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LESSONS FROM THE RUSSIAN - UKRAINIAN WAR

Doctor (PhD) Andras Huguik

Research Fellow of the Hungarian Peacekeepers' Association.

Corresponding Author: Doctor (PhD) Andras Huguik

ABSTRACT

Dealing with the war experience has always been and remains a priority in the history of military science. The lessons learned from the Russo-Ukrainian War and their analysis can provide all countries' armed forces with significant input in formulating defense policy, including the development of military forces, planning and organization of military operations, and the use of military technology. This research article aims to predict the outcome of the war based on analysis of the aims and achievements of the opposing sides in the war, the Russian narrative on the war, the nature of the Russian threat to Europe and Western Russophobia and review the lessons learned by defence policy experts of NATO, the EU, the US, China, Russia, and Ukraine. The most important lesson for NATO is that it must commit itself to helping Ukraine win because a Russian victory would only lead to a more destructive war in Europe. The European Union believes that a long-term Russia strategy is needed for preventing Russian aggression against EU/NATO members, former Soviet republics, and containing Moscow's influence in EU candidate countries and the so-called global South. The main conclusion for the US is that the US military should be prepared to conduct protracted large-scale military operations. For China is that there is the need to create a real-time information ecosystem to increase agility, flexibility, and effectiveness of military operations. For Russia is that the general goal of wars today has shifted from the capture and retention of territory to domination over the economic, ideological, and mental space of the enemy and the military activity of the opposing side is made impossible mainly by reducing its military-economic potential. Ukraine has identified three key trends as lessons from the war (the rise of drone warfare, demographic decline, and the need for simultaneously maintained ability to repel long-range enemy attacks and the ability to strike in depth against the enemy), which will be taken into account in the development of armed forces. The author concludes that the above lessons learned represent commitments of EU/NATO and Ukraine to continue fighting with Russia, efforts of Russia to achieve the declared aims of the limited military operation with the support of China, Iran, and North Korea, and preparations of the two interested sides for a possible US-China military conflict. These commitments, efforts, and preparations, together with the unsuccessful efforts to end the war in Ukraine, can result in a new arms race, a NATO-Russia armed conflict, or, in the worst case, a world war.

KEY WORDS: Russo-Ukrainian War, lessons learned, EU, NATO, Russia, Ukraine, USA, views, policy

Introduction

This article examines issues related to the Russo-Ukrainian War from the perspective of the realist school of international relations. (Security and power are at the heart of realism. According to the followers of the realist trend, states and their leaders are primarily motivated by national interests and the pursuit of maximum security.)

Literature Review

The majority of professional literature does not provide a comprehensive analysis of the development of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. This article aims to fill this gap by analyzing the Russian explanation of the war, examining the contradictions within the Russian narrative, presenting the nature of the Russian threat to Europe and how it is supposed to be realized, investigating the origins of Russophobia, and assessing the lessons learned by several players. The author does not impose his opinion on the reader; he leaves it to the reader to evaluate what is said. Presentation of the lessons from war is based on the work of internationally recognized researchers. Of particular interest to the readers might be the little-known studies by Russian military experts. The conclusion of the research article reflects the individual opinion of the author.

Research Objectives

- Presentation of the achievements of the opposing sides in the Russo-Ukrainian War.
- Presentation of the Russian explanation of the conflict, of the contradictions within the Russian narrative, of the nature of the alleged Russian threat to Europe, of its supposed way of realization, and the origins of Russophobia to predict the possible conflict outcome.
- Presentation of lessons learned from the Russo-Ukrainian war by defence policy experts of NATO, the EU, the US, China, Russia, and Ukraine.
- Description of the conclusions regarding the future course of the war that might be drawn after presenting the aforementioned research objectives.

Research Questions

- What are the achievements of the opposing sides in the Russo-Ukrainian War?
- What does the future bring?
- Why does the fear of Russia in Europe seem eternal?
- What are the lessons learned from the Russo-Ukrainian war by defence policy experts of NATO, the EU, the US, China, Russia, and Ukraine?
- What will be the cumulative effect if predictions about the future of war and the practical application of the lessons of war prove true?

Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology

In this research, the author used qualitative research method with content and document analysis techniques. (Qualitative research focuses on, among other things, the exploration and understanding of different social phenomena. Content analysis gives a more detailed understanding of the background of phenomena and can reveal deeper, hidden messages and contexts, whereas document analysis only examines explicit, obvious content.)

Since Hungary, as part of the so-called collective West, represents a specific position close to the realist school, the author also highlighted the works of Hungarian political scientists.

Since public opinion on the issues under study is changing extremely rapidly and opinion polls are contradictory, this article does not examine the public perception of the issues under study.

Textual Analysis

Taking stock of achievements in the Russo-Ukrainian war

What has Ukraine achieved?

Ukraine's survival as a formally independent state is a positive result. Its territorial losses are noticeable but still bearable. Kyiv has managed to maintain Western military support for three years and positioned itself as the first line of deterrence against Russia. The Ukrainian army has become one of the largest and most experienced in Europe. It has mastered the use of modern Western weaponry in combat conditions. Western intelligence support provided certain superiority to Ukraine over Russian forces in combat and operational reconnaissance, as well as in artillery and missile targeting. This is particularly true in the area of space reconnaissance, which has been and continues to be provided by Western military reconnaissance satellites. This allows continuous and real-time monitoring of the area of operations and the territory of the Russian Federation.

The Starlink "universal" satellite internet system of Elon Musk's SpaceX Company has rapidly become Ukraine's key tactical and operational military command, control, communication, and data transmission system, which has propelled Ukraine's armed forces into the 21st century. Starlink, with its features of anywhere operation, streaming information to large numbers of individual consumers, providing internet communications on the move and control of vehicles from any distance, has given Ukrainian armed forces military capabilities that even US forces cannot expect until the mid-2030s. Starlink makes it possible to connect any "military unit" anywhere to the network, exchange data in real time between thousands of subscribers, chat on the military internet and operate special military communication networks using wi-fi, in addition to highly encrypted satellite communications. In effect, all combat "units" and all weapons, when connected to Starlink, become network-centric, with real-time targeting, guidance, and correction capabilities and high precision weapons control potential (Pugov, 2024, p. 21–36).

As for the negative results, Ukraine has suffered heavy human losses, with hundreds of thousands of people killed or wounded. The human toll of the war has been exacerbated by the large number of refugees and displaced persons, many of whom do not want to return home. This is a sensitive loss for the country, which will be extremely difficult to replace by inviting nationals from other countries, as Ukraine does not have the experience of Russia in integrating large numbers of migrants.

Of course, a foreign Ukrainian diaspora can be beneficial: to lobby for pro-Ukrainian laws and sanctions against Russia, and send money to relatives. However, the diaspora cannot be a direct player in the country's economic development.

The human losses are compounded by the significant damage to infrastructure and industry caused by military operations. Reconstruction will require tens of billions of dollars. Even more significant losses have been incurred in the supply of weapons to the armed forces. Colossal stocks of Soviet-origin weapons were exhausted in three years. Western supplies have alleviated the

problem, but the necessary level of supply will be difficult to maintain without significant investments.

As for the territorial losses, their final parameters are unknown. What is clear, however, is that Ukrainian diplomacy's insistence on the 1991 borders is pointless. Under the current circumstances, Russian troops cannot be pushed back to the 1991 borders. Moreover, the Russian army is slowly but steadily advancing. The Russian military-industrial complex has gained momentum and seems to be able to maintain it.

Three years of war have deepened Ukraine's dependence on its Western partners. While Ukraine retained its formal sovereignty, it lost much of its room for maneuver in choosing its political and economic direction. The country's budget is critically dependent on foreign aid. The remnants of the industry have become linked to Western production and supply chains, which only deepens the problems of the national economy. Not only modernizing the country but even keeping the vital activities of the state at a basic level without Western donations is simply impossible.

Assuming that the EU confiscates all of Russia's frozen assets and hands them over to Ukraine, the problem of dependency will remain, as the relevant decisions will again be taken abroad and EU partners could easily use subtle methods to hold on to Russian assets they deem important. As for the Trump administration, it has unashamedly asked Ukraine to reciprocate US aid by handing over significant control over the extraction of the country's natural resources. It will take years, if not decades, to get Ukraine out of this situation. Ukraine has already become a vulnerable, dependent, and marginalized state, and this dependence creates political vulnerability.

Three years after the start of the war, the Ukrainian political system remains unstable. A war-torn Ukraine had developed into an authoritarian state with nationalism as its political ideology. The problem of the legitimacy of the current government and administration is growing. The country's political continuity has been disrupted, and this is reflected not only in the sanctions against the pre-Maidan leadership but also against former President Petro Poroshenko and the 2014 revolutionaries. The vulnerabilities of Ukrainian politics, which have existed since the very beginning of the state's existence, are being reasserted with renewed force (Timofeiev, 2025).

What has Russia achieved?

Russia has only partially achieved its goals: it has weakened Ukrainian military capabilities, dismantled the hard core of the extreme nationalist Ukrainian military units, occupied most of the Donbas region, and gained new territory.

Since it could not yet achieve the overthrow of the Zelensky regime, the restoration of Ukraine's neutrality, the closure of Western military bases and intelligence centers in Ukraine, the suspension of military support by the "Coalition of the Willing" and the Western coordination of attacks on critical infrastructure sites in Russia, the resumption of the war by Russia cannot be ruled out.

Russia must rebuild the vast swathes of Ukrainian territory that have been occupied and destroyed, clear it of dangerous remnants of war, and repopulate it. Ukraine is lost to Russia forever. It has even alienated the Russian-speaking Ukrainians. This is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future.

Russia has no military allies other than Iran and North Korea to help it on the battlefield. But the Russian Federation is opposed by a powerful coalition of the world's most advanced countries, and this

coalition believes that Russia can now be defeated militarily, as there have been historical examples of this (the Crimean War, the Russo-Japanese War, the First World War, and the Soviet/Russian-Polish War of 1920).

The sanctions against Russia are having impacts (but less than expected): - As it is known, most of Russia's foreign trade revenue comes from hydrocarbon exports. Before the war, the EU received a large part of the Russian hydrocarbon exports. This market seems to have been lost to Russia forever. The diversion of hydrocarbon exports to other markets will place a heavy burden on the Russian economy. - As a result of the war, the West will pay particular attention to preventing the export of high technologies to Russia. This will essentially slow down Russia's technological development, which is normally the engine of economic growth. - A large number of young, skilled professionals have left Russia. It is unlikely that they will return anytime soon. This represents a huge loss of human capital for Russia (Gyarmati and Kertesi, 2025).

To provide an objective assessment, it should be mentioned that Russia's special military operation in Ukraine still enjoys broad domestic social support and plays a significant role in the consolidation of Russian society. It has become a challenge that has encouraged people around shared values and national interests. Today, seven out of ten respondents agree that all Russians should contribute to the successful completion of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine (72%), while only 19% disagree. Two-thirds of Russians also support the thesis that they must now live by the principle of "All for the front, all for victory" (64%), with only 28% refusing to agree with this verdict. (Editorial, 2024).

The war has brought negative changes to Russia's security environment: - Two countries with significant armed forces, Finland and Sweden, have joined NATO. This made the Baltic Sea almost entirely NATO's internal sea. - The current brutal Anti-Europeanism of the Trump administration and the alleged Russian threat are likely to lead to unprecedented armament by the countries of the European Union and the United Kingdom (plus Canada), as well as increased military support for Ukraine. - In cooperation with the US, a larger and more effective European military force and nuclear arsenal will be created within NATO to deter Russia. - Although US-Russian relations may be temporarily normalized at a minimum level, and the US, Russia, and China may even divide the world between them, any agreements will probably be limited to the duration of the Trump administration, as they will be reached without the involvement of Europe.

What does the future bring?

To conclude the outcome of the conflict, we need to analyze and assess the Russian interpretation of the circumstances of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the nature of the Russian threat to Europe.

Russian interpretation of the circumstances of the Russia-Ukraine conflict

Russian President Vladimir Putin spoke in unusually frank terms about the Russian interpretation of the context of the Russia-Ukraine conflict during a press conference following his meeting with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban on 4 February 2022. The Hungarian news portal Mandiner presented the Russian narrative in detail (Marácz, 2022) and attempted to assess it objectively. Without claiming to be exhaustive, the Russian interpretation of the circumstances of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the assessment of Moscow's position opinions can be summarised below (Putin's statements in quotation marks):

"The West's support for Ukraine is not primarily about Ukraine's security but is directed against Russia. And in this Ukraine is only a tool for the West. We have been dragged into this armed conflict, and this allows Ukraine's allies to impose radical sanctions against us."

An account of the events leading up to the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war does not rule out this Russian hypothesis.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States (and the West in general), which had become the world's sole leading power, began to support Russia's democratic transformation and to strengthen the West's economic influence through the opportunities for privatization in Russia. The Russian leadership did not initially perceive this threat. NATO's intervention in Yugoslavia without UN authorization and the eastward expansion of the alliance sobered the Kremlin as to the West's real intentions.

"We received promises from the West that NATO would not expand eastwards, yet they did. Poland, Romania, and the Baltic republics. They said one thing, they did another, and they deceived Russia."

Such a promise was not even made when the NATO-Russia Charter was negotiated in 1997. At a meeting of the US and Russian presidents on March 21, 1997, Bill Clinton rejected Boris Yeltsin's proposal to exclude the former Soviet republics from possible enlargement under a "gentlemen's agreement". It is a fact, however, that in a speech in Tutzing, Bavaria, on January 31, 1990, German Foreign Minister Genscher stated that changes in Eastern Europe and German unity should not lead to the neglect of Soviet security needs. NATO must therefore rule out enlargement to the East. This later became known as the 'Tutzing formula'. It is also a fact that on February 9, 1990, US Secretary of State James Baker, negotiating in Moscow with Party Secretary General Mikhail Gorbachev, stated about NATO enlargement: 'Not one inch eastward!'

At the turn of the millennium, the West became uncomfortable with Russia's awakening, but, ignoring Moscow's reservations, continued to expand its influence in the post-Soviet space by organizing "color revolutions" in the post-Soviet successor states. Meanwhile, the United States withdrew from international agreements guaranteeing strategic stability. It has announced the withdrawal from the treaty on limitation of US medium-range nuclear offensive weapons, i.e., nuclear weapons deployed in Europe, and the Open Skies Treaty. In parallel, the missile defense system against "rogue states" has been developed and deployed by the US. These steps have further reinforced Moscow's concerns about its security.

"The United States has denounced the so-called missile defence treaty, has withdrawn from it despite our request to the contrary, and is deploying missile defence systems in Romania and Poland. Their Mk 41 launchers, in turn, are capable of launching Tomahawk missiles, which are not a defense but a strike weapon."

In the wake of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the United States abrogated the 1972 US-Soviet Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty because "rogue states" - North Korea or Iran - could acquire missile weapons that could threaten US territory or allies in the absence of effective missile defence systems. The Mk 41 is a modular and multi-purpose launcher, but according to official US sources, the devices deployed in Europe are different. Nonetheless, Russian concerns about the deployment of

the launchers in Europe appear to be valid, as the US Navy's website acknowledges that the Mk-41 launcher is multi-purpose and can be used to launch Tomahawk drones in addition to the SM system (Department of the Navy, 2016). The only substantive difference is that the Aegis system has different electronics and software, but this can be changed relatively easily and cheaply (Kühn, Péczeli, 2017/1 p. 66-69).

It was in this context that the series of protests began on Maidan Square in Kyiv, demanding the resignation of the Ukrainian president who refused to sign the EU Association Agreement. Using this opportunity, the West had already openly started to antagonize Ukraine against Russia by supporting the anti-Russian Ukrainian opposition. At that time, Ukraine was still guaranteed a neutral status by its constitution. As for NATO accession, it was not supported by the majority of society. The increasingly impatient West, exploiting legitimate discontent against Yanukovych, helped the extreme nationalist Ukrainian opposition to illegally come to power with concerted political, financial, and intelligence support. The opposition renounced Ukrainian neutrality and enshrined the desire to join NATO in the constitution. This was the beginning of Ukraine's "anti-Russia" transformation.

"Why did we sign agreements in Istanbul and Astana promising that neither country would ensure its security at the expense of the other? Ukraine is undermining our security."

The conventions were not just about this. They were also about the freedom of each country to choose and change its security arrangements and its allies. In contrast, the Russian side has consistently referred to its interpretation of the indivisibility of security, namely that no country can increase its security at the expense of another country. If Ukraine's membership of NATO would reduce Russia's security, how, in this spirit, has the Russian annexation of Crimea and Moscow's fomenting of war in eastern Ukraine affected Ukraine's security? It is also important to note that already during the Cold War, the opposing powers realized that security cannot be a 'zero-sum game' - it does not add up to more security for one and automatically less for the other. Making intentions and actions transparent through confidence-building measures has been a means of mutually enhancing security since 1975. Of course, regardless of this, the sense of security, the sense of threat, is a matter of perception. Russia could also feel threatened in spite of more than 6,000 nuclear warheads and launchers facing a few dozen NATO interceptor missiles in Europe, or if 5,000 NATO soldiers in a defensive position are deployed in the Baltic when 150,000 troops are stationed in peacetime in the Russian Western Military District. Security is, therefore, not only indivisible but also subjective. Another illustrative example of the latter is that until Russian aggression was launched and Finland, a neighbor of Russia, joined NATO, Russia shared a land border with 14 countries, 5 of which were NATO members with a 1,260-kilometre common border, which was only 6 percent of the total Russian border. The NATO infrastructure deployed in the region was defensive in terms of the size of the forces, the nature of the assets, and their location. And no NATO member state, including the United States, had expressed any offensive intentions towards Russia. However, Moscow also accused NATO of breaching various

commitments, including several principles and provisions of the NATO-Russia Charter. These have been consistently refuted, not denied, in official NATO statements.

"National security interests must be mutually taken into consideration. Each country has the right to ensure its security. The interests of all parties, including Russia, should be taken into account."

A neutral Ukraine would meet Russia's security needs. But after eight years of war, a neutral Ukraine is hardly a reality. Remarkably, before 2014, support for NATO membership did not reach 30%, but since 2014, it has enjoyed majority support in Ukraine. This is the result of the annexation of Crimea. The only compromise on Ukraine's NATO membership issue would be if Washington and NATO agree that they will not permanently deploy troops and strike weapons on Ukrainian territory once it becomes a NATO member.

"NATO says it is pursuing an 'open door' policy. But where is this laid down? Article 10 of the 1949 treaty says that NATO will consult with its member states and can then admit new countries. It can, but it is not obliged to. America and NATO could say to Ukraine that they cannot take it in because they have previous international commitments."

Article 10 of The North Atlantic Treaty (Washington D.C. - 4 April 1949) reads that „The Parties may, by unanimous agreement, invite any other European State in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area to accede to this Treaty.” In the case of Ukraine, there has been no "invitation," and NATO members have not decided on Ukraine's accession. The final declaration of the Bucharest Summit in 2008 stated that Georgia and Ukraine would one day become members of NATO, but did not set a date or modalities for this. This is a declaration of intent, not a resolution, and a third, non-NATO state cannot use military force to compel the withdrawal of a declaration of intent. There has indeed been no invitation to Ukraine to join NATO, but...! Still, point 16 of the Washington Summit Declaration (issued by the NATO Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Washington, D.C., on July 10, 2024) virtually pledges an invitation. „We fully support Ukraine's right to choose its own security arrangements and decide its own future, free from outside interference. Ukraine's future is in NATO. Ukraine has become increasingly interoperable and politically integrated with the Alliance. We welcome the concrete progress Ukraine has made since the Vilnius Summit on its required democratic, economic, and security reforms. As Ukraine continues this vital work, we will continue to support it on its irreversible path to full Euro-Atlantic integration, including NATO membership. We reaffirm that we will be in a position to extend an invitation to Ukraine to join the Alliance when Allies agree and conditions are met.”

After the formal declaration of Ukraine's intention to join NATO, the process of turning Ukraine into a "counter-Russia" began. In response to this came the annexation of Crimea, followed by the separatism of the Donbas, supported by Russian volunteers, advisers and weapons.

"Crimea is a sovereign, Russian territory - this issue is closed for us."

The invasion of Crimea in 2014 as part of a covert military operation, followed by a referendum to "annex" it, is illegal under international law. The secession of Crimea from Ukraine, following the US-led secession of Kosovo from Serbia, set a new precedent for the post-World War II modification of state borders drawn by the great powers, against the wishes of the central governments concerned, and for the subordination of the right of peoples to self-determination to sovereignty of states. The parallel with Kosovo is, however, just as debatable as the oft-stated claim that Moscow has violated the 1994 Budapest Memorandum that guaranteed the territorial integrity of Ukraine, of which Russia was one of the guarantors. But the Budapest Memorandum did not consist of binding security promises to the signatories, but only 'security commitments'. The US Embassy in Minsk said in a press statement on April 12, 2013, that "the Memorandum is not legally binding", but merely a "political commitment". Even if one accepts the Russian violation of the Budapest Memorandum, it is essential to add that Ukraine signed the document as a neutral country, i.e. the West violated Ukraine's sovereignty by promising NATO membership in 2008 and then helping the Ukrainian opposition take power in 2014, before Russia violated Ukraine's territorial integrity in 2014 by annexing Crimea. The Budapest Memorandum guaranteed both sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The devastation caused by the Ukrainians in the fight against separatism (15,000 dead and wounded) has made the people of Donbass realise that they have no place in a Ukraine that immediately after the 2014 coup introduced itself by banning the use of the Russian language. Since then, they have been told by President Zelensky to go to Russia. It seems that Kiev did not need the people of Donbass, only the territory itself, the industrial facilities, and the treasures underground.

The general European view was that the two Minsk agreements were the best chance of stopping separatism and resolving the crisis, until former German Chancellor Angela Merkel and former French President François Hollande admitted at the end of 2022 that the agreements were only intended to buy time for Ukraine to prepare for the military retaking of the Donbas.

"The Ukrainians are still open today about the implementation of the Minsk agreement: compliance with its provisions would have led to the disintegration of Ukraine."

The implementation of the Minsk Agreements would have meant that the breakaway territories would have been given a special status and thus reintegrated into a federal Ukraine. This would have allowed for Russian influence in Ukrainian domestic politics and would have provided a quasi-Russian veto over Ukrainian foreign policy through the two regions. In other words, the sovereignty of the Ukrainian state would have been damaged. As the implementation of the Minsk Agreements would have gone hand in hand with the transformation into a federal state, the concerns in Kyiv about the possible disintegration were real. However, it cannot be ruled out that the failure of Ukraine to implement the Minsk Agreements, regardless of their content and interpretation, can be explained by the incorporation of Ukrainian extremist nationalism into the

government's agenda: the view that Russian nationalism is a time bomb and that Eastern Ukraine should be retaken, but without the Russian-speaking population, became dominant within the Ukrainian leadership after 2014, partly because of Crimea.

The German and French admission means that the West was very aware that Ukraine was drifting towards war. In fact, they were not only aware of it, but they were pushing Kyiv directly towards war. Kiev thus sabotaged the Minsk agreements, while pointing fingers at Moscow, even though Russia was not even a party to the agreement, only a guarantor. If we look back at the eight years between 2014 and 2022, it seems as if an invisible hand was driving the parties towards war, who in the end may have thought that it was better to get over this whole thing, since it was inevitable anyway (Gábor, 2024).

This is true even if the US interest is undoubtedly not to have to constantly deal with crises in Europe and its neighborhood. However, US policy towards Russia from the collapse of the Soviet Union to the re-election of President Trump does not reflect this recognition: during this period, the US did everything it could to strengthen American influence in the Soviet successor states and to constantly increase confrontation with Russia. If the US grand strategy wants to focus increasingly on China and the Asia-Pacific region, then it must help end the Russian-Ukrainian war, thereby preventing the deepening of Russian-Chinese-North Korean-Iranian military cooperation.

The undoubtedly brilliantly executed Ukrainian drone attack on Russian strategic bombers on the eve of the second round of talks in Istanbul only reinforces the need to end the war as soon as possible. The increasing Ukrainian attacks on important targets in the Russian hinterland, which do not affect the outcome of the war, will result in a ruthless Russian response, which could lead to the expansion of the war. If the Ukrainian attack on Russian strategic bombers was carried out with American and/or Western approval, perhaps with support, it can only limit, but not stop, a Russian response. And the consequences will also hold the American and/or Western partners responsible. If the attack was the result of an independent Ukrainian decision, it was an irresponsible step. On the one hand, it means that the West cannot influence the Ukrainian leadership; on the other hand, it does not improve Ukraine's position at the Istanbul negotiating table. This attack was a threat to Russia's nuclear strike capability, one of Russia's key national interests, which makes it possible for Russia to use nuclear weapons against Ukraine.

In summary, the Russian interpretation of the circumstances of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and the assessment of Moscow's position does not change the fact that Russia committed aggression against Ukraine. But they do place the events in a different light. It seems that, from the Russian side, the fundamental and main reasons for the outbreak of war are 1) NATO enlargement in general, 2) the possible invitation of Ukraine joining NATO, 3) the sabotage of the implementation of the Minsk agreements by involved NATO member states, 4) NATO's all-round support for Ukraine and, in essence, the organization's participation in the current war, and 5) NATO's intention to expand into other post-Soviet states. Regardless of this, NATO will most likely retain its defensive character and will not attack any state without credible and real reasons. Of course, the Russians will never believe this, as a defensive military and political alliance always expands geographically in the direction

from which it expects an attack from its supposed enemy, and it is not possible to win a war solely through defensive warfare.

The content elements of the Russian military threat and the assumed scenario of its realization

The concept of threat

A threat is a set of situations, states, and processes representing the highest level of manifestation of possible dangers. The origin, purpose, and intensity of a threat can also be determined. For a state, processes and actions related to organized crime, terrorism, or the strengthening of violent radicalism pose a threat, for example. Differences of opinion between states or groups of states based on different interests can also lead to a threat, especially if states prefer coercion or the possibility of a violent solution to enforce their interests. All this appears as a threat when the resources of state power (population, economic, military, and technological potential), i.e., the so-called offensive capabilities, are combined with aggressive intent (Hungarian Public Service Online Lexicon).

A military threat is therefore the act of influencing the behavior of others through the use or threat of armed force. A military threat is credible and real when the offensive capabilities required for the influence are coupled with aggressive intent. The assessment of the credibility and real nature of any threat is made more difficult by the fact that it is based on subjective (national) perception.

General perception of the threat posed by Russia

Russia's recent actions, including its military intervention in Ukraine, its military modernization efforts, and its assertive foreign policy stance, have raised concerns within the NATO alliance. At the same time, it is essential to recognize that the threat posed by Russia is not absolute, but rather limited. Russia faces significant economic, demographic, and technological challenges that challenge its ability to exert global influence. NATO's collective defense commitments, military strength, and influence provide a powerful deterrent to any Russian aggression against NATO (Mahmud, 2024).

Nevertheless, European countries are concerned about the perceived Russian threat in connection with the Russo-Ukrainian war, because they believe that:

- If Russia wins, according to the intelligence services of many European states and based on historical experience, it can quickly recover and, adding Ukrainian human and technological capacity to its own, continue its war to regain influence in Central and Eastern Europe.
- Russia has enormous war experience, but European states do not.
- After the conquest of Ukraine, it is likely that Putin will want to destroy the defense solidarity between European states and try to erode the credibility of NATO Article 5 with a minor attack against one of the Baltic States. (It is not certain that all NATO member states would come to the aid of the attacked country, including the United States. It is not certain that the USA will remain the ultimate guarantor of European peace.)
- If Putin wins, it would embolden China to take Taiwan by force, which would ultimately have repercussions for Europe.
- Russia has militarized its economy and is now both a war economy and a war society. It would be a problem to return them to the consumer society of the first decade of Putin.

- Russia has a strong arsenal of hybrid warfare tools, conducting extensive hybrid operations in many European countries. But many of them are only just beginning to develop their capabilities to counter hybrid warfare.

According to General Carsten Breuer, Inspector General of the German army, the Bundeswehr, Putin's war on the West has already begun, as evidenced by the increasing number of hybrid attacks to which all of Europe is exposed. Germany has been hit by several systemic attacks that operate in the gray zone between peace and war: cyber attacks on critical infrastructure, cutting of data cables in the Baltic Sea, sabotage operations, drone espionage, and disinformation campaigns on social media.

NATO's assessment of the Russian threat's realization

It is difficult to reconcile two images of Russia: one that is failing to achieve its ambitions in Ukraine, and the other that poses an existential threat to NATO, especially to the Eastern European states.

Contrary to Russia's bellicose propaganda, Moscow's political and military elites know that Russia would likely lose a full-scale conventional war with NATO, even without the United States' involvement. It is therefore essential for Russia to avoid a protracted conventional armed conflict with the Alliance.

The primary goal of a Russian attack on NATO would therefore not be to destroy the alliance's overall military capability. The aim would be to undermine NATO's resolve and willingness to resist. Russia would likely prefer a short, high-intensity campaign aimed at breaking NATO's political cohesion. The goal would be to start the confrontation locally, affecting no more than one or a few NATO states, and to end it quickly. Such a scenario could begin with a limited incursion into NATO territory at a weak point—for example, one or more of the Baltic States. After the initial attack, Russia could declare that any attempt to retake the captured territory would trigger a nuclear escalation—a strategy military analysts call aggressive sanction. To reinforce this, Russia could place tactical missiles equipped with nuclear warheads on standby and declare that it is ready to launch them immediately. If NATO were to prepare for a counterattack, Russia could escalate further and strike civilian infrastructure deep in Europe with conventionally loaded missiles, signaling that further resistance would only increase the costs. Should Russia conclude that a more drastic escalation would serve its interests, it cannot be ruled out that it will launch nuclear warning strikes on the European hinterland.

Such an attack would be based on the assumption that NATO's resolve is weakened by growing conventional and nuclear threats, potential missile strikes on the European hinterland, and the attendant sabotage and other gray-zone operations. The Kremlin assumes that the United States and its key Western European allies, faced with real consequences on their soil, will falter and refrain from defending their partners.

Any reluctance to defend an attacked NATO member would signal the de facto collapse of the alliance—Russia's primary goal and a prerequisite for asserting regional dominance.

A combat simulation by the influential American RAND Institute showed that NATO would not be able to prevent the occupation of the Baltic States by Russian troops and that even the reinforcement of NATO forces sent there would be destroyed (Hoffmann, 2025 and Kovács, 2025).

The significance of the Russian military threat to the EU

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez confidently declared to his

European allies in mid-March 2025 that Russia would not "move its troops through and over the Pyrenees." This statement reflects the European belief (apart from Poland, Romania, the Baltic States, and the Nordic countries) that Russia does not pose a direct military threat to EU countries. Spain or Portugal may not be in immediate threat, nevertheless, a relatively limited military conflict between Russia and an Eastern European EU member state could upset the entire institutional system of the EU.

Let us assume that by 2030 or 2035, Russia rebuilds its armed forces and take control of most of eastern or southern Ukraine, including the country's resources (population, grain storage, nuclear power plants, and military production capacities). Sensing divisions and hesitation within the EU, Russia decides to test the EU's resolve with a limited military incursion into EU territory. The EU could then invoke the mutual defence clause of the Lisbon Treaty, Article 42(7), which obliges member states to provide assistance and support to any EU country under armed attack. However, the Europeans have never tested the clause, the practical application of which depends almost entirely on NATO's infrastructure and planning.

Any potential provocation by Russia will inevitably require an EU response. Any slight hesitation or failure to act with full unanimity to defend every inch of EU territory would have catastrophic consequences that would extend far beyond the possible problems caused by the created military situation. Imagine an EU country embroiled in a military conflict with Russia, facing an ambivalent or divided reaction from other member states. The slightest hesitation about collective mutual defence would shake the foundations of EU cooperation and solidarity. On a practical level, how is such a nation expected to participate in discussions on agricultural subsidies, the multiannual financial framework, or the Erasmus budget? And if this country were in the eurozone and the Schengen zone, what would be the fate of Schengen or the common currency? This scenario poses a threat to all EU members, including small and medium-sized countries like Ireland, Portugal, and Spain. A decrease in the EU's importance as a political entity would leave the continent's small and medium-sized countries at the mercy of global powers. It would fundamentally change the geopolitical situation in Europe. The assessment of the likelihood of such a scenario varies, but in recent years, many unthinkable things have become reality. In the past, Europeans have considered too many dramatic events unlikely, such as Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The threat posed by Russia to the EU is not primarily about tanks crossing borders or missiles hitting cities as far as the Iberian or Apennine peninsulas. It is rooted in the possibility that even a limited military conflict in Northern or Central Europe would have a direct impact on every corner of Europe. From the shores of the Baltic to the shores of the Mediterranean, it is in the interest of every EU member state to prevent this outcome (Popescu, 2025).

In summary, knowledge of the Russian narrative of the Russo-Ukrainian War and revealed contradictions sheds light on some of the perceived or real causal connections. These connections, supplemented by a multifaceted analysis and assessment of the Russian threat, provide an opportunity to describe the probable development of the Russo-Ukrainian war and its international political environment.

1. The assessment of the credibility and reality of any threat is a subjective (national) perception, and this also applies to the Russian military threat as well. Regardless, Europe's fear of Russia will likely remain forever. Any large, powerful,

unknown state, different from any other country, whatever its policies, is surrounded by fear and suspicion, which is an objective phenomenon. If this phenomenon is supported by unfounded, hostile media policies or targeted propaganda on the part of the international community as part of sanctions against Russia, normal fear and suspicion become a pathological phobia.

The reasons for this, without claiming to be exhaustive, are as follows: – The West wanted to colonize the Russians like it had colonized other continents. Since it failed, with all its might blocked the paths leading to the West, which would result in the general development of Russia. Russia thus remained relatively underdeveloped and unknown, and the West has not been able to accept the continent-sized country as an equal partner to this day; – The descriptions of Western historians visiting Russia presented the empire to the West as an uncivilized world, and without knowledge of the Russian language and culture, they could not explain the lack of Western civilization. All this gave rise to fear; – The fear of the rulers of Europe was constantly growing of a large, strong, expanding, but unknown Russia that had vast reserves; – The Russian political system always suffered and still suffers from a democratic deficit, which is incomprehensible and unacceptable to the democratic West; – The position of Western Europe and the United States that all countries must follow the same development model that has proven successful in the Western world, i.e. that there is no other path of development for a given society, is unacceptable to Russians. – Russia's leader can be friendly, gullible, committed to democratic social transformation, like Gorbachev, a loyal fulfiller of Western demands, a committed believer in good relations with the West, like Yeltsin, or a president who consistently opposes the West, fighting for the enforcement of national interests and a new world order, like Putin but mistrust of Russia persisted, persists, and probably will persist because Russophobia has become a prerequisite for Western solidarity and European unity.

2. Russian aggression against Ukraine has only increased Russophobia. „The world has forgotten that the Russian aggression could have been prevented by the West in three cases: by forcing the implementation of the agreement signed on 21 February 2015 between the Ukrainian President and the leaders of the parliamentary opposition on the formation of a provisional unity government, constitutional reforms and the calling of early elections; by implementing the 2014 and 2015 Minsk agreements aimed at resolving the status of the Donbas separatist region and the situation of the Russian minority; by refraining from interfering in the Russian-Ukrainian peace talks held in March-April 2022. The West has missed these opportunities, demonstrating that it has never favored a peaceful conflict settlement” (Hugyik, 2024).
3. The Western perception of Russia today follows a simple pattern: the Soviet Union has collapsed, Russia is its legal and spiritual heir, and this dictatorial state seeks to restore the former Soviet Union. The first step in this would be to occupy Ukraine. „This approach is popular among those who forget about the remarkable historical fact, that in the heyday of the Russian Empire, the Empire included the Baltic States, Ukraine, Belarus, most of Poland (Kingdom of Poland), Bessarabia, the Caucasus states, Finland, Kazakhstan, Central Asia, Siberia, Alaska. Today, the Russian Federation has only Siberia left. The end result of Russia's supposedly permanent territorial acquisition efforts was an unprecedented loss of territory” (Hugyik, 2024).

4. Since Russia currently is neither able nor willing to launch a protracted war fought with conventional weapons against any NATO country, and cannot use even the weapon of oil and gas exports against Europe, the West (the "Coalition of the Willing" comprising extremely anti-Russian countries of the European Union, the United Kingdom, Canada, and other non-European allies) want to continue the war with the ever-increasing military support of the Ukrainians, even in the absence of American assistance, to end the war under the Ukrainian and Western expectations and completely weaken Russia. This policy, unfortunately, will lead to increasing NATO involvement in the war, and could result in a NATO-Russia armed conflict at best or a world war at worst. Before every world war, a certain phobia appears. Before the first, there was Serbophobia; before the second, there was Judeophobia. It is thought-provoking that now Russophobia is spreading.
5. Neither Ukraine nor Russia was able to achieve its war-related goals. Ukraine's loss is the greatest: its war to join Western integration organizations and liberate territories occupied by the Russians resulted in the annexation of further territories and complete vulnerability to the West. Ending the war is difficult because Kyiv, relying on Western support, is not yet willing to compromise, and Moscow after the occupied territories joined the federation and Ukraine is attacking Russia's hinterland infrastructure and strategic objects with Western help, is no longer willing to compromise.

People in Europe, are already waiting for the Russian attack, preparing survival kits for three days, praising the willingness and readiness of the “Coalition of the Willing”, instead of trying to understand what the thoughts of Fyodor Ivanovich Tyutchev, a Russian poet, diplomat, and conservative publicist mean about Russia:

„You cannot understand Russia with your mind. / You can't measure it with a common measurement unit. / It has its special way of being. / In Russia, you can only believe.”

Defense policy lessons of the Russian-Ukrainian war for NATO, the EU and certain military powers

The most important lessons NATO can draw

- **Russia does not want peace negotiations; it wants to win on the battlefield, it wants to win the war of attrition, while Ukraine is fighting the Russian war machine with asymmetric warfare.**

Ukraine's strategy to destroy Russian oil refineries is an important element of its asymmetric warfare against Russia. These strikes have severely disrupted Russia's oil refining capacity, forcing the country to import gasoline and impose a six-month ban on gasoline exports. This weakens Russia's military logistics and causes economic tension, which curbs Russia's war effort. By targeting vital infrastructure rather than conducting large-scale military operations, Ukraine is maximizing the impact of its force with limited resources. Other experts have different conclusions. According to Sergey Vakulenko, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center in Berlin, which brings together the world's leading experts on Russia and the wider region, drone strikes have a limited impact on Russian industry and the economy, as they do not destroy targeted refineries, but only damage them. For example, the refineries in Ust-Luga and Ryazan were back in operation just a few weeks after the Ukrainian attack. Strikes on Russian refineries mainly cause financial losses to Russian oil companies and have no significant impact on the state

budget and Russian export revenues. The needs of the Russian Armed Forces and the primary fuel needs of the Russian economy can be met by refineries inaccessible to Ukrainian drones. However, the fact is that the cost of repairing refineries is high: tens, if not hundreds, of times higher than the total cost of drones, even when taking into account the low deployment efficiency of drones, i.e., the need to use many drones for a single hit. The war of attrition is clearly in favor of the use of drones (Vakulenko, 2024).

- **Western weapons systems are very vulnerable to electronic warfare.**

Russian electronic jamming has significantly affected the effectiveness of the weapons provided by the United States to Ukraine. The accuracy of GPS-guided munitions, including Excalibur artillery rounds and HIMARS missile systems, has been dramatically reduced due to Russia's advanced electronic warfare capabilities. Initially, Ukraine achieved success with these weapons, but their accuracy declined as Russian electronic interference increased.

- **The war is expanding into outer space.**

As both Ukrainian and Russian forces continue to rely heavily on satellite technology for communications, navigation, and reconnaissance, space has become a key area of conflict. Satellites transmit real-time imagery, data on troop movements, and critical information for battlefield

decision-making. Disruption of these systems can have a decisive impact on the ability to conduct military operations.

Ukraine is using artificial intelligence to help integrate target and object recognition with satellite imagery, which Western experts say means Ukraine is at the forefront of geospatial intelligence.

- **The civilian sector plays a major role in the war.**

Ukrainian commanders believe that the Russians are only being held back by First Person View (FPV) drones bought or manufactured by civilian volunteers. FPV drones will prevent Russia from breaking through on all fronts.

Dzyga's Paw is one of the leading civilian drone construction and procurement funds, playing an important role in building the technological supply chains of drones for Ukrainian units. The fund works with more than 100 military units, providing them with a wide range of drone supplies and its technical staff has played a significant role in the organization of drone operations for Ukrainian forces since the beginning of the war. Their contribution is key to driving innovation and improving the operational capabilities of Ukrainian units.

In the first two years of the war, the civilian volunteers ordered Chinese drones indirectly, from Europe, and then organized their delivery to the front lines. (The Russians have many more drones than the Ukrainians. They have a stable supply chain directly from China.)

- **The use of artificial intelligence (AI) on the battlefield continues to grow.**

Ukraine aims to develop AI for the effective use of drone swarms and low-cost missiles. The integration of AI into FPV drones could significantly improve hit accuracy and potentially increase it to around 80%. Ukraine has already used AI to carry out some long-range drone strikes targeting Russia's deep military installations and oil refineries hundreds of kilometers from Ukraine. The long-range drone strikes were usually carried out by a swarm of 20 drones.

Western-developed AI, in particular AI developed by the company Palantir, has given Ukraine significant advantages, allowing it to identify and destroy many more targets than before.

- **Current electronic supply chains continue to pose a risk to Ukraine and NATO countries. The risk will increase if the West goes to war with China to protect Taiwan.**

Ukraine's heavy dependence on Chinese electronic components for drone production poses a significant supply risk for the country. Between January and June 2023, Chinese companies supplied drones and electronic components directly to Ukraine for USD 200,000. (During the same period, Russia received at least USD 14.5 million worth of drones from Chinese commercial companies by direct delivery.) Ukraine has begun to diversify and invest in producing more electronic components for drones within Ukraine, although it has not yet fully eliminated its dependence on China. (In 2024, Ukraine had already produced 67 drone types compared to 7 in 2022.)

- **Drones are changing the warfare methods that have been conducted so far; they are playing an increasing role, but they will still not replace artillery.**

While drones have become an indispensable component of modern warfare, providing new dimensions for battlefield surveillance, targeting, and targeted attacks, they cannot fully replace the destructive power of conventional artillery and the magnitude of its destructive force. Reliance on drones uses innovative tactics that Ukrainian forces employ to compensate for the lack of artillery, but these tactics overestimate the role of drones in replacing artillery firepower in ground operations. This also applies to Western drones, whose performance is questionable and their costs are too high.

- **Multinational companies can play an increasing role in wars.**

Elon Musk reportedly secretly ordered his engineers to shut down the company's Starlink satellite communications network near Crimea in 2023 to thwart a surprise Ukrainian attack on the Russian naval fleet. The decision was driven by fears that Russia would retaliate with nuclear weapons, which Musk's conversations with Russian officials confirmed. If the NATO alliance is dependent on Starlink communications in future wars, and if Musk can take a personal view on the use of the systems in various military operations, it is a vulnerable point for the West.

- **The CIA's investment in Ukrainian military intelligence (GUR) is paying off big dividends.**

Since 2014, the CIA has helped rebuild Ukraine's military intelligence service. GUR operative officers have received specialized training, including in organizing and conducting covert operations behind enemy lines, using special equipment, weapons, and explosives to carry out such operations. Some intelligence groups have also been trained to conduct intelligence operations against Russia around the world. The CIA has built new headquarters and provided operational funding for the agency's human and signal intelligence, and Special Forces directorates, and as a result, the latter has become an effective force in the war.

- **Within NATO, pro-Russian states will continue to hinder the alliance's unified action in the future.**

NATO has already gone so far as to limit intelligence sharing with Hungary due to the lack of trust created by its too-close ties with Russia. Budapest is known for its pro-Kremlin stance and often obstructs sanctions against Russia and aid to Kyiv.

- **Although the opposing sides have excellent intelligence capabilities, they have underestimated each other's military capabilities.**

Both the West and Russia have significantly underestimated Ukraine's defense capabilities. The Russian soldiers, who expected to be greeted with flowers, were met with strong resistance from the Ukrainian people. The Russians also assumed that a Ukrainian attack to take Russian territory was not possible and that Russia's borders were adequately defended. Likewise, Ukraine and its Western allies miscalculated during the Ukrainian counter-offensive in the summer of 2023, when they believed that a quick offensive could break the Russian army. Although the Russian military has failed to live up to its former reputation, underestimating Moscow's military potential remains dangerous. Since the start of the aggression in February 2022, Russian commanders have acquired and adapted unparalleled combat experience. This military leadership experience, coupled with trained personnel and a rapidly modernizing army, has increased the deployment capabilities of Russian troops engaged in a "limited military operation", despite significant losses.

- **The most important lesson of the war for NATO is that although increasing Western military support for Ukraine is likely to lead to a military conflict between NATO and Russia, NATO must nevertheless commit itself to helping Ukraine win to deter China and other hostile powers.**

A Russian victory in Ukraine would greatly embolden the nascent Alliance of Autocracies, which includes Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea, and encourage Putin's authoritarian allies not to give up their expansionist ambitions. As a 'global axis of evil' develops around Russia's war in Ukraine, the future of the democratic order worldwide is under threat. It is not enough for the West to simply promise Ukraine war material and weapons; it must provide everything Ukraine needs to win a military victory. Ukraine's defeat could lead to the outbreak of a larger and more destructive war in Europe (Kirichenko, 2024).

Defense policy lesson learned by the EU

Since Russia launched its war against Ukraine, the EU policy has been to provide financial, political, and military support to Kyiv. This is complemented by policies such as strengthening the European defense industry, countering Russian hybrid warfare campaigns, and increasing the EU's resilience.

While these are essential steps, they are not enough without a coherent strategic vision to counter the long-term threat posed by Russia. Developing a comprehensive EU strategy to address Russian revisionism is arguably the most pressing geopolitical challenge.

Current Russian foreign policy is aimed at dismantling the post-Cold War European security order, which is rooted in the principles of the 1990 "Charter of Paris for a New Europe" and which affirms the right of each state to choose its security system. Key EU members, especially Germany, France, and Italy, have for years underestimated Putin's revisionist ambitions and prioritized economic relations with Russia. The EU's response to Russia's 2008 war against Georgia and its 2014 aggression against Ukraine (the annexation of Crimea) has not sent a deterrent message to Moscow.

In addition to the war against Ukraine, Russia has stepped up hybrid warfare in the form of sabotage, disinformation campaigns, election interference, cyber attacks, and assassination attempts in EU and NATO member countries. Moscow has put its economy on a war footing and has recently revised its nuclear doctrine, significantly

lowering the threshold for the use of atomic weapons, even against non-nuclear states. More recently, Putin announced plans to mass-produce a new medium-range ballistic missile, the Oresnik, which Russia has already demonstratively used in Ukraine and which Belarus has requested to host. These moves are aimed at discouraging the EU and NATO from continuing to support Kyiv.

Even if a ceasefire could be achieved in Ukraine, the geopolitical situation would not return to the pre-February 2022 situation. Europe must therefore move from short-term crisis management to developing and implementing a long-term, coherent strategy to deter Russian revisionism.

The EU should define its core interests vis-à-vis Russia and articulate its vision for pursuing them. In doing so, EU leaders should answer key questions: What do we want Russia to do (and not to do) in the short and long term? What European interests should be protected and promoted? These answers must rely on Madeleine Albright's famous statement that "foreign policy has to influence other countries to act in ways that meet the interests of the influencing party".

A solid strategy must rest on two pillars: deterrence and containment. Regarding the first pillar:

- In the short term, the EU's primary objective must be to deter Russia from launching aggression against any EU or NATO member state or the so-called countries in the Russian "near abroad" (Moldova, South Caucasus and Central Asian post Soviet countries).
- Although politically sensitive, the EU must also be prepared to resist any attempt by the new US administration to impose peace conditions on Ukraine that lack solid and comprehensive security guarantees.
- The EU must also prevent Russia from continuing its campaign of hybrid warfare against Member States, including electoral interference and the destruction of maritime cables. However, as this is costly and challenging, especially infrastructure protection under the water, the EU must also prioritize deterrence through punishment, with tough sanctions and other punitive measures.

What needs to be done to enforce containment?

- On the European continent, the EU needs to step up its efforts to counter Russian influence within its borders and in the candidate countries, as we have seen in Georgia and Moldova, albeit with different results.
- The EU must also do more to counter Russia's influence in the global South. While this is easier said than done, the collapse of the Assad regime in Syria highlights Moscow's growing inability to protect its allies due to tensions caused by the war in Ukraine. This offers a strategic opportunity for the EU and its member states to position themselves as a more attractive partner for the countries of the so-called Global South and weaken Russia's influence in these regions. To do so, Brussels should adopt a more pragmatic and flexible approach. For example, the EU cannot leave a key country like India without a free trade agreement for decades.
- Regardless of Putin's regime's future, the EU must be prepared for all scenarios - whether Russia's possible new aggression or internal collapse, which is less likely. (It should be noted that Russian society remains very supportive of the war in Ukraine. Therefore, a regime

change is unlikely can fundamentally change Russia's revisionist foreign policy.)

- The alliance between Moscow and Beijing challenges the EU's strategy towards Russia. Evidence suggests that China is supplying Russia with military-grade materials, which has justified Beijing's designation as a "strategic enabler" of Russia's aggression against Ukraine in NATO's Washington Declaration. For the EU, the main strategic objective is twofold: to weaken the China-Russia axis and to prevent China from influencing the European security architecture.
- Developing and implementing a large-scale strategy will not be easy. The lure of the "good old days", when Russia was seen as a reliable partner and a "cheap" energy supplier, is still alive and well in many European capitals, especially Berlin. The situation is further complicated within the EU by policies of state leaders perceived as pro-Russian, such as Hungary's Viktor Orban and Slovakia's Robert Fico. Their influence, especially the possible use of the veto, is a major obstacle to agreeing on more ambitious measures against Russian revisionism (Maycin, 2025).

For an objective assessment of the above position on Russian foreign policy and the Russian threat, it should be noted: 1) each state has the right to choose its security regime, but no one can increase their own safety by ignoring the safety of others; 2) so far, no one has particularly disputed that Georgia was the initiator of the Georgian-Russian war; 3) the argument that the seizure of Crimea was a response to the coup-like takeover of power by the nationalist Ukrainian opposition supported by the West, its blatantly anti-Russian policy and the securing of a Russian military presence in Crimea cannot be ignored; 4) the intensification of hybrid warfare between Russia and EU/NATO is a mutual phenomenon; 5) Russia is quite powerless against the Ukrainian destruction of its strategic objects in the hinterland with American weapons and under American and British intelligence assistance and has therefore understandably lowered the threshold for the deployment of its nuclear weapons as a countermeasure; 6) Russia has neither the intention nor the ability to launch aggression against any EU or NATO member state after three years of failed war in Ukraine.

- The most important defense policy lesson learned by the EU can be summarised as follows: The European Union needs to move beyond a reactive approach in its policy towards the Russian Federation and adopt a solid, long-term strategy based on three main pillars: deterring Russian aggression against EU and NATO members, containing Russia's ability to wage war against Ukraine and other former Soviet republics, and containing Moscow's influence in EU candidate countries and the Global South.

The lessons of the protracted Russia-Ukraine war for the US forces

U.S. officials are monitoring the operations of the Russian-Ukrainian war, and their observations and conclusions on prolonged military conflict, the dynamic nature of warfare, and the transformation of the forces involved are being used to transform U.S. forces to achieve the capabilities necessary to conduct large-scale combat operations (LSCO). All their observations lead to one or more conclusions. These conclusions recommend actions that US

forces, the Department of Defense, and Congress can take to enhance US deterrence, i.e., to close the capability gaps in achieving victory in large-scale combat operations (LSCO).

Observation 1

Although many believed in February 2022 that the Russian-Ukrainian armed conflict would be short, the Russian "limited military operation" has gradually evolved into a "protracted large-scale operation (LSCO)."

Conclusion 1.1

United States military forces must enhance deterrence of potential adversaries by preparing to successfully conduct protracted, large-scale military operations.

- The forecast of a quick end to the Russia-Ukraine war has been overly optimistic. The Department of Defense must use this observation and the lessons learned from it when considering future requirements and capabilities for U.S. forces, particularly in the case of a possible United States-China conflict in defense of Taiwan. Although the People's Liberation Army (PLA) can conduct several operations relatively risk-free, including a naval blockade or occupation of a small area under Taiwanese sovereignty, if China attempts to seize the island of Taiwan, such an operation could lead to the outbreak of war between the United States and China.
- Most analysts believe this war would be short and decided quickly, either with a well-prepared Chinese invasion or a successful defense of the American and coalition forces.
- According to Andrew Krepinevich, a well-known American analyst, a Senior Fellow at the Hudson Institute, and in the MoD Net Assessment Department, the possibility of a protracted conventional conflict between the United States and China is underestimated. Just as Moscow unsuccessfully attempted to strike a decisive blow against Ukraine in 2022 by seizing Kyiv, the PLA's initial operation to seize Taiwan may fail. For Chinese policymakers, the high political stakes could encourage PLA forces to continue fighting despite such a failure. Krepinevich believes that the United States and China would be forced to engage in a conventional, prolonged, highly destructive war, a so-called "war of attrition" for months or longer to avoid nuclear escalation (Krepinevich, 2023).
- A US-China military conflict over Taiwan could lead to significant escalation. The fighting would not be limited to the Taiwan Strait but would extend to the entire Indo-Pacific region. It is conceivable that if the United States were to become embroiled in a large-scale conflict in the region, Russia, Iran, or North Korea (whose interests are increasingly converging due to the Russo-Ukrainian war) would see an opportunity for any aggression against their potential enemy, taking advantage of the US engagement (Brands, 2024).

Potential adversaries, if they perceive that the United States and its partners are not prepared for a protracted conflict, may be willing to risk any protracted aggression. They would calculate that even if they do not initially achieve their objectives, they can prevail through their ability to mobilize and their willingness and ability to sustain high casualties.

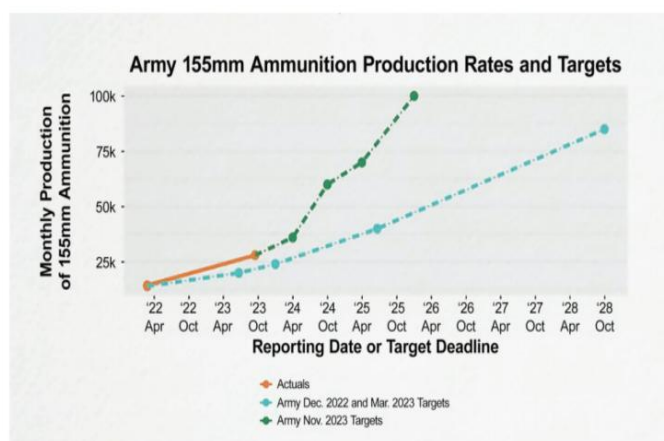
The United States could be involved in direct military conflict in multiple locations in the region simultaneously, conducting LSCO in one location while supporting allies in another. A multi-location conflict in the region is unlikely to end quickly or involve minimal ground forces, as is often assumed in the Indo-Pacific.

Observation 2

As the war has dragged on, competition between Russia and Ukraine (and their external sponsors) has become increasingly important in mobilizing national military potential and increasing the resilience of the defense industry.

- Russia was unprepared for a prolonged confrontation and only recently switched to a war economy. Accordingly, defense spending in 2024 already accounted for almost a third of the federal budget. Moscow has more than doubled its production of critical combat equipment and has an advantage in the production of tanks, artillery, and missiles.
- Kyiv was able to mobilize its defense industry but is at a disadvantage because Moscow launched effective asymmetric strikes on the entire Ukrainian infrastructure.
- External donors play a major role in the war. Russia receives support from Iran, which has already delivered thousands of drones and signed an agreement to manufacture them in Russia. In addition, North Korea has reportedly sent more artillery ammunition (albeit of questionable quality) to Russia than the EU has supplied to Ukraine in total.
- To help Ukraine, albeit to a limited extent, the US and Western countries have tried to overcome their defense industrial shortcomings. The US Army's 155 mm artillery ammunition production is one area where significant progress has been made. In October 2023, the Army produced some 28,000 pieces of 155 mm artillery ammunition, double the monthly capacity of 14,000 in 2022. Production is expected to increase to 60,000 / month by October 2024 and up to 100,000 / month by 2025 (Figure 1). Unfortunately, this is not enough to meet Ukraine's needs.

Figure 1.



Source: Center for Strategic and International Studies based on CSIS data. 2024

Ukraine's Western supporters relied mainly on the supply of ammunition from national stocks and international markets, rather than on their production. According to an analysis by the Royal United Services Institute, Ukraine would need around 2.4 million

rounds of ammunition in 2024-2005 to achieve artillery superiority. Its Western partners could meet only half of this need.

Conclusion 2.1

Congress should consider increasing the use of multi-year procurement of military equipment to provide a sustained and robust demand signal to the defense industry.

- US economic strength and defense industrial capacity ensure that deterrence is maintained. Deterrence can be more credible if the US administration shifts from just-in-time procurement of military equipment to long-term, continuous procurement. If larger stockpiles can reduce the supply risk in a prolonged conventional conflict, then larger stockpiles should be tried.
- The progress made by the United States in increasing ammunition production for 155 mm artillery illustrates the importance of multi-year acquisition planning. With predictable and sufficient funding, the military industry can produce ammunition on the scale needed to support the US allies, while also building up stocks that could be critical to fighting a protracted war.
- Sustained funding is essential for continuously producing higher precision equipment such as Patriot missiles, the Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System (GMLRS), or the Army Tactical Missile System (ATACMS). Research suggests that the bulk of the US forces' precision weapons and munitions could run out within days in a high-intensity US-China military conflict in defense of Taiwan. Because of this option and to satisfy the increasing demand for air defense, the production of Patriot missiles should be increased from 550 to 650 per year (Jones, 2023).
- The challenges of scaling up production, particularly for precision munitions, are not just budgetary. The DoD's first Defense Industrial Strategy, released in January 2024, describes the negative impacts of supply chain bottlenecks, limited access to critical minerals and energy, and a limited workforce (DoD, 2023).

Observation 3

As the Russo-Ukrainian war becomes an increasingly protracted war of attrition, quickly consuming the higher-level capabilities and the military hardware that provides them, the availability of simpler, similar capabilities and the cheaper, easier-to-produce and expendable military hardware that displays them becomes critical. In the Russo-Ukrainian war, in addition to important and valuable capabilities and assets, both sides began to use cheaper assets extensively, providing lower-level analog capabilities. The joint application of long-range precision artillery and FPV drones is the best evidence of this phenomenon.

- The protracted Russian-Ukrainian war is a mix of novel and enduring features. The century-old fundamentals remain, including massive-scale conventional artillery, cover, camouflage, concealment, and use of small assault troops. However, the transparent battlefield and precision targeting are changing combat and maneuver, generating innovations.
- The Russian and Ukrainian forces use high-end missiles, including GMLRS and ATACMS by the Ukrainian side, and Moscow's Cirkon hypersonic cruise missile. However, their systematic use is not possible due to the high costs and difficulties of production. Even the start-up of mass production of conventional artillery ammunition is often

problematic due to production lines that have been "dormant" for a long time and take time to regenerate to meet mass production requirements.

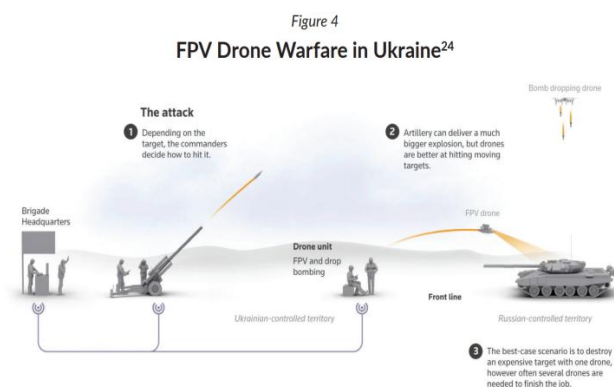
- The protracted war has forced the Ukrainian and Russian forces to make creative use of cheap, stockpiled assets. FPV drones are a prime example (see Figure 2). Camera-equipped, small, explosive-armed, highly maneuverable unmanned devices transmit real-time video to operators and allow them to direct the device to the target using a remote control (Horton, Korolchuk 2023). FPV drones are inexpensive (typically costing \$400) compared to the platforms they can destroy (Editorial, 2024). They typically have a range of up to 10 km. Their long-term, regular future use is indicated by the fact that the Ukrainian army has set a target of producing one million of these drones by 2024 (Roshchina, 2023).

Conclusion 3.1

The DoD must consider the cumulative effects of American weapons' quick destruction in a protracted attrition war and strike an appropriate balance in procurement between expensive weapon systems of high capabilities in small numbers and larger numbers of cheaper, rapidly deteriorating equipment with inferior capabilities.

- In the future, it is conceivable that a decision could be taken to redirect investment, to an optimal extent, from producing expensive, advanced weaponry in small production runs to producing large numbers of cheaper equipment that can be more usefully employed in protracted combat operations. According to the Army Chief of Staff, General Randy George, "Simple, inexpensive technology, more rapidly deployed, provides combat advantages" (George, 2024).
- The Army's decision in February 2024 to end the Future Attack Reconnaissance Aircraft program was partly motivated by observations from the Russian-Ukrainian war (Ferrari, 2024).

Figure 2. FPV Drone Warfare in Ukraine



Source: Vakulenko, 2024. „How Serious Are Ukrainian Drone Attacks for Russia?“, 5 April.

Observation 4

In future conflicts, the United States and coalition forces may face adversaries who have the advantage of mass-scale asset and manpower deployment and are willing to make great sacrifices for military success, as Russia has demonstrated in its offensive in eastern Ukraine. To counter this, the US military must exploit advances in robotics for effective countermeasures and increased protection of its forces.

Conclusion 4.1

The US Army should continue to test human-machine integration (HMI) to enhance the protection of its forces. If the test results are positive, Congress should provide sustained funding for the Army to obtain and use these capabilities (combat equipment).

- To test concepts for the use of robots, the Army has set up two pilot platoons integrating soldiers and robots: one for light infantry at Fort Moore, Georgia, and another for mechanized troops at the Fort Irwin National Training Center in California. The robots will be responsible for carrying out hazardous and some target tasks, while decisions on the use of the robots and the conduct of combat operations to be made by the responsible commanders.
- There are several dangerous target tasks that robots have to perform: - in the initial phase of clearing a building from the enemy, inspecting the internal structure of the building and preparing and transmitting a schematic of the building's construction to a nearby operator; - conducting reconnaissance to locate enemy formations before US soldiers are within line of sight, - transporting wounded soldiers by unmanned vehicles, thereby relieving platoon personnel of the burden of performing evacuation tasks so that they can focus on other combat tasks (South, 2023).

Observation 5

The transformation of Ukraine's armed forces, their adaptation to changes in warfare, and the procurement and fielding of new military equipment are taking place according to several parallel - and competing - schedules, and are not coordinated.

- A protracted conflict, such as the Russian-Ukrainian war, with its constantly changing nature of warfare, forces the opposing sides to adapt. Kyiv has faced the challenge of quickly adapting to the ever-changing nature of the battlefield while building the force it needs to deter future aggression and cooperate with Western militaries. The force transformation (reform) aimed at resolving the tension between the current and future needs of the Ukrainian armed forces also provides the United States with experience in implementing the most significant American military reform in the past 40 years.
- In adapting to the changes in the battlefield, Ukrainian small military units have started to use new technology, including drones, artificial intelligence and electronic warfare. These adaptations have proven critical to improving the Ukrainian Army's ability to detect and respond to changes on the battlefield. At the same time, political leaders in Kyiv have taken the steps necessary to build Ukraine's long-term deterrent capability and integrate it into Western military structures as well. A notable example of this longer-term adaptation is the procurement of Western F-16 fighter aircraft.
- As regards the reform of the Ukrainian armed forces, experts have seen contradictions in the short and long-term roadmaps for the transformation of the Ukrainian armed forces. This was noticeable in the discussions on the US long-range ATACMS missiles and F-16 aircraft. These systems are sometimes seen as capable of changing the outcome of war without taking into account the factors that make their deployment possible: production and delivery capacity, logistics, and training of operators and service personnel. These assets were already delivered when Ukraine had just started to coordinate the provision

of these factors. However, full coordination will take years. It is not clear why Kyiv insists on acquiring capabilities such as ATACMS or F-16s if they are not going to change the course of the war shortly. While the priority is the ongoing war, once it is over, Ukraine would need qualitative superiority over Russian forces and interoperability with NATO to prevent a relapse into conflict.

As Ukraine is engaged in a protracted war, the Ukrainian military leadership is not able to choose between adapting to the present or transforming in preparation for the future. It has not yet realized that it must do both at the same time.

- The Russian armed forces have also evolved, albeit in a slow, centralized approach, but this has allowed them to carefully systematize changes and thoroughly adapt to them at the operational level after failing to repel Ukrainian counter-attacks in 2022 - introduce a new type of reinforcement of ammunition depots and the building of multilayer defensive lines in 2023 (Ryan, 2024).

Conclusion 5.1

The continued transformation of the US forces must include simultaneous coordinated efforts to meet current and future force requirements.

- The rapidly changing nature of warfare in Ukraine has made it clear to the United States that it cannot afford periodic transformations every few decades; transformation must be continuous. US forces deployed globally for deterrence must be prepared for 'tonight's fight', but cannot afford to sacrifice today's readiness for tomorrow's. The military must simultaneously build the force and capability systems it needs to deter potential adversaries and prepare to conduct protracted, manpower- and asset-depleting large-scale combat operations (LSCO) in a war of attrition in conditions that could characterize the security environment from 2030 to 2040 and beyond. While the 2040 timeframe seems distant, given the rapid emergence of new capabilities and the time required testing and fielding them, critical decisions for future forces must be made now.

Observation 6

The Russia-Ukraine war has shown that even when technology spreads to the battlefield, the war still requires an intensive physical burden, and soldiers have to meet increased physical and mental demands.

Conclusion 6.1

The US Army must ensure the success of the transformation of the recruiting system announced in October 2023, so that the modern American combat force is staffed with soldiers with the right physical and mental skills who can innovate faster and adapt more quickly than their opponents (McEnany, Colonel Roper, 2024).

In summary, US military and defense policy experts are monitoring the Russia-Ukraine war and using their conclusions on the protracted conflict, the dynamic nature of warfare, and the transformation of the forces involved, to implement US armed forces reform, particularly to achieve the capabilities required to conduct large-scale combat operations (LSCO). The US understanding of LSCO is that it is an intensive (as each of the opposing sides seeks to gain or maintain the initiative), multi-corps, multi-division, multi-service, joint combat operation with high human and technical losses.

According to the relevant Field Manual 3-0 Operations (2022/1-46), LSCOs are large-scale, combined (joint) forces operations involving higher units (corps), multinational troops, and often irregular forces on both sides. The following key factors are expected to characterize LSCO over the next 10 years:

- Multi-dimensional warfare (air, land, sea, space, and cyberspace).
- On the land battlefield, conventional and precision artillery strikes will complement each other, and the warring parties will have to find the right combination of the two (see the combined use of artillery and drones in Figure 2).
- Information warfare is a necessary but increasingly complex task.
- LSCO requires the use of huge quantities of ammunition.
- The success of the combat use of unmanned military equipment means that the opposing parties will employ these systems throughout the depth of the LSCO.
- The use of advanced technologies is leading to an increasingly transparent battlefield, making camouflage and concealment more difficult.
- LSCO will become increasingly devastating and destructive in terms of forces and assets as time goes on, thanks to the presence of sensors, drones, and robots, and the combined use of precision strikes and massive conventional artillery firepower. Accordingly, the human and material costs of LSCO mean that combatants will need to clarify their preference for destruction or material warfare (the slow attrition and exhaustion of enemy forces and assets) before an operation is launched.
- Increased battlefield visibility, high casualty attacks, and the challenges of battlefield mobility may require a reassessment of US approaches to maneuver, artillery fire, and defense.
- The logistic support of LSCO is a challenge for the planning and executing of logistical operations, as the enemy will hamper these operations by all means from the start point of operations to the battlefield.
- LSCO will also cover urban warfare in complex combat environments.
- It must also be expected that the enemy will consider the use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) as an asymmetric advantage and will probably seek to use WMD in LSCO.
- The US military must maintain its advantage in effectively selecting and training soldiers and military leaders. In the LSCO, in addition to advanced techniques and technology, well-trained personnel with quick adaptation capability are of paramount importance. A belligerent that makes rapid adaptation an essential part of warfare will be better able to exploit opportunities on the battlefield (DoD, 2024).

Chinese perception of the lessons of the war in Ukraine

The conflict in Ukraine has demonstrated the transformative role of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) in modern warfare, particularly in reconnaissance, precision targeting, and the destruction of enemy defenses.

The PLA is accordingly developing and improving various types of drones, including • Cost-effective, single-use drones for mass drone attacks. • Drones that ensure the defeat of enemy air defenses during large-scale, coordinated attacks. • First-person view (FPV) drones, which provide the user with significant combat advantages,

particularly in reconnaissance and close-range strikes.

The PLA Air Force recently launched a nationwide competition to design low-cost unmanned aerial vehicles with autonomous navigation capable of precision targeting, electronic warfare, extended-range reconnaissance, drone swarm application coordination, and logistics support. Most of the extremely low-cost drones used by Ukraine come from the Chinese electronics center in Shenzhen Huaqiangbei. China's dominance in commercial drone production will help the PLA to secure cost-effective reconnaissance and precision strike solutions and dominate asymmetric warfare supported by smaller drones. Beijing's priority is to achieve technological superiority and operational readiness in "smart warfare". The PLA's strategy for the use of unmanned aerial vehicles refers to artificial intelligence-led coordination systems that allow drones to cooperate in precision targeting without direct human intervention, or to prevent an enemy from passing through a land, sea, or air area.

The PLA also aims to use drones to continuously monitor the area of operations, map battlefields, and extend the range of artillery strikes. These efforts reflect an approach aimed at a complete transformation of warfare.

By recognizing the crucial role of integrated networks in drone operations, electronic warfare, and precision targeting, experts say the war in Ukraine has also influenced the April 2024 reorganization of the PLA Strategic Support Forces into three equal components. 1) Space Warfare Forces: these include all space-based C4ISR (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance) systems, all missile launch sites, all military satellites and space assets; 2) Cyber Defense Forces: these perform cyber attack, cyber defence and cyber intelligence missions. 3) Information support forces: their mission is to "develop an information network system that meets the requirements of modern warfare". The objective of the PLA is to establish a coherent, real-time information ecosystem to enhance operational speed, flexibility, and the effectiveness of combined (joint) military operations.

The success of unmanned ground vehicle (UGV) logistics, reconnaissance, and combat applications in Ukraine has led the PLA to also deploy logistics UGVs (Advanced multipurpose unmanned ground vehicles) with a variety of modular payloads for material transport, casualty evacuation, and other logistical support. It will also test UGVs equipped with artificial intelligence-based targeting systems and various weapons for urban warfare and perimeter defense. The expert reports stress that the UGVs will be equipped with advanced sensors and communication tools so that they can be integrated into a wider range of operations with UAVs and conventional assets. The above steps reflect a clear strategy of China to use the lessons of warfare in Ukraine and integrate them into its military doctrine. This indicates a serious intention to learn from the wars of others, which is a historical hallmark of successful military reform programs (Graham, Singer 2024).

Conclusions of Russian military science

According to Russian experts, the indirect strategy has become dominant in warfare, and the overall aim of war has shifted from the capture and retention of enemy territory to the domination of economic, ideological, and mental spaces and the control of critical state structures of the opposing party (Chekinov, Bogdanov 2010).

The "special military operation" against Ukraine (a single, large, combined military operation of relatively short duration below the level of war, conducted to achieve a direct strategic-political

objective, and it can be concluded by achieving the objectives set) was also based on this approach (Litvinenko, 2022).

The aim of the operation was not the permanent occupation of significant areas of Ukraine, but the removal of the Ukrainian political leadership and the installation of a pro-Russian government (Miller, Belton 2022). Accordingly, the size of the Russian joint force was not commensurate with the manpower required for a war against Ukraine.

Lessons from the "special military operation":

1. The battlefield is being transformed, and concepts such as the front line of own forces or the periphery of defense are becoming obsolete (Grau, 1990). The distinction between attack and defense is blurred. Enemy forces can be detected in time and, with long-range artillery and strike systems, can be fired on before they can be engaged.
2. The view that the attacking side determines the direction and timing of the attack is no longer necessarily true; the battle is fought on a fragmented battlefield by separate battalions, regiments and brigades.
3. Western military science greatly overestimates the importance of offensive maneuvers with highly mobile and relatively light units and devalues the role of static combat and fortification. However, the transparent battlefield, "the simple fact that we can see everything the enemy is doing and they can see everything we are doing", increases the importance of static defense (Zalujni, 2023).
4. The "special military operation" has demonstrated that in a transparent battlefield, it is essential to disperse forces, increase the number of hidden and well-protected reserve positions, command posts, ammunition and material depots, change their location several times a day, strictly observe the rules of camouflage, to use a large number of false targets and the latest imitation devices, and to avoid routine activities (Romanchuk & Sigin, Military Thought 2023/4 p. 44).
5. The use of battalion battle groups in defense should be reviewed. The long distance between defensive strong points, the poor fire coordination between them, and the open wings allow the enemy to infiltrate or bypass them. When using battle groups, it is also advisable to take into account the temporary abandonment of the area or object in question (Takács, 2024).
6. The principle of centralized military command on the battlefield should be reviewed. Modern reconnaissance, command, control, and communication systems now allow subordinate commanders to be involved in the development of fight concepts without leaving their command post, which can lead to more informed decisions (Dudko, Moraru, Smelov, Military Thought 2023/7 p. 53, 59-60).
7. Aircraft capabilities do not allow the Russian Air Force to operate sustainably in several strategic directions at the same time.
8. The performance of air and space reconnaissance systems has proved very limited, especially in detecting moving targets and redeploying forces.
9. When planning Russian strikes, there was insufficient experience of how many strike drones to launch at a given target to ensure its destruction, taking into account the enemy's air defense activity. A single-strike mission requires the use of dozens or more drones to achieve the desired effect (Yermolin, Zubov, Fomin, Military Thought

2023/2).

Perhaps the most significant lesson for the Russian forces is that the destruction of critical infrastructure alone will not lead to the full achievement of war objectives, since military operations will continue after the critical infrastructure has been restored. Reducing the military-economic potential to a critical level makes further military action by the opposing side impossible (Seryantov, Pavlov, Military Thought 2023/11 p. 27). Therefore, in contrast to the strike operation aimed at destroying Ukrainian electrical grid infrastructure in the winter of 2022-2023, Russian strike operations were already mainly targeting Ukrainian military-industrial facilities by the turn of 2023-2024 (Jórárt, Takács, Nagy, 2024).

Lessons for Ukraine's army

Kyiv cannot rule out future Russian attacks and needs to maintain a larger army than before the 2022 invasion. This force and the costs of building and maintaining it will have to balance the budget expenditure of the state security needs, the costs of economic reconstruction, and the costs of repatriating refugees. However, the Ukrainian formations will differ from the composition of most European armies because of three dominant trends: 1) the rise of drone warfare; 2) demographic decline; and 3) the specifics of air defense (a mix of multi-layered air defense and long-range precision missile strike systems with a new type of strategic reserve).

Trend 1: The rise of drone warfare: The war in Ukraine showed that drones are an integral part of modern warfare. Kyiv used a combination of artillery, electronic warfare, and drones to hold off the Russian advance, and entirely new drone formations and technical skills emerged that further increased the impact of this combined effort. This new ground combat approach requires continuous battlefield adaptation and a dynamic, decentralized civilian sector supporting the military.

The country now has over 500 drone manufacturing companies (compared to only 5 at the start of the war) and now produces long-range drones domestically. It plans to manufacture more than 2.5 million of these devices annually.

Trend 2: Worrying demographic outlook: Ukraine, like many European states, has already faced a bleak demographic future, exacerbated by young people fleeing war. Ukraine left the Soviet Union in 1991 with a population of 52.5 million but is expected to fall to 37.9 million by 2025. This reality led to the first modern 'war of the old', with the older generations on the Ukrainian side fighting the war. Aware of this situation, the Ukrainian government has introduced conscription for men aged between 25 and 60. This also justifies Ukraine's increased reliance on drone warfare in the future.

Trend 3: The specifics of new air defense: - Russia has created a war economy, with the support of Tehran, Beijing, and Pyongyang, capable of mass-producing long-range attack drones for supporting powerful artillery strikes. As a result, a warfare trend has emerged in which civilians are increasingly falling victim to mainly Russian attacks on infrastructure, energy, and military installations. Ukrainian sabotage actions on the territory of Russia and the targeted liquidation of Russian military leaders and propagandists only reinforce this trend. This new form of warfare goes beyond the conflict in Ukraine and is likely to leave its mark on future military conflicts between the great powers. - Given the decreasing production costs and increasing range of modern attack drones, this trend, will only accelerate and lead to a whole new way of warfare: on the one hand, belligerent states will still have to hold captured enemy territory but also defend their own territory, and on the other hand, it will become increasingly important to repel long-range

attacks while maintaining the ability to strike the enemy from a long distance.

In summary, the lessons of the war (the trends identified above) will influence the formation of the new Ukrainian force as follows: - The new Ukrainian armed forces will be larger than in 2022, but smaller than in 2025, at least in manpower, given the need to redirect people back to work and rebuild the country. - The new force will still need to maintain Ukraine's comparative advantage in drone warfare. This requires not only the retention of drone units but also the survival of the network of those small and medium-sized enterprises that allowed Ukraine to expand drone production during the war. This need also creates labor and training difficulties. Ukraine needs to maintain a technical training and education system that meets the requirements of a peacetime economy, keeps drone warfare alive, and meets all the force development objectives. - Even if the US reduces direct aid, new mutually beneficial American investments are necessary in the drone ecosystem.

- Ukraine needs to expand its layered air defense system while maintaining the production of long-range precision strike weapons. So far, the effectiveness of the country's air defense has been sustained due to Western support and the adaptation of Ukrainian ingenious solutions. This effectiveness must be improved with new investments in high-performance air defense equipment, high-energy laser weapons, and low-cost, effective air defense equipment. - The United States probably can support this idea by revising its international arms trade regulations and, as in the case of the Israeli Iron Dome, by developing co-production and pilot projects that benefit both countries. - Ukraine needs to develop new defense plans to integrate larger military formations using unmanned aerial vehicles with multi-layered air defense and precision strike systems. These plans should include an entirely new concept for the strategic reserve. The new strategic reserve concept should find creative ways to effectively integrate cyber defense and mobilize civil society both domestically and abroad, including civilian financial support for the drone industry (Jensen, 2025).

Findings

Summary of the lessons of the Russo-Ukrainian War

The most important conclusion for NATO is that it must commit itself to helping Ukraine win while deterring Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea from any other aggression. A Russian victory would only lead to a more destructive war in Europe. In the ongoing war, NATO must reckon with four important factors when supporting Ukraine: 1) The alleged pro-Russian states within the organization will continue to hinder the alliance's unified action in the future; 2) Multinational corporations may gain an increasing role in war, which makes the alliance vulnerable (see the example of Starlink); 3) The risk posed by electronic supply chains may increase if the West gets involved in a war with China to protect Taiwan; 4) The role of drones must be properly assessed. Although they change the current warfare and play an increasingly important role, they will still not replace artillery.

For the European Union, the biggest lesson is that 1) it must move beyond a reactive approach to the Russian Federation's revisionist ambitions and adopt a solid, long-term strategy based on three main pillars: deterring Russian aggression against EU and NATO members, containing Russia's ability to wage war against Ukraine and other former Soviet republics, and curbing Moscow's influence

in EU candidate countries and the so-called Global South. 2) The EU must also be prepared to resist the new US administration's attempt to impose peace conditions on Ukraine that lack solid and comprehensive security guarantees.

The lessons of the Russo-Ukrainian war for US defense policy can be summarized as follows: 1) The US military must be prepared for protracted, large-scale, resource-intensive military conflicts. The ongoing transformation of the force must encompass the coordinated satisfaction of current and future military needs. 2) It must provide personnel with the appropriate physical and mental capabilities, with the ability to adapt and innovate faster than the enemy. 3) Only the timely adoption of annual defense budget appropriations will enable the transformation of the force. 4) Congress should consider continuous procurement spanning multiple budget years. 5) The Department of Defense must strike a balance between the acquisition of expensive weapons systems that provide superior capabilities and cheaper but weaker analog weapons systems. 6) If the testing results for the application of robotics are positive, the military should be provided with permanent funding to receive and use these devices.

For China, the most important conclusions are: 1) The experience of the Russo-Ukraine war should be taken into account in the formulation of military strategy (see the April 2024 reorganization of the PLA Strategic Support Forces and the alleged modification of the military conflict management strategy for Taiwan and the Himalayas). 2) The PLA will aim to create a coherent, real-time information ecosystem to increase the speed and flexibility of joint military operations and their effectiveness. 3) The conflict in Ukraine has demonstrated the game-changing role of UAVs in modern warfare, and the PLA is accordingly pursuing significant development and modernization of various types of drones (single-use drones for mass drone attacks, drones to help counter enemy air defense and FPV drones). 4) Based on the experience in Ukraine, the PLA will begin the introduction of Advanced multipurpose unmanned ground vehicles (UGV) for logistical support. It is also planning AI-based UGVs for urban warfare and perimeter defense.

The lessons drawn by Russian military science are: 1) The general objective of war has shifted from the capture and retention of territory to the domination of economic, ideological and mental space and control of critical structures of the state; 2) The reduction of military-economic potential to a critical level makes further military action by the opposing side impossible; 3) The distinction between attack and defense is blurred. Combat takes place on a fragmented battlefield, where separate battalions and brigades fight in encounter combat. 4) On the battlefield, it is essential to disperse forces, increase the number of command and control reserve posts, and material depots, change their location, strictly observe camouflage, use false targets, and avoid routine activities. 4) Reviewing the principle of centralized military command on the battlefield is necessary. Command and control systems now allow subordinate commanders to be involved in the common development of ideas to conduct the battle without leaving their command posts, leading to more informed decisions in the field. 5) Gaining more experience in how many strike assets to launch at a given target to ensure its destruction is a key requirement. 6) The Basic condition of successful Air Force operations is achieving sustained air force activity in several strategic directions simultaneously.

Ukraine has identified three key trends as lessons from the war: (1) the rise of drone warfare; (2) demographic decline; and (3) the specific characteristics of the new missile era (the need to expand

the layered air defense system while maintaining the production of long-range precision strike capabilities), which it will take into account in its force transformation. Consequently, the structure of the Ukrainian army will differ from that of most European armies.

Ukraine will need to develop new strategic plans with a new concept of strategic reserve, including better integration of cyber defense into the defense system, mobilization of civil society both at home and abroad, and civilian financial support for the drone industry.

Conclusion

Features of the situation around the Russian-Ukrainian war (a possible new arms race worldwide as a consequence of the above lessons; the new US administration's mediation without EU/NATO to end the war in Ukraine; the EU/NATO countries' force development plans, their determination to support Ukraine and continue the war to bring Russia to its knees and put an end to the war according to the Western expectations, even in the absence of US support; the missing mutually acceptable compromises between the opposing sides in the Russian - Ukraine war to promote a long-term settlement) suggest that the direct Russian-Ukrainian negotiations could lead at best to a longer-shorter-lived ceasefire, but not to an end to the war and could result in at best a NATO-Russia armed conflict, and at worst in a world war.

This conclusion is also supported - from a different perspective - by the now prevailing view in Ukrainian political expert circles on the development of the Russian-Ukrainian military conflict, which is that after the end of the 2008 Russian-Georgian war, the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, taking into account its experience, had already begun planning a war against Ukraine. Now the same General Staff is planning a world war using the new experience in Ukraine. The war with Ukraine is a part of a global conflict, the Third World War that aims to resolve the geopolitical and civilizational confrontation between the West and Russia over dominance in the world and the redistribution of regional spheres of influence.

As in the Russo-Georgian war, Russia will not achieve its ultimate goal in the war with Ukraine. However, its annexation of Crimea and occupation of Donbas can be seen as an Intermediate strategic success and achievement of Intermediate goals, paving the way for further military escalation and Russian expansion.

The difference between the current war and the Russo-Georgian war is that Putin then overestimated the West's ability to intervene, and now, during the Russo-Ukrainian war, he underestimates the West's strength. At the same time, NATO and the EU overestimate their capabilities and underestimate the scale of the Russian threat.

For Putin, the ultimate goal of the Russo-Ukrainian war is to overthrow the democratic regime and eliminate Ukraine's state sovereignty. In considering such scenarios, Raymond Aron wrote in his book "Peace and War between Nations" that "reaching a compromise between the parties becomes virtually impossible once hostilities break out since overthrowing the government or regime of the enemy state becomes one of the aims of the war." This war has only two outcomes: "lose-lose" and "lose-win", but there is no possibility of a "win-win" outcome due to a lack of compromise between the warring parties (Perepelica, 2016).³⁴

As for the alleged Russian plans for world war, this is contradicted by the Russian Federation's military and political leadership's understanding of modern warfare, discussed above, the Russian Federation's stated political intention to avoid war against NATO,

the capabilities of the Russian Federation's armed forces and its military-economic potential, but nobody cares.

The desire to destroy Russia is an overriding EU and NATO goal. A clear proof of this is the Western policy on the Russo-Ukrainian war. The main elements of this policy are 1) comprehensive support for Ukraine including intelligence and technical support of long range Ukrainian strikes on Russian targets in the hinterland of the Russian Federation, 2) increasing sanctions on Russia to the point of significantly weakening its military potential, 3) forcing the Russian side to enter into peace negotiations while putting Ukraine in the most favorable position possible. This approach appears to be an ultimatum-like message that is difficult to understand, contains few specifics, ignores any international compromise-seeking efforts, rejects peace, and does not seem like a sufficiently thought-out, detailed Western strategy.

This position can and should be debated for the sake of clarity, but the fact that the Russian-Ukrainian war could even lead to a nuclear conflict is probably not worth arguing about. After the Ukrainian destruction of some important infrastructural facilities in the Russian hinterland by Western means and with direct Western support, Russia was forced to change its nuclear doctrine and decrease the threshold for using nuclear weapons. It means that Moscow threatens to use nuclear weapons in certain cases. When the Russians say that such weapons can be used in the event of a certain threat, they introduce a highly subjective element, because Moscow itself decides when a given threatening situation arises.

The use of nuclear weapons is no longer taboo; the defining principle of nuclear deterrence has lost its validity. Nuclear deterrence served to maintain the status quo between equal parties as a credible form of the threat of force that does not need to be fulfilled. What keeps the other party from launching missiles is the certainty that, in that case, it will also be destroyed. This prevents violence and encourages the other party to avoid violence.

Deterrence and threat are two different things, however. Threatening lacks credibility. Deterrence is predictable; threatening is unpredictable. Deterrence treated the use of nuclear weapons as taboo, the threat breaks the taboo. If we used to think that even a limited nuclear strike was impossible, completely irrational, and would lead to the destruction of the world, this has changed to some extent.

The situation is further complicated by the fact that deterrence only works between equal parties, and Russia is already not an equal party. Russia will undoubtedly be weakened by sanctions and war, while it still has the world's largest nuclear arsenal, and unlike the early post-Soviet era, it is now led by a leader who, according to some, cherishes Peter the Great's dreams, while others say he is only consistently defending Russian national interests and wants a more just world order against American hegemony.

However, the different positions do not affect the conclusion: the Russo-Ukrainian war could easily lead to the use of nuclear weapons by Russia against Ukraine or its Western supporters (Kovács, 2025). If we add to such a hypothetical scenario the possible consequences of the airstrikes carried out by Israel on June 13, 2025, with American approval, against Iran, then it is quite possible that we will soon be on the verge of World War III.

In this situation, the spread of the Russian-Ukrainian war can only be prevented by an immediate ceasefire and the start of negotiations on a peace agreement. However, this is only conceivable if Kyiv declares that, with certain concessions, it is prepared to meet

Moscow's fundamental demands: for example, the de jure recognition of Crimea and the de facto recognition of occupied territories of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhia and Kherson regions (Ukraine effectively lost these territories in 2014); the restoration of Ukraine's neutrality and the suspension of its intention to join NATO (some NATO member states do not support Ukraine's accession anyway). The international community could help the process by stopping military support for Ukraine, admitting Ukraine to the European Union as soon as possible, and gradually lifting sanctions against Russia. EU membership would, on the one hand, enable the application of the security clause in the Lisbon Treaty, which would provide security guarantees for Ukraine, and, on the other hand, within the framework of EU legal harmonization, automatically would be fulfilled other demands made by Russia such as: guaranteeing the rights and freedoms of the Russian-speaking population, lifting restrictions on the activities of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (the Eastern Christian Church supported by Moscow), and banning the glorification of Nazism. Zelensky is unlikely to be re-elected due to the loss of territory, the democratic deficit, and the desperate corruption, so Russia's demand for his resignation becomes pointless. Both sides could therefore declare that they have achieved their goals: Ukraine provided EU accession and the country's future economic development, while Russia resolved the problems of the Russian-speaking population and NATO expansion.

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