup> Beardsworth, J., 'High Death Toll of Russian Generals in Ukraine a Blow to Military Capability', The Moscow Times, 6 May 2022, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/05/06/high-death-toll-of-russian-generals-in-ukraine-a-blow-to-military-capability-a77609>.

totally annihilated by the Ukrainians. Many others lost 30% and more of their combat strength, making them incapable for further offensive operations. In preparation for the second phase of the war, the offensive in the Donbas, several of the crippled Category A battalion tactical groups (BTG) were merged or filled up with other troops to get them back to full combat strength. This did not do any good to the cohesion of these BTGs. Many other units deployed now are Category B units, whose peacetime strength is only at about 50-70% and whose equipment is usually less modern. They were brought to full staffing with soldiers from other units and reservists.

Still, disproportionately high Russian casualties should not obscure the fact that Ukraine has one large disadvantage in the long-term perspective; it cannot replace its casualties just as easily as Russia with its greater resources. Ukraine is also suffering on the battlefields; its infrastructure is largely destroyed, and its casualties are probably equally high to Russian ones. Not accounting for war fatigue, high losses in personnel and material, Ukraine has also to cope with geographical realities, including extended supply lines, as the distance between Lviv –the operational center of Western military assistance- and Donbas is 800 miles. Despite all these factors, Ukraine can still hold out and win the war in the end.

Back in 2014, Ukraine was unprepared for the Russian invasion; its army was disintegrating, with low logistic stockpiles, a problematic command and control system and low morale.<sup>125</sup> Eight years later, the Ukrainian Armed Forces have amazed analysts and defied expectations with their efficient defense and their resilience vis-à-vis the 2022 invasion. Ukrainian success in 2022 is all more remarkable since until the Russian offensive the Western countries –with the exception of the U.S. and Lithuania- had not provided lethal weapons to Ukraine. The preparation of the Ukrainian army both internally and with external expertise since 2014 has been thorough and effective, contributing to the ongoing successful confrontation of the invading forces.

The Ukrainian army has undergone extensive restructuring and organization over the last years having to face an ongoing front against the insurgents in Eastern Ukraine.

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<sup>125</sup> Robinson, P., 'Explaining the Ukrainian Army's Defeat in Donbass in 2014', in: J.L. Black and M. Johns (eds), *The Return of the Cold War: Ukraine, the West and Russia*, London and New York: Routledge, 2016, 111-116.

Ukrainian success was based on a series of careful steps based on the Development Program of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (Defense Forces).<sup>126</sup> Multinational training of the Ukrainian Armed Forces in the framework of military assistance was essential in this regard.<sup>127</sup> Ukrainian progress in its military reforms was verified by its obtaining the status of NATO Enhanced Opportunities Partner, an upgrade since the previous support Ukraine was receiving in the context of the NATO-Ukraine Comprehensive Assistance Package. The command and control system of the Ukrainian Armed Forces was radically altered to conform with the principles and logic of NATO J (L/M/N/A) structures with the reforms reaching to the level of brigades, unified ranks, and individual duties.<sup>128</sup> Key strategic documents, such as the Military Security Strategy (2021)<sup>129</sup> and the Strategic Defense Bulletin<sup>130</sup> have helped upgrade and prepare the Ukrainian Armed Forces for the invasion introducing additionally as a primary goal maximization of the involvement of Ukrainian citizens in national defense. In this context, the Ukrainian Parliament adopted a law "On the Fundamentals of National Resistance" advancing the notion of a forthcoming total war for defense of the homeland.<sup>131</sup>

Ukrainian forces participated in large-scale training exercises along with NATO members. Operation Rapid Trident in September 2021 featured 6,000 troops from 15-countries along with 4,000 Ukrainian soldiers, which had the chance to absorb important lessons just months before the outbreak of the massive Russian invasion. Rapid Trident is an annual, multinational exercise organized by Ukraine and the United States with thousands of service members from NATO allied and partner nations participating each time. Other bilateral and multilateral military exercises include Sea Breeze and Cossack Mace.<sup>132</sup> In this context, constant cooperation with NATO as a

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<sup>126</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, <https://mfa.gov.ua/news/ministr-vadim-pristajko-prijnyav-delegaciyu-strategichnih-radnikiv-visokogo-rivnya-komitetu-reform-mou-ta-zsu>.

<sup>127</sup> <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/570/2020#Text>.

<sup>128</sup> President of Ukraine, 'Command and Control of the Ukrainian Armed Forces', 2021, [https://www.president.gov.ua/storage/j-files-storage/01/02/37/10a2d853870e4c75c72dfdeca432e34b\\_1631893013.doc](https://www.president.gov.ua/storage/j-files-storage/01/02/37/10a2d853870e4c75c72dfdeca432e34b_1631893013.doc).

<sup>129</sup> President of Ukraine, Military Security Strategy of Ukraine, 2021, <https://www.president.gov.ua/documents/1212021-37661>.

<sup>130</sup> President of Ukraine, Strategic Defense Bulletin, 2021, <https://www.president.gov.ua/documents/4732021-40121>.

<sup>131</sup> <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1702-20#Text>

<sup>132</sup> NATO, 'NATO forces take part in exercise Sea Breeze in the Black Sea', 20 July 2020, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_177384.htm?selectedLocale=en](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_177384.htm?selectedLocale=en); Defence Intelligence of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, 'First International Ukrainian-British Military Exercises "Cossack Mace-2021"

whole and with individual member states greatly enhanced Ukrainian combat readiness, defense capabilities and bolstered the morale of the soldiers themselves. Various NATO members advised the Ukrainian side on capacity building in various combat activities, including organization, use of support troops, and use of intelligence data. The model of dissemination of human capital throughout the ranks of the army was put in good use. Individual units down at the company level and platoon have assumed initiatives which are absolutely essential for defense in the extended front and often detached battle lines of the Ukrainian territory. Ukrainians received instructions on urban combat techniques and battlefield medical care, so that their abilities in conducting ambushes and trapping the enemy in a well prepared staggered defense were greatly expanded. The Ukrainian medical support is far superior to the Russian one. Retreating from the outskirts of Kyiv and other parts, the Russians had left behind hundreds of corpses, contributing to low morale among Russian troops.

The invasion has clearly demonstrated the operational inadequacy of the Russian army and has helped to dispel the image of the powerful Russian army constantly promoted by Russia in the past. Conventional wisdom of security analysts was that, despite the problems of Russia's economy, its military forces were immune to setbacks and that they had undergone a massive modernization program.<sup>133</sup> All these assumptions have proven to be untrue. Russia is in no position to challenge NATO in a conventional war.

### Political-Strategic Lessons

Russian aggression should have been taken much more seriously, at the latest since after the occupation of the Crimea 2014. Lowering energy dependence and not increasing it through North Stream 2 should have been a consequence. The implementation of the Minsk Agreement by both sides should have been a focus of western foreign policy.

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End', <https://gur.gov.ua/en/content/zavershylysia-pershi-ukrainskobrytanski-viiskovi-navchannia-cossack-mace-2021.html>.

<sup>133</sup> International Institute for Strategic Studies (ed.), *Russia's Military Modernisation: An Assessment*, London and New York: Routledge, 2020.

On the other hand, Russian concerns should have been addressed more sincerely. Persistent talks about Ukraine joining NATO were perceived as a provocation in Moscow. It was a mistake not to rule out NATO membership for Ukraine as this provided argument for Putin's propaganda. Such a membership has never ever been realistic anyway, as it would have brought Russian occupation forces into NATO territory. Furthermore, it would have allowed Ukraine an attempt to retake the separatist territories under the umbrella of NATO. Ukrainian NATO membership would have led to very high risk of a direct military confrontation between NATO and Russia. A neutral status for Ukraine, maybe with guarantees from some major international powers would make much more sense and could be eventually also accepted by Moscow. However, statements of the American President Biden and some other western politicians that NATO would not get involved in Ukraine with military forces were certainly also a bad idea, as they assured Putin that there is no military risk.

Russian worries about minority rights in Ukraine were never ever taken seriously, neither by the Ukrainian political leadership (with the exception of Russian-friendly President Viktor Yanukovich 2010-14) nor by the West. Ukrainian is the only official language of the country. While the use of Russian language has been allowed on a local level since 2012, a law restricted its use in 2019. The significance of Eastern Ukraine and particularly the Donbas for Russia's already weak economy has been totally ignored. Many companies located there provide raw materials for Russian industry, including space and defense industries, and the steel for most Russian tanks. Dnipro (until 2016 named Dnipropetrovsk) was one of the key centers of the Soviet Union's military and space industry, including for the design and production of ballistic missiles and space rockets. Many helicopters from the Russian companies Kamov and Mil are still equipped with engines from Motor Sich, which is located in Zaporizhzhia on the eastern bank of the Dnieper River. The industries of Dnipro and Zaporizhzhia are just two examples out of many, who would be together with those in the Donbas de-facto lost for Russia's economy if Ukraine would join the EU -although many of them do not meet EU-standards anyway.

Learning the lessons from the Ukraine War (and from the pandemic), it is not only urgently necessary to reduce Western dependency on Russia, but also on China in

some key economic areas. Self-sufficiency of our countries needs to be enhanced, to be prepared for times of crisis. Globalization has reached its limits. However, there is the real danger of a future formation of a Sino-Russian political, economic and military bloc. The disadvantages from such a bloc must be clearly demonstrated to Beijing, stressing that a peaceful cooperation with the West allows for maintaining the desperately needed economic growth of China's economy. A multipolar global order should fit better for their strategic interests than a bipolar.

The importance of the transatlantic partnership has increased significantly again. There is no European defense against Russia without the U.S. Nevertheless, the American focus on the Pacific Rim will remain, as giving China a free hand is no option. For Europe, the Russian threat is also an addition to other, ongoing risks. The threat of terrorism, the challenge of migration, and the requirement for crisis management in Africa and the Middle East will remain. Consequently, some kind of real burden sharing will be required within the transatlantic partnership. Altogether, European NATO members will need to invest much more in their defense, which is also a vital American interest. Forces for crisis response and for main defense are required. A new strategy for the containment of Russia and the mitigation of other risks is required. All this will become much more complicated, as a more frequent deadlock at the U.N. Security Council can be expected. The significance of the U.N. in crisis management will decrease as Russia -with its veto power- has no reason to do the West any favor.

**TABLE 2: EQUIPMENT LOSSES**

TYPE OF WEAPON	RUSSIA	UKRAINE
<b>Tanks</b>	<b>789</b>	<b>198</b>
<b>Armored Fighting Vehicles</b>	<b>435</b>	<b>89</b>
<b>Infantry Fighting Vehicles</b>	<b>873</b>	<b>142</b>
<b>Armored Personnel Carriers</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected Vehicles</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Infantry Mobility Vehicles</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>109</b>
<b>Command Posts and Communications Stations</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Engineering Vehicles and Equipment</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Self-Propelled Anti-Tank Missile Systems</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Heavy Mortars</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Towed Artillery</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Self-Propelled Artillery</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Multiple Rocket Launchers</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Anti-Aircraft Guns</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Self-Propelled Anti-Aircraft Guns</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Surface-To-Air Missile Systems</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Radars</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Jammers And Deception Systems</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Aircraft</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Helicopters</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Unmanned Aerial Vehicles</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Naval Ships</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Logistics Trains</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Trucks, Vehicles and Jeeps</b>	<b>1184</b>	<b>301</b>
<p>The list only includes destroyed vehicles and equipment of which photo or videographic evidence is available, therefore the amount of equipment destroyed is significantly higher than recorded here. The General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine provides the following numbers for Russian equipment losses as of June 24: 1507 tanks, 3637 armored personnel vehicles, 759 artillery systems, 241 MLRs, 99 anti-aircraft warfare systems, 216 aircraft, 183 helicopters, 622 UAVs, 137 cruise missiles, 2553 vehicles, 14 warships/boats and 60 units of special equipment. <b>Source:</b> 'Attack on Europe: Documenting Russian Equipment Losses during the 2022 Russian Invasion of Ukraine', Oryx, <a href="https://www.oryxspioenkop.com/2022/02/attack-on-europe-documenting-equipment.html">https://www.oryxspioenkop.com/2022/02/attack-on-europe-documenting-equipment.html</a>; 'Attack On Europe: Documenting Ukrainian Equipment Losses during the 2022 Russian Invasion of Ukraine', Oryx, <a href="https://www.oryxspioenkop.com/2022/02/attack-on-europe-documenting-ukrainian.html">https://www.oryxspioenkop.com/2022/02/attack-on-europe-documenting-ukrainian.html</a> (Update: 24 June 2022)</p>		



## 6. Possible Military Scenarios

While the analysis of the war is essential in understanding the complexities of both Russian foreign policy and the Western response, it is equally important on a methodological level to employ strategic foresight, in order to assess the multiple possible trajectories and eventual outcomes of the war in Ukraine.<sup>134</sup> Considering immediate future developments on the front in Ukraine, there are three possible scenarios for the outcome of the hostilities. Realities on the ground are of course constantly liable to potential change and there are many variables to consider, still among these three scenarios presented here, we tend to consider Scenario 2 as the most probable and in a declining order Scenarios 1 and 3.

### Scenario 1: Russian advance to the Dnieper

In this first scenario, the Russian army manages to occupy the whole of Eastern Ukraine advancing up to the eastern banks of the Dnieper River with coordinated attacks from both the east and the southern zone and effectively separating Western from Eastern Ukraine. After its tactical success, Russia proceeds to declare victory, annexation of the occupied territories or establishment of independent 'People's Republics' following the model of the seceded territories of Eastern Ukraine and declares that the effective protection of the Russian-speaking part of the Ukrainian population as a strategic goal has been achieved.

If a major part of the Ukrainian army is annihilated by the Russians in the battle for the Donbas or encircled and forced to capitulate, this success could be exploited for an advance from the Kherson region towards the major port of Odessa and further on

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<sup>134</sup> Concerning the value of strategic foresight see Sotiriadis, J. & Grove, J.V., 'Strategic Foresight and Futures Studies: A Methodological Approach', in: U.S. Air Force Warfighting Integration Capability (ed.), Global Futures Report: Alternative Futures of Geopolitical Competition in a Post-Covid-19 World, June 2020, 4-6, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/AD1108029.pdf>.

to the seceded pro-Russian region of Transnistria in Moldova. They would thus achieve the strategic objective to control the whole coastline and completely cut off the remaining Ukrainian state from its access to the Black Sea, turning it into a dependent land-locked state.

Overall, Russia continues to enjoy a numerical superiority against Ukraine and a successful reorganization of its operation could lead to a sort of victory. However, even if the Ukrainians are defeated in the Donbas and are able to conduct an orderly retreat before being encircled by an advancing Russian army, their military power could remain widely intact. In this case, a Russian advance along the coast towards Odessa would be very risky. A marine landing operation in or near Odessa is by now out of the question and beyond Russian operational capabilities. After the humiliating sinking of the cruiser Moskva, the flagship of Russia's Black Sea Fleet, on April 14 by coastal anti-ship Neptune missiles, the Russian Navy is keeping its ships out of range of Ukrainian coastal defense systems.<sup>135</sup>

### Scenario 2: War of attrition

In this scenario, the hostilities will continue for an undetermined period, with Russia making only minor inroads and the Ukrainian side fighting effectively with increasing Western aid, but remaining incapable of decisively defeating the Russian army.

Russian forces will likely continue to focus offensive efforts in eastern Ukraine and specifically southward of Izyum with westward advances from Donetsk in order to encircle Ukrainian troops in southern Kharkiv Oblast and Western Donetsk. There is a great probability that effective Ukrainian counter offensives around Kharkiv City –a major urban center and strategic goal of the Russian offensive- could disrupt Russian positions northeast of the city. The Ukrainians have already cleared the northwest part of the city and are constantly pushing the Russian forces to a distance from Kharkiv. If the Ukrainian counterattack is successful, then the Russians could abandon their

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<sup>135</sup> 'What the Sinking of the Moskva Means', War on the Rocks, 15 April 2022, <https://warontherocks.com/episode/warcast/26828/what-the-sinking-of-the-moskva-means/>.

positions around the city, just as they did with the encirclement of Kyiv. The Russian military has learned from its initial mistakes and is acting now more carefully, although important tactical mistakes continue to occur. The Russians changed their tactics from maneuver warfare to large-scale breakthrough attacks, exploiting superior firepower in a limited geographical area. Still, Russian morale remains rather low and combat effectiveness is mostly limited. On May 11, the Ukrainian Army destroyed with coordinated actions significant elements of a Russian motorized rifle brigade that tried to cross a pontoon bridge over the Siverskyi Donetsk River.<sup>136</sup> Estimates of the Defense Ministry of the United Kingdom raise total Russian casualties as high as one third of its invasion ground forces, adding furthermore that the invasion had lost its momentum as of mid-May.<sup>137</sup> Until early June, the Russian forces had made only slow advance in the eastern front, although it managed to capture Sievierodonetsk pushing back Ukrainian forces.

An ongoing war of attrition is currently the most probable scenario. On a political and strategic level, Ukraine cannot accept the occupation of its territory and certainly not the occupation of the territory lost so far during the 2022 invasion. If Ukraine wishes to survive as a state, it cannot agree to an accommodation with invading Russia at the current frontline. It will have to liberate at least the greater part of its Russian occupied national territory to accept a viable compromise on the ground that could include some form of autonomy for both the eastern regions and Crimea. The Russian side plans to wear out Ukrainian resistance, especially in terms of human capital and personnel; Ukraine relies on the Western sanctions inflicting an ever-increasing cost on the Russian economy and society that will undermine the will of Russia to carry on the invasion as too costly. Belarus is mobilizing forces on the common border with western Ukraine. While it is more likely that this shall only fix Ukrainian forces, a local attack cannot be ruled out entirely to break a stalemate.

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<sup>136</sup> Stepanenko, K. and Kagan, F.W., 'Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 14', Institute for the Study of War, 14 May 2022, <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-may-14>.

<sup>137</sup> 'Britain says Russia has lost a third of its forces in Ukraine', Reuters, 15 May 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/britain-says-russias-donbas-offensive-has-lost-momentum-2022-05-15/>.

In all probability, hostilities will continue throughout the next months. Finally, the conflict could evolve into some sort of frozen conflict after a ceasefire, which might be agreed after both sides are exhausted.

### Scenario 3: Ukrainian offensive and victory

In this scenario, Ukrainian forces manage not only to hold their defense positions but also effectively liberate the areas around the city of Kharkiv to the northeast and Kherson to the south. Already during the initial phase of the invasion, the Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov had remarked that such an attempt would require heavy weaponry: "To win such a war, we need different help than what we have been receiving before. We want to liberate the enemy-occupied territories as soon as possible. To do this, we need other weapons."<sup>138</sup>

After it endured the initial onslaught, Ukraine started receiving heavy weapon systems. These include tanks, heavy artillery, and long-range air defense missiles. These weapons not only bolster Ukrainian defense capabilities; they could contribute to an eventual counterattack, a coordinated attempt after a war of attrition to expel the invading Russian army from occupied territory. Ukraine could have the chance to deploy an adequate tank force to allow for larger offensive operations. With the influx of Western material and capture of substantial Russian military material, Ukraine has already achieved parity in some sectors, such as armored vehicles and tanks. With all this equipment and support, Ukraine will probably manage to liberate the remaining areas around Kharkiv and push back the Russia forces from this front, but advancing towards Donbas itself and Mariupol, let alone the Crimean Peninsula, is a different story. A successful offensive would require a decisive superiority of the attacking forces over the Russian ones in both personnel and material. For such a coordinated effort to unfold successfully, Ukraine needs at least local air superiority and sufficient numbers of trained personnel to replace its significant losses. It is rather unlikely that Ukraine will be able to

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<sup>138</sup> Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, Address by the Minister of Defence of Ukraine Oleksii Reznikov to the partnering states, <https://www.mil.gov.ua/en/news/2022/04/07/address-by-the-minister-of-defence-of-ukraine-oleksii-reznikov-to-the-partnering-states/>.

achieve the required numerical superiority. Furthermore, it would need to be prepared on both operational and moral levels to accept large-scale casualties. Extremely high casualties of the Ukrainian army that amount to 1,000 soldiers a day (150-200 dead and 800 wounded) undermine the prospect of a sustainable Ukrainian counter-offensive in the immediate future.<sup>139</sup> Ukrainian losses in material are also high, as of late June, Ukrainian forces have lost 30-50% of their equipment in active combat.<sup>140</sup>

### The use of nuclear weapons

An analysis of possible scenarios needs to examine also the critical question of the potential use of nuclear weapons by Russia. Strategic nuclear weapons are a formidable asset, but their use has always been a taboo in international relations, as even a limited one could lead to total escalation. Employment of strategic nuclear weapons would also mean suicide for Russia itself, which is not the plan of its leadership. The constant threats to use (strategic) nuclear weapons carry one single purpose, to deter NATO and the European states from direct military involvement in Ukraine.<sup>141</sup>

Russia has the largest nuclear warhead stockpile in the world with almost 6,000 warheads.<sup>142</sup> About 2,000 of these are tactical nuclear weapons, while many of them have low-yield warheads (1 kt or even below) and a very high precision and are employed by artillery, missiles, and fighter jets. The effect of such an explosion is rather local in its destruction radius. The blast of a 1 kt warhead detonating 200 m above the ground would destroy most buildings up to 600 m away. Emission of radiation would also be rather limited, but still kill everyone up to 800 m from the impact. Larger weapons like the Iskander-M short-range ballistic missiles have a range of about 500 km

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<sup>139</sup> Sabbagh, D., 'Ukraine's high casualty rate could bring war to tipping point', The Guardian, 10 June 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jun/10/ukraine-casualty-rate-russia-war-tipping-point>.

<sup>140</sup> Magnuson, S., 'Ukraine to U.S. Defense Industry: We Need Long-Range, Precision Weapons', National Defense, 15 June 2022, <https://www.nationaldefensemagazine.org/articles/2022/6/15/ukraine-to-us-defense-industry-we-need-long-range-precision-weapons>.

<sup>141</sup> Lonergan, E. and Yarhin-Keren, M., 'Cyber Signaling and Nuclear Deterrence: Implications for the Ukraine Crisis', War on the Rocks, 21 April 2022, <https://warontherocks.com/2022/04/cyber-signaling-and-nuclear-deterrence-implications-for-the-ukraine-crisis/>.

<sup>142</sup> Kristensen, H.M. & Korda, M., 'Russian nuclear weapons, 2022', Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists 78:2 (2022), 98-121.

and a 5-50 kt warhead (in comparison, the Hiroshima explosion had a yield of 13 kt). Soviet doctrine considered twelve 10 kt nuclear warheads necessary to take a deployed enemy division in a defensive position out of action.<sup>143</sup>

There are two kinds of potential targets for Russian tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine. The first ones are priority targets in the operational depth of the defender, namely throughout Ukraine. This could include troop concentrations, larger air bases, and logistic zones. However, as Ukraine has dispersed its assets, only smaller targets remain which could be also attacked sufficiently by conventional weapons. The other ones are targets on the battlefield, including assembly areas, fortifications, and logistic depots. If the Russians are advancing, it does not make sense for them to use tactical nuclear weapons in the vicinity of their own troops as those would need to advance through contaminated areas. The Russian population in Ukraine and the infrastructure would be also at risk. Nevertheless, if a Ukrainian counteroffensive would be successful and the Russians would be at the edge of a total defeat, it could well be that Putin decides to use a few tactical nuclear weapons to stop the Ukrainians and to force them to negotiate. One must not forget the significance of the Donbas and the Crimean Peninsula for Russia and the impact of a humiliating defeat on the survival of Putin's regime. In the last ten years, several Russian military maneuvers included the employment of tactical nuclear weapons with the purpose to "escalate to de-escalate" a conflict when its own territorial integrity is in jeopardy. Even if a few tactical nuclear weapons were used, it would be still unlikely that NATO would escalate to an all-out nuclear war over Ukraine. Nevertheless, sanctions would be extended and tightened as much as possible.

In its 2020 document, called "Basic Principles of State Policy of the Russian Federation on Nuclear Deterrence," Russia has stated the specific circumstances under which it could employ nuclear weapons. This essential document presents four scenarios that might warrant nuclear use, having added two cases to the previous versions. The initial two cases were "use of nuclear weapons or other types of weapons of mass destruction by an adversary against the Russian Federation and/or its allies" and "aggression against the Russian Federation with the use of conventional weapons

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<sup>143</sup> Isby D.C., *Weapons and Tactics of the Soviet Army*, London: Jane's, 1988, 293.



when the very existence of the state is in jeopardy”’. The two new cases added in 2020 are an “arrival [of] reliable data on a launch of ballistic missiles attacking the territory of the Russian Federation and/or its allies” and an “attack by [an] adversary against critical governmental or military sites of the Russian Federation, disruption of which would undermine nuclear forces response actions.”<sup>144</sup> According to an announcement of the Russian Foreign Ministry on May 6, there is no intention to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine.<sup>145</sup> U.S. intelligence estimates on May 10 concluded that the Russian leadership could authorize a major nuclear exercise, although the use of a nuclear weapon does not constitute an imminent threat.<sup>146</sup> In this context, we conclude that the use of nuclear weapons is unlikely, but cannot be ruled out if the Russians would face a total defeat.

Summing up our estimations of possible military scenarios we have to bear in mind the realities on the ground so far and the diplomatic balances. How long will the war in Ukraine last? Russia will certainly not abandon its long-term strategic objectives including severely weakening Ukraine. If Russia decides to adopt a mid-term strategy of attrition, then the war in Ukraine will turn into a great *Materialschlacht*, where logistics of the Western nexus and Russia shall confront each other. So far, the Western states have been able to keep Ukrainian resistance running. Russia has responded with blackmail of potential escalation even against NATO member-states that are actively assisting Ukraine. Still, these are nothing more than hollow threats; Russia will not dare to challenge NATO members themselves; it will focus on individual states and attempt to curb their participation in the war using subversion, media propaganda, cyber warfare, and energy blockades. Therefore, in essence Russia has not been in position to stop the substantial Western material support to Ukraine, a key factor in preserving Ukrainian military capabilities.

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<sup>144</sup> President of the Russian Federation, Executive Order on Basic Principles of State Policy of the Russian Federation on Nuclear Deterrence, <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202006020040?index=0&rangeSize=1>. Cf. Roberts, C., ‘Revelations about Russia’s Nuclear Deterrence Policy’, *War on the Rocks*, 19 June 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/06/revelations-about-russias-nuclear-deterrence-policy/>.

<sup>145</sup> ‘Russia has no intention to employ nuclear weapons in Ukraine, says diplomat’, TASS, 6 May 2022, <https://tass.com/politics/1447783>.

<sup>146</sup> Barnes, J.E., ‘The U.S. intelligence chief says Putin is preparing for a prolonged conflict.’, *The New York Times*, 10 May 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/10/us/avril-haines-putin-russia-ukraine-war.html>

## 7. Policy Recommendations and Conclusions

The 2022 invasion of Ukraine is a critical and landmark event for international order and the security of Western states, especially European ones, that has to be understood in its entirety. The Russian invasion must be answered with decisive and effective measures that shall safeguard the independence and territorial sovereignty of Ukraine even with a gradual and compromising approach. In the case of a defeat of Ukraine, Russia could feel encouraged to continue its aggressive foreign policy with military means, in its “near abroad”, where Moldova and Georgia could be next on the target list, but also in more distant regions like Northern Africa. Other countries, like eventually China and Iran, could attempt to follow Russia’s example. Therefore, it is so important to stop Russia in Ukraine and to make the war for Putin as costly as possible to make it a negative example for the outcome of military aggression.

Accepting the consequences of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine would have inherent dangers. Therefore, it is necessary to maintain the western commitment to the principle of state sovereignty and free choice for foreign policy. The West, with the U.S. as its leading economic and military power, continues to enjoy global strategic and economic superiority. What the West often lacks is internal cohesion and the power that emanates from conviction of beliefs, the very one that helped the West endure during decades of the Cold War. If Russian war crimes and its aggressiveness against Ukraine and other states of Eastern Europe would remain unchecked, a new perception of arbitrary inter-state relations and a menacing new landscape of post-imperial geopolitical spaces would arise. The Western states need to sustain their support of Ukraine on all levels: military, logistical, technological and informational, financial, and diplomatic. Military assistance is the most important aspect of maintaining the capabilities of Ukrainian defense against the Russian invasion. Resistance to Russian revisionism can be achieved with an effective combination of military, economic and diplomatic means.

On a diplomatic level, the EU, the U.S., NATO, and their allies should increase their efforts to isolate Russia to the greatest degree possible by delegitimizing its international presence and by drawing to their position major regional actors of the international system that have so far remained neutral in the conflict. On an economic level, the West needs to maintain effective long-lasting severe sanctions that shall reduce Russia's capability to fund and conduct its military operations in Ukraine by destroying its supply chains, modes of production, and international financial standing. Of course, the existing issue of EU's energy dependency on Russian gas and commodities is a factor to be taken into account and one that will determine geopolitical realities ahead in the next decades. On a military level, both NATO as an autonomous entity and individual member-states of the Western alliance must maintain their supply of weaponry, logistical, and intelligence assistance to Ukraine. The Western states should increase the delivery of weapons that will not only strengthen Ukraine's sustained defense, but shall eventually lead to a Russian defeat on the battlefield and on a strategic level. NATO has already significantly enlarged its military deployments in Eastern Europe and the Baltic states to deter further aggression. NATO member-states have to maintain the 2% requirement of GDP spending for defense and consider raising this to an even higher level, in order to obtain considerable military capability both as individual actors and as members of the NATO alliance.

Preservation of territorial access to the Black Sea ports by maintaining control over southwestern coastal Ukraine is essential for the survival of this state. The vast majority of Ukraine's exports run through its seaports. Odessa port is Ukraine's largest seaport with a total annual traffic capacity of 43 million tons (18 million tons dry and 25 million tons liquid cargoes).<sup>147</sup> If all the ports were under Russian control, this would undermine Ukraine's economic independence significantly.

For the EU and the U.S., it is now of vital interest to contain Russian expansion and -indirectly- to deter others (like eventually China) from similar adventures by demonstrating the negative consequences of such a military escalation for the aggressor. This shall be achieved by harsh economic sanctions and by enabling the

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<sup>147</sup> 'Port of Odessa', World Port Sources, [http://www.worldportsource.com/ports/commerce/UKR\\_Port\\_of\\_Odessa\\_1569.php](http://www.worldportsource.com/ports/commerce/UKR_Port_of_Odessa_1569.php)

Ukrainian forces to sustain the war against Russia. Crucial assistance includes not only logistics and weapon deliveries (including deadly Stinger surface-to-air missiles and Javelin anti-tank guided missiles), but also extensive intelligence support. Ultimately, comprehensive sanctions shall force Russia to end the war or -as a fallback option- to make a “success” extremely costly to deter further aggression by Russia (or other countries from following the Russian example). The strategic objective is to enforce a withdrawal of Russia from Ukraine or at least to prevent a further expansion of the Russian influence beyond what they have achieved right now by making the war in Ukraine as costly as possible for them.



Fig. 10: Shrapnel marks on the statue of a child after shelling hit Gorky Park, an amusement park in Kharkiv, on April 2, 2022 (Thomas Peter/Reuters)

The diplomatic instrument works on maintaining and strengthening the international rejection of Russia's invasion. However, what must be taken into account are the consequences of the war and the sanctions for many Arab and African states who import a huge portion of their grain, meat, and other agricultural products from

Ukraine or Russia. As mentioned, in several countries, there is already a significant increase in prices for the consumers (by far higher than in Europe), while the stocks of provisions could run empty within a few months. This could have a huge destabilizing effect; especially as rising fuel prices affect all kinds of logistics. One must not forget that rising prices were one of the factors leading to the revolts of the "Arab Spring." A timely combination of diplomacy and very costly economic support will be required if the sanctions continue in the months to come to maintain stability in Africa and the wider Middle East. Therefore, western sanctions against Russia must find the right balance between efficiency and preserving their own economic capabilities. Europe with a ruined economy would neither be of help for Ukraine, nor for the poorer countries in the developing world.

The key questions are now on the Russia side, how long will Putin be able to sustain the war? Will the sanctions work before the Ukrainian military collapses? On the other side, it is also necessary to ask, how long can the EU sustain the sanctions, eventually including a stop of oil and gas imports, and -at least equally important- how can the shortfall in grain and meat supplies for the African, Arab, and also some Asian countries be compensated? Consequently, the western center of gravity is to maintain the wide rejection of the Russian aggression and the support of the sanctions. Otherwise, the strategy over Ukraine will likely fail. After a ceasefire, possibly some kind of far-reaching autonomy for the eastern Oblasts could be a compromise acceptable to both sides. Maybe the Autonomous Province of Bolzano-South Tyrol in Northern Italy could serve as a positive example. Regarding the Crimean Peninsula, we should note that a territorial reintegration into Ukraine seems to be unrealistic; such a prospect can be achieved neither with military, nor with diplomatic means.

The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine is a clear and violent manifestation of Russian revisionism in its purest form. On a geopolitical level, it is also an attempt by Putin's regime to reap benefits that would be not possible in a long-term perspective due to the decreasing relative power, economic output, and influence of Russia in the greater Eurasian geopolitical framework. Russia is trying to establish favorable security conditions for the decades ahead. In fact, Russia is attempting to freeze time, as its

influence is poised to decrease over the next decades due to a deteriorating demographic base and growing energy independence of the European Union.<sup>148</sup>

Having realized this, Russia will orient its economy away from Europe, focusing increasingly on markets and partners in Asia and Africa. One must not forget, the vast majority of the global population of 7.9 billion lives in Asia (4.7 billion) and Africa (1.4 billion), and as explained before, most of these countries are not supportive to western sanctions against Russia. It will certainly take some time, but in the end, this new orientation of the Russian economy could very well work. Consequently, containing Russia, a nuclear, energy, and commodities “super power” will be very challenging. Finally, some kind of peaceful coexistence with Russia returning to the path of international law must be the aim.

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<sup>148</sup> Eberstadt, N., A Statistical Glimpse at Russia's Multiple Demographic and Human Resource Problems. 2018. South Central Review 35:1, 147-174.



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