EDITED BY

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REFLECTIONS ON THE RUSSIA–UKRAINE WAR

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Cover design: Andre Klijsen
Cover illustration: Tomas Ragina
Lay-out: Crius Group

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Setting the Scene

Lonneke Peperkamp, Maarten Rothman, Sebastiaan Rietjens,
& Eline Stevens

And you know what
together they will hunt down the bear
and this will be very easy to explain.[1]

Introduction

On 4th September, 2022 Ukrainian armed forces started an offensive to liberate the Kherson region in southern Ukraine. It progressed steadily but slowly. Two days later another offensive was launched in the Kharkiv region in northern Ukraine. Another two days later US Chief of Staff General Mark Milley credited 'real and measurable gains' to recently delivered M142 HIMARS rocket artillery systems. Two more days after that, the Russian Defense Ministry confirmed a withdrawal of Russian units from part of Kharkiv oblast 'to regroup.' On 11th September, as the Russian front collapsed, Russian missile strikes on critical infrastructure caused a total blackout and water shutdown. The next day Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky addressed Russia in a Telegram post reading in part: 'Read my lips: Without gas or without you? Without you. Without light or without you? Without you. Without water or without you? Without you. Without food or without you? Without you.'

On 15th September, Ukrainian forces discovered mass graves in the woods outside recently liberated Izium. When asked by reporters, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov claimed the massacres at Izium and Bucha were lies. On 20th September, Russia's parliament adjusted the Criminal Code on mobilisation, martial law, wartime and armed conflict, as well as on punishment for desertion. The next day, Russian president Vladimir Putin announced a partial mobilisation of reservists. Over the next few days anti-war protests broke out across the country, while thousands of Russians fled to escape the draft. Also on 20th September,

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[1] Last sentences of 'The Wolf Hour,' a Ukrainian poem written and translated into English by Ela Yevtushenko (March 1, 2022). Available at: https://humanrightsartmovement.org/ihraf-translates/the-wolf-hour-a-ukrainian-poem-written-and-translated-into-english-by-ela-yevtushenko.

Zelensky delivered a pre-recorded video address to the United Nations General Assembly calling for Russia to be punished for its aggression. Two days later, the four Ukrainian oblasts under partial Russian occupation held sham referenda in which majorities of 87% to 99% were said to support annexation to Russia. The referenda were condemned by the UN, OSCE, NATO, EU and many states, including even Kazakhstan (where Russian troops had helped suppress protests in January the same year). On 26th September underwater explosions rendered the Nord Stream gas pipelines under the Baltic Sea inoperable.

This single month in the Russia-Ukraine war illustrates the many different aspects of the war. They range from fighting on the ground to high diplomacy, from domestic anti-war protests in Russia to international supplies of advanced weapon systems to Ukraine, from justification through sham referenda to coercion via economic sabotage, from operational misdirection to covering up war crimes. The events in this single month also show how these aspects are connected: the collapse of a front leads directly to the discovery of mass graves; the delivery of weapon systems depends on Zelensky's appeal to the international community; sham referenda followed by annexation enable accusations of unwillingly mobilised soldiers who refuse to defend the motherland.

This volume offers uniquely comprehensive and timely reflections on the Russia-Ukraine war. Bringing together the expertise of our colleagues at the Netherlands Defence Academy allows us to adopt a distinctively interdisciplinary approach, with which we explore this multitude of factors and their interconnections. Individual chapters draw from a variety of disciplines, such as military operational sciences, intelligence studies, international law, military management studies, history, international relations theory and military ethics, and from various bodies of knowledge, such as burden sharing, just war theory, Russia's new type warfare, and deterrence.

Collecting empirical data in an ongoing war is obviously difficult. The situation on the ground was too unsafe to do field research and interview large numbers of combatants or others involved. Still, the authors collected empirical data in many different ways varying from international databases such as ACLED and Eurostat, international media reports, numerous blogs and other open-source reports, Twitter feeds, as well as impressions from people directly involved in the conflict.

With this volume, we aim to contribute to the still fairly small body of academic literature on the Russia-Ukraine war. With 27 chapters analysing a wide range of aspects from a variety of perspectives, placing the war in a broader international and historical context, as well as giving significant attention to the operational aspects of warfare, including its conventional and new characteristics, we hope to fill a knowledge gap and set the scene for future research.

Structure

The volume is structured along five main themes: (1) narratives and intelligence, (2) warfighting, (3) international involvement, (4) rules and norms and (5) lessons to learn and the end of the war.

Narratives and intelligence

The first section centres around historical and contemporary narratives as well as intelligence issues. The chapters draw from historical perspectives, intelligence studies, moral theory, military operational sciences and anthropology to show how narratives and intelligence impact military operations and the human experience of war. Floribert Baudet's contribution, 'The War on Ukraine: A Warning from History,' places the Russia-Ukraine war in a historical perspective. In doing so, he emphasises the limited yet indispensable value of historical narratives: whilst the past has limited predictive value, it offers valuable insights into the minds of today's actors and helps anticipate developments and dynamics. Taking the analysis a step further, Baudet argues that historiography can identify areas of future conflict and so serve as an early warning mechanism.

Moving forward, Michelle Hogendoorn, Bram Spoor & Sebastiaan Rietjens delve into the intelligence challenges in 'Caught by Surprise: Warning for Russia's Invasion of Ukraine.' Why did so many experts fail to predict the Russian invasion, despite the obvious warning signs? This chapter assesses the complexities within the intelligence-policy nexus, discusses the warning process, and brings to light the factors that caused the 'surprise.' The section continues with Hannah van Beek & Sebastiaan Rietjens, who explore the increasing importance of open-source intelligence. In 'Open-Source Intelligence in the Russia-Ukraine War,' they distinguish four main functions: debunking and refuting false narratives; reshaping perceptions; informing military troops; and documenting potential war crimes and human rights violations. However, aside from the obvious value of open-source intelligence, van Beek & Rietjens also identify related challenges: the time-consuming nature of information verification; the potential ethical and legal problems; and the vulnerability of the open source community. Peter Schrijver builds upon these chapters by showing how intelligence services use digital communication to promote their own narratives while countering the narratives of the opponent. In 'The Wise Man Will Be Master of the Stars,' Schrijver analyses the use of Twitter by the Ukraine's military intelligence service (GUR). This chapter concentrates on how this service exploits sensitive communications intelligence (COMINT) on its Twitter feed and aims to maintain public opinion against the invasion.

The opening section concludes with some profound reflections on the human experience of war. In 'Morale and Moral Injury among Russian and Ukrainian Combatants,' Tine Molendijk emphasises the role of narratives in shaping morale, combat motivation, and moral injury. She shows how narratives such as 'we fight for our existence' or 'us against the rest' can boost the morale of combatants. Molendijk also draws attention to the risk of moral injury, showing how deceptive narratives can increase that risk. The end of her chapter takes us beyond the battlefield, as Molendijk suggests that, instead of a superheroes versus villains tale, a tragic narrative might be a more fitting frame for Western societies to understand the Russia-Ukraine war.

Warfighting

This section offers an in-depth discussion of the underexplored operational aspects of the Russia-Ukraine war. Each of the chapters offers a unique perspective on the way warfare has unfolded over the last two years. As such, this section highlights the various dimensions of the military operations, contributes to understanding the tactical, operational, and strategic aspects of the armed conflict, and provides insights into the functioning of various operational domains of warfare.

The section begins with Frans Osinga's chapter 'Putin's War, A European Tragedy.' Based on a reconstruction of the war, Osinga draws important lessons for NATO's deterrence strategy. He argues that the West needs to shift towards credible deterrence by denial instead of by punishment, and that it must restore and exploit its qualitative asymmetric advantage so as to prevent being dragged down in costly conflicts. Han Bouwmeester continues with an analysis of Russian strategic deterrence. In 'Putin's Miscalculation' he discusses Russia's new-type warfare, i.e. the way Russia attempted to disrupt Ukrainian society through non-military means, revealing appropriate Ukrainian responses and Russian miscalculations. As a test case for the effectiveness of new-time warfare, Bouwmeester concludes that this deterrence strategy has led to disappointing results for Russia.

Moving from deterrence to logistics, Thijs Cremers et al. note that poor planning and a lack of logistic and sustainment capacity seem to have contributed significantly to the mediocre success of the Russian invasion. In 'Russian Military Logistics and the Ukraine Conflict,' they argue that effective logistics demands a comprehensive approach from the tactical to the strategic level, and highlight the intimate relationship between logistics and military success. The following two chapters draw on limited war theory to analyse the conflict. In 'Explaining Stalemate from a Corbettian Maritime Perspective,' Henk Warnar aims to understand how a regular large-scale attrition war has emerged in Ukraine. Warnar highlights the unexpected role of the maritime domain, and places the Russia-Ukraine war in

the context of great power competition. Maarten Rothman & Martijn Rouvroije's chapter, 'All Quiet on the Northern Front?' merges insights from limited war theory and research on covert action to examine military activities along the northern border with Russia, allowing us to see the military value of such limited cross-border actions.

How is digital and space technology used in the Russia-Ukraine war? Moving to the 'newer' operational domains, Kraesten Arnold et al. turn our attention to operations in cyberspace. In 'Assessing the Dogs of Cyberwar,' they note that Russian cyber operations are often merely seen as unsuccessful nuisances. Such a view, however, downplays the significance of such operations. The authors shed light on the digital dimension of warfighting, and argue that we ought to recognise its operational and strategic impact. Concluding the section on warfighting, Lonneke Peperkamp & Patrick Bolder highlight the crucial role of space technology in 'The Space Domain and the Russia-Ukraine War.' This chapter provides an overview of space capabilities and how these are used in war. Aside from the many advantages, e.g. in terms of intelligence and transparency, logistics, and precision targeting, Peperkamp & Bolder also identify related challenges. As space technology tends to blur military-civilian lines, this increases civilian risk *and* the power of companies providing essential space capabilities – both of which raise concerns. Together, these chapters shed light on the warfighting dynamics, deepening understanding of the nature of modern military operations, and how that plays out in the Russia-Ukraine war.

International involvement

The third section places the war in a broader context, reflecting on the ways in which the international community is involved. In doing so, this section covers topics related to direct involvement, such as sanctions, NATO contributions, and weapon deliveries, as well as the indirect implications of the war on international institutions and the world order.

Esmée de Bruin et al. discuss the effectiveness of economic sanctions in 'Does the Russia Sanctions Revolution Bring About Change?' While many states impose sanctions on Russia as a way to limit its ability to wage war in Ukraine, de Bruin et al. show how Russia's preparation and the non-universal application of sanctions negatively impact their effectiveness. Marion Bogers & Robert Beeres look at the broader spectrum of instruments that have been used to counter Russian threats since 2014. In 'NATO Members' Burden Sharing Behaviour in the Aftermath of Russia's Annexation of Crimea,' they discuss economic sanctions, NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence, defence spending and activities reducing dependency on Russian gas and oil. Interestingly, it appears that there are significant differences

in the way that NATO member states have aimed to counter Russian threats. International involvement can also take the form of weapon deliveries. Martin Fink shifts focus to the Russian perspective, and focuses on how Russia might try to counter international support by interfering with vessels that supply the enemy from the sea. In 'Contraband of War at Sea,' Fink analyses the legal limits of such actions by delving into the law of contraband.

Looking at the broader implications of the Russia-Ukraine war, Sabine Mengelberg & Floribert Baudet assess the impact of the war on the possible return to a bi-polar world with two rival blocs; the Europeans and Americans on the one hand, and Russia and China on the other. In 'Between Multilateralism and Great Power Competition,' they question that view, and emphasise the ongoing relevance of international organisations such as the UN and NATO, as they strengthen the normative framework, facilitate dialogue, and help foster international stability. Theo Brinkel & Carel Sellmeijer are somewhat more sceptical in their analysis of the role of the UN in their chapter 'The Russia-Ukraine War and the Changing Character of the World Order.' Drawing attention to failing efforts to restore peace and security in Ukraine, they suggest that any future UN involvement might be limited to a minimal role with traditional peacekeeping, which will have an impact on the international order as well. In terms of international responses to the Russia-Ukraine war, how do states determine their position? Jörg Noll & Sonja de Laat close this section with 'The West Versus the Rest?' In this chapter, they offer a fresh perspective by looking at the neutral positions of India and Brazil, who instead of 'choosing sides,' place trust in diplomacy and strong international institutions.

Rules and norms

What kind of warfighting is permissible? The normative framework that applies to the Russia-Ukraine war is the central theme of the fourth section. The chapters draw from both moral theory and international law to evaluate the conflict, highlighting the moral and legal boundaries within which combatants and other fighters ought to behave themselves. Peter Olsthoorn sets the scene in 'Fighting Justly' by observing that war is almost always conducted largely with restrictions. The rules and norms that govern warfare are grounded in the just war tradition; a body of thought on the rights and wrongs of warfare that has shaped the codification of legal norms in e.g. the Hague and Geneva Conventions. After reflecting on the usefulness of morality, Olsthoorn argues that a discussion of the war in moral terms allows us to see that Russia is waging an unjust war in an unjust manner. We then shift to the legal framework. 'The "Technology War" and International Law' specifically focuses on the new technologies that are used in the Russia-Ukraine war. Steven van de Put & Marten Zwanenburg examine how international law

applies to technologies employed on the battlefield, including, for example, cyber operations and artificial intelligence (AI). They analyse and categorise various important technologies and suggest how international law might 'catch up' with technological developments so that it can effectively regulate new forms of warfare.

The following two chapters, respectively written by Thijs Cremers & Han Bouwmeester and Allard Wagemaker & Karishma Chafekar, evaluate the role and activities of private military security contractors (PMSCs) such as Wagner and Redut. In 'Russian Commercial Warriors on the Battlefield,' Cremers and Bouwmeester analyse the thin line between mercenaryism and PMSCs, which is caused by unclear definitions and legal vagueness. They consider both the positive contributions to peace and stability as well as the negative consequences of outsourcing security tasks. While Wagner might violate rules and norms in Ukraine, the authors suggest that the prevailing negative connotation with PMSCs could also reflect an exaggeration of our Western moral conscience. Wagemaker and Chafekar specifically focus on the Wagner uprising and attempted coup. In 'A Military Oath for Russian Private Military Security Contractors?' they consider the meaning of loyalty for PMSCs, and relate that to the function of military oaths of office. Both chapters provide important insights into the dynamics and challenges of these 'commercial warriors.'

Finally, Monica den Boer et al. shed light on the international crimes that have been committed in Ukraine. 'Collecting Evidence of International Crimes in Ukraine' explores accountability options and the challenges of international crimes investigations in an ongoing conflict. In their discussion of the relevant actors, they specifically focus on the role of the Royal Netherlands Marechaussee's role in the collection of evidence.

Lessons and ending

What are the lessons to be learned from the developments of the last two years? Whilst we must acknowledge the limitations of trying to answer that question – the war is still unfolding at the time of writing – this last section reflects on key lessons that can be drawn from the Russia-Ukraine war in Ukraine. Martijn van der Vorm and Gijs Tuinman underline the value of learning from the first large scale conventional war in Europe in the 21st century. However, in 'Lessons from Ukraine: Benchmark or Significant Exception?' they show that observing foreign wars to derive lessons and successfully implementing these is not as straightforward as it seems. The chapter also takes a step back to reflect on military learning theory, adaptation processes, and how to optimise learning from others. Whilst Van der Vorm & Tuinman focus on what we can learn from military operations, Kramer et al. focus on the lessons to be learned for the organisational design of military organisations. In 'Revisiting the

Synthetic Organisation,' they examine the challenges of organisational adaptation and responses in light of a dynamic and complex environment, where an armed force needs to respond before fully comprehending the crisis. Using the concept of the 'synthetic organisation,' Kramer et al. show how the Ukrainian military has adapted by using unconventional tools and tactics.

Lastly, this section looks ahead towards the ending of the war. How will the war end? And when will it end? Berma Klein Goldewijk tackles the first question. In her chapter 'War Diplomacy in Ukraine,' she distinguishes various potential endings; victory or defeat, an armistice or durable cease-fire, and a political settlement or peace deal. Shifting attention to the role of war diplomacy, Klein Goldewijk challenges the view that diplomacy is the opposite to war, and shows how war diplomacy can be linked to the causes but also the ending of this war. Robbert Fokking and Roy Lindelauf focus on the second question in 'When Will It End?' While it is hard to estimate the duration of an armed conflict, it is often determined by the availability of resources – manpower, ammunition and other supplies. Against that background, this last chapter uses mathematical models and open source data to estimate when and how the war might end.

Acknowledgements

Narratives and Intelligence

The War on Ukraine: A Warning from History

Floribert Baudet*

Abstract

Based on the run-up to the Ukraine war and the wars in Yugoslavia in the 1990s, this contribution aims to highlight two points relating to the utility of the past in understanding the future. First, although the past in itself has only limited predictive value, the study of the past and of past conflict may offer insights into the mind-set of today's actors. As people tend to act according to their beliefs and convictions that are essentially based on an understanding of their personal, and national histories, some courses of action and some outcomes are more likely than others. History can help us imagine what might happen and which dynamics may come into play.

Additionally, the study of historical writing, i.e., the interpretation of past events, may identify areas of future conflict. History is replete with overlapping territorial claims and mutually exclusive interpretations and sometimes, under certain conditions, these develop into war. It is proposed that historiographical debates and 'public history' could perhaps contribute to an early warning device and reduce strategic surprise, provided that conditions could be identified that trigger their transformation into tools for political mobilisation and war.

Keywords: Ukraine, Yugoslavia, Historiography, Early warning, Moral component

1. Introduction

What can history teach us about the war in Ukraine or its future relations with Russia? At times when uncertainties confound our judgment, people tend to look for guidance in theories and other insights derived from the past. Most if not all of our scenarios pertaining to the future of war in one way or another involve an analysis of past events, the search for useful analogies and the forward linear projection of perceived trends and developments, i.e., they display a belief in the magisterial potential of the past, sometimes unwittingly.[1] Attractive as it may seem,

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[1] Cf. Baudet, "Ranke and files," 66-86.

unfortunately history *by itself* does not teach anything, nor does it recommend a particular course of action. Historians are no prophets and a crystal ball is not among the tools they use in their trade. Metaphorically speaking, the past is a junkyard rather than a clear well. It is as confusing and contradictory as the present. It consists of random *and* interconnected events that are experienced, interpreted and reinterpreted until, perhaps, a certain measure of consensus is achieved. What can be learned from the war in Ukraine therefore has very little to do with historical necessities or eternal truths that can be extrapolated at will, even if a given state's or individual's behaviour may crudely conform to an established pattern.[2] The number of factors involved in predicting their course of action in ten years is too large to make a meaningful prediction, although it is conceivable that their behaviour will not fundamentally change between today and next week.

Still, those that argue that because the past may thus rhyme at best, it is useless, deprive themselves of a valuable frame of reference that can be put to good use. Building on an analysis of the run-up to the Ukraine war and the disintegration and war in Yugoslavia, this contribution will highlight two points relating to the utility of the past for the identification of future developments. The first is that it is through the study of their societies and their personal history that one can grasp a political actor's mindset, which in turn may help limit the number of scenarios we need to reckon with. The other is that *historiography*, i.e., the study of history writing, and 'historical culture' (a term that will be explained later on), could perhaps serve as an early warning device, provided that conditions could be identified that trigger their transformation from mere areas of academic contestation into tools for political mobilisation, and war.

2. The past is present

The past is not only prologue,[3] it is present. Man is a historical being in the sense that his beliefs, values, convictions and also actions are founded in his individual and collective understanding of their personal and national past experiences. This, in turn, is not a static one-way exercise with history providing lessons and groups and individuals acting as the attentive students of these lessons. They may feel that they are but in essence there is some sort of dialogue between the past and the present. New experiences alter the way previous experiences are interpreted, and past experience provides the lens through which the present is analysed. While

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[2] Morillo and Pavkovic, *What is Military History?* 48-52.

[3] In opposition to Williamson and Sinnreich, eds., *The Past as Prologue: The Importance of History to the Military Profession.*

people are not captives of their past, it provides a strong normative frame of reference. By itself this frame does not prescribe war, indiscriminate killing, mass rape and the deliberate destruction of historical heritage, but studying such convictions and beliefs is a necessity when we hope to grasp an idea of their owners' future behaviour – in peacetime as in war.

There is, furthermore, general academic consensus that in times of uncertainty people tend to attach even more importance to their identity and heritage. In a world of rapid change, e.g., by the collapse of an empire, war, the influx of migrants or the introduction of technologies that appear to replace man by machines, the past appears preciously structured and clear. The *imagined* past, that is; the *real* historical past was as confusing to those that lived through it as the present often is to us. This imagined past is tailored according to present-day needs and concerns. Hence the tendency of every society to invent some Golden Age, somehow lost, but apparently still within reach provided that the right effort is made.[4] Such sentiments are vulnerable to manipulation. Perhaps even more so in societies with a long tradition of autocratic rule where safety valves so to speak are largely absent.

In this chapter I will discuss two cases in which this mechanism can be identified. There are many more, but the process that led to the disintegration of Yugoslavia and in the run-up to the Russian invasion of Ukraine share a number of similarities. In both cases there is a 'national cradle,' i.e., Crimea and Kosovo; in both cases in one of the contestants an alliance was forged between the Church and the State; in both cases, the opponents' right to exist was contested, and lastly, in both cases aggression was portrayed as self-defense against resurgent Nazism.

To start with the former Yugoslavia, for most Serbs, possession of Kosovo, where according to legend their medieval Tsar Lazar on 28th June, 1389, sacrificed himself in battle against the Ottoman Turks to gain the Kingdom of Heavens for his people, and of Metohija, where the Serb Patriarchate is, is essential.[5] During the Serbian Uprisings of 1804 and 1811, in the Balkan war of 1912 and during the dissolution of Yugoslavia the medieval battle of Kosovo served as an inspiration. Control over these areas was Serbia's principal war aim in the First Balkan War (1912), and it was one of the key issues that helped Slobodan Milošević establish himself as the champion of all things Serb, with devastating consequences for Yugoslavia as a

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[4] MacDonald, *Balkan Holocausts? Serbian and Croatian Victim-centred Propaganda and the War in Yugoslavia*; Cf. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*; Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.*

[5] In Serbian *Kosovo* can mean two things: it refers to the entire area of today's independent Kosova, or only to its eastern half. Its name is derived from *Kosovo polje*, the 'Field of Blackbirds,' north of Prishtinë where the 1389 battle against the invading Ottoman empire took place. *Metohija* ('monastic estates') is a Serbian term for the western parts of present-day Kosova. In Socialist Yugoslavia, present-day Kosovo was referred to as *Kosmet*, a contraction of *Kosovo i Metohija.*

whole. A call to 'avenge Kosovo' appealed to large sections of the Serb nation, and perhaps continues to do so.[6]

Tragically enough, even though the Serbs gained autonomy and then independence from the Ottoman Empire, and in 1912 wrested control of Kosovo from the Ottomans, the 1389 defeat was never avenged enough. In 1989, Milošević used the 600th anniversary of the battle to issue a thinly veiled threat to Yugoslavia's other nations when he spoke about the struggles that Serbia was facing. These had not been armed battles, but this could not be excluded yet.[7] This was part of a wider process of Othering in which non-Orthodox Christian Yugoslavs were consistently portrayed as a threat to the Serbs' survival. In this narrative Yugoslav Muslims, i.e., Bosnian *Muslimani* and the Albanians of Kosovo, were singled out as the greatest threat to Serb identity; the Bosnian Muslims were traitors to the Serb cause as they had adopted their enemy's religion, the Albanians because their presence in Kosovo and Metohija 'defiled' this 'Serb Jerusalem.' Both groups had a higher fertility rate, which was presented as a deliberate attempt to outbreed the Serbs.[8]

Building upon real historical memories and distortions created by Communist Yugoslavia, Croat nationalism, by contrast, was portrayed as Nazism, and Croats as genocidal by nature.[9] This struck a chord with many members of Croatia's and Bosnia's Serb minority, whose grandparents had survived the Croatian World War II Nazi puppet state. The leaderships in Slovenia and Croatia did not stand by idly and soon engaged in a similar war of words and images. Bosnia's leadership followed an intermediate course, stressing Yugoslav brotherhood and unity, but to no avail. In 1989-1990 the bones of Tsar Lazar were carried around the future battlefields in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo. With each side stressing the need to defend, by force if necessary, what was rightfully theirs, Yugoslavia collapsed under the weight of the imagined histories of its constituent nations.[10]

In Russian history, one of the dominant conceptions is that there can only be one polity between the White, Baltic and Black Seas: Russia. Vladimir Putin's view that the collapse of the Soviet Union constituted the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century should therefore not be seen as a great exaggeration on the part of a paranoid despot.[11] Rather, it reflects his deep conviction that those events robbed

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[6] Baudet and De Baets, "Kosovo, het verleden op spitsroeden," 99-111.

[7] Kurspahić, *Prime Time Crime: Balkan Media in War and Peace*, 50.

[8] Mertus, *Kosovo: How Myths and Truths Started a War*, 8; Cf. National Library for Medicine, "Albanians accuse Serbs of waging demographic war, flock to secret birth clinics."

[9] Krestić, "O genezi genocida nad Srbima u NDH."

[10] Cf. MacDonald, *Balkan Holocausts?*; Thompson, *Forging War: The Media in Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.*

[11] The Associated Press, "Putin: Soviet collapse a 'genuine tragedy'"; Osborn and Ostroukh, "Putin rues Soviet collapse as demise of 'Historical Russia'"; Herschberg, "Putin is repeating the USSR's

Russia of its rightful place in history, which is that of a great power, a position that he set out to restore. This ambition is welcomed by millions of Russians who after the disintegration of the Soviet Union were at a loss as to their identity, because they tend to conflate 'Russia' with the entire area of the former Tsarist empire and the former Soviet Union.[12]

Though not shared universally, such ideas stem from a particular understanding of Russia's history that has a long pedigree but gained new popularity in the 1990s and early 2000s. Since the 15th century, its intellectuals and political leaders have claimed that the East-Slavic lands cannot be anything else than 'Russian,'[13] an identity that is centered around the conflicting beliefs that Moscow is both the 'third Rome' and the sole heir to the medieval political entity of *Rus'* that at its height included most of the territories between the Black Sea, Novgorod and Moscow and introduced Eastern-Orthodox Christianity in these areas after the baptism of one of its Grand Dukes in the vicinity of Sevastopol in Crimea.[14] Such beliefs not only lie at the heart of the so-called *Russkiy Mir* – 'the Russian world'[15] but they are one of the causes of the war against Ukraine and without doubt will impact its outcome. Given Crimea's special place in the Russian myth of origin it is unlikely that any Russian leader will voluntarily give up the peninsula. Ukraine will have to conquer it and it is to be expected that Russia will cling to it as if it were Moscow itself. It is highly likely that Ukraine will try especially as Ukraine, like Russia, sees itself as the heir to medieval Rus, and spokespersons for the government in Kyiv have on numerous occasions reiterated its intention to restore Ukrainian control in the peninsula.[16] And in fact, in August 2023, it was reported that Ukraine is training

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mistakes. The wrong lessons of history"; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, "Putin laments Soviet breakup as demise of 'Historical Russia,' amid Ukraine fears"; Conradi, *Who Lost Russia?: From the Collapse of the USSR to Putin's War on Ukraine.*

[12] Kuzio, "Russian national identity and the Russia-Ukraine crisis"; Cf. Igor Zevelev, "Russian national identity and foreign policy."

[13] Von Hagen, "Does Ukraine have a history?" 660. This belief is also reflected in the official title of the Russian tsars: *Vserossiyskiy tsar*, and in the name of the Russian state: *Rossiyskaya Federatsia, i.e.,* the *tsar of all the Russias*, and *the federation of Russias.*

[14] While both may be said to reflect the cultural influence of the Byzantine empire, these two ideas conflict because as the true heir to the Roman imperial tradition Russia should perhaps seek domination over its neighbors, Slavic or other, but not necessarily deny their right to express a separate cultural identity, whereas as heir to *Rus'* it sees itself as the sole guardian of Eastern-Orthodox Christianity, that spread through the lands of *Rus'*. In those areas there can be no other identity than the Russian one.

[15] Note that it is *Russkiy mir*, not *Rossiyskiy*. *Russkiy* means Russian in an ethnic, cultural or linguistic sense. *Rossiyskiy* refers to the Russian state (vide footnote 14).

[16] For instance: Cook, "We're approaching the red line of Crimea"; Deutsche Welle, "Volodymyr Zelenskyy vows Ukraine will retake Crimea."

50,000 personnel to 'de-occupy' Crimea.[17] Another corollary is that any leader that wishes to restore Russia's 'rightful' position in the world will feel the urge to limit the political and cultural freedom of movement of the independent Slavic states Belarus and Ukraine. Those that expect that the removal from power of President Putin will end Russia's imperial aspirations, may well cherish false hope.

On the Ukrainian side, a somewhat different set of ideas informs thinking. In the 16th and 17th century when large parts of the country were part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth,[18] the Orthodox elites in what is now Ukraine faced growing pressure to adopt Catholicism. A number of responses were formulated. One was to insist on Rus' continued legal existence that would justify equality with Poland and Lithuania within the Commonwealth, another was the creation of the Uniate Church that kept the Eastern rites but accepted the Pope as its highest religious authority. Another still was to strongly hold on to Orthodoxy and find outside allies that could help to protect it. In these last circles the idea of *Malorussiya*, literally 'Little Russia,' was formulated. It expressed religious unity with Russia, whereas the addition 'little' implied distinctiveness. It was, in hindsight, a most unfortunate terminology in that it helped legitimise Muscovite political claims to the territory and underlay the union of Pereiaslav of 1654 that brought the Cossacks of Zaporizhzhia in Central Ukraine under Moscow's control. As the Russian empire acquired and conquered more and more of present-day Ukraine, local elites largely accepted Tsarist rule, while at the same time maintaining that *Malorussiya* was different from Russia proper.[19] Over time, this became increasingly difficult; in the late 18th century, when the Russian empire conquered the Black Sea coast, it abolished the Cossack hetmanate as the most conspicuous proof of Ukrainian separateness, and invited Russian and foreign settlers to the newly conquered areas, that were dubbed *Novorossiya,* 'New Russia.' In addition, Cossack military units were disbanded – although these would be recreated periodically as, for instance, during the Napoleonic wars. In the 19th century, Kyiv was proclaimed the mother of all Russian cities, and the Tsars banned the use of Ukrainian in schools and imposed their version of Rus history throughout their domain.[20] From a Ukrainian

[17] Любезна, Катерина. "Україна готує 50 тисяч нових кадрів для стабілзації ситуації у Криму після деокупації."

[18] From 1386 the Lithuanian grand-dukes also served as kings of Poland. In 1569 the two entities merged into the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

[19] Kohut, *The Question of Russo-Ukrainian Unity and Ukrainian Distinctiveness in Early Modern Ukrainian Thought and Culture*; See also: Kuzio, "Russian stereotypes and myths of Ukraine and Ukrainians and why Novorossiya failed," 297–309; and: Kohut, "History as a battleground: Russian-Ukrainian relation and historical consciousness in contemporary Ukraine," 123–46.

[20] Miller, *The Ukrainian Question: Russian Empire and Nationalism in the 19th Century*; Plokhy, *Ukraine and Russia: Representations of the Past*; See also: Musliu and Burlyuk, "Imagining Ukraine: From history and myths to Maidan protests," 631-655.

nationalist perspective this was part of a continuous effort to erase Ukrainian identity as such. The same lens applies to Stalin's agricultural policy. In the 1930s he ordered the compulsory collectivisation of the agricultural sector throughout the Soviet Union. For Ukrainian nationalists collectivisation and the ensuing famine that cost the lives of millions of people, was directed at the Ukrainians' national identity, hence Kyiv's current campaign to have the famine, the *Holodomor*, recognised internationally as a genocide.[21]

These events have been interpreted differently in different parts of the country, however, with the east and south more susceptible to the Russian and the Soviet interpretations of the past.[22] This is even more true of the perception of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) that was active in western Ukraine during the 1930s until about 1950. Initially they applied terrorist tactics to safeguard Ukrainian rights against repression by the Polish state. Then, from 1941, hoping for German support for an independent Ukrainian fascist state, they fought the Soviet Union and killed thousands of Eastern Galician Jews, and from 1943 also Poles. They continued to fight the Soviet Union until they were defeated in 1950.[23] In the early 2000s, president Yushchenko accorded its surviving members veterans' pensions on a par with the millions of Ukrainians that had served in the Soviet armed forces. Both, so the argument ran, had fought for Ukraine. This caused concern in those areas where Ukrainian nationalism was not strongly developed, such as in the eastern part of the republic.[24] Worse still, the continued veneration of OUN leader Bandera and similar figures by a section of the Ukrainian public would from about 1997 onward be used by Russia to argue that in Kyiv, Nazism was alive and kicking. In fact, it enabled Moscow's propagandists to suggest that Ukrainian nationalism

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[21] The famine is increasingly seen as intentional: Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivisation and the Terror-Famine,* 326; Applebaum, *Red Famine: Stalin's War on Ukraine,* 189–208, 354; For the current 'politics or memory': Kasianov, "Holodomor and the politics of memory in Ukraine after independence," 179–170, 172.

[22] Cf. Smoor, e.a., "Understanding the narratives explaining the Ukrainian crisis: identity divisions and complex diversity in Ukraine," 63-96.

[23] Rossoliński-Liebe, "The fascist kernel of Ukrainian genocidal nationalism"; Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin,* 194–195, 326–327; Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair: Life and Death in Ukraine under Nazi Rule,* 285– 297, 299–300.

[24] Marples, *Heroes and Villains: Creating National History in Contemporary Ukraine*; Marples, "Stepan Bandera: The resurrection of a Ukrainian national hero," 555-566; Narvselius, "The 'Bandera debate': The contentious legacy of World War II and liberalization of collective memory in Western Ukraine," 469–90; Osipian, "Regional diversity and divided memories in Ukraine: Contested past as electoral resource," 616–642; In all, somewhere between twenty and twenty-three thousand people were members of UPA, the armed wing of Bandera's OUN. In contrast, several million Ukrainians served in the Red Army: Katchanovski, "Terrorists or national heroes? Politics and perceptions of the OUN and the UPA in Ukraine," 220.

itself was national-socialist, an idea that ties in with the aforementioned Russian belief that all East-Slavs are, or ought to be, Russians.[25]

Actors' ideas about the past therefore do matter. These provide a frame of reference that influences the way an actor perceives his environment, and in fact, him or herself. This, it cannot be stressed enough, does not mean that history has *predictive* power in that it enables us to determine beforehand what a given actor will decide. But it does enable us to identify which courses of action and which decisions are more likely than others. It can help us to preclude a number of scenarios. In a world characterised by uncertainty this is an extremely valuable tool.

3. A warning from history

In the previous paragraphs the focus was on the past as a frame of reference for nations and individual actors. It was argued that the past is not a static pile of data. It is reinterpreted, reframed and rewritten according to present concerns. This not only applies to 'collective memory,' the way a society makes sense of past experiences, but also to more explicit forms of engaging with the past, i.e., history writing, and various forms of 'historical culture,' such as school books, historical movies and exhibitions. History writing and historical culture however do not happen or evolve in splendid isolation; they reflect today's concerns.[26]

Such marked changes in the way a society engages with its past have received considerable attention from academics, but much less so from those that are involved in threat assessments. This surely is an omission. Here, too, examples from the Yugoslav and post-Soviet experience may serve as an illustration. In the previous section it was argued that ideas about the past underlay actions in the present. Here I will make the case that marked changes in the way the past is seen, may indicate that some sort of crisis is looming.

In federal Yugoslavia each republic had its own academic community and public space. What could and could not be discussed, made and seen was defined by the communist leaderships in each of the federation's entities. Nonetheless there was also a Yugoslav public space of sorts, as Serbo-Croatian served as a lingua franca throughout the federation. After the death of dictator Josip Broz Tito in

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[25] Kravchenko, "Fighting Soviet myths: The Ukrainian experience," 447–84; See also: Riabchuck, "Ukrainians as Russia's negative 'Other,'" 75-85; Vladimir Putin himself states as much in his "On the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians."

[26] See, in relation to Ukraine, Kraft van Ermel, *On the Crossroads of History: Politics of History in Ukraine and Questions of Identity in Post-Cold War Europe (1991–2019)*, especially chapter 1 in which the author discusses the concept of 'politics of history.' It must be stressed most emphatically that this is not limited to Russia or Ukraine, or the Western Balkans for that matter.

1980, there was no overarching authority anymore and although the system he had devised continued to function for a while, his successors lacked a federation-wide power base and increasingly saw themselves as representatives of the republic from which they hailed. While communist Yugoslavia had been far from averse to symbolically mobilise 'the people,' the republics now did so too.[27] Historians and other intellectuals contributed to this in no small way. Already in 1979 the federation-wide historical association stopped functioning after a conflict over the representation of the Second World War, which Yugoslav propaganda had depicted for decades as a unified struggle led by Tito and his Partisan movement against foreign aggressors and domestic quislings. Soon after Tito's demise, especially Serbian historians and intellectuals began to question his wartime record and the cult of personality that had developed around the partisan leadership, and Tito in particular.[28] The (allegedly perennial) historical suffering of the Serbs at the hands of their present-day compatriots soon became an important theme in historiography and popular culture. The World War II Serb-nationalist Četnik resistance movement was increasingly depicted as heroic, whereas before it had been ritually condemned for chauvinism and collaboration with the Germans.[29] In addition, Croatian contributions to the partisan movement were downplayed and Croat sympathies for the fascist Ustaše were highlighted. The official Yugoslav wartime population losses, themselves already doctored as Tito had hoped to secure more substantial reparations, were increasingly believed to reflect Serb losses only. Directors and artists challenged official views as well, such as Emir Kusturica's *When father was away on a business trip* (1985), that dealt with the political persecutions of the late 1940s and early 1950s.[30] Around the same time, a movie was made about Tsar Lazar that proved highly popular and rock band *Bijelo dugme* that in the

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[27] For instance through education, cf. Zgaga, *The Situation of Education in the SEE Region. Final Content Report on the Project 'Support in OECD Thematic Review of Educational Policy in South Eastern Europe'* 2.

[28] Banac, "The fearful asymmetry of war: The causes and consequences of Yugoslavia's demise," 141–74; A classic example is Dedijer, *Novi prilozi za biografiju Josipa Broza Tita*; Another example is future president Koštunica and Čavoški's, *Stranački pluralizam ili monizam: Društveni pokreti i politički sistem u Jugoslaviji 1944-1949*.

[29] Đuretić, *Saveznici i jugoslovenska ratna drama;* Cf. Pavlowitch, "L'histoire en Yougoslavie depuis 1945," 89-90; Banac, "Historiography of the countries of Eastern Europe: Yugoslavia," 1098-1103, 1101-1102. See also: Ćirković, "Historiography in isolation: Serbian historiography today," 35-40.

[30] Kusturica would later direct the prize-winning *Underground* (1995). Widely praised among Western audiences and critics, it actually is an ambiguous take on Yugoslavia; on the one hand it makes ample use of national stereotypes, e.g., the Serb hero is deceived by his Croat friend that engages in arms trade with Germany; and we also see a treacherous Muslim. On the other hand, when the Serb in a gruelling scene kills his Croat friend, as he starts to end the flames, he mutters that 'a war is not a true war until brother fights brother,' while the movie ends with a happy party on a Yugoslavia-shaped

1970s had led the Western orientation of Yugoslav youth culture, released an album that mixed traditional folk music with 1980s synth pop, a mix that would later be termed *Turbofolk* and associated with ultranationalism. Its cover, a reproduction of the famous 1919 painting *Kosovska devojka* by Uroš Predić of a Serb girl giving a dying soldier something to drink in the aftermath of the 1389 battle, likewise reflected the changing mood.

Still, until 1986 Serbia's leadership opposed 'chauvinism.' When Milošević came to power, however, it was actively encouraged. By that time a narrative had developed in which the federalisation of the common state, Tito's key achievement, was portrayed as detrimental to the Serbs' interests. Through television, radio, movies, books the regime reached out to Serbs living in other entities of the federation. It also organised so-called 'Meetings of Truth' that shook the foundations of Yugoslavia and gave the Serbs a sense of empowerment. This was followed by secret police operatives who started organising paramilitary groups.[31]

Similar developments took place in Slovenia, Yugoslavia's most liberal republic. A vibrant counterculture had developed in the early 1980s, that was actively suppressed when its expressions ran against the perceived interest of the republican leadership. However, when, in 1987, the Communist youth organisation's periodical *Mladina* openly equalled Titoism with Hitlerism and the federal authorities intervened, Slovenia's leadership decided to portray the federation's intervention as an attack on Slovenia. This struck a chord with the public and bolstered this leadership's domestic legitimacy.

Croatia and Bosnia, the federation's most oppressive republics, also controlled media outlets and publishing houses. It was only around 1988-1989 that Croatia's leadership started to hesitantly follow the example of Serbia and Slovenia. Multiethnic Bosnian communists in contrast remained committed to the existing federal structures, until, in the wake of the dissolution of the federal communist party and the end of the communist regimes in Eastern Europa, they felt compelled to hold democratic elections that brought ultranationalists to power. The seeds the communists had sewn would soon blossom.

In a similar vein, Russian representations of Ukraine and Ukrainian representations of Russia have changed since 1991. In both countries attempts were initially made to come to terms with the Soviet past, and especially Stalinism. In Russia however this proved far more difficult than in Ukraine, perhaps because the Russian Federation considered itself the heir to the Soviet Union. Stalin is still

island with the narrator assuring the public that however dispersed we are at present we will tell our children that 'once upon a time there was a country...'

[31] On Serb paramilitary formations: Vukušić, *Serbian Paramilitaries and the Breakup of Yugoslavia. State Connections and Patterns of Violence.*

hugely popular, ostensibly because he won the Second World War and made the Soviet Union a great power. It is acknowledged that millions perished during his reign, both during the Collectivisation and the ensuing Terror of the 1930s, and again in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Still, in 2008 Stalin, a Georgian by birth, was voted the all-time third-greatest Russian, and critical thinking about his achievements is actively discouraged. School books stress his achievements and downplay his crimes.[32] Apart from a brief spell in the 1990s, the past continues to be subjected to present-day political demands. It is no surprise that among the organisations and persons silenced by the Putin regime are *Memorial*, a group of historians committed to researching Stalinism, and the venerable Moscow Helsinki Committee, established by Soviet dissidents in 1976 to monitor Moscow's human rights record.[33]

In parallel to this tightening of control, public memory was increasingly filled with narratives about how Russia and Russian values have always been threatened by the West, how these had made inroads in treacherous and ungrateful Ukraine, that furthermore had collaborated with Nazism. This, in turn justified strong leadership in Russia.[34] Years before Putin used this narrative to legitimise his invasion of Ukraine, it was disseminated through Russian books and movies. Regardless of their story line, in such endeavours the Ukrainians in it were Nazi sympathisers and spoke Ukrainian. When they 'rediscovered' their 'true' self, they switched to Russian.[35] Against this background it is quite conceivable that (at least some) displays in Ukraine of Nazi-related symbols are actually part of Russian false flag operations. The message that Russia's 'special military operation' against Ukraine is fully justified and part of an eternal struggle against Western aggression is also disseminated in schools.[36]

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[32] Medieval ruler Aleksandr Nevsky, who defeated the 'German' Teutonic Knights in the 13th Century and became a Saint, was first. Sullivan, "Breaking down the man of steel: Stalin in Russia today," 457-462, 475-476; Nelson, "History as ideology: The portrayal of Stalinism and the Great Patriotic War in contemporary Russian high school textbooks," 57.

[33] Laruelle, *Russian Nationalism*; Kuzio, "Nationalism and authoritarianism in Russia: Introduction to the Special Issue," 1–11.

[34] Keenan, "Collecting history imprints from Russia in the age of the new official historiographic agenda," 114-129; Cf. Kuzio, "Soviet and Russian anti-(Ukrainian) nationalism and re-Stalinization," 87–99.

[35] Yekelchyk, "Memory Wars on the silver screen: Ukraine and Russia look back at the Second World War," 4-13; See also: Norris, *Blockbuster History in the New Russia: Movies, Memory, and Patriotism*; van Gorp, "Inverting film policy: Film as nation builder in Post-Soviet Russia, 1991–2005," 243–58; Smorodinskaya, "'The fathers' war through the sons' lenses," 89–112; Baraban, "Forget the war: Wartime subjectivity in post-Soviet Russian films," 295–318.

[36] McGlynn, "Russia's history textbook rewrite is a bid to control the future."

Ukrainian intellectuals, in contrast, have been relatively free to address the past. In the last decade of the Soviet Union historians and others rediscovered a narrative about the present-day's Ukrainians' relation to medieval Rus. But while the Ukrainian declaration of independence of 24th August, 1991 argued that the new state had roots stretching back to these ancient times, this view was not imposed in schools and public life, and Ukrainian officials and intellectuals refrained from arguing that Rus' heritage was Ukraine's only. When, around 1994, the government proposed as state symbols the arms of the princely state of Halyč-Wolyn (roughly Eastern Galicia, present-day Western Ukraine), large sections of the public – both Russophones and Ukrainophones – in the eastern and southern parts of the republic were hardly interested and the symbols were adopted as part of a deal that granted autonomy to Crimea. Independence and the activities of emigree movements meanwhile stimulated an exploration of topics that had been glossed over in official Soviet historiography or had been treated in a highly ideologised fashion. These included the first independence and the civil war (1917-1921), the collectivisation, and Soviet counter-insurgency in western Ukraine.[37] As said, these were increasingly interpreted through a nationalist lens, i.e., these heinous Soviet policies were believed to be Russian policies directed at the Ukrainians' very exist- ence, and this was reflected in a number of textbooks in schools.[38] The Southern and Eastern parts that had been longer exposed to Russian and then Soviet rule than the Western districts, meanwhile, had developed a somewhat dissimilar frame of reference.[39] Although Ukrainian army recruits were treated to a more or less official history of Ukraine, the Kyiv government did not impose such a history on society as a whole.[40] Rather, it tried to balance the diverging narratives in the same vein as it had tried to steer a middle course between the pro-European and pro-Russian strands of society, a divide that was encouraged and exploited by

[37] von Hagen, "Does Ukraine have a history?" 670-671; Narvselius, "The 'Bandera Debate': The contentious legacy of World War II and liberalization of collective memory in Western Ukraine," 469–90; Osipian, "Regional diversity and divided memories in Ukraine: Contested past as electoral resource," 616–42.

[38] Kuzio, "Nation building, history writing and competition over the legacy of Kyiv Rus in Ukraine,"; Janmaat, "History and national identity construction: The great famine in Irish and Ukrainian history textbooks," 345-368; idem., "Nation-building in post-Soviet Ukraine: Educational policy and the response of the Russian-speaking population"; idem., "Identity construction and edu- cation. The history of Ukraine in Soviet and Post-Soviet schoolbooks,"; Krylach and Kul'chytskyi, "Die Diskussionen in der Ukraine über die Schulbücher zur Vaterländischen Geschichte."

[39] Wilson, "The Donbas between Ukraine and Russia: The use of history in political disputes," 265–89.

[40] Kuzio, "Nation building, history writing and competition over the legacy of Kyiv Rus in Ukraine," 41.

Russian informational activities.[41] The more Ukraine asserted its sovereign right to carve out its own political future the more Russia stepped up its efforts to subvert it. Russia's war against Ukraine did not start in 2014 with the annexation of Crimea and the secession of Donets'k and Luhans'k, much less so with the invasion of February, 2022.

In hindsight, then, there seems to be a close relationship between these shifts in historiography and historical culture in the former Yugoslavia, and in Russia and Ukraine, and the ensuing wars. From the two cases I discussed, it may be tentatively concluded that changes in historical culture and public memory by themselves may be dramatic but that an additional ingredient is needed, i.e., a translation of such sentiments into a political program. This does not require an evil dictator. It does however require a deeply felt sense of crisis, political, economic, and moral, and a feebly developed public space in which the past cannot truly be discussed and put to rest. Another key issue would be to establish whether in these and other cases the process of Othering fell on fertile grounds because it struck a chord with people's pre-existing convictions. Still, a thorough analysis of historiography and historical culture could, perhaps, have prevented the intelligence failures surrounding the events of 2014 and 2022, just like it could have raised awareness that Yugoslavia had run into trouble in the early 1980s, rather than the late 1980s by which time a number of events had been set in motion that would fatally undermine that state.[42] After all, key issues in intelligence analysis involve assessing intentions and assessing likelihood. A thorough knowledge of how a society engages with its past experiences surely would greatly benefit the quality of analysis.[43] In this respect, the work of the Netherlands-based *Network of Concerned Historians* may be of help: established some thirty years ago, it has monitored the freedom of historians around the world to research and disseminate their views. It lists court-cases, administrative measures, dismissals, physical attacks and the like. As such

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[41] Tsekhanovska and Tsybulska, "Evolution of Russian narratives about Ukraine and their export to Ukrainian media space"; Cf. Boyte, "An analysis of the social-media technology, tactics, and narratives used to control perception in the propaganda war over Ukraine," 88–111; Alekseyeva, *Narrative Warfare: How the Kremlin and Russian News Outlets Justified a War of Aggression against Ukraine*; Lange-Ionatamišvili, "Analysis of Russia's information campaign against Ukraine"; Bertelsen, *Russian Active Measures: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*.

[42] This ties in with literature on intelligence failures. In each stage of the intelligence circle things may go wrong. Crucially though, the decision to act on a report hinges on its apparent trustworthiness.

[43] Compare Whaley, *Practice to Deceive: Learning Curves of Military Deception Planners,* who at 194–205 gives a number of qualities that a deception planner needs: a thorough empathy of the opponent's mind; See also: Heuer Jr., "Improving intelligence analysis: Some insights on data, concepts, management in the intelligence community," 8; as quoted in Marrin, "Preventing intelligence failures by learning from the past," 664.

its reports document 'sensitive' issues and changes in the way governments and societies address these.[44]

A number of serious challenges come to mind though; one is cost as considerable effort will be 'wasted' on studying the pasts of countries and groups and leaderships that do not resort to war. Second, it requires well-developed language skills. Third, once such insights that call for long-term action have been obtained, they have to compete with more pressing short-term issues. Fourth, the question of what could be actually done to influence the course of events must be answered, and lastly, governments need to believe that there is an issue upon which they should act. Nonetheless, it would be worthwhile to try to develop a predictive tool that includes historiographic analysis as it would help identify key areas of contestation, and reduce the level of uncertainty in trying to assess intentions and likelihood. This line of reasoning runs more or less parallel to that of Wirtz in relation to indications and warning for terrorism, when he wrote that '[i]n terms of non-state actors such as criminal organizations or terrorist cells, deviations can be observed in what constitutes normal activity,' deviations that may indicate that something is afoot.[45]

4. Conclusion

History does not predict. It can nonetheless help understand future developments. In the first place, studying the past may provide insights in the mindsets of actors and help distinguish between potential and probable courses of action. Knowledge of this type enables us to better assess the likelihood of their occurring and help mitigate the risk of costly strategic surprise. Man is a historical being. Of course we may express a willingness to overcome or ignore the past, but inescapably, our interpretations of it are always there to guide, or in fact, haunt us. Almost thirty years after the Dayton Agreement that ended the Bosnian war, it is still debatable whether the arrangement would survive international disengagement from Bosnia. Likewise, although Russia clearly violated international law by annexing Ukrainian territory in 2014 and again in 2022, it is unlikely that it will voluntarily return those areas, especially Crimea, that, like Kosovo, is seen as the cradle of the nation.

If our frames of reference are rooted in our interpretations of history, the study of history may also provide early warning of sorts. Not because history repeats

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[44] See "Concerned Historians." The Network was founded in 1995 by Groningen-based Belgian historian Antoon de Baets whose career has been devoted to defending the freedom to research, while at the same time stressing the need for methodological rigour.

[45] Wirtz, "Indications and warning in an age of uncertainty," 552.

itself, or because we somehow are now able to overcome the so-called 'historian's fallacy' – 'the belief that, having identified and analyzed the causes of past mistakes, future mistakes, including surprise – can be avoided,'[46] but because historical interpretations evolve. They shift as a result of new finds, but they do so primarily as a result of new questions and new experiences that trigger a reinterpretation of past experiences. Dramatic changes in the way a society perceives its past reflect dramatic changes in its perception of the present, and this, in turn may point at changes in the way it will assert itself in the future. However dramatic, such changes by themselves generally are insufficient for a war to erupt, but in combination with a number of other factors they are indicative that there is trouble ahead.

As said, it is a long way from recognising these dramatic changes to translating them into timely and actionable intelligence, let alone successful conflict prevention. But, then again, *pre-war* engagement, however modest its chances of success, is to be preferred over *post-war* reconciliation after the loss of tens of thousands of lives that were lost in senseless efforts to undo the past. Perhaps the best option lies in supporting the development of a public space in which the past can be discussed and put to rest. This requires engagement, rather than isolation. As the preamble of the constitution of UNESCO rightly argues: 'Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is there that the defences of peace need to be erected.'

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[46] Cancian, *Coping with surprise in Great Power conflicts*, VIII.

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Caught by Surprise: Warning for Russia's Invasion of Ukraine

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Abstract

Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24th came as a surprise to many. Observers did not expect Russia to invade, even though a suspicious build-up of Russian troops, the statements of Putin, and other significant moments set the alarm bells off. Still, predictions ended up wrong and a lot of experts did not believe an actual invasion would happen. How did they ultimately find themselves caught off guard? This chapter exemplifies the significant challenges during the warning process prior to the invasion for the intelligence community as well as the decision-makers in France, Germany and the United States.

Keywords: Surprise, Strategic warning, Intelligence-policy nexus

1. Introduction

The events on the 24th of February, 2022 left the world in a state of disbelief. During the months leading up to the invasion, British and American intelligence services provided detailed warnings about Russia's plans and intent to invade Ukraine to their respective governments as well as to international partners across the world.[1] Meanwhile, many continental European countries such as Germany and France, were largely surprised by the invasion. German special forces even had to evacuate the head of Germany's foreign intelligence service (BND) from Kyiv on the day the invasion began.[2] This chapter explores these differences and intends to contribute to answering the following research question: to what extent did Russia's invasion of Ukraine surprise western countries and how can this be explained?

To answer this question the chapter first presents a theoretical framework that addresses the two main concepts of our study: surprise and strategic warning.[3]

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[1] Brown, "How western spy planes keep tabs on Russian tactics."

[2] Reuters, "Special forces evacuated German spy chief from Ukraine."

[3] See e.g.: Gentry and Gordon, *Strategic Warning Intelligence*; Ikani, Cuttmann, and Meyer, "An analytical framework for postmortems of European Foreign Policy?" 197-215; Grabo and Goldman, *Handbook of Warning Intelligence*.

Based on this framework the national warning approaches of France, Germany, and the United States are explored and compared.

2. Surprise and strategic warning

The literature on strategic warning and surprise is strongly concerned with explaining why surprises occurred and whether they were avoidable. A surprise is an occurring event 'that so contravenes the victim's expectations that opponents gain a major advantage.'[4] Surprises occur at all levels of warfare, from strategic to tactical. Levite provides a classical definition of strategic surprise and characterises it 'as an abrupt revelation – often after being victimised by an attack or a sudden shift in the security environment – that one has been working with a faulty threat perception regarding an acute, imminent danger posed by a foreign threat to core national values.'[5] In a similar manner Betts considers strategic surprise to be a lack of preparedness based on incorrect judgements regarding when, where or how an attack would take place.[6]

Although the distinction is sometimes difficult to make, there is a difference between a strategic surprise and a tactical surprise that centres on shorter-term, more focused questions about the specificities of threat manifestation, prevention and management.[7] The classic discussion of strategic versus tactical surprise comes from an analysis of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. While tactically surprising and catastrophic, these attacks were largely not a strategic surprise. The US intelligence community had recognised the threat from Al Qaeda in numerous reports, and decision-makers in the executive branch dedicated long-term resources to increasing defences against attacks.

Whether strategic or tactical, most authors agree that surprise is a matter of degree. Ikani et al.[8] stress that the existing literature offers little help in distinguishing between different kinds, degrees, and objects of surprise. Neither does current literature discuss how surprise may differ significantly among – as well as between – analysts, policy-planners, and decision-makers. To fill this gap, Ikani et al. have developed a taxonomy of surprise that is presented in Table 3.1.

[4]   Cancian, "Strategic surprise."

[5]   Levite, *Intelligence and Strategic Surprises*, 1.

[6]   Betts, *Surprise Attack*, 98–110.

[7]   Dahl, *Intelligence and Surprise Attack: Failure and Success from Pearl Harbor to 9/11 and Beyond.*

[8]   Ikani et al., "An analytical framework for postmortems of European Foreign Policy?"

Degree \ Dimensions	Perfect Surprise	Significant Surprise	Partial Surprise
Dissonance *In terms of the recognised gap between event and previous beliefs*	Threat not even considered, implies cognitive shock and belief transformation	Threat considered, but deemed impossible or very unlikely, implies major Bayesian belief adaptation	Threat deemed possible, but unlikely, implies slight to moderate Bayesian belief updatin
Scope *In terms of the range of surprising substantive threat characteristics*	Threat both strategically and operationally surprising	All the most relevant operational features of threat are surprising, but strategic notice was available	Some important features of the threat are surprising, strategic notice was available
Spread *In terms of who is has been most affected among relevant officials*	Entirety of government, analysts and decision- makers	Most analysts and decision-makers	Only some analysts and decision-makers

Table 3.1: A taxonomy of surprise within government[9]

Ikani et al.[10] distinguish three dimensions of surprise. These are dissonance (i.e. the recognised gap between events and previous beliefs), scope (i.e. the range of surprising substantive threat characteristics and risks), and spread (i.e. who has been most affected among relevant officials). In addition to these dimensions, they define three different degrees of surprise. In a 'perfect surprise' the threat was not even considered, it was both operationally and strategically surprising, and the entirety of the government was caught by surprise. This category resembles the so-called 'Black Swans.'[11] In the second degree, significant surprise, threats were considered but deemed very unlikely. Strategic notice was available, but most relevant features were surprising and therefore both analysts and decision makers were surprised.[12] In the final category of 'partial surprise' the threat was considered unlikely, some important features of the threat were surprising and only some analysts and decision makers were surprised. Take for instance the Arab Uprisings.

[9] Ikani et al., "An analytical framework for postmortems of European Foreign Policy?" 202

[10] Idem.

[11] The Black Swan Theory was first proposed by Nassim Nicholas Taleb in 2007. A Black Swan is an unpredictable event that is beyond what is normally expected of a situation and has potentially severe consequences – they are characterised by their extreme rarity, their severe impact, and widespread insistence they were obvious in hindsight. Nicholas Taleb.

[12] Rietjens, "Caught by surprise. Book Review."

Despite anticipating some level of 'instability spill over,' the exact manner, timing, speed and broader consequences caught many actors by surprise.

Surprises encompass the process of informing decision-makers about potential or ongoing events that impact national security, urging leaders to consider policy decisions or responses to address the threat.[13] Ikani et al. argue that a well-functioning nexus between knowledge producers such as intelligence services and decision-makers is essential to prevent surprises. They propose a comprehensive set of performance criteria for such a nexus that is shown in Table 3.2.

		Performance criteria
Knowledge producers	Reflexivity	Accuracy Timeliness Convincingness
Decision-makers		Due attention and prioritisation Openness to inconvenient knowledge claims Deference to superior expertise

Table 3.2: Performance indicators for the intelligence-policy nexus[14]

Relevant performance criteria for the knowledge producers are accuracy (accurate judgements about threat aspects), timeliness (threats must be communicated on time), and convincingness (the need for intelligence to be understandable and believable for decision-makers). For decision-makers, the criteria identified are attention and prioritisation (the ability to prioritise the most dangerous events over less relevant threats), openness to inconvenient knowledge claims (the willingness to overcome dominant ideas biases and political conveniences), and deference to superior expertise (decision-makers must accept well-founded knowledge claims). In the context of performance, reflexivity is important to both decision-makers and knowledge producers. This term refers to the idea that both knowledge-producers and decision-makers should critically examine their own biases, methodologies and assumptions during the process of interpreting intelligence information.[15]

Together the taxonomy of surprise as well as the performance criteria for the intelligence-policy nexus are used as a lens to diagnose the warning efforts of different countries before Russia's invasion of the Ukraine.

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[13] Gentry and Gordon, *Strategic Warning Intelligence: History, Challenges, and Prospects.*

[14] Ikani et al., "Estimative intelligence in European foreign policymaking," 205.

[15] Werd, "Reflexive intelligence and converging knowledge regimes," 512-526.

3. Warning for a Russian invasion

As the drumbeat of war grew louder in the months before February 24th, 2022, Western intelligence officers, military analysts and political scientists struggled to interpret Putin's intentions.[16] This section explores the warning efforts of three different countries: France, Germany, and the United States. The empirical data is collected by means of desk study and includes numerous documents including news articles, social media posts and open-source warning reports.

3.1 France

The French intelligence services did not accurately and convincingly warn of Russia's invasion of the Ukraine. The chief of the French defence staff, General Burkhard, explained: 'The Americans said that the Russians were going to attack, they were right. Our (intelligence) services thought instead that the conquest of Ukraine would be too great, and the Russians had other options.'[17] This failure to warn led to the resignation of General Eric Vidaud, the director of the Directorate of Military Intelligence (DRM).[18]

There were several reasons underlying France's warning failure. In the days following Russia's attack, Vivaud noted that DRM had provided 'inadequate briefings' and 'lacked expertise' on key issues.[19] He argued that the DRM traditionally focused on locations where French military and troops are active. Consequently, the DRM has much expertise on areas such as the Sahel region, but was less equipped to make judgements on the Russia-Ukraine conflict.[20]

A second factor contributing to France's wrong assessment is related to several biases, both within the services as well as amongst the senior decision-makers. Kleine-Brockhoff, Vice-President of the German Marshall Fund, stressed that 'we [France and Germany] wanted to believe that Russia would become a responsible stakeholder in the current European and global order... We have chosen to overlook the indications to the contrary.'[21] Also President Macron, who spoke regularly to President Putin in the days leading up to 24th February,[22] failed to demonstrate any sign of Putin's behaviour

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[16] Eckel, "How did everybody get the Ukraine invasion predictions so wrong."

[17] Keiger, "Who's to blame for France's catastrophic intelligence failure in Ukraine?"

[18] Bondarev, former member of the Russian delegation to the United Nations. See his article: "Diplomat defects from the Kremlin."

[19] Dodman, "Wrong about Putin: Did Germany and France turn a blind eye to the threat from Russia?"

[20] Idem.

[21] Idem.

[22] BBC, "French intelligence chief Vidaud fired over Russian war failings."

and plan to invade Ukraine. Due to France's tradition of maintaining special ties with Moscow, its view and obsession of Russia as a major power has for a prolonged duration channelled the dialogue between France and Russia.[23] As a result, Macron gave significant importance to the relationship with Russia. Following his predecessors, he tried to establish a shared European security framework that included Russia. During a European Commission meeting a couple of months prior to the invasion, Macron repeated that for Europe it should be the foremost political priority to include Russia in the European security framework.[24] As the French president tried to keep the lines of dialogue and negotiations open, this special relationship, however, turned out to be one-sided. In March 2021, the head of France's armed forces, General Thierry Buckhard admitted that there have been different views on the intelligence available. Around the same time, officials within Macron's office stated that Putin seemed clearly 'paranoid' and therefore it would be hard to predict his movements.[25]

France's assessment was furthermore hindered by a lack of coordination and coherence. Until a few months before the attack, data collectors and analysts were geographically split. While the collectors were at the Air Force base outside Paris, the analysts were located at the Ministry of Armed Forces in downtown Paris.[26] This negatively impacted the speed as well as the quality of the intelligence process.

In reaction to this failure, DRM took several measures. It created 'intelligence fusion cells' to improve the coordination between data-miners and analysts and broadened their intelligence focus. French General Cyril Carcey, now serving as the Deputy Director of the DRM, explained that the DRM can 'no longer focus on a 60-degree angle between Western Africa and the Middle-East dictated by the fight against terrorism.' As a result, he continued, 'we constantly look around with a 360-degree spectrum, not only geographically-speaking, but also with the integration of space, cyber and underwater domains.'[27]

3.2 Germany

Like France, the Russian invasion of the Ukraine largely caught Germany by surprise. The most illustrative example of this surprise was the evacuation of Bruno Kahl, the head of Germany's foreign intelligence service. He was in Kyiv the

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[23]   Gnesotto, "Relations with Russia: France's unique position."

[24]   Heng, "France and Russia benefit from special relationship."

[25]   Cobbe, "French Military intel chief's resignation as fallout for misjudging Putin's intentions in Ukraine."

[26]   Delaporte, "French military intelligence office reorganizing post-Ukraine, with '360 degree' threat-analysis."

[27]   Idem.

moment Russia invaded and 'had to be taken home overland in a grueling two-day journey by special forces when the country's airspace was closed.'[28]

The reasons for this surprise were manifold. According to Annalena Baerbock, Germany's foreign minister, Berlin failed to listen to eastern European allies who did warn of threats from Moscow.[29] Overall, this was because Germany has been resorting to what has been called 'checkbook diplomacy'; or rather a belief that political and economic successes would lead Russia to a democratic path. In this regard, *Wandel durch Handel* marked the idea that closer economic links were needed with Russia as it became more intertwined with Europe's and Germany's. For many years this approach has been successful as it pushed the integration of Russia and expanded commercial ties with the West in general and Germany in particular. As a result, the ideas of checkbook diplomacy and *Wandel durch Handel* widely resonated amongst the German population as well. A poll by the Kantar Public Institute for example revealed that 52% of the Germans wanted the government to act cautiously in international affairs. While 41% of the Germans opted for a stronger German presence, the great majority of them preferred a diplomatic way.[30] Reflecting on this, Nick Schmid, spokesperson for Germany's Social Democratic Party, argued 'it's a bitter acknowledgment that for 30 years we emphasized dialogue and co-operation with Russia… Now we have to recognize that this has not worked. That's why we have entered a new era for European security.'[31]

Also, Germany's intelligence and security services faced a lot of criticism for the lack of warning of the invasion. Like the German decision makers, German intelligence services had a good relationship with the Russians. John Sipher, former CIA officer in Moscow even argued: 'For too many years, German security services arrogantly thought they understood Russia, while at the same time the Russian services were stealing them blind.'[32]

There were also other reasons that fuelled the critique of Germany's services. Some sources state that the services believed Russian troops along the Ukrainian border were part of 'an exercise' and the 'worst-case scenario would not happen.'[33] Others state that post-Cold War thinking and the earlier mentioned *Wandel durch*

[28] Reuters, "Special forces evacuated German spy chief from Ukraine."

[29] Pitel, "Robert Habeck adds to criticism of German intelligence blunders. Foreign service failed to foresee Russia's invasion of Ukraine, deputy chancellor says."

[30] Schwarz, "Understanding Germany's half-hearted support of Ukraine."

[31] McGuinness, "Ukraine War: Germany's conundrum over its ties with Russia."

[32] Pitel, "Robert Habeck adds to criticism of German intelligence blunders. Foreign service failed to foresee Russia's invasion of Ukraine, deputy chancellor says."

[33] Idem.

Handel were so prevalent in German policy circles that it underspent its own military and outsourced its security to others – mostly the United States.[34]

Two former chiefs of the BND German foreign intelligence agency, *Bundesnachrichtendienst*, Gerhard Schindler and August Hanning, stated the warning failure was due to risk aversion, bureaucracy and excessive oversight.[35] Schindler and Hanning warned Berlin politicians through a joint-op ed for 'running down the country's intelligence capacity through a mixture of bureaucracy and underfunding.'[36] They referred to the BND as lacking funds and human intelligence sources, making it severely difficult for officials to make decisions based on good intelligence. Being the only service that operates abroad, these former heads considered the BND to be a 'toothless watch dog.

Overall, Germany largely underestimated Putin's aggression and its plans to invade Ukraine. The invasion, however, triggered Germany to make significant changes in their security and foreign policies and ended the unrestricted dialogue and co-operation between Germany and Russia.[37]

3.3 United States

Unlike the French and German intelligence services, the US intelligence community provided adequate strategic warning about Russia's invasion. Many observers consider the US intelligence community's assessments as a great intelligence success, breaking the negative track-record that after 9/11 has been central to the U.S. intelligence community.

In the spring of 2021, Jon Finer, deputy national security adviser, NSC, White House, stated: 'we started to see a concerning build-up of Russian forces on the border with Ukraine, given the history of 2014 and the conflict that has been going on ever since, it raised concerns about their intention.'[38] While the pacing threat at that moment was China, the National Defense Strategy pointed to Russia as the acute threat. A couple of months later as the buildup continued, some signs were given that it was not just force buildup for diplomatic effect. Avril Haines, director of National Intelligence, even stated 'Putin is clearly considering military action on some level.'[39]

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[34] Blumenau and Muttreja, "How Russia's invasion changed German foreign policy."

[35] Pitel, "Robert Habeck adds to criticism of German intelligence blunders. Foreign service failed to foresee Russia's invasion of Ukraine, deputy chancellor says."

[36] O'Reilly, "Ex-intel chiefs: German Foreign Intelligence Agency on the verge of collapse."

[37] McGuinness, "Ukraine war: Germany's conundrum over its ties with Russia."

[38] Banco, Graff, Seligman, Toosi, and Ward. "Something was badly wrong: When Washington realized Russia was actually invading Ukraine."

[39] Banco, et al., "Something was badly wrong: When Washington realized Russia was actually invading Ukraine."

The Geneva Summit in June 2021, at which both Putin and Biden were present, provided an opportunity to discuss the tensions between Russia and Ukraine. This seemed to have some positive effects as the Russians withdrew some forces directly after the summit. This was, however, for a short time only. In October 2021, briefings were given in the White House that flagged Russian troop movements and a build-up of military troops.[40] These briefings indicated that Russia had deployed 70,000 troops with the potential capability of deploying up to 175,000 troops. Despite the build-up, US officials believed that the deployments were designed to 'obfuscate intentions and create uncertainty.'[41]

General Mark Milley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, stated: 'As there was planned a Russian exercise called Zapad, they started marshaling the troops for the exercise in the September time frame. Right about then we realized this is odd; it was much bigger in scale and scope than the previous year's exercise.'[42] The Central Intelligence Agency's director Bill Burns agreed with these unmarkable signs of a Russian build-up along Ukrainian borders. Also, Antony Blinken, the Secretary of State remarked: 'through the information that we got, we had an understanding of what the Russian leadership was actually thinking and planning for those forces.'[43] Other officials within the National Security Council, still believed the Geneva Summit made Putin come to his senses.

Another important moment was the G-20 Meeting in the autumn of 2021. Although Russia participated, Putin did not show up but sent foreign minister Sergey Lavrov instead. Biden talked directly to the French, German and UK prime ministers and shared the information the US had gathered on Russia's plans.[44]

In the months leading to the February 24th invasion, US intelligence services as well as policy makers started to intensify their intelligence disclosures. There were several different reasons to do so. Dylan and Maguire[45] convincingly argue that these disclosures were aimed at influencing external audiences. They should, amongst others, deter Russia, prevent false flag operations and convince other countries, most notably France and Germany. At first, many remained in disbelief. As Avril Haines, Director of National Intelligence, explained: 'It was hard to believe at first, honestly. Most people said, "Really? A large-scale military option? That seems unlikely!"' Although the US intelligence services remained unclear about when and how an invasion would take place, gradually many officials within US

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[40] Abdalla, et al., "Intelligence and the war in Ukraine, part I."

[41] Idem.

[42] Banco, et al., "Something was badly wrong: When Washington realized Russia was actually invading Ukraine."

[43] Idem.

[44] Idem.

[45] Dylan and Maguire, "Secret intelligence and public diplomacy in the Ukraine War," 33-74.

policy and intelligence circles became convinced an invasion was going to happen. The UK, being the main European partner of the US, soon followed. As Karen Piece, the British Ambassador to the United States, stated: 'It did not take too long for the whole UK system to think this would be an invasion.'[46] Other countries, most notably France and Germany, were still not convinced. The occupation of Iraq and the long war in Afghanistan very much undermined its credibility to do so. Liz Truss, former UK Prime Minister, stressed: 'We were sitting on very serious, good intelligence, but – for whatever reason- that wasn't necessarily the shared view of what was going to happen. Our allies had a different view...I think none of us wanted to believe.'[47]

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the surprise surrounding Russia's invasion had varying degrees of impact. In the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the international community found itself grappling with the shock of the event many had failed to predict. Hence, this chapter delved into the complexities of surprise, examining the varying responses of Germany, France and the United States. Each country's unique approach to intelligence gathering, decision-making and assessing Russia's intentions resulted in different degrees of surprise. In conjunction with the theoretical framework of Ikani et al., this chapter serves as a cautionary tale, emphasising the need for constant vigilance and adaptability in the ever-evolving landscape of global security.

Tables 3.3 and 3.4 summarise the main findings of this chapter.

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[46] Government U.K., "Karen Pierce DCMG."

[47] Banco, et al., "Something was badly wrong: When Washington realized Russia was actually invading Ukraine."

Degree *Dimensions*	*Perfect Surprise*	*Significant Surprise*	*Partial Surprise*
Dissonance	*Germany and France*: • Intelligence services considered Russian troops along the Ukrainian border to be part of an exercise. • Great gap between the event (invasion) and the previous beliefs (economic and diplomatic integration in Europe). • The head of the BND was evacuated from Ukraine at the start of the invasion.		*United States:* • The threat of an invasion was identified, but it was unknown how it would play out.
Scope		*France and Germany:* • Multiple warnings were given, both failed to listen and stayed in unbelief.	*United States:* • The U.S. intelligence community accurately predicted the invasion was going to take place. They remained unclear, however, about when and how an invasion would take place.
Spread	*France and Germany:* • Both intelligence services and policymakers were surprised.		*United States:* • Neither decision-makers nor the intelligence community were surprised

Table 3.3: Degrees of surprise

	Accuracy	Timeliness	Convincingness
France	• Invasion and conquest deemed unlikely. • Lack of coordination within the intelligence services impacted quality. • Expertise on areas such as the Sahel region, making the DRM less equipped to judge other areas.	• Lack of coordination within the intelligence services impacted speed. • Lack of resources within DRM.	• Both the intelligence services and the policymakers did not want to believe Putin was planning to invade. • Inadequate briefings and lack of expertise.
Germany	• Germany's intelligence service failed to foresee the invasion and rather believed it was just an exercise. • German services incorrectly believed they understood Russia.		• While assessment was wrong, it seemed convincing as it was in line with decision-makers' perceptions.
U.S.	• The buildup of Russian troops and military equipment was spotted early, but it remained unclear when and where the invasion would happen.	• Failed to grasp combat capabilities of Russian forces but warning was timely.	• Due to its earlier intelligence failures the U.S had troubles convincing others, but at least succeeded domestically as well as in the case of some allies, most notably the UK.

Table 3.4: Performance indicators for the intelligence-policy nexus

	Due attention & prioritization	Openness to inconvenient knowledge claims	Deference to superior expertise
France	• The focus of the DRM on places where French troops are active is unlikely to be made without political imperative.	• US and UK intelligence dissemination, presenting an entirely different threat assessment, were not believed.	Not applicable as both producers and decision-makers shared the same threat perception.
Germany	• Emphasis on dialogue and co-operation with Moscow (checkbook diplomacy). • Focus was more on risk aversion, bureaucracy and excessive oversight than threats. • Germany underspent its military and intelligence services.	• Moscow-centric bias. • Berlin failed to listen to eastern European allies who did warn of threats from Moscow.	• It took a war in Ukraine for Germany to accept the real threat coming from Putin.
U.S.	• Ever since 2014 Crimea Russia had the attention of both intelligence as well as policy makers.	• Agenda competition: Afghanistan.	• Not applicable as both producers and decisionmakers shared the same threat perception.

Conclusively, the French and German miscalculations seemed a product of skepticism and misjudgment. They were unable to grasp Putin's true intentions and simultaneously thought to hold a special relationship with Moscow. Both countries experienced significant challenges and faced several shortcomings in accurately warning of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. In line with their German counterparts, who long resorted to their idea of 'checkbook diplomacy' and *Handel durch Wandel*, French decision-makers contemplated that political and economic successes possibly could lead to a democratic path for Russia.

The United States, to the contrary, warned multiple times and widely shared intelligence in the months leading to the February 24th invasion. Ever since 2014 Crimea, both US intelligence agencies as well as decision-makers have focused on Russia. The US intelligence community was largely successful in providing strategic warning about Russia's invasion of Ukraine, but still suffered from a tactical surprise. Moreover, previous intelligence failures impacted the convincingness of their claims.

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CHAPTER 4

Open-Source Intelligence
in the Russia-Ukraine War

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Abstract

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, a steady flow of information has allowed audiences to watch the Russia-Ukraine war unfold in real-time. In contrast to earlier conflicts, the role of amateur analysts as well as open-source organisations stands out. On a large scale, they collect and process publicly available information and subsequently disseminate open-source intelligence analyses. This chapter explores the open-source community in the Russia-Ukraine war with a specific emphasis on these amateur analysts and open-source organisations. Based on numerous news articles, social media posts and reports on open-source intelligence in the Russia-Ukraine War, the chapter identifies four main functions of open-source intelligence, namely 1) debunking and refuting false narratives, 2) reshaping perceptions, 3) informing military troops, and 4) documenting potential war crimes and human rights violations. The main issues the open-source community in the Russia-Ukraine war face include 1) information verification being time-consuming and complicated, 2) ethical and legal problems and 3) the vulnerability of the community and its network infrastructure.

Keywords: Open-source intelligence, OSINT, social media, Bellingcat

1. Introduction

A steady flow of information allows audiences to watch the Russia-Ukraine war unfold in real-time. The information available is very diverse and consists of video feeds, photographs, reports and satellite imagery amongst others. However, in contrast to earlier conflicts, amateur and semi-professional intelligence analysts play a great role in disclosing this information. They produce intelligence analyses based solely on open-source information. One of these amateur intelligence analysts, Justin Peden, was a 20-year-old sophomore from the University of Alabama. He searched through satellite images, TikTok video and security feeds and shared his

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* This author uses a pseudonym.

findings on troop movements and aircraft models with more than 220,000 followers on Twitter.[2] In addition to individual researchers, several organisations such as the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) and Bellingcat concentrate on generating intelligence solely based on open sources. The ISW, for example, provides a daily update covering the key events of the conflict, including street level assessments and interactive mapping. As such, these individuals and organisations conduct the type of work that intelligence agencies do behind closed doors. And in many cases, these newcomers seem to outperform governmental intelligence agencies.[3]

There is a growing body of literature addressing open-source intelligence (OSINT), which is generally defined as the process of collecting, processing and analysing public information from open data sources to generate knowledge and produce actionable intelligence.[4] Recent publications address the history of OSINT,[5] the role of social media,[6] as well as ethical issues[7] amongst others. This chapter builds upon this literature and explores the open-source community in the Russia-Ukraine war. The chapter emphasises amateur analysts as well as open-source organisations such as ISW but largely excludes intelligence agencies and their use of open sources.

To meet this objective, this study adopts a case study approach. The data included in this study contains numerous news articles, social media posts and reports on open-source intelligence in the Russia-Ukraine War. These data have been collected through keyword searches via university libraries and digital libraries, such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate and JSTOR, as well as a plethora of news and social media websites. Keywords included combinations of e.g. 'open-source information,' 'public data,' 'Russia,' 'Ukraine,' 'OSINT' and 'satellite imagery.' Content analysis was conducted to identify patterns in the data. To this effect words, themes and concepts within the texts were categorised and subsequently analysed.

This paper is structured as follows. Section 2 presents the main function of open-source intelligence. Section 3 subsequently addresses the main issues the individuals and organisations of the open-source community face. Section 4 discusses the results and concludes the chapter.

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2   Schwartz, "Amateur open- Source researchers went viral unpacking the war in Ukraine."
3   Rietjens, "The future of NLDISS," 12-23.
4   European Commission, *Open-Source Intelligence*.
5   Block, "The long history of OSINT."
6   Dover, "SOCMINT: a shifting balance of opportunity," 216-232.
7   Bean, "Is open source intelligence an ethical issue?" 385–402.

2. Functions of open-source intelligence

Early 2023, the Economist published the article 'Open-source intelligence is piercing the fog of war in Ukraine.'[8] This is generally seen as the main function of OSINT: to provide insight in a complex and cluttered environment. The story of open-source intelligence in the Russia-Ukraine war, however, begins long before Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24th, 2022. As early as April 2021, digital evidence, such as social media posts by Belarusian, Russian, and Ukrainian civilians as well as commercial satellite imagery showed the mobilisation of Russian troops along the Russia-Ukraine border[9] This prompted graduate student Steven De La Fuente to scour commercial satellite imagery.[10] His search led to the main road from Belgorod, Russia, to Ukraine's Kharkiv, where he saw the build-up of armored personnel carriers, mobile missile launchers, and other military vehicles. The videos were not the only direct indication of an invasion. Hours before Putin announced the start of 'special military operations,' analysts at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies saw a 'traffic jam' appear at 3:15 a.m., at the same spot where De La Fuente had seen the build-up.

Since the invasion in February 2022, the open-source community has been shedding light on the Russia-Ukraine conflict and offering it in real-time.[11] The information used comes from a variety of sources, including mapping data, metadata, smartphone footage posted on social media, as well as high-resolution overhead images captured by commercial satellite companies.[12] Unlike during most previous major conflicts, nearly everyone, military or civilian, carries a phone with a camera and can upload footage in a matter of seconds.[13] The Ukrainian population, in particular, has grown to become 'a gigantic, distributed, open-source sensor network,' providing details on Russian troops via social media.[14]

As a result of this, using open sources has enabled analysts to gain insight into on-the-ground events; document materiel losses, targets, and casualties; track military infrastructure; and determine the impact of an attack[15] OSINT analysts on Twitter, for example, have kept tallies of verified major equipment losses on both

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[8] The Economist, "Open-source intelligence is piercing the fog of war in Ukraine."

[9] Burgess, "If Russia invades Ukraine, TikTok will see it up close"; For instance in*:* Visontay et al.; Woodruff, Swan, and McLeary.

[10] Aldhous and Miller, "How open-source intelligence is helping clear the fog of war in Ukraine."

[11] For instance in: Lippert, "Open-source methods, the cyber weapon anyone can use in Ukraine War."

[12] Aldhous and Miller, "How Open-source intelligence is helping clear the fog of war in Ukraine."

[13] Puiu, "How open-source intelligence (OSINT) is exposing the Ukraine war in real-time."

[14] Abdalla, Davies, Gustafson, Lomas, and Wagner, "Intelligence and the war in Ukraine: Part 1."

[15] Datta, "OSINT comes of age for near real time coverage of Ukraine conflict"; Moran, "Open-source intelligence: how digital sleuths are making their mark on the Ukraine war."

sides, and social media footage has indicated structural problems with the quality of parts and maintenance of Russian equipment.[16] In addition, automated air-traffic data and similar online tools have allowed journalists and analysts to track yachts of Russian oligarchs against whom international sanctions have been imposed.[17]

An excellent example of the coordinated use of open-source intelligence is *Eyes on Russia.* Within this project, leading open-source organisations, as well as amateurs, have been collaborating to provide a live picture of the ongoing conflict. The project's database contains thousands of entries that can be used to create a timeline which can be filtered on multiple categories, including military presence, bombings, civilian casualties, and military losses.[18] The above made an open analyst conclude: 'there will always be a fog of war, but I think it is the thinnest veil of war we've ever had.'[19] When we unravel the general notion of piercing the fog of war, we identify four functions of OSINT: debunking false narratives, reshaping perceptions, informing military troops and documenting potential war crimes and human rights violations. These are now elaborated on.

2.1 Debunking false narratives

The first function is debunking and refuting false narratives. Propaganda and erroneous narratives have been trusted strategies to win hearts and minds, and the Russia-Ukraine war is no exception. Both Russia and Ukraine engage in a rhetorical conflict in an attempt to sway international sentiment.[20] OSINT serves as a crucial line of defense in favour of the truth, by determining what did and what did not really happen.[21] To this effect, OSINT researchers, (mainly) Western governments and long-established news organisations have played a key role. Several traditional media outlets have started developing their in-house OSINT capabilities, establishing teams tasked with incorporating open sources and OSINT techniques into their investigative journalism activities.[22] Examples include the New York Times Visual Investigations team, France 24 Observers, and the NOS OSINT team in The Netherlands.

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[16] Puiu, "How open-source intelligence (OSINT) is exposing the Ukraine war in real-time"; Janovský, "How open-source data got the Russia-Ukraine War right."

[17] Duncan, Blood, McIntyre, and Davies, "Jets linked to Russian oligarchs appear to have kept flying despite sanctions."

[18] Strick, *Eyes on Russia – Mapping Russia's War on Ukraine #* [Video]. YouTube.

[19] Puiu, "How open-source intelligence (OSINT) is exposing the Ukraine war in real-time";

[20] O'Brien, "Open source intelligence may be changing old-school war"; GlobalData, "The role of OSINT in the war in Ukraine."

[21] Freear, "OSINT in an age of disinformation warfare."

[22] Moran, "Open-source intelligence: how digital sleuths are making their mark on the Ukraine war."

Perhaps the most notorious example of the use of OSINT to counter an inaccurate narrative comes from the town of Bucha, where photographs show widespread wreckage and corpses in civilian clothing strewn across streets.[23] Russia denounced the images as 'another hoax' and in an effort to influence the narrative, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov asserted that Ukrainians had staged the scene after Russian forces withdrew.[24] Using commercial satellite photos and video footage to cross-reference, the Visual Investigations team of The New York Times debunked these claims. The images showed that the bodies had been laying on the ground for weeks before Russian forces had retreated and Ukrainian forces arrived.[25]

Although most cases concern pro-Russian dis- and misinformation, there have also been several examples of debunked pro-Ukrainian claims. A famous example is the 'Ghost of Kyiv,' a story which emerged within the first days of Russia's attack. Several Ukrainian news sites and official Ukrainian government Twitter accounts spread the news that a Ukrainian jet pilot had taken down six enemy aircrafts in the first 30 hours of Russia's invasion.[26] Soon after photos and a video allegedly portraying the pilot had started circulating, OSINT analysts proved these were fake and that the clip was created with a video game.[27]Although the Ukrainian Ministry of Defence first promoted the tale, its Air Force later admitted that it was a myth, 'created by Ukrainians.'

2.2 Reshaping perceptions

The second function of OSINT in the Russia-Ukraine war is to reshape perceptions amongst the general public as well as amongst the troops. The Centre for Emerging Technology and Security (2022) underlines the importance of public perceptions: 'Wars are won by human actions and human decisions. Some decisions are taken on the battlefield–to stand and fight, or to flee. But many crucial decisions are taken elsewhere: by foreign political leaders, who must decide how far to go in defence of their values and interests in supporting either side. In democracies, politicians cannot go further than the public will support, so individual citizens' beliefs count, too.'

OSINT has a prominent role in this conflict and some even argued it represents an entirely new chapter of the political and diplomatic use of intelligence

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[23] Higgins, "Russia's Bucha 'facts' versus the evidence."

[24] Salerno-Garthwaite, "OSINT in Ukraine: civilians in the kill chain and information space."

[25] Browne, Botti, and Willis, "Satellite images show bodies lay in Bucha for weeks, despite Russian claims."

[26] Romansky, Boswinkel, and Rademaker, *The Parallel Front: An Analysis of the Military Use of Information in the First Seven Months of the War in Ukraine.*

[27] Eisele, "Fact check: The "Ghost of Kyiv" fighter pilot."

in international affairs.[28] There are two main reasons for this. First, by exposing the horrors of the war (such as the bloodshed in Bucha and the Russian use of unguided munitions against civilian targets) and refuting official Russian government narratives, OSINT revelations have swung the international opinion in favour of Ukraine.[29] The discoveries of potential human rights violations and war crimes have proven politically damning for the Russian government as they have horrified Western society as a whole and have become part of the wider public discourse, thereby reaching diplomats and foreign policy decision-makers at the state level.[30] This has put tremendous political pressure on Western governments to sanction Russia and arm Ukraine.[31] As a result, an increasing number of countries have provided Ukraine with (military) support.[32]

2.3 Informing military troops

The third function of OSINT is to inform military troops. There are few reports addressing the use of OSINT for military purposes by (pro-)Ukrainian troops, and even fewer about (pro-) Russian troops. Juliette Kayyem, former Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, argues that this is 'a war where the crowd is essentially helping to make tactical decisions. People are making decisions about where they want to attack, [and are establishing] where the Russian tanks are, or what we are seeing in the skies, based on the [man or woman] on the street with an iPhone.'[33]

As such, social media platforms and mobile phones are a force multiplier.[34] This is especially true when it comes to coordinating OSINT collection for targeting activities, as civilians share coordinates with their smartphones. Identifying the location of military targets has traditionally been a task that military personnel execute, but now it is also entrusted to civilian information infrastructures. In an effort to crowdsource intelligence, the Ukrainian government asked citizens to help

[28] Abdalla, Davies, Gustafson, Lomas, and Wagner, "Intelligence and the war in Ukraine: Part 1."

[29] GlobalData, "The role of OSINT in the war in Ukraine"; Smith-Boyle, "How OSINT has shaped the war in Ukraine."

[30] Lahmann, "Ukraine, open-source investigations, and the future of international legal discourse," 810–820.

[31] GlobalData, "The role of OSINT in the war in Ukraine"; Smith-Boyle, "How OSINT has shaped the war in Ukraine"; Hockenhull, *How open-source intelligence has shaped the Russia-Ukraine war*.

[32] Smith-Boyle, "How OSINT has shaped the war in Ukraine."

[33] O'Brien, "Open source intelligence may be changing old-school war."

[34] O'Brien and Toubman, "Open source intelligence combats disinformation on Russia's war against Ukraine."

them locate Russian troops.[35] Standardised chatbots in the government's public services app, Diia, allow them to report Russian units and locations and geotag pictures and videos of Russian troop movements.[36] In this respect, the Ukrainian Security Service tweeted: 'Your messages about the movement of the enemy through the official chatbot [...] bring new trophies every day.'

Another example of the use of social media information for military purposes is the images taken on August 8th, 2022 by a pro-Russian journalist, who shared them on the messaging app Telegram.[37] The photos supposedly show the local headquarters of the Russian Wagner paramilitary group. The nameplate on the building was apparent in the images, effectively revealing the group's location as it indicated the address.[38] Ukrainian forces reduced the headquarters to ruins a few days after the photographs were published online.[39]

Likewise, a pro-Russian OSINT organisation allegedly utilised video footage from a Ukrainian news channel to locate and launch a missile at a munitions factory in Kyiv, killing three civilians.[40] Although these examples seem indicative of the use of OSINT for targeted killing, it is most probable that OSINT was combined with various other sources to provide the intelligence required for armed forces to target enemy forces.[41]

2.4 Documenting potential war crimes and human rights violations

Since the early days of the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, openly available content has become a tool for online investigators and NGOs to search for evidence of war crimes and human rights violations.[42] Cases include the systematic and pervasive bombing of Ukrainian medical institutions, the bloodshed in Bucha, and a cluster munition strike on a kindergarten outside of Kharkiv, which resulted in the deaths of three civilians.[43] To prosecute potential war crimes or human rights violations, OSINT may serve as lead evidence. It can provide concrete proof of violations,

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[35] Abdalla, Davies, Gustafson, Lomas, and Wagner, "Intelligence and the war in Ukraine: Part 2."

[36] O'Brien and Toubman, "Open source intelligence combats disinformation on Russia's war against Ukraine."

[37] Burgess, "Their photos were posted online. then they were bombed."

[38] Salerno-Garthwaite, "OSINT in Ukraine: civilians in the kill chain and information space."

[39] Burgess, "their photos were posted online. then they were bombed."

[40] Idem.

[41] Salerno-Garthwaite, "OSINT in Ukraine: civilians in the kill chain and information space."

[42] Lippert, "Open-source methods, the cyber weapon anyone can use In Ukraine War."

[43] E.g.: Sabbagh, "Researchers gather evidence of possible Russian war crimes in Ukraine"; Oxendine, "Open-source data documents war atrocities in Ukraine"; Higgins, "Russia's Bucha 'facts' versus the evidence."

and can be used in addition to field investigation and testimonies collected on site.[44] Gabriela Ivens, the Head of Open Source Research at Human Rights Watch, states: 'We look for nearby military targets which could have been a legitimate target, or evidence that the attack was disproportionate. We look for the type of weapons used, the chain of command, the affected buildings and the human toll.'[45]

Normally, evidence used in war crime cases consists of witness testimonies and forensic evidence, yet these can be difficult to collect. As the types of accessible open sources and the number of OSINT tools are expanding, it seems highly likely that open-source investigation methods and evidence may fill in crucial gaps.[46] Although trials have yet to take place, prosecutors of the International Criminal Court appear willing to use OSINT as evidence of atrocities committed in Ukraine.[47]

However, for evidence to be admissible in court, verified open-source information needs to be gathered, documented, and made accessible to accountability.[48] In response, the OSINT community has been documenting and studying evidence that could be useful in the future. Initiatives such as *Eyes on Russia*, for instance, not only map, document and verify significant incidents for the purpose of conveying to the public the events of the conflict, they also document these actions to hold potential human rights violators accountable. Likewise, the U.S. Department of State has announced the establishment of the Conflict Observatory, a hub site that employs open sources to create reports for upcoming civil and criminal legal processes and assist victims in seeking compensation and restitution.[49] Unsurprisingly, collecting evidence from online sources to meet the standards of a criminal court necessitates painstaking work.[50] As a reported MIT Technology Review states: 'It's not enough to just see a video of an attack or a photo of dead bodies.'[51]

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[44] Lippert, "Open-source methods, the cyber weapon anyone can use In Ukraine War."

[45] Lippert, "Open-source methods, the cyber weapon anyone can use in Ukraine War.'

[46] Idem. Simonite, "The race to archive social posts that may prove Russian war crimes."

[47] International Criminal Court, *Ukraine.*

[48] Freear, "OSINT in an age of disinformation warfare"; Bacchi and Reuters, "Ukraine invasion played out online as web sleuths trawl intelligence."

[49] Vick, "Bellingcat's Eliot Higgins explains why Ukraine is winning the information war."

[50] Simonite, "The race to archive social posts that may prove Russian war crimes."

[51] Basu, "The online volunteers hunting for war crimes in Ukraine."

3. Issues related to open-source intelligence

In addition to the different functions of OSINT, the findings of this study show that the OSINT community faces many issues in the Russia-Ukraine war. These issues include the verification of information, ethical and legal issues and the vulnerability of the network. Each of these issues is elaborated on in this section.

3.1 Verification is time-consuming and complicated

Historically, the main issue of OSINT has been the vast amount of information which needs verification.[52] This is also prevalent in the Russia-Ukraine war. The verification of information is complicated due to a variety of factors and no longer solely due to information overload. More than any prior conflict, the Russia-Ukraine war has been plagued by mis- and disinformation, and it is no longer a question *if*, but *which* social media posts contain fabricated stories and erroneous narratives. TikTok, especially, has become a platform for fake videos and livestreams about the conflict, combining dramatic footage of military videogames, computer-generated imagery and videos of old conflicts. Coincidentally, according to research funded by the United Kingdom, the Russian government has been employing a so-called 'troll factory' to disseminate false information on social media and in online comment sections, with the intention of manipulating international public opinion on Russia's actions in Ukraine.[53] As a result, the amount of open-source information which necessitates fact-checking and verification has increased.

Information verification is further complicated by images and videos spread by pro-Russian social media and fake fact-checking channels.[54] These posts claim to refute 'fakes' made by the Ukrainians that depict damaged Russian military units or Russian air strikes destroying civilian infrastructure. Except, the posts 'debunk' non-existent, fake posts and videos.[55] Researchers at Clemson University's Media Forensic Hub and ProPublica have identified over twenty such posts, but it is likely that many more exist, and although the videos have over a million views, it is not clear who has created them. According to ProPublica: 'The videos combine with propaganda on Russian state TV to convince Russians that the "special

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[52] Hatfield, "There is no such thing as open source intelligence."

[53] Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, Truss and Dorries, *UK Exposes Sick Russian Troll Factory Plaguing Social Media with Kremlin Propaganda.*

[54] Idem.

[55] Centre for Emerging Technology and Security, *The Information Battlefield: Disinformation, Declassification and Deepfakes: CETaS Expert Analysis.*

operation" in Ukraine is proceeding well, and that claims of setbacks or air strikes on civilian areas are a Ukrainian disinformation campaign to undermine Russian confidence.'[56]

Social media companies are urged to moderate the content users post on their platforms and they could, in theory, lessen the burden that information overload has placed on the OSINT community.[57] In practice, however, some social media platforms seem either unable to moderate content, or are simply unwilling to do so. Several platforms have been labelling false or misleading viral videos about the conflict, but the amount of information posted seems to be too much for content moderators employed by social media platforms to handle.[58] In addition, researchers have expressed dissatisfaction with the way TikTok is handling this problem, as the platform does not provide transparency or analytic tools to academics, researchers and journalists, which misinformation experts have long since requested. As one researcher notes: 'When TikTok fails to ensure the accuracy of information receiving millions of views on its platform, that burden is falling on outside researchers and everyday TikTok users.'[59]

Instead of trusting TikTok and other companies to verify the content posted to their platforms, independent fact-checkers have been manually researching that content themselves – an incredibly time-consuming process.[60] The process of confirming sources and information is necessary in order to counteract the majority of risks associated with reflexive control: the control someone has over their opponent's decisions by imposing presumptions that influence how they act. Like other intelligence collection disciplines such as human intelligence, OSINT runs the risk of being used as so-called 'chickenfeed.' This necessitates rigorous validation. Varzhanskyi[61] furthermore criticises the use of OSINT and states it is often the result of a 'serendipitous discovery' and at times analysts mistake the quantity of evidence to support a claim for the quality of that claim.

[56] Silverman and Kao, "In the Ukraine conflict, fake fact-checks are being used to spread disinformation."

[57] Oremus, "Social media wasn't ready for this war. It needs a plan for the next one."

[58] NOS, "Meta verwijdert Russische desinformatie over Oekraïne, gericht op Europa"; Bacchi and Reuters, "Ukraine invasion played out online as web sleuths trawl intelligence."

[59] Sardarizadeh, "Ukraine war: False TikTok videos draw millions of views."

[60] Varzhanskyi, "Reflexive control as a risk factor for using OSINT: Insights from the Russia–Ukraine conflict,"1–31.

[61] Idem.

3.2 Ethical and legal issues

Professional open-source initiatives and collectives have ethical and legal stand-ards they hold themselves to.[62] Twitter group chats, for example, have developed informal behavioural rules when sharing and verifying information.[63] These rules include a ban on sharing graphic videos of dead bodies and keeping Ukrainian troop movements under wraps. When members of these collectives unintention-ally release inaccurate or misleading information, they are supposed to remove their tweets and 'issue corrections.' The informal atmosphere and communication between analysts help them avoid making mistakes. While these informal ethical guidelines and verification techniques have been honed over the last decade, the ethical and legal issues of open-source intelligence within the Russia-Ukraine conflict have, however, all but been resolved.

The OSINT community consists of 'all types of people.'[64] Numerous anony-mous internet users have earned recognition as a result of the reliability of their open-source investigations. However, as more individuals become interested in the hobby of sharing and dissecting information online – a hobby which has no professionally enforced norms or ethical codes of conduct – there is concern that their activities may endanger lives or unintentionally contribute to sharing false narratives.[65] When social media accounts with many followers post information, this information spreads rapidly, regardless of whether or not it is correct.[66]

OSINT has also generated criticism since its community serves as investigator, judge, juror, and executioner in 'the court of public opinion.'[67] Freear[68] argues that some open-source organisations receive government funding, but act more as activists than as journalists. In a similar line, Lahmann[69] argues that the biases and prejudices of individuals or open-source organisations may wittingly be incor-porated. Furthermore, they might, wittingly or unwittingly, publish information that originates from a malicious source or disclose classified or otherwise secured

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[62] Schwartz, "As grisly images spread from Ukraine, open-source researchers ask what's too gory to share."

[63] Perrigo, "How open source intelligence became the world's window into the Ukraine invasion."

[64] Lippert, "Open-source methods, the cyber weapon anyone can use in Ukraine war."

[65] Verma, "The rise of the Twitter spies."

[66] The Week, "What is open-source intelligence – and how is it helping to map the Ukraine war?"

[67] Freear, "OSINT in an age of disinformation warfare."

[68] Idem.

[69] Lahmann, "Ukraine, open-source investigations, and the future of international legal discourse, 810–820.

information. Lahmann[70] therefore concludes that 'we should not naively take civil society actors engaging in open-source investigations as neutral arbiters of truth by default.'

The international community of volunteers InformNapalm illustrates this dilemma well.[71] The goal of this community is to 'debunk myths and expose secrets of the Russian hybrid war' and it has been described as a 'Ukrainian activist website'[72] as well as a 'volunteer activist group.'[73] On several occasions InformNapalm published correspondence of Russian state officials[74] and personal information about Russian military officers,[75] that hackers had provided them. Although this information might have great value, few would consider InformNapalm to be a 'neutral arbiter of truth.'

Finally, the use of facial recognition raises a whole slew of ethical concerns.[76] Firstly, mismatches could make it harder for civilians to stay hidden in battle zones or could even lead to civilian deaths.[77] Second, the use of facial recognition is prone to questions about privacy, racism and other technological and cognitive biases. In fact, Clearview AI, the company whose services both Ukraine and the United States use, is facing lawsuits in the U.S., accusing it of violating privacy rights by taking people's images from the Internet without their consent.[78] Even those who do not have social media accounts and only appear in the background of a photo uploaded to the Internet, may appear in databases used by facial recognition software.[79] Third, the use of such software to identify dead soldiers and civilians may appear to be the least harmful way to use the technology in conflict, but oversight experts are worried that 'once you introduce these systems and the associated databases [...], you have no control over how it will be used and misused.'[80]

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[70] Idem.

[71] According to its website, InformNapalm does not receive any governmental funding.

[72] The Guardian, "Ukrainian bloggers use social media to track Russian soldiers fighting in east."

[73] BBC, "Ukraine conflict: Hackers take sides in virtual war."

[74] For instance at Inform Napalm, "Hacking Andrey Lugovoy, member of the Russian State Duma, First Deputy Head of the Security Committee."

[75] For instance at Inform Napalm, "Hacking Lieutenant Colonel Kasatkin, Russian war criminal, head of Combat Training of A-50 early warning aircraft, military unit 41520."

[76] Dave and Dastin, "Exclusive: Ukraine has started using Clearview AI's facial recognition during war."

[77] Hill, "Facial recognition goes to war."

[78] Dave and Dastin, "Exclusive: Ukraine has started using Clearview AI's facial recognition during war."

[79] Hill, "Facial recognition goes to war."

[80] Dave and Dastin, "Exclusive: Ukraine has started using Clearview AI's facial recognition during war."

3.3 Vulnerability of the network

In 2012, Omand et al.[81] wrote that passive bystanders can now 'become active citizen journalists, providing and relaying information from the ground.' They regarded this as a positive development, as it could improve communication between the government and its citizens. The Russia-Ukraine war, however, has made it clear that 'letting civilians partake' in collecting information to create intelligence does not only have upsides. We highlight two underlying issues: the vulnerability of the network and the blurring between civilians and combatants.

First, although the OSINT community's use of online networks has made it reasonably resilient to physical targeting,[82] online networks are not immune to inference or attacks. In February 2022, for example, Ukrainian government websites and online services like the government app Diia faced cyberattacks, such as DDoS attacks.[83] Similarly, several researchers who posted footage of the war on social media found their Twitter accounts being suspended.[84] Some of them received a message saying their activity on the platform violated the Twitter rules, yet the exact violation was not specified. Although a Twitter spokesperson later announced that these suspensions were an error and not part of a coordinated campaign intended to disable OSINT accounts, the OSINT community became painfully aware of how easily their voices can be silenced.[85]

When Ukrainian data servers and cell towers were under attack from physical missiles, the Ukrainian government sought solutions to protect its internet infrastructure.[86] This led them to Elon Musk's company Starlink, which connects mobile internet terminals to a satellite and establishes a dispersed communications network. Although Starlink's network is less susceptible to being jammed or otherwise interfered with, its satellites could become targets of cyberattacks, physical attacks and spoofing, which is the term for when a radio is used to fake a GPS signal.[87] This could have grave consequences for the OSINT community. Although such a scenario has yet to occur, Russia has openly demonstrated its ability to destroy satellites, and Konstantin Voronstov, Russia's senior foreign ministry official, told the United Nations that 'quasi-civilian infrastructure may be a legitimate target for

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[81] Omand, Bartlett, and Miller, "Introducing Social Media Intelligence (SOCMINT)," 801–823.

[82] Freear, "OSINT in an age of disinformation warfare."

[83] Tett, "Inside Ukraine's open-source war."

[84] Faife, "Twitter accounts sharing video from Ukraine are being suspended when they're needed most."

[85] Albon, "How commercial space systems are changing the conflict in Ukraine."

[86] Tett, "Inside Ukraine's open-source war."

[87] Meaker, "High above Ukraine, satellites get embroiled in the war."

a retaliatory strike.'[88] The matter of satellite security is further complicated by the fact that neither a procedure for reporting cyberspace attacks nor a procedure for cooperation on a joint response to such an attack have been established.[89]

As a second issue, observers have expressed their worry about the increasingly blurred lines between civilians and combatants.[90] Civilians are under protection of international humanitarian law, so long as they avoid participating in military conflicts.[91] When open-source analysts and citizens share intelligence online that critically informs or otherwise supports hostile military actions, would that cause them to lose their civilian status and potentially be tried for espionage under the law of war? If so, would they thereby become legitimate targets for retaliation and attacks? Such questions have started a debate amongst OSINT analysts on whether to publish videos taken by citizens from their homes, for example, given that these individuals might be identified and geolocated.[92]

4. Discussion and conclusion

The significance of information from open sources has long been acknowledged, but especially in the last few decades, this topic has garnered great attention.[93] 'With the coming of the information age in particular, the rise of the Internet and the digital domain for production and storage of information, the nature and volume of publicly available information has changed fundamentally,' Block remarks. However, while most research on OSINT in intelligence studies emphasises its use by intelligence agencies, this chapter highlights the role of individuals and open-source organisations to generate OSINT in the Russia-Ukraine war. The chapter argues that the increasing availability and accessibility of open-source information has largely democratised the field of intelligence. As a result, individuals and open-source organisations increasingly challenge traditional intelligence agencies as the main intelligence provider on war and conflict. By generating OSINT, these individuals and organisations contribute to debunking false narratives, reshape perceptions, inform military troops and document potential war crimes and human rights violations.

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[88] Idem.

[89] Albon, "How commercial space systems are changing the conflict in Ukraine."

[90] Aldhous and Miller, "How open-source intelligence is helping clear the fog of war in Ukraine."

[91] O'Brien, "Open source intelligence may be changing old-school war."

[92] Aldhous and Miller, "How open-source intelligence is helping clear the fog of war in Ukraine."

[93] Block, "The long history of OSINT."

In doing this, the open-source community and its network infrastructure display many vulnerabilities. The community lacks guidelines on how to verify information and protect itself from harm, whilst part of this community at the same time unjustly regards its analyses as comprehensive. Furthermore, the use of open sources is associated with many ethical and legal issues, including the use of standards and dealing with the biases and prejudices of the actors involved.

Finally, to better understand the role of OSINT in the Russia-Ukraine war, it is recommended that future studies address declassified sources, for instance on the military use of OSINT, and focus on the relationship between OSINT and other intelligence collection disciplines such as geographical intelligence and human intelligence.[94]

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[94] Hatfield, "There is no such thing as open source intelligence."

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CHAPTER 5

'The Wise Man Will Be Master of the Stars'. The Use of Twitter by a Military Intelligence Service in Wartime: The Case of the GUR

Peter Schrijver

Abstract

The impact of social media communication strategies on the public perception of (military) intelligence services is a factor that cannot be overlooked. An effective communication strategy can help to build trust, while an ineffective strategy can erode public confidence. This is relevant in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, where both sides use social media to promote their perspectives and counter each other's narratives. Mid-2021, Ukraine's military intelligence service, the Main Directorate of Intelligence, commonly known as the GUR, joined the social media platform Twitter with the message: 'Sapiens Dominabitur Astri' (the wise man will be master of the stars). This chapter explores the presence of the GUR on Twitter and concentrates on how this service exploits sensitive communications intelligence (COMINT) on its Twitter feed.

Keywords: Russia-Ukraine War, War and conflict, Digital influence operations, Communication strategy, Coercive intelligence disclosure, Narrative superiority

1. Introduction

On February 24th, 2022, Russia began a multi-pronged invasion of Ukraine aimed at seizing Kyiv and capturing or killing president Volodymyr Zelensky. Russia's goals are to overthrow and replace Ukraine's elected government, through territorial conquest and by subduing the entire country's populace to its political and informational influence.[1] Consequently, the information environment[2] has received significant attention from both Russia and Ukraine. Russia views controlling the information environment as a crucial step toward suppressing Ukraine, hence

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[1] Mankoff, *Russia's War in Ukraine: Identity, History, and Conflict*, 1.

[2] Information environment: an environment comprised of the information itself, the individuals, organisations and systems that receive, process and convey the information, and the cognitive, virtual and physical space in which this occurs; "AJP-10, Allied Joint Doctrine for Strategic Communications," 7.

Ukraine has made significant efforts to protect this environment, e.g., by prioritising the repair of telecommunications infrastructure and by executing multi-layered communications campaigns.[3]

Ukrainian activities in the information environment have been an integral part of its response to Russia's aggression. This effort can be tied to John R. Boyd's concept of moral conflict, which he explains in an article titled, 'Discourse on Winning and Losing.'[4] Boyd did not define moral in a strictly ethical sense of right and wrong, but characterised moral conflict as a style of warfare that sought to weaken an opponent's confidence and cohesion. If trust is the foundation of an adversary, then one should seek to dissolve that.[5] He emphasised the importance of non-physical factors in modern warfare, which is particularly relevant in the context of asymmetric warfare, where weaker forces are up against stronger opponents.[6] Granted, Ukraine's conventional forces have steadily acquired strength and capability due to Western weapon deliveries and training, and the commitment and grit of Ukraine's military. However, the country cannot match Russia's ability to mobilise additional manpower. Therefore, Ukraine must also rely on psychological operations and other irregular tactics to create confusion, demoralisation, and disorientation among its Russian invaders and gain outside support.

To gain deeper insight into the tactics of Ukraine in the information environment, this chapter analyses the social media strategy of the Main Directorate of Intelligence of the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense, commonly known as the GUR (a transliterated acronym of the original Cyrillic). This military intelligence service joined the social media platform Twitter[7] in 2021 with the message: '*Sapiens Dominabitur Astri*' (i.e. the wise man will be master of the stars).[8] A remarkable aspect of the GUR's social media presence is the service's disclosure of raw intelligence, including sensitive communications intelligence (COMINT), on its Twitter feed as a means for interaction with outside audiences.

The distribution of intelligence to the public can be perceived as a coercive tool, in which disclosures of intelligence are made in an effort to change strategic judgements, decisions, or behaviour.[9] Coercive intelligence disclosure is about

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[3] "06 Integration of the Ukrainian tech sector for civil defense By Jerry England, TRADOC G-2 – Red Diamond Newsletters – Operational Environment and Threat Analysis Directorate."

[4] Boyd, *A Discourse on Winning and Losing*.

[5] Brown, *A New Conception of War*, 114.

[6] Boyd, *A Discourse on Winning and Losing*, 138.

[7] In July 2023, the social media platform Twitter was renamed X.

[8] Defence intelligence of Ukraine [@DI_Ukraine], "Просто нагадуємо, що Sapiens dominabitur astris🦉 P.S. Ваше Головне управління розвідки ᴜᴀ." https://t.co/CmDaFFZB5Q.

[9] Riemer and Sobelman, "Coercive disclosure: The weaponization of public intelligence revelation in international relations," 3.

deliberate intelligence release, rather than unauthorised or unlawful intelligence leaks in order to accomplish a particular objective.[10] One of these objectives might be to support so-called narrative superiority, in which case the intelligence is disclosed in a way that strengthens the strategic communication themes or narratives a state or organisation wants to promote.[11]

This article focuses on the rationale behind GUR's communication strategy on Twitter: To what extent does this strategy align with the existing concept of coercive intelligence disclosure? On a broader theoretical level, the article provides insight into communication strategies of a military intelligence service during wartime, specifically regarding the tension between secrecy and openness: disclosure of intelligence is considered expensive because it generally requires giving up state secrets, and it provides adversaries insight about the depth of knowledge an agency has.[12] Initially, the focus is placed on the content disseminated through the GUR's Ukrainian-language Twitter feed (@DI_Ukraine), which, as of September 2023, has garnered a following of over 259,000. Particularly, the attention is drawn to the method of distributing sensitive COMINT-related material via the GUR's social media platform. After this analysis, an assessment follows to determine the congruence between the GUR's social media strategy and the principles of coercive intelligence disclosure.

2. Researching GUR's campaign on Twitter

About the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, analysts noted that the use of telecommunications infrastructure by the Ukrainian government, specifically through the successful incorporation of smartphones, social media, and messaging apps, provided the Ukrainians with a significant advantage in terms of information over the Russian invaders.[13] Nevertheless, minimal attention has been given to the role of Ukrainian intelligence services' use of social media.

2.1 Method

To gain insight into the recurring themes of the military intelligence service the GUR on Twitter, a qualitative content analysis was performed, using the

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[10] Riemer and Sobelman, 2.

[11] Dylan and Maguire, "Secret intelligence and public diplomacy in the Ukraine War," 2022, 47.

[12] Riemer and Sobelman, "Coercive disclosure: The weaponization of public intelligence revelation in international relations," 5.

[13] "06 Integration of the Ukrainian tech sector for civil defense By Jerry England, TRADOC G-2 – Red Diamond Newsletters – Operational Environment and Threat Analysis Directorate."

web-based tool www.vicinitas.io to collect real-time and historical tweets.[14] The dataset consists of all 2,000+ tweets that the GUR has published on Twitter since opening an account in June 2021 through mid-March 2023. From this database, 209 tweets containing the Ukrainian language hashtag #ГУРперехоплення (GUR-interception) were extracted for further analysis. These specific tweets contained audio files in which Russian military personnel communicated with colleagues or relatives. This allowed for coding recurring themes (see paragraph 3.3) in released COMINT-related material using reflexive thematic analysis (RTA), which combines the possibility of inductive and deductive approaches.[15] An inductive method entails deriving meaning and identifying patterns from the information without any predetermined ideas, meaning that there's no anticipation of which patterns will surface. Consequently, it permits the patterns to be dictated by the data itself. On the other hand, the deductive approach initiates analysis based on an anticipated set of themes already believed to exist within the data.

2.2 Tweeting before the Russian invasion of February 2022

In the content of the GUR's Twitter feed, two distinct periods can be discerned: the first stage is the communication strategy before the start of the Russian large-scale invasion, and the second stage starts immediately after the Russian attack commenced on 24th February, 2022. During the first period, the GUR disseminated tweets on a wide range of topics, such as Ukrainian commemoration days, excerpts of interviews that the GUR-director major-general Kyrylo Budanov gave to media, and accomplishments and remembrances of the GUR personnel. Some remarkable examples of the pre-invasion period include: in September 2021 the GUR proudly tweeted that it had brought more than 700 people to safety in Kabul during the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in support of the international evacuation mission.[16] Further, closer to home, the service regularly reported on incidents in the conflict zone where Ukrainian forces were deployed against Russian and separatist fighters of the breakaway Luhansk and Donetsk People's Republics (LPR, DPR). Repeatedly, the GUR messaged on poor living conditions in these republics, civilians who resisted compulsory military service and the corruption of Russian

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[14] "Vicinitas."

[15] Byrne, "A worked example of Braun and Clarke's approach to reflexive thematic analysis," 1396.

[16] Defence intelligence of Ukraine [@di_ukraine], "ᴜᴀexclusive footage from the DIU special forces evacuation mission in Kabul🇺🇦 Ukraine managed to achieve a staggering result and get more than 700 people out from Kabul, although we did not have our own peacekeeping contingent in Afghanistan!" Https://T.Co/JhFpoHXPz1.

officers.[17] Great pride was taken in the defence agreement with the United States in November 2021. Head of the GUR Budanov announced on Twitter that this agreement could also offer important opportunities to modernise Ukrainian intelligence services.[18]

Just two days before the Russian invasion in February 2022 the lighter tone on the GUR's Twitter account was gone. A message by Minister of Defence Oleksiy Reznikov and Commander-in-Chief of Ukraine's armed forces Valerii Zaluzhnyi was placed on the GUR-account in which they stated that 'the aggressor, due to the determination of the Ukrainian soldiers, will not be able to take any Ukrainian city.'[19] A few days later, possibly inspired by intelligence received from Western counterparts,[20] the GUR warned that the Russian Federation leadership considered organising a terrorist attack on civilians in the DPR and LPR, which would create a pretext for an attack, a so-called *casus belli*.[21] On the 24th February, 2022, the day of the invasion, only a message about the availability of public shelters for air raids was tweeted on the GUR account.[22]

2.3 Tweeting on the Russian invasion

At the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the GUR Twitter account remained silent for a few days. But on February 28th, 2022, the GUR tweeted a strong message in which its content producers expressed regret for the brief silence due to a focus

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[17] Defence intelligence of Ukraine [@DI_Ukraine], "‼️#ГУРінформує🛡. Командування ЗС РФ посилило пропаганду військової служби на ТОТ ДЛО. З початку жовтня збільшились: 👉обсяги реклами 👉випадки безпідставного затримання чоловіків з примушенням до проходження військового вишколу. 1/2 Детальніше." https://cutt.ly/WRhfDRF https://t.co/Ul8hDNuSry.

[18] Defence intelligence of Ukraine [@DI_Ukraine], "⚡️Виконання рамкової угоди зі США в оборонній сфері відкриває великі можливості для модернізації української розвідки – бригадний генерал Кирило Буданов Детальніше." https://cutt.ly/ERM4CKF https://t.co/ja6xZf1WMP.

[19] Defence intelligence of Ukraine [@DI_Ukraine], "‼️ «Хто хоч раз дивився в очі нашим воїнам, точно знає – агресору не взяти ані Київ, ані Одесу, ані Харків, ані будь яке інше місто» – спільна заява Міністра оборони України Олексія Резнікова та Головнокомандувача ЗСУ Валерія Залужного Читати повністю 👉." https://mil.gov.ua/news/2022/02/12/hto-hoch-raz-divivsya-v-ochi-nashim-voinam-tochno-znae-agresoru-ne-vzyati-ani-kiiv-ani-odesu-ani-harkiv-ani-bud-yake-inshe-misto-spilna-zaya-va-ministra-oboroni-ukraini-oleksiya-reznikova-ta-golovnokomanduvacha-zsu-valeriya-zaluzhnogo/ https://t.co/8TDP4wDsLF.

[20] Barnes, "U.S. exposes what it says is Russian effort to fabricate pretext for invasion."

[21] Defence intelligence of Ukraine [@DI_Ukraine], "‼️#DIUinforms🛡 regarding threat of committing terrorist attacks at industry facilities of the so-called #DPR and #LPR 1/5." Https://T.Co/nAz7eDfaI6.

[22] Defence intelligence of Ukraine [@DI_Ukraine], "‼️Список укриттів по всій Україні ДСНС України опублікували оновлену карту, яка допоможе знайти найближче бомбосховище. 👉Посилання 👉." https://armyinform.com.ua/2022/02/24/spysok-ukryttiv-po-vsij-ukrayini/?fbclid=IdwAR2BqkZl6kolsHLOVsYq_Eo7ZEkG2IFXtdlgZov--dLXSCoJWP2kDfkzBrY https://t.co/1Ziuo6eXIQ.

on targeting Russian personnel and equipment. This tweet set the stage for a new phase in the GUR's social media strategy.[23]

On March 1st, 2022, the GUR began the publication of lists with information on Russian and Belarusian military units.[24] These records included names, ranks, birthdays, and other personal information of military personnel. According to the GUR, the lists contained the names of military personnel who either participated in or supported the invasion. The intelligence service sought to encourage the surrender of enemy personnel with doxing – publishing personally identifiable information online – and justified it by claiming those people contributed to Russia's illegal invasion.[25]

In addition to demonstrating its access to Russian sources, the GUR was also seeking to engage with Ukrainian and international audiences by soliciting assistance. This became necessary due to the Russian campaign launched in the autumn of 2022, which involved multiple waves of missile and drone strikes on Ukrainian infrastructure, including civilian areas and critical energy infrastructure. On any typical day, dozens of missiles and drones would be launched against Ukraine.[26] One of the weapons of choice for these attacks was Iranian-made Shahed-136 drones loaded with explosives. These drones detonated on impact and crippled energy infrastructure across Ukraine. To stem the incoming havoc, the Ukrainian military intelligence service, the GUR, requested the public via Twitter to provide information on the transport routes used by Iran to deliver drones to the Russian Federation and to identify the specific persons responsible for the supply.[27] In August 2023 the GUR reported to have discovered that the final assembling of the Shahed drones takes place in Russia.[28]

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[23] Defence intelligence of Ukraine [@DI_Ukraine], "Вельмишановний український народе, вибачте нас за тимчасову соціальну тишу. Багато роботи, якщо ви розумієте про що ми… ☺ Працюємо у режимі 24/7, визначаємо розташування живої сили та техніки окупанта, знищуємо його без жалю! Ворога буде знищено! Слава Україні! Смерть ворогам!" https://t.co/sCn8EdzYIc.

[24] Defence intelligence of Ukraine [@DI_Ukraine], "#ОкупантиРФ ‼ Кожний українець повинен знати їхні імена! Особовий склад 23 вап ВКС РФ, який бомбить Україну та вбиває мирних громадян ⚰ 🪦 Ці військові злочинці будуть знищені! Ніякий бункер не допоможе вберегтись від гніву за вбивство нашого населення!" https://gur.gov.ua/ua/content/osobovyi-sklad-23-vap-vks-rf.html https://t.co/l9Vr3kUn2f.

[25] Watts, "Ukraine symposium – doxing enemy soldiers and the law of war."

[26] Mackintosh, "Russian missile strikes pound Ukraine, knocking out power and putting entire country under air-raid alarm."

[27] Defence intelligence of Ukraine [@DI_Ukraine], "‼Gathering of information about supplying of Iranian weapon to the RF we ask to provide any information that will help to determine logistical routes of the supply of the Iranian weapon and to identify the specific persons responsible for the supply 🧷." https://twitter.com/DI_Ukraine/status/1587795506746490881.

[28] Defence Intelligence of Ukraine, "Vadym Skibitskyi: We working to find out where exactly Russia manufactures 'Shahed' drones."

2.4 Communicating with COMINT

Besides the described direct appeal for help to the public, even more remarkable aspects of the GUR's communication strategy on social channels can be discerned. This specifically pertains to the regular publication of voice files containing conversations between Russian military personnel amongst each other, or with their family members or persons otherwise related. The intercepted conversations published by the GUR are interceptions of GSM traffic through base transceiver stations (BTS) controlled by the Ukrainians. Russian servicemen are prohibited from using mobile phones, even on Russian territory, meaning that from a formal point of view, Russian command should be taking measures to block this channel of leakage.[29] However, Russian soldiers, especially on the front lines, still find ways to acquire phones, sometimes stealing them from the Ukrainian population, to call home.[30]

Although the language and discourse used in the audio files indicate the audio fragments released by the GUR are genuine intercepts, there is no guarantee audio specialists might have modified the contents. Therefore, achieving absolute certainty about the reliability of the intelligence material released by the GUR is a challenging undertaking. Furthermore, the GUR only released excerpts of audio material which it deemed suitable for release to promote public discourse on themes suitable to its communication strategy. Nevertheless, this study presents an analysis of crucial aspects and themes related to the strategic communication practices of the Ukrainian military intelligence service in wartime.

The recorded conversations can be labelled as communications intelligence (COMINT), since it entails the interception and analysis of the communications of government officials, military personnel, and other groups or individuals. If it becomes public knowledge that an entity has access to this information, then that tends to mean the end of this access.[31] Despite concerns over losing access to intelligence sources, the GUR started to release tweets containing audio recordings of which the majority fit into three main categories: alleged Russian war crimes, Russian disillusionment of the war including plans for desertion, and the weakness or corruption of Russian military leadership. In the researched period (February 2022 – March 2023) the GUR released 211 of these voice files on Twitter and other social media channels.

First category, examples of alleged Russian war crimes: on April 20th, 2022, the GUR released an audio intercept that revealed a command to kill Ukrainian prisoners of war in the Popasyana area of Luhansk Oblast in eastern Ukraine: 'Keep

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[29] "Makiivka."

[30] "The mobile network battlefield in Ukraine – Part 2 | Enea."

[31] Clark, "The protection of intelligence sources and methods."

the most senior among them, and let the rest go forever. Let them go forever, damn it, so that no one will ever see them again, including relatives.'[32] Ten days later, the GUR released audio, which revealed the 'occupiers' stealing solar panels and complaining about their losses.[33] Then on May 23rd, the GUR intercepted the audio of two soldiers from the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) discussing rape, extortion and looting by members of their unit.[34] Later in June, an intercept revealed the Russians captured a Ukrainian crew member of a tank, interrogated him, and then shot him, 'as they did not leave prisoners alive.'[35] Furthermore, on August 2nd, a Russian admitted to using phosphorus ammunition, which is prohibited by the Geneva Conventions, and dismissed his father's reminder of this prohibition.[36]

The second category of released intercepts by the GUR provides a glimpse into the disillusionment felt by Russian military personnel during the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. On June 21st, 2022, a member of the Russian military discussed the potential encirclement by Ukrainian forces and the poor quality of their rear units.[37] Then, on June 27, a Russian confessed to his mother that many soldiers in his unit had given up mentally and wished to escape the war.[38] At the end of July, a Russian soldier

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[32] Defence intelligence of Ukraine [@DI_Ukraine], "#ГУРперехоплення !!«Пленных в Попасной приказано убить» ▪Головне управління розвідки МО України отримало аудіоперехоплення розмови окупантів, в якому йде мова про наказ вбити усіх військовополонених ЗСУ в районі Попасної (Луганська обл.)." https://t.co/iRHoDhmKUi.

[33] Defence intelligence of Ukraine [@DI_Ukraine], "#ГУРперехоплення ▯Окупанти крадуть сонячні батареї та жаліються на великі втрати ✎Перехоплення за посиланням." https://youา tube.com/watch?v=HsJoxcyiTqY https://t.co/l593ugkTeR.

[34] Defence intelligence of Ukraine [@DI_Ukraine], "#ГУРперехоплення ☎ Зґвалтування, мародерство, масові злочини – окупанти обговорюють останні новини в підрозділ. ▪ Двоє вояків з так званої «ДНР» діляться враженнями від перебігу подій в їхній частині. ✎Перехоплення за посиланням." https://youtube.com/watch?v=z6OjA-U8MkY https://t.co/umMbgmCW7C.

[35] Defence intelligence of Ukraine [@DI_Ukraine], "#ГУРперехоплення ☎»Одного в плен взяли танкиста. Потом допросили нах*й и застрелили» ▪ Окупант розповідає про взятого в полон танкіста, якого вони після допиту застрелили, тому що одного-двух полонених в живих не залишають. Посилання на перехоплення." https://youtu.be/K9NM9WRzhnQ https://t.co/PelYL8Yq8o.

[36] Defence intelligence of Ukraine [@DI_Ukraine], "#ГУРперехоплення ☎»О, фосфор полетел» Окупант розповідає, що вони використовують фосфорні боєприпаси ▪ Батько нагадав окупантові, що це заборонено Конвенцією, та Олексій відказав: «Папа, ты знаешь сколько тут всего используем, что запрещено впринципе.»" https://t.co/eatGLrIrev.

[37] Defence intelligence of Ukraine [@DI_Ukraine], "#ГУРперехоплення ☎ «Силовики, алкаш. Хорошого нічого немає» – рашист розповідає про можливе оточення з боку ЗСУ та про якість тилових підрозділів." https://t.co/MWoJUrZD42.

[38] Defence intelligence of Ukraine [@DI_Ukraine], "#ГУРперехоплення ☎ «Половина взагал духовно здались вже» – окупант розповідає матері про бажання втекти з війни." https://t.co/msPUoesnY2.

compared the war in Ukraine with that in Chechnya and Afghanistan, expressing his negative attitude towards the Russian government and military command.[39] On August 21st, a Russian military officer told his wife: 'We have a great number of people who refuse to fight. We should be committed to an offensive soon, but there aren't enough people, because everyone declined.' He hoped he would soon be withdrawn from the conflict.[40] Two days later, another Russian military officer shared information about the refusal of officers and soldiers to advance.[41]

Other audio intercepts obtained by the GUR highlight the dire situation faced by Russian soldiers on the front lines. On August 30, a Russian soldier in the Kharkiv region reported that they were surrounded by 'American' forces with no water or food left and discussed the destruction of the 7th company.[42] On September 3rd, a military officer in the Donetsk region complained: 'we are supposed to be the infantry, we are the strength. And now, out of three hundred people only 72 survived, the rest is dead.'[43] On September 4th, Russian soldiers objected about the poor supply of new units that arrived: 'They arrive without proper clothing, no sleepings bags, or anything.'[44] Furthermore, on October 1st, 2022, a military officer in a difficult moral situation called his wife to say goodbye.[45]

The third and final category of GUR tweets contained examples of weak or corrupt Russian leadership. These audio intercepts released by the GUR provide a

[39] Defence intelligence of Ukraine [@DI_Ukraine], "#ГУРперехоплення 📞 «Чеченська і афганська – ясельки» – рашист порівнює нинішню війну з попередніми ▪ Чоловік розповідає дружині про своє негативне ставлення до російської влади і військового командування. 💬»Ростовську частину розгромили. Там практично нічого не залишилось.»" https://t.co/1dLVjrSyce.

[40] Defence intelligence of Ukraine [@DI_Ukraine], "#ГУРперехоплення ‼»МЫ УЖЕ ВСЁ, У НАС ЛЮДИ СДАЮТСЯ» ▪Російський військовий розповідає про масову відмову солдатів та впевнений, що їх скоро виведуть." https://t.co/egZEavqfTA.

[41] Defence intelligence of Ukraine [@DI_Ukraine], "#ГУРперехоплення ‼ "ВСЕ КОМАНДОВАНИЕ, ВСЁ НАШЕ, КОМАНДИР РОТЫ НАШ, КОМБАТ... ОНИ ВСЕ ОТКАЗ НАПИСАЛИ" Російський військовий ділиться інформацією про рішучу відмову командування і солдатів наступати." https://t.co/bxVArlCaNB.

[42] Defence intelligence of Ukraine [@DI_Ukraine], "#ГУРперехоплення ‼»У НАС НИЧЕ НЕ ОСТАЛОСЬ УЖЕ, НИ ВОДЫ, НИ ЕДЫ» російський військовий, знаходячись в Харківській області, розповідає, що їх ЗСУ взяли в кільце, та обговорює знищення їх 7-ї роти." https://t.co/oSIoxxLHNc.

[43] Defence intelligence of Ukraine [@DI_Ukraine], "‼Seventy Two Servicemen Remained Alive from Among 300 Ones, the Rest Are Either Wounded or Killed Russian Soldier, Being in the Donetsk Region, at a State of Alcoholic Intoxication Talks about the Losses of Personnel." Https://T.Co/SWbPBI7WHF.

[44] Defence intelligence of Ukraine [@DI_Ukraine], "‼Young People Have No Clothes, No Sleeping Bags, Nothing at All Russian Soldier Told about Bad Provision of New Units, Which Enter at the Positions." Https://T.Co/7Qdw6sPBLl.

[45] Defence intelligence of Ukraine [@DI_Ukraine].
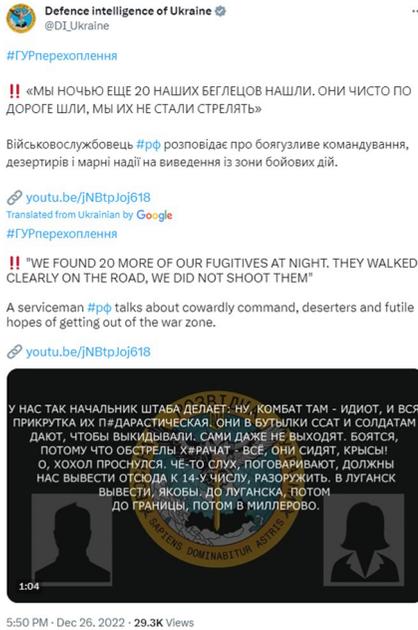
Figure 5.1: A screenshot of a social media post on the Twitter account of the GUR, which contains an intercepted phone call in which a Russian military member complains about his 'cowardly command' and 'deserters'

window into the mindset of Russian military personnel towards their leadership during the conflict in Ukraine. On September 14th, a Russian military member in the Kharkiv area complained about the incompetence of his superiors: 'there is no organization at all, I thought it was an army, but there is no army.'[46] Similarly, on November 28th, a military officer described his commanding officers as idiots who were hiding themselves in the rear area, however assigned their troops on dangerous missions: 'there is a minefield in front of you, start an attack.'[47] On December 26th, a Russian military member near Donetsk talked about the

[46] Defence intelligence of Ukraine [@DI_Ukraine], "#ГУРперехоплення ‼"Я ДУМАЛ, ТУТ АРМИЯ, А ТУТ НЕ АРМИЯ.А ТАМ ПРОСТО МОЧИЛОВО ДРУГ ДРУГА, ДА?" військовослужбовець рф на харківському напрямку розповідає про дезорганізованість і некомпетентність власного військового керівництва." https://t.co/Mmiwt89OwV.

[47] Defence intelligence of Ukraine [@DI_Ukraine], "#ГУРперехоплення ‼"ВСЕ "ВОЕННЫЕ ПОЛИЦИИ" ЗАБИТЫ. НАРОД УХОДИТ,ИХ ВОЗВРАЩАЮТ. НИКТО ВОЕВАТЬ НЕ ХОЧЕТ, УЖЕ ВСЁ, НАЕЛИСЬ» Військовослужбовець #рф про ідіотів у командуванні, небажанні воювати та настановах від тітки "хапати все, що погано лежить" 📎." https://youtu.be/8tI_FK_gKKI https://t.co/VRGQG9PQ5l.

cowardice of staff officers, deserters, and vain hope of withdrawal from the combat zone (see Figure 5.1).[48]

Further audio intercepts obtained by the GUR highlighted the challenges faced by Russian soldiers on the front lines. On January 4th, 2023, a Russian soldier talked to his mother about the forgery of soldiers' places of death and alcoholism.[49] The verbal attacks by late Wagner CEO Yevgeny Prigozhin in May 2023 on Twitter of Russian military incompetence lend credence to what the GUR Twitter account claims.[50] In this context it is worth mentioning that the GUR released an interception in January 2023 in which a Russian soldier tells his father about a shooting incident between his unit and one of Wagner's groups.[51] This was months before reports of tensions between Wagner and regular Russian army units started to seep through from the Bakhmut area.[52]

3. The rationale for the GUR's disclosure of intelligence

The traditional view is that intelligence services operate covertly and discreetly to avoid public scrutiny. Intelligence is typically perceived as an asset that governments safeguard against exposure, fearing the loss of access to sources.[53] Then again, as Israeli scholar Clila Magen explains, in the social media age intelligence services face a new set of challenges, including a dramatic reduction in the ability to control and manage information. This inherently puts pressure on intelligence

[48] Defence intelligence of Ukraine [@DI_Ukraine], "#ГУРперехоплення !! «МЫ НОЧЬЮ ЕЩЕ 20 НАШИХ БЕГЛЕЦОВ НАШЛИ. ОНИ ЧИСТО ПО ДОРОГЕ ШЛИ, МЫ ИХ НЕ СТАЛИ СТРЕЛЯТЬ» Військовослужбовець #рф розповідає про боягузливе командування, дезертирів і марні надії на виведення із зони бойових дій. 🖇" https://youtu.be/jNBtpJoj618 https://t.co/5IJop6LR8N, Tweet, *Twitter*, 26 December, 2022.

[49] Defence intelligence of Ukraine [@DI_Ukraine], "#ГУРперехоплення !! «СТАВЯТ, ЧТО ПОГИБ В БЕЛГОРОДЕ, А НЕ В УКРАИНЕ» Військовий #рф розповів матері про фальсифікацію місця загибелі військових та про алкоголізм на позиціях. 🖇." https://youtu.be/WVbCmJU26qw https://t.co/8EbtCIvsLr.

[50] Dmitri [@wartranslated], "⬛Explicit Content Warning! Prizohin Films Himself in Front of a Large Number of Corpses, and in an Unusually Aggressive Manner Puts Forward Demands to Russian Military Leadership to Provide More Ammunition." Https://T.Co/ZjikU2EnZM.

[51] Dmitri [@wartranslated], "In This Call, a Russian Soldier Tells His Father about an Accident with Wagner Mercenaries Where Officers Shot Mobilised Soldiers, and Discusses Rumours Such as That 2/3rd of the Ukrainian Army Are Now Poles and Blacks." Https://T.Co/r4PaEcA7qh.

[52] Melkozerova, "Massive split in Russian military forces as Wagner vows to quit Bakhmut on May 10."

[53] Riemer and Sobelman, "Coercive disclosure: The weaponization of public intelligence revelation in international relations," 20.

services to respond to public enquiries.[54] At the same time, intelligence services have learned that they can be proactive and use the media to achieve their goals.[55] The disclosure policies observed in the context of the Russian invasion raise questions about the potential use of intelligence for influencing operations.[56] Israeli researchers Riemer and Sobelman argue that states can leverage intelligence as a coercive instrument. They describe coercive intelligence disclosure as the public disclosure of secrets or the signaling of an intention to do so, which can exploit the vulnerabilities of other actors.[57]

Riemer and Sobelman contend that coercive intelligence disclosure can achieve three aims.[58] First, it can prevent adversaries from achieving their strategic and operational goals by interfering with their operations, forcing them to refocus their resources, and inducing them to adapt to the reality that their secrets have been made public. Second, by influencing their domestic communities and eroding their political standing, it might exert indirect pressure on the targets. Third, it might help the discloser create or support a compelling narrative that persuades other international actors to act. This third notion is tied to the notion that the controlled release of intelligence can help to achieve narrative superiority.[59] This idea is based on Russia's time-tested strategy of influencing the information environment to its advantage, during the takeover of Crimea in 2014.[60] For example, narrative superiority was gained early 2022 by British and American intelligence-led exposures revealing how Russian intelligence agencies in the run-up to the invasion exploited media assets to disseminate disinformation.[61] This undermined Russian propaganda that relies on fabrication.[62]

As explained, the disclosure of audio intercepts on Twitter has been an established modus operandi by the GUR since the start of the Russian invasion in February 2022. Applying Riemer and Sobelman's concept of coercive intelligence disclosure, one of the possible motives behind the GUR's sensitive intelligence disclosures is to compel Russia to modify its operations, thereby thwarting Russian efforts to accomplish their objectives. Naturally, the GUR is vested in the cessation

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[54] Magen, "Strategic communication of Israel's Intelligence Services: Countering new challenges with old methods," 272.

[55] Magen, 273.

[56] Dylan and Maguire, "Secret intelligence and public diplomacy in the Ukraine War," 4 July 2022, 61.

[57] Riemer and Sobelman, "Coercive disclosure: The weaponization of public intelligence revelation in international relations," 3.

[58] Riemer and Sobelman, 3.

[59] Riemer and Sobelman, 24.

[60] Dylan and Maguire, "Secret intelligence and public diplomacy in the Ukraine War," 4 July 2022, 47.

[61] Dylan and Maguire, 47.

[62] Dylan and Maguire, 47.

of Russian operations in Ukraine and the termination of violence against civilians and Ukrainian prisoners of war. However, Russian leadership in Moscow has yet to issue orders to the armed forces to alter their behaviour or tactics, despite the GUR's dissemination of evidence on social media relating to Russian war crimes, ineffectiveness, and declining morale.

A second possible motive for the GUR's disclosure of intelligence on Twitter is to sway public opinion in Russia and make its citizens demand better conduct of the Russian military in Ukraine. Although the use of Twitter has been restricted in Russia from time to time, Russian citizens can still approach the platform through Virtual Private Network (VPN) connections. Further, the GUR posts similar content on YouTube and Telegram (widely used in Russia). According to an analyst of the National Institute of Strategic Studies (NISS) in Kyiv, the initial hope of the GUR leadership was indeed that their reports about bad morale and disillusion of the Russian military in Ukraine could influence public opinion in Russia. However, after several months, the GUR leadership concluded that its social media content was of limited influence in Russia. This was given the outright denial and disinterest for widely documented Russian military acts of violence against the Ukrainian population.[63]

The main reason for the ongoing intelligence disclosures by the GUR is that it helps to support a compelling narrative that persuades other states and international organisations to act. This is the third option Riemer and Sobelman researched: the belief that the controlled release of intelligence can help to achieve 'narrative superiority.' The recurrent messaging by the GUR on Russian misbehaviour against civilians and military personnel, low morale of Russian military personnel, and weak leadership, ties into a wider Ukrainian government communication strategy in which narratives like this are regularly stressed, both to international and domestic audiences. Time and time again, Ukraine asks for international attention and action, and tries to mobilise actors to act against alleged Russian war crimes. The release of raw intelligence by the GUR, containing testimonies of Russian misconduct, adds an extra layer of credibility to strategic communications not just towards Western audiences, but also towards its own population. Ukraine assesses there is a public relations benefit in releasing intercepted material that embarrasses the Russian military and reveals details of Russian atrocities on the battlefield.[64]

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[63] (name known with author), Analyst National Institute Strategic Studies, Kyiv, 4 July 2023.

[64] (name known with author), Analyst National Institute Strategic Studies, Kyiv.

4. Going beyond traditional boundaries with a purpose

The release of COMINT related material, which is traditionally considered highly classified and sensitive, by the GUR can be seen as a modern development where very few secrets are likely to remain secret forever. Carefully selected declassified intelligence can be used to inform the public and seize the moral high ground.[65] This is within the scope of how Riemer and Sobelman defined coercive intelligence disclosure and narrative superiority.

To explain the specific effort of the GUR to contribute to Ukrainian narrative superiority, it is useful to look at the concept of shame. Shame is particularly effective when it can stimulate emotions such as anger or concerns within target audiences.[66] The best way to stimulate such strong emotions is to represent themes that are regarded as repugnant from the point of view of the target audience's norms, ideas and values and which can clearly be presented as direct faults of shameful actors.[67] The release of audio interceptions, that depict a negative image of the Russian armed forces, fits this pattern. Repetitively, the GUR points out the opponent's corrupt leadership, logistics shortcomings and lack of respect for the lives of its soldiers. This negative image is reinforced by reports of ill-treatment of civilians and Ukrainian prisoners of war. In this case, shame is meant to damage the Russian image and to exert public pressure on foreign decision makers and the Ukrainian people, mobilising them to support or continue the resistance against foreign invaders.

Therefore, the GUR has its analysts purposefully select chatter that is degrading to the Russian war effort, from much larger streams of Ukrainian interception of Russian communications. It can be inferred that audio intercepts containing information that would give a tactical advantage to the Ukrainian military are directed through compartmentalised channels towards the armed forces for targeting purposes. However, material that is useful to name and shame the opponent gets selected and prepared for release on social media channels. This is done in support of the strategic narrative that Ukraine fights a just war against a disgraceful foreign invader.

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[65] Magen, "Strategic communication of Israel's intelligence services: Countering new challenges with old methods," 272.

[66] Hirschberger, "External Communication in Social Media During Asymmetric Conflicts," 25.

[67] Hirschberger, 26.

5. Reflection and concluding remarks

The practices of the GUR are part of a longstanding development in which intelligence is used beyond its traditional territory of informing key decision makers and military commanders and is integrated into information warfare. Within this information warfare spectrum, from communication to indoctrination, information can be used to undermine trust and amplify emotional resonance.[68] The GUR effort sets a precedent in terms of quantity since their program of releasing sensitive intelligence goes beyond the occasional trickle of a few documents, surveillance footage or satellite imagery to influence an outside actor. Within a year's time frame, the GUR has consistently released sensitive audio intercepts on an almost daily basis. Future research is needed to expand knowledge about the active strategic communications posture of the GUR and the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), which is at least as active when it comes to activities on social media.

In conclusion, the Ukrainians have employed an approach in their social media strategies that draws upon the concept of moral conflict, as elucidated by John Boyd. The approach by the GUR, emphasising abject Russian behaviour, aims to maintain public opinion against the invasion in both western countries and Ukraine to gain narrative superiority. By maintaining a strong international opinion opposing the Russian invaders, Ukraine sustains essential support of training and weapons from Western governments, while preserving the loyalty of the Ukrainian populace in wartime. Both are critical for Ukraine's survival and reflect Boyd's concept of moral conflict where the successful integration of material and moral imperatives are prerequisites for victory.

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[68] Clack and Johnson, *The World Information War: Western Resilience, Campaigning, and Cognitive Effects.*

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Morale and Moral Injury among Russian and Ukrainian Combatants

Tine Molendijk

Abstract

This chapter explores morale and moral injury in the Russia-Ukraine War, emphasising the role of narratives. Ukrainians have been engaged in a fierce struggle for their very existence, while the morale-boosting narratives among Russian forces have faced serious challenges. Yet, the involvement of NATO countries possibly reinforced an 'us against the rest' mentality in Russian troops. Also, on the battlefield, unique dynamics shape morale, with the willingness to sacrifice for comrades being paramount for combat readiness. Previous conflicts' insights suggest that both sides face a substantial risk of moral injury. Russian soldiers, in particular, may be susceptible to moral injury, not as deep remorse but as feelings of betrayal by their leadership and society post-deployment. This chapter contemplates how 'us/them' narratives in Western societies shape our understanding of the crisis. A tragic narrative, rather than a superheroes versus villains tale, might better capture the human aspect of war.

Keywords: Morale, Combat motivation, Moral injury, Narratives, Resilience

1. Introduction

Amid the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict, this chapter emphasises the often-overlooked human dimension. While international relations and military strategy are critical, the suffering inflicted on civilians and soldiers warrants attention. This chapter focuses on soldiers' experiences, providing insights into the challenges faced by those directly engaged in the fighting. In the short term, morale's role in combat readiness is striking, while a longer-term concern is the risk of moral injury.

Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, iconic moments emerged that captured the resilience of Ukrainians.[1] For instance, the famous 'Russian warship,

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[1] Dickinson, "Will morale prove the decisive factor in the russian invasion of Ukraine?"; Khurshudyan and Hrabchuk, "As morale suffers, Russia and Ukraine fight a war of mental attrition"; France 24, "Short on Equipment, High on Morale"; Johannesson, "The critical role of morale in Ukraine's fight against the Russian invasion."

go **** yourself' quote from a Ukrainian guard on Snake Island quickly became a symbol of their early resistance.[2] Additionally, a video showed an unarmed Ukrainian POW, Oleksandr Matsievsky, calmly saying 'Glory to Ukraine' moments before being gunned down by his captors. Western journalists and military analysts openly admired the seemingly unbreakable Ukrainian morale, undoubtedly intensified by their wish for Ukrainian victory.[3] In stark contrast, Russian forces exhibited notably low morale from the outset, followed by further demoralisation in the ensuing months.[4] The Russian soldiers faced several issues, including inadequate preparation, insufficient supplies and personnel, logistical failures, leadership issues and poor service coordination.[5] News articles began reporting on instances where soldiers were heard telling each other over the radio they 'were all fooled.'[6] Also, reports emerged of soldiers who refused to redeploy for a second time after a period of leave,[7] and of soldiers in Ukraine who refused 'to carry out orders, sabotaging their own equipment.'[8]

At the same time, the first signs of psychological problems have been observed among both Ukrainian and Russian combatants.[9] This is not surprising given the well-documented effects of war on mental health. Previous conflicts have shown that soldiers' moral beliefs and expectations can be shattered when faced with the harsh realities of war, leading to severe long-term mental health problems.[10] However, it is not just demoralisation that can be problematic, but high morale as well. High morale often leads to prolonged exposure to combat, increasing the risk of moral

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[2] The Guardian, "'Go fuck yourself,' Ukrainian soldiers on Snake Island tell Russian ship."

[3] Dickinson, "Will morale prove the decisive factor in the Russian invasion of Ukraine?"; Khurshudyan and Hrabchuk, "As morale suffers, Russia and Ukraine fight a war of mental attrition"; France 24, "Short on equipment, high on morale"; Johannesson, "The critical role of morale in Ukraine's fight against the Russian invasion."

[4] Johnson, "Dysfunctional warfare"; Dalsjö, Jonsson, and Norberg, "A brutal examination"; Lymar, "Lessons for the West"; Massicot, "What Russia got wrong."

[5] Johnson, "Dysfunctional warfare"; Dalsjö, Jonsson, and Norberg, "A brutal examination"; Lymar, "Lessons for the West"; Massicot, "What Russia got wrong."

[6] Khurshudyan and Hrabchuk, "As morale suffers, Russia and Ukraine fight a war of mental attrition."

[7] Sauer, "'They were furious.'"

[8] Churchman, "UK spy chief."

[9] Bryant, Schnurr, and Pedlar, "Addressing the mental health needs of civilian combatants in Ukraine"; Zasiekina et al., "A concept analysis of moral injury in Ukrainian National Guard service members' narratives"; Hamama-Raz et al., "Can patriotism be a protective factor for symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder?"; Tenisheva and Beardsworth, "Scarred by war, returning Russian soldiers struggle to adapt to civilian life"; Ilyushina, "Russia sends soldiers to war but ignores mental trauma they bring home"; Kinetz, "'Never saw such hell.'"

[10] Bica, "A therapeutic application of philosophy. The moral casualties of war: Understanding the experience"; Lifton, *Home from the War: Learning from Vietnam Veterans*; Litz et al., "Moral injury and moral repair in war veterans."

dilemmas. Also, hatred towards the opponent and overconfidence can lead soldiers to disregard moral boundaries and engage in actions that may later haunt them.[11]

This chapter considers the potential roles of morale and moral injury in the Russian-Ukrainian war, drawing on insights from past conflicts. However, several factors warrant caution in this tentative reflection. Firstly, the limited availability of systematic and in-depth information on the ongoing war, relying on secondary sources. Secondly with so much at stake, disinformation and propaganda have become a weapon of war, primarily by Russia but also by Ukraine, complicating the assessment of information reliability. Also, the emotional investment of Western Europe and the US in the conflict has inevitably influenced news reporting. Thirdly, at the time of writing the conflict is still ongoing, and in any case, the full extent of its human impact may only become apparent years or decades later, as mental health problems develop with time. These considerations make this reflection highly tentative.

This said, contemplating the possible influence of morale and moral injury through findings from past wars still provides valuable insights. A lens of narratives will be used to organise the analysis of morale and moral injury, to bring further focus and to offer insight into the impact of macro level rhetoric on the micro level of military experience. In the final section, the lens of narrative will be brought home, by exploring the role of (sometimes wishful) narratives in western societies in shaping understandings of the conflict.

2. Morale

2.1 Morale and narratives

Morale is a broad term that refers to motivation, confidence and discipline, not in a generic sense, but in relation to achieving goals. It is related but not to be confused with morality, which refers to personal and collective values and norms in a specific sociohistorical context. Morale is critical to military effectiveness and combat readiness, which makes it a vital topic for military leaders: high morale is positively associated with performance, and negatively related to psychological casualties.[12] As Napoleon allegedly said, 'three-quarters of victory is down to morale, only one quarter to the balance of military forces.'[13] To offer a definition of morale

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[11] Molendijk, "Toward an interdisciplinary conceptualization of moral injury: From unequivocal guilt and anger to moral conflict and disorientation"; Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*.

[12] NATO HFM-329RTG, "The military leaders guide to psychological support across the deployment cycle."

[13] Thoral, "Troop morale and military unity."

in a military context, morale is the enthusiasm and persistence with which an individual unit member or entire unit engages in accomplishing mission objectives.[14]

Morale is often mentioned as an ideational factor influencing combat performance, alongside material factors such as the quality of equipment and logistics. However, morale and material issues are interdependent. Ostensibly trivial factors such as food, sleep and dry clothes play an important role in maintaining morale.[15] The same goes for other organisational and performance issues, which moreover influence one another. For instance, unprofessional conduct by leaders and colleagues, failing equipment and the absence of expected victories can cause demoralisation, while the reverse is also true.[16] As such, the co-dependence of morale and performance on the battlefield can result in either a positive spiral or a negative one.

At the same time, good material circumstances are not sufficient conditions for morale, and may even not always be necessary. Trained soldiers understand the rigours of combat and are generally willing to face deprivation and push themselves to their limits, even putting their lives on the line.[17] The ability to persevere amidst material and physical adversity, however, does demand conducive ideational circumstances, such as a convincing shared narrative. Narratives offer assumptions and meanings through which to understand events and experiences, including a *moral* of the story. By constructing a why-what-and-how, narratives enable people to make sense of what happens to them, make judgments about what is justified and unacceptable conduct, and create a compass that guides their actions. The creation of guiding life stories can be a highly personal effort of constructing a coherent understanding of one's experiences and forming a sense of self-identity.[18] But narrative creation also occurs at collective levels, including as a conscious, strategic enterprise of governments to garner support from the wider public for a military operation, and foster a sense of purpose and unity among the soldiers fighting the mission.[19] In any case, personal narratives are always situated in relation to broader narratives, whether they reflect or actively resist these wider narratives.

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[14] cf. Manning, "Morale and cohesion in military psychiatry"; Peterson, Park, and Sweeney, "Group well-being"; NATO HFM-329RTG, "The military leaders guide to psychological support across the deployment cycle."

[15] Manning, "Morale and cohesion in military psychiatry."

[16] Manning; Thoral, "Troop morale and military unity."

[17] Strachan, "Training, morale and modern war."

[18] Kleinman, *The Illness Narratives*; Molendijk, *Moral Injury and Soldiers in Conflict*; Molendijk, "Moral injury in relation to public debates."

[19] Graaf, Dimitriu, and Ringsmose, *Strategic Narratives, Public Opinion and War*; Molendijk, "Moral injury in relation to public debates"; Molendijk, "The role of political practices in moral injury"; Kalkman and Molendijk, "The role of strategic ambiguity in moral injury."

In turn, narratives are shaped within the context of broader discourses. For instance, in Russia, a particular political discourse of Russian-Ukrainian 'brotherhood' has been propagated for decades. While emphasising both literal and symbolic familial ties, this discourse portrays Russia as the dominant 'big brother,' relegating Ukraine to the position of 'little Russia' (see also Baudet's contribution in this volume). This includes a rhetoric of ´the Great Patriotic War´ and the idea of Ukrainian 'denazification' to eliminate 'anti-Russia' elements in Ukraine allegedly fostered by Ukrainian nationalists and the West.[20] At the same time, since 2014, when Crimea was annexed by Russia, Ukrainians have been engaged in a fierce struggle for their very existence. While the Russian regime may perceive its war with Ukraine as existential, driven by its claim of Ukraine as part of historical Russia, Ukraine's battle is literally about its survival.[21] This sentiment voiced as: 'If Russia stops fighting, there will be no war. If Ukraine stops fighting, there will be no Ukraine' encapsulates the high stakes involved.[22] It is within this wider context that more specific narratives emerge (see Figure 6.1).

MORALE

the enthusiasm and persistence with which an individual unit member or entire unit engages in accomplishing mission objectives

Explicit narratives among Russian combatants	Explicit narratives among Ukrainian combatants	Implicit narratives among Russian and Ukrainian combatants	Other driving factors among Russian and Ukrainian combatants
Narrative of harmless exercising	Narrative of own, families' and country's survival	Latent ideology	Skills and drills
Narrative of liberation	Narrative of protection and liberation	Us/them mentality	Fear of punishment
Narrative of walkover victory	Narrative of military strength and resilience	Real men should serve norm	Comradeship
		Esprit de corps	Survival
		Loyalty with fellow soldiers	

Figure 6.1: The role of narratives in morale among Russian and Ukrainian combatants

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[20] Kuzio, "Imperial nationalism as the driver behind Russia's invasion of Ukraine."

[21] Hamama-Raz et al., "Can patriotism be a protective factor for symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder?'; Knott, 'Existential nationalism."

[22] Hamama-Raz et al., "Can patriotism be a protective factor for symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder?"; Knott, 'Existential nationalism."

2.2 Morale in Russian combatants in the presence of explicit narratives

At the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, several strategic narratives seem to have been available to Russian troops, including a narrative of harmless exercising, a narrative of liberation, and a narrative of walkover victory. The first narrative is the story that the Russian troops that were sent to the borders of Ukraine in the weeks leading up to the invasion were only participating in large-scale military exercises. The Kremlin had kept its intentions secret even from a significant part of its military, and it appears that initially the narrative of exercising was told to part of the invading troops as well.[23] Intercepted phone calls from Russian soldiers and interviews with captured Russian officers and enlisted personnel, although the credibility of these sources is never clear, indicate that the operation's scope was not communicated at the tactical level.[24] As a military expert wrote: 'the soldiers themselves were likely shocked by suddenly finding themselves first, at war, and second, against a capable opponent.'[25] Russian lower-rank soldiers maybe only really became aware of what they were actually doing shortly before they were doing it, which possibly affected their morale. Tentative assessments 'give an emerging picture of a rank-and-file taken by surprise and *demoralized by its own attack*.'[26]

However, two other narratives were then still available to them. The first is a narrative of a walkover victory, similar to the bloodless annexation of Crimea in 2014, which seemed to be Kremlin's initial optimistic view of the invasion. In fact, the majority of Western military analysts also believed that Russia's powerful military would easily defeat Ukraine's armed forces.[27] The second narrative is a story of liberation. As mentioned, the idea of Ukrainian 'denazification' had been formulated in Russia.[28] As part of this, the Ukrainian leadership was portrayed as nothing more than 'a band of drug addicts and neo-Nazis,' as famously stated by Putin at the onset of the invasion.[29]

In the mentioned phone calls by Russian soldiers in Ukraine, many stated they initially believed that they were there to liberate or conquer Ukraine and protect

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[23] Dalsjö, Jonsson, and Norberg, "A brutal examination"; Edmonds, "Start with the political."

[24] Edmonds, "Start with the political"; Jankowicz, "Captured Russians said their leaders lied about the plan to invade Ukraine, leaving them unprepared for fierce resistance"; Al-Hlou et al., "'Putin is a fool'"; Boffey and Sauer, "'We were allowed to be slaughtered.'"

[25] Edmonds, "Start with the political."

[26] Jankowicz, "Captured Russians said their leaders lied about the plan to invade Ukraine, leaving them unprepared for fierce resistance," emphasis added.

[27] Dalsjö, Jonsson, and Norberg, "A brutal examination."

[28] Kuzio, "Imperial nationalism as the driver behind Russia's invasion of Ukraine."

[29] Edmonds, "Start with the political."

Russia.[30] While, again, it is difficult to judge the credibility of these statements, such beliefs and subsequent disillusion are not uncommon among soldiers, even in less propagandised contexts. Many soldiers in recent UN and NATO missions have related that they expected a warm welcome as liberators, only to encounter suspicion and hostility and to achieve anything but great success.[31] In Ukraine, too, grateful civilians and triumph turned out to be far from the truth as well, while the fierce Ukrainian resistance quickly led to substantial Russian losses.

2.3 Morale in Russian combatants in the absence of explicit narratives

There is a general consensus that 'political or patriotic instruction is important in getting the soldier to the front, in inculcating the sense of duty which causes him to volunteer or to report on mobilization.'[32] However, many researchers have been surprised by a *lack* of such explicit political ideology on the battlefield, without it necessarily resulting in a lack of morale.[33] For instance, in his research on American soldiers in Vietnam, Moskos found that soldiers ´had a general aversion to overt patriotic appeals,' while also signaling other 'preconditions in supporting the soldier to exert himself under dangerous conditions.'[34]

One of these preconditions is what Moskos called 'latent ideology,' which refers to underlying, implicit beliefs and values that individuals hold without being consciously aware of them. As several studies found,[35] soldiers often hold latent beliefs in the legitimacy and superiority of their own way of life, even while maintaining 'a profound skepticism of political and ideological appeals.'[36] For years, Russian propaganda has disseminated the narrative of Ukrainians as anti-Russia.[37] Also, many Russians have internalised the belief that 'every real man should serve,'[38] consistently bolstered by Russian state media portraying soldiering as 'unquestionably the

[30] Edmonds; Jankowicz, "Captured Russians said their leaders lied about the plan to invade Ukraine, leaving them unprepared for fierce resistance"; Boffey and Sauer, "'We were allowed to be slaughtered'"; Al-Hlou et al., "'Putin is a fool'"; Kinetz, "'Never saw such hell.'"

[31] Molendijk, *Moral Injury and Soldiers in Conflict*; Lifton, *Home from the War: Learning from Vietnam Veterans*; Brock and Lettini, *Soul Repair*.

[32] Slim, *Defeat into Victory*, 182.

[33] Moskos, "The military"; Slim, *Defeat into Victory*; Strachan, "Training, morale and modern war."

[34] Moskos, "The military," 62.

[35] Moskos, "The military"; Slim, *Defeat into Victory*; Strachan, "Training, morale and modern war."

[36] Moskos, "The sociology of combat," 15.

[37] Edmonds, "Start with the political"; Kuzio, "Imperial nationalism as the driver behind Russia's invasion of Ukraine"; Johnson, "Dysfunctional warfare"; Knott, "Existential nationalism."

[38] Mathers, "Russia is depending on its soldiers for victory in Ukraine but they have to bring their own first aid kits—and 200,000 are probably already dead."

manliest job.'[39] So even as expectations of swift victory and liberation have proven illusory, the 'us against anti-Russians' narrative seems to have been able to live on,[40] while the belief that real men should serve may persist regardless of whether Russians support the political goals of a war.[41] In fact, the invasion may have even reinforced an us/them mentality, serving as a self-fulfilling prophecy of Russian power against anti-Russian sentiments. The Western support for Ukraine may have intensified this mentality further, leading Russian troops to view themselves as defending Russia against Western aggression and creating an 'us against the world' narrative.

Of course, even with this mentality, soldiers' survival instinct still kicks in when they are confronted with danger. Yet, while civilians will flee war zones because that is what they have learned to do, soldiers tend to fight. This brings us to one of the most significant drivers of morale: the fellow soldier.[42] It has become almost dogma in modern military theory that soldiers fight for their comrades more than for their country. Yet, contrary to popular belief, this loyalty is not always the result of intensive training, or of an *esprit de corps* of devotion. In some cases, it stems from the immediate life-and-death necessities of combat, where soldiers depend on their primary group for survival.[43] This can explain why even untrained, non-patriotic Russian soldiers would continue to fight.

Then again, as small-group loyalty becomes increasingly important as the fighting intensifies, it also creates a paradox. Intensive combat can erode small-group loyalty when significant casualties result in the influx of replacements who struggle to bond with their colleagues.[44] Moreover, small group solidarity can also foster dissent from military leaders and the organisation, negatively affecting combat performance.[45]

Dissent by Russian soldiers has resulted in disciplinary actions, echoing past conflicts where 'tough punishments curbed manifest cowardice.'[46] Protesting

[39] Troianovski et al., "Aren't you a man?".

[40] cf. Kinetz, "'Never saw such hell.'"

[41] Mathers, "Russia is depending on its soldiers for victory in Ukraine but they have to bring their own first aid kits—and 200,000 are probably already dead."

[42] Strachan, "Training, morale and modern war"; Gray, *The Warriors*; Manning, "Morale and cohesion in military psychiatry"; Peterson, Park, and Sweeney, "Group well-being"; Stouffer et al., *The American Soldier*; Moskos, "The military"; Shils and Janowitz, "Cohesion and disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II."

[43] Stouffer et al., *The American Soldier*; Moskos, "The military"; Shils and Janowitz, "Cohesion and disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II"; Strachan, "Training, morale and modern war"; Newsome, "The myth of intrinsic combat motivation."

[44] Strachan, "Training, morale and modern war," 212.

[45] Strachan, "Training, morale and modern war"; Newsome, "The myth of intrinsic combat motivation."

[46] Strachan, "Training, morale and modern war," 215.

the war or discrediting the military is illegal in Russia, and soldiers refusing to fight face severe penalties, including forced conscription.[47] However, it is unclear whether these methods enhance or undermine morale. Financial motives and cultural norms, further, serve as informal disciplinary measures, associating dissent with impotence, dishonour and weakness.[48]

2.4 Morale in Ukrainian combatants

On the Ukrainian side, soldiers have displayed notable morale throughout their ongoing battle.[49] While this surprised friend and foe, it can be explained in the context of the abovementioned factors influencing morale (see also Brinkel and Sellmeijer in this volume on the relationship between resilience and democracy). The Ukrainians are engaged in a battle for their own, their families' and their country's survival.[50] Also, the narratives that were available to them, revolving for instance around survival, protection, liberation, military strength, resilience and *esprit de corps*, have remained intact. They may have even gained strength over time, bolstered by victories and international support, including access to equipment and combat training.

That said, Ukrainian combatants have suffered significant losses too. As the war dragged on, exhaustion and mental fatigue were reported among Ukrainian soldiers. They struggled with losing comrades they had come to rely on and who relied on them, as well as an influx of new and inexperienced recruits, both of which are major challenges to morale.[51] Reports have emerged of Ukrainian soldiers

[47] Mathers, "Russia is depending on its soldiers for victory in Ukraine but they have to bring their own first aid kits—and 200,000 are probably already dead"; Knott, "Existential nationalism."

[48] It is likely that newly mobilised conscripts, who frequently come from economically disadvantaged regions, ethnic minorities, and marginalised backgrounds, were deployed with low levels of morale . As inexperienced soldiers being deployed with a lack of food, warm clothes and medicine, many may have felt like they were being sent to Ukraine to become cannon fodder. The Wagner Group's strategy of recruiting from Russian prisons initially proved successful, but 'the flow of volunteers dried up as reports of the high casualty rates made their way back to prisons.' Yet, formal and informal discipline can motivate a substantial number of soldiers to continue their involvement in the war even when explicit morale is absent.

[49] Dickinson, "Will morale prove the decisive factor in the Russian invasion of Ukraine?"; Khurshudyan and Hrabchuk, "As morale suffers, russia and ukraine fight a war of mental attrition"; France 24, "Short on equipment, high on morale"; Johannesson, "The critical role of morale in Ukraine's fight against the Russian invasion."

[50] Dickinson, "Will morale prove the decisive factor in the Russian invasion of Ukraine?"; Khurshudyan and Hrabchuk, "As morale suffers, Russia and Ukraine fight a war of mental attrition."

[51] Melkozerova, "Ukraine army discipline crackdown sparks fear and fury on the front"; Ordoñez, "Exhausted Ukrainian soldiers fight mental fatigue as the war drags on"; Khurshudyan and Hrabchuk, "As morale suffers, Russia and Ukraine fight a war of mental attrition."

panicking, rebelling against orders, getting drunk, misbehaving and deserting their positions.[52] Moreover, panic attacks, defections and desertions in fellow soldiers appeared to be 'contagious,' further challenging the morale of Ukrainian soldiers.[53] A new law was signed in January 2023, introducing harsher punishment for disobedient soldiers while stripping them of their right to appeal, which confirms that morale problems are emerging.[54] Indeed, no human being is immune to the physical and mental exhaustion of war. Still, even a year after Russia launched its war against Ukraine, Ukrainians persist in their fight, demonstrating remarkable resilience.

3. Morally injurious experiences: moral transgressions, dilemmas, senselessness and betrayal

3.1 What is moral injury?

The discussion of morale challenges raises the question of how it could impact soldiers in the long run. This leads us to the issue of moral injury, which has been observed in various conflicts throughout history, albeit not always under this term.[55] Moral injury refers to the psychological and social problems caused by participating in, witnessing, or being a victim of an act that violates one's moral beliefs and expectations.[56] It is typically classified into perpetration-based moral injury, which involves guilt and shame for actions taken or not taken, and betrayal-based moral injury, which entails anger and distrust, for example towards military or political leaders.[57] In reality, morally injured individuals often experience a combination of perpetration-based and betrayal-based symptoms, as no act occurs in a social vacuum: 'even war crimes can't be owned exclusively by the perpetrators´.[58]

Moreover, only a small portion of morally injurious experiences are straightforward war crimes. More frequently than clear-cut moral transgressions, they

[52] Melkozerova, "Ukraine army discipline crackdown sparks fear and fury on the front"; Johannesson, "The critical role of morale in Ukraine's fight against the Russian invasion."

[53] Ordoñez, "Exhausted Ukrainian soldiers fight mental fatigue as the war drags on."

[54] Melkozerova, "Ukraine army discipline crackdown sparks fear and fury on the front"; Johannesson, "The critical role of morale in Ukraine's fight against the Russian invasion."

[55] Molendijk, *Moral Injury and Soldiers in Conflict*; Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*; Bica, "A therapeutic application of philosophy. The moral casualties of war: understanding the experience"; Jones, "Moral injury in time of war."

[56] Litz et al., "Moral injury and moral repair in war veterans."

[57] Griffin et al., "Moral injury."

[58] Boudreau, "The morally injured," 749.

involve moral conflict.[59] For instance, morally injurious situations often entail moral dilemmas, where adhering to one value requires violating another, engendering tragic remorse. Additionally, soldiers may experience moral detachment, resulting from being so morally overwhelmed that they act in ways they later come to regret. Lastly, soldiers may develop profound feelings of senselessness.[60]

The following section considers risk factors associated with moral injury in Russian and Ukrainian combatants (see Figure 6.2).

MORAL INJURY

psychological and social problems caused by participating in, witnessing, or being a victim of an act that violates one's moral beliefs and expectations

Perpetration-based moral injury

Betrayal-based moral injury

Socio-cultural moral beliefs and expectations

Shattering of justifying narratives

Military moral beliefs and expectations

Commission or omission of perceived moral transgressions by self

Commission or omission of perceived moral transgressions by military and political leadership

Own or others' perceived role in situation(s)

Existential reality of battlefield

Extent and significance of harm inflicted

Figure 6.2: Risk factors of moral injury in war

3.2 Moral injury in Russian combatants

The crux of moral injury, like other trauma-related conditions, lies not so much in the physical facts of an event but rather in the *meaning* that people ascribe to it.[61] Therefore, here again, narratives are pertinent, as they hold a pivotal role in shaping these meanings. People use rationalising and justifying frameworks as defense mechanisms.[62] When these justifying frameworks crumble, moral injury

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[59] Molendijk, "Toward an interdisciplinary conceptualization of moral injury: From unequivocal guilt and anger to moral conflict and disorientation."

[60] Molendijk.

[61] Molendijk, "Moral coping or simply uncomplicated soldiering?"

[62] Bandura, "Moral disengagement in the perpetration of inhumanities"; Janoff-Bulman and Timko, "Coping with traumatic life events."

can ensue.[63] The conflict's course and outcome are crucial factors in this process. Losing the war instills a sense that all the efforts were in vain, while winning can reinforce a narrative of triumph, national pride and the fulfilment of a greater mission. Also, the outcome influences whether existing narratives persist or new ones emerge, reflecting the adage, 'History is written by the victors.' The saying 'History is written by the victors' reflects how outcomes impact narratives. Both Russian and Ukrainian combatants are prone to developing moral injuries, albeit in distinct ways.

As discussed, while Ukrainian narratives have persisted, Russian narratives have been extensively challenged, rendering Russian troops susceptible to moral injuries in this regard. Notably, this does not mean that many Russian soldiers would completely turn against their own war and embrace an opposing vision of Ukraine. Evidence from soldiers' moral conflicts in previous wars suggests that this is improbable. If veterans struggle with moral conflicts, these struggles often entail guilt and shame stemming from experiences such as witnessing women and children dying, or making mistakes that led to the death of their colleagues.[64] Also, many soldiers experience disillusionment and feelings of betrayal by their military organisation and political leaders for the situations they have been placed in and their treatment afterwards.[65] Some soldiers furthermore develop profound confusion about wider narratives concerning their deployment, including disorientation about how 'dirty but necessary' the suffering was that they witnessed and caused.[66] However, this all still does not necessarily lead to the development of remorse for fighting in the first place and opposition to the war in general.[67] Historical examples, such as German Nazi soldiers, Dutch Indonesia veterans and American Vietnam veterans, indicate that even drastic shifts in societal narratives of military

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[63] Molendijk, "Toward an interdisciplinary conceptualization of moral injury: From unequivocal guilt and anger to moral conflict and disorientation"; Janoff-Bulman, *Shattered Assumptions*; Molendijk, "Moral coping or simply uncomplicated soldiering?"; Lifton, *Home from the War: Learning from Vietnam Veterans*; Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*.

[64] Schorr et al., "Sources of moral injury among war veterans"; Currier, McCormick, and Drescher, "How do morally injurious events occur?"; Molendijk, *Moral Injury and Soldiers in Conflict*; Gray, *The Warriors*; Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*; Ein et al., "The potentially morally injurious nature of encountering children during military deployments."

[65] Schorr et al., "Sources of moral injury among war veterans"; Currier, McCormick, and Drescher, "How do morally injurious events occur?"; Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*; Molendijk, *Moral Injury and Soldiers in Conflict*.

[66] Molendijk, *Moral Injury and Soldiers in Conflict*; Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*; Lifton, *Home from the War: Learning from Vietnam Veterans*.

[67] Molendijk, *Moral Injury and Soldiers in Conflict*; Drescher, Nieuwsma, and Swales, "Morality and moral injury: Insights from theology and health science"; Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*.

operations typically result in only a minority of soldiers making 180-degree turns in their perceptions.[68]

Yet, Russian soldiers do appear susceptible to other symptoms, such as moral distress stemming from having killed human beings up close and being a 'flesh-witness' to the sight and smell of their suffering.[69] In Ukraine, furthermore, there is mounting evidence of Russian soldiers committing 'a pattern of widespread' war crimes, including willful killings, attacks on civilians, torture, rape, and more.[70] While many war criminals display a callous indifference to their actions, there are also many instances where atrocities have evoked profound remorse in the perpetrators.[71] Again, this statement requires nuance. On the one hand, the Russian military seems to instill specific moral standards that diverge from international humanitarian law, as well as distinct viewpoints on Ukraine.[72] The atrocities perpetrated by Russian troops are not incidental occurrences and mere by-products of corruption, but rather reflect a longstanding, structural aspect of Russian military doctrine, extending beyond Putin's reign.[73] Thus, Russian soldiers may view civilian targeting as necessary for their strategy. Even when they recognise it as wrong, their narrative of protecting Russia may enable rationalisation. On the other hand, despite the adage *inter arma enim silent leges* – in times of war, the laws are silent – no soldier is devoid of judicial and moral standards. Albeit to varying degrees, universal moral intuitions, like valuing human life, guide moral reasoning worldwide.[74] Accordingly, soldiers worldwide distinguish between murder and

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[68] Kellenbach, *The Mark of Cain*; Scagliola, "Cleo's 'unfinished business'"; Shay, *Odysseus in America: Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming*.

[69] Molendijk, *Moral Injury and Soldiers in Conflict*; Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*; Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*; Maguen and Burkman, "Combat-related killing."

[70] Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, "Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, A/HRC/52/62"; OHCHR, "The situation of human rights in Ukraine in the context of the armed attack by the Russian Federation, 24 February to 15 May 2022."

[71] Maguen and Burkman, "Combat-related killing"; Kellenbach, *The Mark of Cain*; Giesen, "The trauma of perpetrators"; Mohamed, "Of monsters and men."

[72] Provoost and Kitzen, "Don't underestimate the bear—Russia is one of the world's most effective modern counterinsurgents"; Zhukov, "Counterinsurgency in a non-democratic state"; Kinetz, "'Kill everyone.'"

[73] Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, "Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, A/HRC/52/62"; Provoost and Kitzen, "Don't underestimate the bear—Russia is one of the world's most effective modern counterinsurgents"; Kinetz, "'Kill everyone'"; Zhukov, "Counterinsurgency in a non-democratic state."

[74] There appear to be universal moral foundations such as care/harm, fairness/cheating, loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion, sanctity/degradation, and liberty/oppression. See e.g. Graham et al., "Moral foundations theory"; Haidt and Joseph, "Intuitive ethics"; Graham et al., "Moral foundations theory."

legitimate killing, innocent civilians and armed enemies, and illegitimate and legitimate targets.[75]

Regarding the specific attitude toward taking Ukrainian lives, Russians have grown up not only with stories about anti-Russian elements in Ukraine, but also with the idea that Ukraine is a 'brotherly nation.'[76] Although, as mentioned, Ukraine is generally perceived as the 'little brother' that should obey 'big brother Russia,' there exists this familial notion. Furthermore, a significant number of Russians have relatives living in Ukraine.[77] Ultimately, whether or not they are able to justify Ukrainian killing, veterans' accounts of numerous wars reveal that the existential reality of the battlefield may still crush some fundamental beliefs about humankind.[78] To use the words of Vietnam veteran Bica,[79] 'as the screams of dying comrades replace the sounds of inspiring anthems, and the chaos, insanity, and horror of the battlefield become apparent,' the realisation may dawn that war is 'destruction and nothing else.'

3.3 Moral injury in Ukrainian combatants

Ukrainian soldiers may face war as 'destruction and nothing else' as well. Yet, it is also a fight for family, home and country, possibly shielding them from moral injury in one sense while making them susceptible in another. Unlike Russian soldiers, they confront the literal destruction of their families, homes, and country, giving the suffering they encounter a significantly different meaning than it does for Russian soldiers. Furthermore, as with any war, Ukrainian soldiers may have unintentionally been involved in actions that caused harm to their fellow Ukrainians due to errors and misjudgments.[80] Moreover, the intense individual and collective survival instincts that are essential for navigating the immediate challenges of combat may have resulted in behaviour that will haunt some in the long term.[81] The combination of the harsh reality of war, instinctual survival responses,

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[75] Walzer, *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad.*

[76] Khaldarova, "Brother or 'Other'?"

[77] Petrova, "For many Ukrainians, everyday Russians are as guilty as Putin."

[78] cf. Gray, *The Warriors*; Bica, "A therapeutic application of philosophy. The moral casualties of war: Understanding the experience"; Lifton, *Home from the War: Learning from Vietnam Veterans*; Janoff-Bulman, *Shattered Assumptions*; Molendijk, *Moral Injury and Soldiers in Conflict*; Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam.*

[79] "A therapeutic application of philosophy. The moral casualties of war: Understanding the experience," 87.

[80] Schorr et al., "Sources of moral injury among war veterans"; Molendijk, *Moral Injury and Soldiers in Conflict*; Gray, *The Warriors*; Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam.*

[81] Schorr et al., "Sources of moral injury among war veterans"; Molendijk, *Moral Injury and Soldiers in Conflict*; Gray, *The Warriors*; Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam.*

and an environment of impunity can create a volatile mixture that leads to moral transgressions and even war crimes.[82] The United Nations have reported a small number of possible violations of international humanitarian law by Ukrainian soldiers, including positioning near civilian areas without protecting civilians and incidents of summary execution and torture of Russian POWs.[83]

It is important to reiterate that the Ukrainian soldiers' crimes are incidental and incomparable to the widespread atrocities by Russian troops, which appear deliberate and structural in their military strategy. Also, not all incidents reported are necessarily illegitimate, for instance certain fighting tactics. However, it would be unwise to assume that no transgressions at all are perpetrated by Ukrainian forces. No documented war has been completely free of legal and moral breaches. Discussing such issues may provoke strong emotions and criticism, but it is vital to remain realistic about war's devastating impact on human behaviour. These incidents may have caused moral conflicts for the soldiers involved, or they may do so in the long term.

Furthermore, moral injury may also affect soldiers who have not committed any potentially illegitimate act. Increasingly, reports are emerging of Ukrainian soldiers experiencing moral turmoil.[84] In a rehabilitation centre where Ukrainian soldiers are sent for a week before being redeployed to the frontlines, a local psychologist relates: 'Many can't sleep. They have nightmares. [...] There is also this enormous sense of guilt. They feel guilty about their friends who died on the front line. And – because many of them have never killed a living being – they sometimes even feel guilty about killing enemy soldiers. They use the word "murder."'[85]

Besides survivor's guilt and distress about having killed, Ukrainian soldiers have reported feeling a moral betrayal by the Russians. For instance, Ukrainian soldiers of the Donbas war have been cited stating 'Brother nation Russia, they kill us, betray us, and it hurts because we are brothers,' referring to how Russian declarations of being brother nations and their 'subsequent betrayal was seen as particularly hurtful.'[86]

[82] Gupta, *Path to Collective Madness: A Study in Social Order and Political Pathology*; Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*; Zur, "The psychological impact of impunity."

[83] OHCHR, "The situation of human rights in Ukraine in the context of the armed attack by the Russian Federation, 24 February to 15 May 2022"; Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, "Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, A/HRC/52/62."

[84] e.g. Kakissis, Harbage, and Lytvynova, "A rehab center revives traumatized Ukrainian Troops before their return to battle"; Cancio, Kuptsevych-Timmer, and Omori, "Perpetual war with the brother nation."

[85] Kakissis, Harbage, and Lytvynova, "A rehab center revives traumatized Ukrainian troops before their return to battle."

[86] Cancio, Kuptsevych-Timmer, and Omori, "Perpetual war with the brother nation," 12.

The experiences of Allied forces in World War II, as veterans of another 'good war,' offer insight into how these moral struggles can unfold. Reflecting on what war brought out in him and his fellow soldiers, WWII veteran Jesse Glenn Gray writes: 'Faced with this presumptuousness of the human creature, his closedness and dearth of love, the awakened soldier will be driven to say in his heart: "I, too, belong to this species. I am ashamed not only of my own deeds, not only of my nation's deeds, but of human deeds as well. I am ashamed to be a man." [...] How many soldiers have experienced in battle a profound distaste for the human creature!'[87]

In his wartime diary, he wrote about the deaths for which he bore responsibility, concluding: 'I hope it will not rest too hard on my conscience, and yet if it does not I shall be disturbed also.'[88]

4. Concluding reflections: Us/them fairy tale narratives in the west

The issues of morale and moral injury among Russian and Ukrainian soldiers are clearly situated within interrelated processes at the micro, meso, and macro levels. They underscore the relevance of broad ethical questions about war in the real-world context of the battlefield, while at the same time calling discussions about the ethics of war out of abstract arguments toward closer consideration of the concrete psychological costs of war.

Take, for instance, the Just War tradition, a tradition of theory that attempts to provide ethical guidelines for war. The preceding discussion showed that the grounds on which political leaders resort to war inevitably affect soldiers' conduct during the war and their retrospective appraisal of their own conduct. This confirms both the relevance of Just War tradition and an interconnection among its three categories: jus ad bellum (the justification for going to war), jus in bello (the ethical conduct of war), and just post bellum (justice after war).[89]

The core criteria of the Just War tradition have been incorporated into the formal frameworks of the United Nations. As solidified ethical principles, these international laws and regulations protect not only civilians but also combatants, both physically from other combatants and mentally from themselves. Clearly, Just War criteria and human rights can also be misused by political leaders, such as Putin, as a narrative to justify war crimes. At the same time, it became clear that

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[87] Gray, *The Warriors*, 205–7.

[88] Gray, 176.

[89] see also Molendijk, "Just war theory for morale and moral injury: Beyond individual resilience"; Molendijk, *Moral Injury and Soldiers in Conflict*.

reality cannot be entirely reduced to a social construct of narratives. The cruel experience of war on the battlefield, where civilians do not necessarily welcome invading soldiers with open arms, reveals the existential reality of invasion, possibly damaging narratives of justification. Previous conflicts have demonstrated that while soldiers may cling even tighter to these narratives, the visceral experience of war and the darker side of humankind can haunt them indefinitely.[90]

SOCIETAL NARRATIVES OF WAR

why-what-and-how of events, to make sense of what is happen, make judgments about what is justified and unacceptable, and guides future action

Us/them categorizaton
- There are only two sides, and you are either with or against us
- 'Our' violence is justified, 'their' violence is barbaric

Complex categorizaton
- Partiality in the case of aggression is crucial
- But there are multiple dimensions and actors

Black/white fairytale stucture
- Evil villains versus superheroes
- Transgressions by villains are evil, transgression by heroes are ethically irrelevant

Tragedy structure
- There is such a thing as wrong versus right
- But all humans are capable of doing inhumane things

Dehumanization
- 'Their' soldiers are a priori demonized, without exception or nuance
- 'Our' soldiers are asked to be superhuman, leaving no room for human flaws

Humanization
- Soldiers are human agents with the capacity to engage in both evil and heroic actions
- They should be held accountable accordingly

Figure 6.3: Societal narratives of war

As a final point, it is important for Western audiences to recognise that, just as Russian and Ukrainian individuals and collectives, we also construct narratives of the conflict that can have tangible impacts. Engaging in critical self-reflection allows us to uncover how our own narratives shape our understanding of the invasion, potential solutions, and ultimately influence our actions and interference in the conflict (see Figure 6.3). In the face of crisis and threat, it is common to fall into us/them narratives, where we tend to believe that our own violence is justified and perhaps even virtuous while that of the other side is barbaric.[91] A 'war narrative

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[90] cf. Gray, *The Warriors*; Bica, "A therapeutic application of philosophy. The moral casualties of war: Understanding the experience"; Lifton, *Home from the War: Learning from Vietnam Veterans*; Janoff-Bulman, *Shattered Assumptions*; Molendijk, *Moral Injury and Soldiers in Conflict*; Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*.

[91] Lambert, Schott, and Scherer, "Threat, politics, and attitudes"; Leudar, Marsland, and Nekvapil, "On membership categorization"; Skitka et al., "Confrontational and preventative policy responses to terrorism."

emphasizes a bipolar divide of some kind: a dichotomous representation of the international scene, a global clash between two antagonistic forces that invariably carry with them a moral identity.'[92] But this can be dangerous.

To be sure, it is indeed essential to take a clear stance during wartime, as passive neutrality in asymmetric conflicts inevitably means choosing the side of the aggressor. Also, Schadenfreude about enemy casualties and aversion to criticism of Ukraine are understandable. However, care must be taken when crafting a narrative that oversimplifies by categorising all Russians as evil and all Ukrainians as superheroes. Such a 'fairy tale' division fails to provide a nuanced understanding and ends up dehumanising not only Russian soldiers but Ukrainians as well. It demands that they be superhuman.

An alternative perspective on war views it as a tragic human endeavour, where all soldiers can cross moral boundaries and, thus, should be safeguarded from their own actions. The historical lesson that humans can commit inhumane acts is precisely what led to the establishment of international laws and regulations for war. Ethical baselines, developed over centuries, are not naïve, but a tradition of minimalist ethics. When these standards are deemed irrelevant in the challenging circumstances for which they are designed, they lose their meaning.

Hence, while expecting clean wars is unrealistic, it is equally unrealistic to dismiss transgressions committed by the 'heroes' as ethically irrelevant. As the 'fairy tale' narrative not only fails to protect Ukrainian soldiers from their own actions but also exposes them to the risk of being vilified in the post-war aftermath, as seen in past military operations like Vietnam, Srebrenica, and the Dutch East Indies. Acknowledging war as a tragic human endeavour, instead, allows for genuine empathy for soldiers who cross moral boundaries in the fog of war and must live with the consequences.

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[92] Vinson and McDonnell, "War narratives," 5.

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Warfighting

Putin's War, a European Tragedy: Why Russia's War Failed and What It Means for NATO

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Abstract

This reconstruction of the first 500 days of the war, argues that, while the war holds important new lessons at the tactical and even operational level of war, there is also much worryingly and tragically familiar in Russia's aggression. Assessing this through the lens of NATO's deterrence challenge, it concludes that the West needs to develop capabilities that (1) enable a credible deterrence by a denial posture, instead of the current deterrence by punishment strategy, and that (b) prevent the West being dragged into a costly attritional war as has unfolded in Ukraine. That in turn requires the West, in particular European militaries, first and foremost to restore and exploit its qualitative asymmetric advantage.

Keywords: Deterrence, Asymmetry, Capability development

1. Introduction

This reconstruction of the first 500 days of the war, argues that, while the war holds important new lessons at the tactical and even operational level of war, there is also much worryingly and tragically familiar in Russia's aggression. Assessing this through the lens of NATO's deterrence challenge, it concludes that the West needs to develop capabilities that (1) enable a credible deterrence by a denial posture, instead of the current deterrence by punishment strategy, and that (b) prevent the West being dragged into a costly attritional war as has unfolded in Ukraine. That in turn requires the West, in particular European militaries, first and foremost to restore and exploit its qualitative asymmetric advantage.

2. Part I: The first year

2.1 A war foretold

When Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24th 2022, the 'West' was surprised and shocked. Major war had returned on the European continent and the Russian numerical superiority suggested Russia would succeed in toppling the regime in Kyiv and subsequently occupy the country. Yet this war had been predicted by US intelligence as early as October 2021, and Russia's aggression had been evident ever since the annexation of Crimea in 2014; in the various subversive actions in European countries; and the incessant barrage of cyber- and social media attacks on European societies. In 2014, NATO refocused on Art. 5 in light of this paradigm shift, the ongoing Russian military modernisation and the emergence of the Anti-Access/Area-Denial challenge. The EU promulgated its new security strategy in 2016, warning that the EU member states faced an existential crisis. Great power competition had returned. And the Kremlin informed the West a new cold war had begun.

Beyond economic sanctions and NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence and Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) proposals, Europe had responded timidly to the annexation of Crimea, communicating weakness and a divided Europe instead of strength and unity. That perception, and a hunger to restore Russia's status as a superpower, merged with an ultranationalist belief in Russia's unique and superior culture, fears of Western liberal ideas and the conviction that Russia's security requires regaining its Cold War spheres of influence. Preluding the genocidal character of Russia's war, Putin, in a lengthy essay had revealed his obsession with Ukraine, arguing no Ukrainian culture or identity existed.[1] His polarising rhetoric in the months prior to February 2022, practically painting himself in a corner from which he could not retreat without loss of face, combined with the steady build-up of forces along Ukraine's borders that remained on station there for months, were telltale signs that, despite Russian diplomats claiming the contrary, Russia was intent on invading Ukraine.

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[1] See for this for instance: Hunter, "The Ukraine crisis: Why and what now?" 7-28; Götz and Staun "Why Russia attacked Ukraine: Strategic culture and radicalized narratives," 482-497; Tesch, "Absolutism, spiritualism, exceptionalism and convulsion: the core of Vladimir Putin's war in Ukraine and against the West," 73-79; for elaborate debunking of the "it is NATO's fault" argument, and various other fallacies, see Ash et al., "How to end Russia's war on Ukraine," 3.

2.2 Western self-deterrence and a cunning plan

The US and Baltic leaders' warnings to European capitals fell on deaf ears, unwittingly easing Putin's strategic calculation.[2] Theory suggests deterrence fails if the deterrent threat remains uncommunicated, the challenger is unconvinced of the deterrer's resolve, suspects the deterrer's coalition is weak and disunited, and believes he can create a fait accompli before the deterrer can mount a suitable response. Europe was divided, it felt no political obligation to militarily help defend Ukraine (not being a NATO member), and it allowed its energy dependence on Russia to prevail over security considerations. Moreover, the Kremlin succeeded in confusing and deceiving the West by repeatedly denying its intent to start a war. Europe, communicating the need for all parties to avoid escalation, communicated it feared the risk of (nuclear) escalation more than Russia did, offering Putin a gift he had not asked for: self-deterrence.

The Kremlin planned for a rapid 10-day campaign – a special operation – creating a fait accompli, outpacing the West's ability to generate a political and military response, aimed to overwhelm Ukraine's military and result in the Russian Flag flying over Kyiv's government buildings. Victory seemed assured and nearly succeeded. This war pitted the 9th biggest economy in the world against the 56th. Enjoying superiority in numbers – Russia had mustered 150,000-190,000 troops along the long Ukrainian border – and prevailing doctrine led to expectations that Russia would be able to overrun Ukraine. Russia could employ three times the number of tanks and artillery pieces that Ukraine could mobilise, eight times the number of combat helicopters and ten times the number of combat aircraft. Zapad exercises indicated Russia could deploy these in a coordinated and mutually supportive manner, aided also by hypersonic missiles, massive cyberattacks, and swarms of drones. While perhaps insufficient for achieving Putin's maximalist objective (the full occupation of Ukraine) such a force differential promised a rapid advance, too fast for Ukraine to mobilise units, and for the divided West to generate a timely robust response. Toppling the democratically elected government in Kyiv certainly seemed feasible.[3]

The initial phase of the invasion seemed to go according to plan. Ukraine's transport and communications infrastructure suffered massive cyberattacks. Around 1,000 cruise missiles and stand-off weapons struck airfields, military headquarters,

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[2] See for instance an admission of this in: Wintour, "Germany did not listen to warnings about Russia, says Annalena Baerbock"; Harris et al. "Road to war: U.S. struggled to convince allies, and Zelensky, of risk of invasion."

[3] Miller and Belton, "Russia's spies misread Ukraine and misled Kremlin as war loomed."

and air defence positions.[4] Electronic warfare operations jammed communications and radar systems, temporarily neutralising Ukrainian SAM systems. In the air, Ukrainian fighter jets confronted qualitatively and quantitatively superior Russian counterparts that benefitted from airborne early warning and long-range air-to-air missiles. A wave of helicopters inserted airmobile units to Hostomel airfield near Kyiv in order to secure it and receive transport aircraft loaded with armored vehicles and infantry that would connect with the mechanised columns advancing towards Kyiv from the north and northeast.

2.3 A failure in combined arms operations

Yet, within weeks, the campaign was losing momentum and by default transitioned into an attritional contest the Kremlin had not anticipated. Ukraine had put up a surprisingly effective resistance. Russia's northern and northeastern armored advances stalled, evidence of poor preparation and lack of logistical coordination. Ukrainian artillery meanwhile fired on Hostomel airfield, troops shot down several helicopters, eliminated the landed Russian units, and punched holes in the runway, making landing with transport aircraft impossible. The columns of the northern advance were bombarded with artillery fire, anti-tank missiles and drones. By retreating into cities and woods, Ukraine denied Russia the full use of its superiority in armour and artillery and an early decisive battle.[5]

Failures in conducting combined arms tactics and logistics, and not exploiting its air power advantage to achieve air superiority, conduct air interdiction, strategic attacks and provide responsive close air support, all contributed to the failing of the envisioned 10-day 'special operation.' After day three, Ukraine succeeded in denying Russia the use of airspace, providing freedom of manoeuvre for its ground troops and logistics.[6] Not achieving air superiority ranks as one of the most significant blunders. That was due in particular to the effective deployment of ground-based mobile anti-aircraft systems. The day before the start of the Russian offensive, the Ukrainian command, based on American warnings, removed aircraft from the military airfields known to the Russians and distributed the mobile SAM systems. As a result, Russian air and missile strikes hit virtually empty air force infrastructure which failed to eliminate the Ukrainian air force.

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[4] This reconstruction gratefully draws on one of the scarce reports on the air war: Bronk, Reynolds, and Watling, "The Russian air war and Ukraine requirements for air defense."

[5] See for a good initial assessment: Dalsjö, Jonsson, and Norberg. "A brutal examination: Russian military capability in light of the Ukraine War," 7-28; Kahn, "How Ukraine Is remaking war: Technological advancements are helping Kyiv succeed."

[6] Bronk, Reynolds, and Watling, "The Russian air war and Ukraine requirements for air defense."

Electronic warfare initially managed to jam Ukrainian radar and communication systems, negating Ukraine the use of its mobile SAM systems, but also hampering Russia's own communications. After a couple of days Russia therefore ceased jamming, enabling Ukrainian SAMs to become effective which, combined with the deployment of many man-portable air defence systems such as Stingers, caused heavy losses among Russian helicopters and fighter jets (an estimated 88 in the first week alone). Russian pilots did not adjust their tactics and often flew into Ukrainian airspace alone and without a protective escort. Due also to inadequate coordination with their own ground troops and resulting fratricides, the Russian Air Force became reluctant to conduct offensive air operations over Ukrainian territory. Subsequent airstrikes were mainly carried out from Russian and Belarusian airspace. Effectiveness of those however was degraded due to a lack of precision munitions and the use of non-guided ammunition dropped from a medium altitude. Close air support missions also were relatively ineffective because the Ukrainian SAM threat forced them to apply low-level tactics. The ground advance therefore operated largely without air support.

Air strikes increasingly targeted cities. From April onwards, Russia ceased conducting offensive missions beyond the frontline. Russian fighters with long range air-to-air missiles, however, remained very effective against Ukrainian aircraft near the front lines. But the intensity of air operations dropped to about 140 daily sorties, rising to 250-300 around the summer, a small number given the available number of combat aircraft, the length of the front line and the size of Ukraine. As a consequence, Ukraine retained freedom of movement for its own ground troops and logistical supply lines remained relatively secure. Recognising the strategic importance of air defence, from the start of the invasion, and well into 2023, President Zelensky told the West that air defence was one of his primary concerns, next to 'ammo, armour, and artillery.' In February 2022, Zelensky even pleaded the West for a no-fly zone and consistently requested Western fighter jets to be supplied. 'Close the skies' he begged Western leaders in January 2023, stressing the challenges Ukraine faced with its dwindling stockpile of air defence missiles and number of fighter aircraft.

2.4 Russia retreats from Kyiv

Putin, on April 9, declared units would retreat from Kyiv and instead focus on the Donbas, the complete conquest of Ukraine clearly out of reach. Instead of allowing the heavily tired and demoralised troops around Kyiv to recuperate, Russia threw those units into the fight straight away. A disconnected under-resourced four-front attritional war ensued, including pre-modern siege warfare. Russian units encircled and pulverised cities, showing no regard for the law of armed conflict, causing

horrific numbers of civilian casualties and committing war crimes in Bucha and Irpin. The fierce battle for Mariupol seemed to confirm that Russia was now adopting the playbook of the Chechen War, where Russia surrounded and obliterated the city of Grozny. Conquering the entire Donbas and connecting it with the Crimea and thus establishing Novorossiya now seemed the objective. The last major cities to fall to Russia after prolonged massive artillery barrages and costly urban combat were Severodonetsk, and Lysichansk. Defending these cities cost Ukraine dearly too but bought precious time required for mobilising new units and introducing Western military capabilities.

The Russian air force stepped up the contest for air superiority. Numerous airstrikes along with long-range missiles, ballistic missiles, and cruise missiles targeted logistical supply lines throughout Ukraine, including targets around Lviv, the region where Western military support enters the country, forcing Ukraine to reallocate scarce mobile SAM systems. The strategic impact of this air interdiction operation was ultimately minor due to low accuracy, intensity and frequency of the interdiction campaign. Moreover, Ukrainian air defence managed to intercept an increasing number of those missiles, rising from about 20-30% to 50-60% in May-June 2022. And despite Russian nuclear rhetoric, the West remained resolved to supply Western equipment while Ukraine remained able to direct troops and equipment to the front by rail.

At the frontline too, Russia stepped up the fight for air superiority in spring/summer 2022. Operating from eastern air bases relatively close to the front, high-flying fighters lured Ukrainian SAM operators to switch on the systems which revealed their location, after which low-incoming SU 24 Fencer and Frogfoots tried to disable them. Other fighters fired anti-radiation missiles at Ukrainian SAM radars as did artillery, supported by reconnaissance drones. Ukraine applied the same tactic, especially from August onwards when it could use HIMARS systems. In the southern Kherson Oblast several S-400 systems were thus disabled. Ukraine also started to operate with Mig-29s modified to launch Western HARM anti-radiation missiles. These attacks then enabled Ukrainian Frogfoots to attack targets around and behind the front. In the Donbas, Russian Frogfoots sometimes exploited the gaps created in air defence cover and penetrated up to 100 km behind Ukrainian lines. Yet neither camp succeeded in actually creating a permanent hole in the enemy air defences at the front.

While struggling in the costly defensive, losing approximately 500 soldiers each day during the Summer of 2022 in the Donbas, Zelensky surprisingly predicted Ukraine would soon start an offensive now that Western materiel was coming in, an offensive directed at the city of Kherson. The strategic logic was threefold: after six months of suffering, communicating hope and success would bolster Ukrainian public and military morale; it sent a signal of gratitude to the West that their military support would be put to good use resulting in significant territorial gains, communicating at the same time more support would be welcome; and, finally,

it forced Russia to re-consider allocating its forces and potentially withdrawing those from the Donbas front towards the Kherson area, thus alleviating some of the pressure on Ukrainian troops in the Donbas.

In August and September 2022, scores of HIMARS salvos struck Russian command centres and ammunition depots well behind the southern frontline, Russian SAM sites were hunted south of Kherson city and bridges were destroyed, all confirming the perception that Kherson was indeed the target of the Ukrainian counteroffensive. In response, Russia transferred 20,000-30,000 troops from the Kharkiv area to help defend Kherson. Next, in a surprise attack, Ukrainian units sped through the remaining shallow Russian defensive lines in the Kharkiv province, rapidly reconquering it. Russia, meanwhile, stubbornly defended Kherson but recognised that, with the bridges over the Dnepr River dysfunctional, logistical support for the units there was increasingly problematic and it subsequently withdrew most of its capabilities in an orderly fashion to the left bank of the river, from where it could continue with artillery attacks on the city. Ukraine liberated the city on November 9.[7]

2.5 Russia on the defensive

Russia subsequently focused on the defence of the occupied territories and unleashed a new strategic air offensive under the new Russian commander Surovikin. This time, Ukraine's energy infrastructure was systematically attacked with dozens of ballistic, cruise missiles and also with cheap Iranian Shaheed drones, causing widespread blackouts across Ukraine. With winter approaching, this was a major humanitarian concern. The intended strategic goal was to demoralise the population in cities and undermine their resolve, in order to put pressure on Zelensky and force his government to accept the status quo. In addition, the campaign was aimed at disrupting Ukraine's war industry and electrified rail transport, which is essential for the efficient and rapid transportation of heavy freight and large numbers of people over long distances. Finally, this was a targeted attack on Ukrainian air defence, forcing Ukraine to deploy scarce air defence capabilities to protect cities and critical infrastructure, risking weakening the air defences of Ukrainian units at the front.

Again, the campaign failed to impact Kyiv's strategic decision-making. The attacks came 'late' in the war at a time when Ukraine was winning on the frontline. The massive damage to civilian buildings caused international outrage. The European Parliament declared Russia a state sponsor of terrorism and the West pledged to support Ukraine 'for as long as necessary.' Operational considerations

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[7] For a good preliminary analysis see: Zabrodskyi, Watling, Danylyuk, and Nick Reynolds, "Preliminary lessons in conventional warfighting from Russia's invasion of Ukraine: February–July 2022."

also played a role: (a) could Russia repeat these attacks with high intensity and speed (how large is the stockpile of drones and missiles); (b) at what rate can the destruction be repaired, and (c) to what extent and for how long can the drones and missiles be intercepted (in other words: is the number of SAM systems and ammunition stockpile sufficient)? As it turned out, Russia proved unable to sustain a prolonged high intensity bombing campaign, with often one- or two- week intervals between strikes, enabling Ukraine to restore the electricity supply. Air defence systems the West supplied also played a major role in this: the interception rate rose to over 80%.

2.6 Putin's flawed assumptions and Western support

Clearly the Kremlin had based its initial invasion plans on faulty assumptions. Politically, it had not anticipated the swift Western reaction in the shape of massive sanctions and military support for Ukraine. It also assumed a divided Ukrainian population, a weak regime, and a weak military. It discovered a stiff military resistance instead and found the invasion unified the nation, fueled a remarkable societal resilience, and energised its leadership. Zelensky became what Churchill was for Great Britain in 1940. Putin had also overestimated Russia's own military capabilities and the secrecy of its planning process effectively meant that (a) the frontline troops received orders far too late; (b) too little coordination had taken place between the tactical ground formations, and between the infantry units and the necessary supporting artillery and Russian air power for close air support; (c) the logistics were not in order and the units crossed the border with their tanks and armoured vehicles in non-combat formations. Its deeply corrupt and hierarchical command culture in turn hampered honest communication about the situation at the frontline as well as adapting to the realities there when the plans did not work out.[8] After three months, when it became obvious to Western leaders Russia would perhaps not succeed and Kyiv might prevail, time was turning against Putin.

In the summer of 2022, despite its sometimes-fragile unity and unilateral overtures towards Putin by Macron and other European leaders, a coalition emerged of Western countries willing to structurally offer military support to Ukraine. Mindful initially of potential 'red lines' and the risk of escalation, this had started reluctantly with the provision of anti-tank weapons and shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles. Following the reports of war crimes in Bucha and Irpin, and the destruction of entire Ukrainian cities, this support expanded to include sophisticated weapon systems such as howitzers, tanks, armoured personnel carriers and long-range rocket artillery, along with massive financial support to purchase weapons, rebuild

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[8] Freedman, "Why war fails: Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the limits of military power."

destroyed infrastructure, and help the Ukrainian economy survive. The West had recognised the huge security and humanitarian interests involved and rediscovered what it meant to be 'the West.'

Support seemed too little and too late, according to many analysts.[9] But when, in November 2022, Russia bombed Ukrainian electricity plants public support for Ukraine across Europe rose to 74%[10]. Russia must not win on the battlefield, argued German Bundeskanzler Scholz. The war can only end if Russia is defeated, the Swedish prime minister concurred. The West subsequently agreed to Kyiv's request for more anti-aircraft systems, including the transfer of Patriots, NASAM and German modern IRIS-T systems. In addition, the Netherlands and Denmark floated the suggestion to deliver F-16s and train Ukrainian pilots and technicians. Eastern European countries gave Ukraine disproportionate levels of military support, supplying Ukraine with their most modern equipment. While US support towered over Europe's, it remained hesitant to deliver long range ATACMS missile systems and approve the training of Ukrainian pilots on F-16s and the subsequent supply of those aircraft.[11] The US decision to supply Patriot systems followed in January 2023, and in July of that year the US finally approved the F-16 deal initiated by the Netherlands and Denmark. Several nations pledged to deliver modern Western tanks and hundreds of infantry fighting vehicles, in addition to other capabilities such as mine-clearing systems, drones, and counter-battery radars. The UK and France provided Stormshadow long range air launched missiles. The EU in turn placed an order for the production of 1 million artillery grenades, to be delivered in Winter 2024, indicating that the West was convinced the war would last beyond 2023 and adamant to signal the Kremlin's hope to outlast Western support was futile.

3. Part II: Into 2023

3.1 Gaining the initiative

Using the winter to construct impressive defensive lines with tank barriers, minefields and trenches,[12] in January 2023 Russia launched a Winter offensive with barrages of artillery (sometimes firing 20,000-30,000 shells a day) and waves of

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[9] Frum, "What Ukraine needs now"; Applebaum, "Germany is arguing with itself over Ukraine."

[10] European Commission. Eurobarometer 98.1. Kantar Public [producer] EB042EP. Brussels: Autumn 2022. DOI: 10.2861/732690.

[11] O'Brien and Stringer "America's unconvincing reasons for denying F-16s to Ukraine"; Schake, "Biden Is more fearful than the Ukrainians are."

[12] See for an extensive description of Russia's defensive system: Jones, Palmer, and Bermudez Jr., *Ukraine's Offensive Operations, Shifting the Offense-Defense Balance*.

Russian infantry smashing well-developed Ukrainian defence lines in the terrain, towns, and cities. Ukraine countered with artillery and long range missiles, causing massive Russian losses, in particular in the battle for Bahkmut. There Ukraine decided to arrest the Russian ground offensive. While the city itself had no special strategic significance, it became the political symbol of Ukrainian resistance and for the Russian Winter offensive. Russia by then probably already had lost half of the deployed tanks and more than 6,000 armored vehicles, as well as 200,000 soldiers, including 40,000-60,000 dead.[13] According to British intelligence, Russia was losing 500-800 men a day in February. By mid-2023 this war already ranked among the 10% bloodiest wars of the past 100 years, not counting the civilian casualties. Russia's limited advances on the battlefield by mid-2023 were disproportionately small in relation to its military losses.

Yet for Ukraine great concerns remained. Russia's numerical advantage in infantry after the September mobilisation and the continued increase in recruits – perhaps totaling 500,000 – could thoroughly frustrate a Ukrainian counter-offensive. Moreover, Russia still could deploy hundreds of combat aircraft. That capability could effectuate a Russian breakthrough on a part of the frontline. A breakthrough in the air – the neutralisation of the Ukrainian air denial capacity due to an exhaustion of ammunition stocks – would furthermore threaten the transport network and make the delivery of Western military aid, ammunition and troops to the front much more difficult. Conversely, if Ukraine could achieve air superiority over part of and behind the Russian front, then it would become extremely risky for Russia to mass fuel supplies, stocks of ammunition, artillery, tanks and armoured vehicles in readiness for an offensive. As it stood, it was trench warfare in the air: neither side able to win, but neither side could afford to lose it.

In June 2023 Ukraine started its anticipated counter-offensive across a broad front, now equipped with about 300 Western tanks and 800 APCs, as well as artillery systems, including, from July onwards, cluster munitions. That offensive, while locally successful with impressive tactical trench clearing operations, struggled to make territorial gains. Extensive minefields, combined with Russian anti-tank and artillery coverage, slowed down advances. Admitting the offensive progressed slower than expected and desired, in view of initial losses and well organised Russian defences, Ukraine shifted towards an interdiction strategy, attriting Russian armour, infantry and in particular its artillery capabilities.[14] Long range missiles and drones in turn systematically destroyed C2 facilities, ammunition depots, fuel storage infrastructure and even crucial bridges connecting the Crimea to the Donbas and Russian mainland. Western style manouevre operations proved

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[13] British intelligence update of February 17, 2023

[14] Gady and Kofman, "Ukraine's Strategy of Attrition," 7–22.

unfeasible due to a lack of skills for large scale combined arms operations, and lack of air power that could destroy Russian defences prior to ground operations and provide close air support for protection.[15]

The gradual reduction of Russian heavy weapon capabilities, combined with steady mounting – and demoralising – casualties could at some point result in a collapse of a section of the frontline, enabling re-conquering of a substantial segment of lost territory. In particular if that would create a wedge between the Crimea and the Donbas, it would send a strong political signal to, on the one hand, the Kremlin that Ukraine, with Western military systems, could also succeed in the future, and, on the other hand to the West, that Ukraine knew how to put Western support to good use and therefore deserved continued support.

3.2 No end in sight

By the summer of 2023, most analysts and Western politicians had become convinced that the war might well last for years. Some Western analysts argued, in light of Russia's military preponderance, that Zelensky should opt for ending the war by making territorial concessions.[16] Far-right and leftist politicians even suggested the West should withhold further military support thus forcing Zelenksy into making concessions. Regardless of the immorality of external actors forcing an invaded nation to make concessions to an authoritarian leader such as Putin, or the dangerous signal it would send to Putin that he could get away with aggression and war crimes,[17] there was never a chance in 2022 and 2023 that an agreement could be reached. There was no trust that the other side would honour a diplomatic agreement and neither side had political space to start negotiating in the first place.

Putin's aims remained unchanged (the elimination of Ukraine as a sovereign nation). Moreover, he could presumably, despite the enormous military losses, the economic damage as a result of the sanctions, the outflow of a million men, the problems in the automobile, arms, and aviation industries, and despite the loss of status due to the war, not end the war and at the same time remain in power.[18] He also still had the impression that Russia can win in the end. Under his dictatorial leadership, Russia will be prepared to sustain the struggle for a long time and absorb the enormous costs on the assumption that the West is neither

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[15] O'Brien, "Can Ukraine Fight as Well on Offense?"

[16] For instance: Charap, "An Unwinnable War, Washington Needs an Endgame in Ukraine."

[17] Natalukha, "There Can Be No Negotiations With Putin."

[18] Belton and Ebel, "Political risks rise for Putin as Ukraine's counteroffensive begins"; Rumer, "Ukraine: The end of the beginning"; Galeotti, "Russia-Ukraine war: Far from the front line, Putin's commanders are in chaos."

willing nor able to support Ukraine on a lasting basis. And as long as Zelensky is in Kyiv, negotiations are impossible, said Foreign Minister Lavrov.

Zelensky said the same about Putin in the Kremlin. Ukraine also does not consider it impossible that it can win, or that it can at least recapture a lot of ground, which would give it a much better negotiating position. Moreover, 85% of the Ukrainian population considered concessions unacceptable, which is logical in view of the many Russian war crimes, tens of thousands of civilian casualties that Ukraine already had to deplore and the millions of displaced persons and refugees. Finally, Zelensky and his administration, and with them many Western politicians and analysts, had no confidence that Putin would honour any truce. Rather, this would be exploited as a strategic pause in which his forces can regain strength, while slowly eroding Western support. After a few years, following such a period of 'frozen conflict,' battle could resume. In that time, Ukraine would not be able to revive the economy nor repair the heavily battered society that suffered a 40% decrease in GDP and 500bn Euros of damage. Zelensky instead put forward his conditions for peace, demanding complete withdrawal of Russian forces from Ukraine and complete restoration of the borders of 1992; financial reparation by Russia; and, regarding Russia's war crimes, justice. Many commentators agreed.[19] So in 2022-2023 the goals of the two sides were irreconcilable.[20] And, as Margaret McMillan stated, not all wars end at the negotiating table.[21]

4. Part III: Implications for European security

4.1 The future of war?

Whether the future of war can be gleaned from this clash between two almost similar twentieth century armed forces is doubtful.[22] That future will in no small measure be determined by the way states respond to recent wars and prepare for it, which will be determined by their security concerns, geographical location, technical and financial capacities and societal preferences and strategic culture. Context matters. It is also inappropriate at this stage to make categorical claims

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[19] See for instance: Polyakova and Fried, "Ukraine should aim for victory, not compromise"; Stent, "Russia can be stopped only on the battlefield"; Cohen, "It's not enough for Ukraine to win. Russia has to lose."

[20] Latona, "UN chief says peace talks in Ukraine conflict not possible right now"; Ash, et al., "How to end Russia's war on Ukraine, Safeguarding Europe's future, and the dangers of a false peace."

[21] MacMillan, "How wars don't end: Ukraine, Russia, and the lessons of World War I."

[22] Kofman, "NATO should avoid learning the wrong lessons from Russia's blunder in Ukraine."

about technologies, the future relevance or obsolescence of weapon systems or tactics based on incomplete information in an unfinished conflict.

Path-dependency too matters. Any analysis concerning the meaning of this war (does it herald the future of war?) must acknowledge the impact of the many Russian mistakes and shortcomings: (1) a poorly thought-out campaign plan; (2) based on misguided assumptions; (3) insufficient training and preparation of the units involved; (4) a weak, corrupt, and highly centralised command and control system with a culture that stifles lower-level initiative and reliable information; (5) poor quality of material and maintenance; (6) poor logistics capabilities; (7) an inability to conduct joint warfare; (8) a lack of discipline and a well-trained cadre of non-commissioned officers.[23]

4.2 Pointers at the tactical and operational level

Nevertheless, some pointers can be identified. The war shows accelerated innovation at the technical and tactical level. Land warfare in particular seems altered. The coupling of (cheap) drones with artillery and infantry confirms predictions that this would drastically alter ground combat by enhancing battlefield transparency and responsiveness.[24] These drones make it extremely risky for an opponent to mass armoured and infantry units and material, also given the enormous dominance of artillery, which causes the most casualties on both sides. As two analysts observed: 'The war in Ukraine clearly demonstrates drones are altering the dynamics of war. For Ukraine, airpower is largely taking the form of drones, a first for a large nation [...]. military drone technology is quickly becoming central to warfare. Given the relative cost-effectiveness of drones – compared to similar manned aircraft – they are challenging the existing assumptions about the use of airpower, allowing lesser adversaries to engage effectively in aerial warfare.'[25]

The same applies to the impact of MLRS-like systems, which has forced Russia to place command centres and ammunition depots at a greater distance from the frontline, aggravating existing command logistical challenges. HIMARS systems also disabled SAM systems, a reminder that fighting air superiority is a joint task.

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[23]   See also Gen. Petraeus on CNN, in: Bergen, Peter. " Gen. David Petraeus: How the war in Ukraine will end"; Massicot, "What Russia got wrong, can Moscow learn from its failures in Ukraine?"; Johnson, "Dysfunctional warfare: The Russian invasion of Ukraine," 5-20.

[24]   Maurer, "The future of precision-strike warfare—strategic dynamics of mature military revolutions."

[25]   Lowther and Siddiki, "Combat drones in Ukraine," 13.

This ties in with a larger operational level observation: the dominance of the defence over the offence which portends a break with the recent Western military experience in which the offence had become dominant due to tactical, operational and technological superiority, in particular in the air domain. Extensive Anti Access/Area Denial capabilities on both sides have had a strategic impact on the evolution of the war. Ukraine aggressively denied Russia use of Ukrainian airspace, reducing the offensive potential of the Russian air and missile force. This proved key for the initial turnaround around Kyiv, for holding out in the east, for the breakthrough in Kharkiv, the Kherson offensive as well as for keeping the transport and energy infrastructure functioning. As a RUSI report summarises, 'There is no sanctuary in modern warfare. The enemy can strike throughout operational depth. Survivability depends on dispersing ammunition stocks, command and control (C2), maintenance areas and aircraft.'[26] Attrition thus became the default strategic option for both.

But there is also much continuity. The problems both sides experienced in efforts for rapid breakthroughs fit the pattern of the industrial wars since 1914. As Biddle has argued, offensive manouevre is far from dead, and breakthrough is still possible, especially at thinly stretched defences like those of the Russians in Kherson and Kharkiv since mid-summer 2022. But it remains very hard to accomplish against deep, prepared defences with adequate supplies and operational reserves behind them. Exposed defenders are increasingly vulnerable to long-range weapons and sensors, but covered and concealed positions remain highly resistant to precision engagement. Overextended positions without secure supply lines can be overwhelmed, but consolidated positions with viable logistical support are still much harder and more costly to overcome.[27]

On an operational level, it is clear that neglecting joint warfare expertise can be fatal, a useful reminder for NATO units, as is the relevance of air superiority. Adaptability and the ability to use civilian technologies – drones, commercial communication tools (Starlink), simple target location apps, crowd-funding, etc – once again proved important.[28] The use of drones, while novel in its scale of employment, demonstrates again the usual action-reaction dynamics, in which new weapon technology quickly inspires the development of countermeasures in tactics, doctrine and defence systems.[29] As a result, in this war the average lifespan of a drone is five to six sorties. The attrition among drones, from small to the larger Orlan-10 and

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[26] Zabrodskyi, Watling, Danylyuk, and Nick Reynolds, "Preliminary Lessons in Conventional Warfighting from Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: February–July 2022."

[27] Biddle, "Ukraine and the future of offensive maneuver."

[28] Zabrodskyi, Watling, Danylyuk, and Nick Reynolds, "Preliminary lessons in conventional warfighting from Russia's invasion of Ukraine: February–July 2022"; See also: Ryan, "A year of war, Part I."

[29] Calcara, et al., "Why drones have not revolutionized war," 130–171.

the famous Bayraktar TB2, increased dramatically during 2022: 70-90% of drones were shot down by mid-2022. At the tactical and organisational level other familiar important factors are re-confirmed, such as quality of training, intelligence (with which the US and UK provide crucial support to Ukraine), logistical organisation and capacity, competent leadership, the importance of troop morale, and well-designed defence lines, including minefields and trenches. Russia's default strategy of attrition also harks back to twentieth century modern interstate warfare dynamics.

4.3 Déjà vu at the strategic level

At a strategic level, pointers for the future worryingly resemble the past. Prior to the war, many subscribed to the prediction that war in the future would be conducted primarily by non-state actors, or wear the face of hybrid conflict in which state actors used all kinds of non-military instruments (including cyberattacks) to influence societal processes in a target state and remain below the threshold of what the West would recognise as true war. But instead, Russia reminded the West that conventional military power and even nuclear sabre-rattling are still major currencies in international politics. Major war had returned on the European continent.[30]

The war also holds worrisome paradoxes. It is post-modern as well as modern and sometimes pre-modern. It involves a renewed acquaintance with the Russian strategic culture of total war. In Russia's criminal, indiscriminate, horrifically destructive assaults on the identity of the Ukrainian people, including the forced deportation of families and abduction of children, and the obliteration of their society (witness the destruction of the Kakhovka dam), the tenets return of pre-modern brutal strategies and the most hideous face of totalitarian regimes. Mariupol fell after prolonged, almost mediaeval, siege tactics. City bombings and the long battle for Bakhmut show stark similarities to the battle of Stalingrad. In the surrounding countryside, the muddy trenches resemble those of the Somme in World War I. The casual use of nuclear threats by Russian media personalities and senior politicians also echoes a previous era. Similarly, the realisation that the West must be prepared for industrial warfare is a rediscovery of the importance of what Michael Howard called the 'forgotten' dimensions of strategy.[31] Quantity of weapon systems, ammunition stocks, industrial capacity, spare parts, redundancy, societal resilience; they are all strategic qualities.

That is a disturbing *deja vu*. Although Russia made mistakes in this war and suffered enormous losses, it has in the meantime caused more than EUR 500 billion in damage to Ukrainian society, displaced millions of inhabitants and caused

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[30] Porter, "Out of the shadows: Ukraine and the shock of non-hybrid war."

[31] Covington, *The Culture of Strategic Thought Behind Russia's Modern Approaches to Warfare*; Vershinin, "The return of industrial warfare"; Howard, "The forgotten dimensions of strategy," 975-986.

tens of thousands of civilian deaths. That risk has not disappeared, especially for Eastern European member states of NATO and the EU, which also explains why Finland and Sweden rapidly applied for membership and Poland will increase defence spending to 4% of GDP. While Russia can ill afford a direct confrontation with NATO during the war with Ukraine, it has the ability to reconstitute its armed forces within a timespan of just a couple of years. Moreover, in a context of a direct confrontation with NATO, Russia would presumably have shown a different plan, with much better preparation, realistic assumptions and application of the doctrines practiced, (but presumably also a greater reluctance to bomb cities for fear of Western retaliation) and nuclear escalation.[32]

4.4 Thinking through the military implications for NATO

Those observations turn into implications for Western security and defence policies, military strategy, doctrines, and investment priorities when viewed through the lens of the strategic context of Western states: collective defence and deterrence. The war presents the West with distinct imperatives to adjust its deterrence in order to bolster its credibility. Second, when such a deterrence strategy fails, the West must be able to avoid being dragged into a prolonged costly attritional contest as the war in Ukraine has turned into. That war as well as the 'old' Cold War deterrence strategy and associated conventional capabilities provide clues as to what is required to accomplish both.

In light of Russia's aggression the Baltic States justifiably called for replacing NATO's deterrence by punishment strategy with a much more credible deterrence by denial strategy. Until then, the West relies on the assumption that the threat of a painful and costly military punishment for Russia would be enough to dissuade it from a military invasion of one of the eastern European member states. Since 2014 it was clear that this strategy lacked credibility. Indeed, many doubted NATO could successfully defend the territory of its most exposed members with the military resources then available.[33] The large numbers of Russian surface-to-surface missiles and anti-aircraft systems in Kaliningrad, among others, posed a major threat to the thin line of Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP) units in the Baltic states, and could deny air superiority to the West, which was crucial to defend the EFP units

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[32] Freedman, "Kyiv and Moscow are fighting two different wars: What the war in Ukraine has revealed about contemporary conflict."

[33] Shlapak and Johnson, *Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank, Wargaming the Defense of the Baltics,* 206, 1.

to provide air support and reinforcements. As a French analyst put it, without air superiority, the EFP units are not tripwire but sitting ducks.[34]

Decades of defence cuts, a focus on peace operations and a continued addiction to US military contributions sustained the so-called 'capability gap': the list of European military shortcomings featuring SEAD, ISR, Air C2, EW capabilities and stand-off munitions. European 4th generation fighters stand no chance against modern Russian S-300 and S-400 air defence systems without substantial American SEAD and Stealth fighter contributions. Russia's A2/AD threat on NATO borders thus undermined the credibility of conventional deterrence strategy. A quick Russian operation a few kilometres across a Baltic border would create a highly problematic fait-accompli situation for NATO.

It is that context, the New Cold War, in which possible lessons must be placed and given relevance to the West. NATO member states agreed on a new strategic concept in June 2022, calling for a Forward Presence strategy that is as necessary as it is ambitious. In the words of that concept: 'We will significantly strengthen our deterrence and defence posture to deny any potential adversary any possible opportunities for aggression. To that end, we will ensure a substantial and persistent presence on land, at sea, and in the air, including through strengthened integrated air and missile defence. We will deter and defend forward with robust in-place, multi-domain, combat-ready forces, enhanced command and control arrangements, prepositioned ammunition and equipment and improved capacity and infrastructure to rapidly reinforce any Ally, including at short or no notice.'[35]

In July 2023 in Vilnius NATO members further outlined the consequences of this new strategy, and also agreed that in the future the natural position of Ukraine would be as a member of NATO.

4.5 What is old becomes new: Restoring and exploiting asymmetry

A look at the 'old' Cold War provides useful insights into effectuating such a deterrence by denial strategy. It is essential that the stopping power is strengthened so that an aggression can be halted at the border. That stopping power consists (first) of artillery and missile systems and the restoration of European land power capabilities for Art. 5 operations. This also requires expansion of the physical

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[34] See for instance: Meijer and Brooks, "Illusions of autonomy: Why Europe cannot provide for its security If the United States pulls back," 7–43; Zapfe, "Deterrence from the ground up: Understanding NATO's enhanced forward presence," 147-160; Frühling and Lasconjarias, "NATO, A2/AD and the Kaliningrad challenge," 95-116.

[35] Vilnius Summit Communiqué Issued by NATO Heads of State and Government, 11 Jul. 2023 - | Press Release (2023) 001.

infrastructure on the eastern border of the alliance, and of stockpiles of ammunition. Yet (second), even more important is repairing and exploiting asymmetry on an operational and strategic level.

During the last two decades of the Cold War, the credibility of NATO's conventional deterrence strategy was underwritten by technological and operational superiority, in particular in air power (as well as sea power, for that matter). Numerically inferior, it was expected that, after an intense battle with the first echelon of the Warsaw Pact land forces, the belt of army corps' would eventually be defeated by the second and third echelons. On land there was no great difference in the quality of the weapon systems on either side. In the air power domain, a qualitative advantage emerged from the mid-seventies onwards with the introduction of the 4th generation fighters and bombers (F-15, F-16, F-18, Tornado, B-1) with precision weapons, cruise missiles and large numbers of SEAD assets and electronic warfare capabilities. This offered a real possibility to severely degrade the second and third Warsaw Pact echelons. With the impressive continuous belt of integrated air defence systems – the Hawk and Nike SAM belt – Russian air attacks could also be parried. This combination undermined the strategy of the Warsaw Pact.

That asymmetry needs to be restored and exploited. Russia is once again relying on its ability to sustain the war longer than Ukraine and the West. The new Forward Presence strategy should prevent such a scenario – getting bogged down in an attritional war. Enhanced land power capabilities is certainly essential, and eastern European states are therefore already investing in tanks, artillery and surface to surface missile systems. Yet that is not sufficient: winning the air denial contest is a strategic precondition. As two studies concluded before the war, what is needed is addressing the well-known 'critical capability shortfalls' in the area of 'A2/AD, stand-off munitions, SEAD, Destruction of Enemy Air Defences (DEAD), Enhanced ground Based Air Defence, Theatre Ballistic missile Defence, Electronic Warfare, modernised and hardened C4ISR, and 5th Generation combat aircraft.'[36]

A RUSI report emphasised this, stating that 'Fixing this deficiency should therefore, be seen as a matter of urgent priority.'[37] Because, the report continues, 'The only alternative – accepting that air superiority is not attainable over future battlefields contested by Russia or another adversary nation – would require a total redesign of NATO's joint forces towards a force that relies on massed artillery, armor and infantry as the core of its fighting power, rather than air-delivered

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[36] Schroeder, *NATO at Seventy: Filling NATO's Critical Defense-Capability Gaps*; Van Hooft and Boswinkel, *Surviving the Deadly Skies Integrated Air and Missile Defence 2021-2035*.

[37] Bronk, "Regenerating warfighting credibility for European NATO air forces," vi.

firepower. That alternative implies demographic, political and financial costs that far outstrip the costs of regenerating warfighting credibility for NATO air forces.'[38]

Such investments are a precondition for restoring the ability to protect ground troops on the eastern flank against missile and air attacks and, if necessary, to provide essential 'stopping power' at an early stage by means of Air Interdiction and Close Air Support. This reinforces the political signal of the Forward Presence strategy that Russian military aggression has no chance of success. If there is one lesson to be learned from the tragic war now once again taking place on European soil, it is that redressing operational and strategic asymmetries is essential.

4.6 A tragic return of history

A new Cold War has descended upon Europe, one that is more dangerous than the previous one. At the time, both camps sought to maintain nuclear stability from the 1970s onwards. Arms control regimes were agreed upon, as well as con-fidence-building measures, and borders in Europe were no longer really under contention. Now, however, the various nuclear weapons treaties have been dis-mantled and the leader in the Kremlin aims to restore Russia to superpower status and expand the Russian empire with the spheres of influence of old. Borders are being redrawn again by Russia, which is now framing this war as an existential one, and casually uses nuclear threats as an instrument. The Kremlin considers it a war of civilisation pitting Russia against the West, and one that will determine the future order in Europe and the credibility of NATO and the EU. With China looking on in the background, it is a systemic war that has the potential to structurally undermine the international legal order.

Putin has unleashed major war on the European continent but has not achieved any of his strategic objectives, despite the tragic slaughter he inflicted upon Ukrainian society. On the contrary: he unified the Ukrainian people and they will probably join the EU and NATO in the not too distant future; his military is suffering massively without much to show for it, and its international status has been greatly diminished; his economy is hurting from unprecedented heavy sanctions; NATO has and will be further enlarged and has revamped its defensive strategy; the EU has become more unified, aware that Ukraine fights a war also for Western interests and values. Still, this is ice cold comfort for the millions of Ukrainian refugees and internally displaced persons, livelihoods and futures destroyed, the thousands of civilian casualties and tens of thousands of military maimed, traumatised or killed.

[38] Ibid.

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Putin's Miscalculation: The Effectiveness of Russia's New-type Warfare in Ukraine

Han Bouwmeester

Abstract

This chapter focuses on whether Russian authorities used new-type warfare prior to and during the invasion of Ukraine. First publicly announced in 2015, this concept is the practical implementation of the Russian doctrinal concept of strategic deterrence. New-type warfare assumes that an opponent is initially disrupted by non-military means; should that not be enough to take over a country then it scales up to classical methods of warfare with military means. In the period leading up to the physical invasion of Ukraine, which began on February 24th, 2022, the Russian authorities had tried to hit Ukrainian society with political and energy restraining measures as well as with distorted information. The Russian authorities also caused many incidents, including coup attempts and covert, deceptive intelligence activities, but to no avail. The Ukrainian authorities responded appropriately, and it forced Russia to escalate further. On February 24th, 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine with four different physical ground attacks, assuming it could conquer Ukraine within 10 days, but that was not the case. Putin would have liked things to be different and made a major miscalculation. The effectiveness of Russia's new-type warfare, as applied in Ukraine, turned out to be quite disappointing for the Russian authorities.

Keywords: New-type warfare, Gerasimov, Manipulation, Disruption

1. Introduction

February 24th, 2022, 04:15 in the morning, Moscow time, President Vladimir Putin declared war on Ukraine in a specially pre-recorded, televised statement and labelled it a 'special military operation.'[1] Hostilities began at 05:00 that morning with a serious jamming of all Ukrainian military frequency bands and provocation of Ukrainian early warning system radars by Russian UAVs posing as Russian air strikes. Meanwhile, a few Russian hackers linked with the Russian authorities launched cyberattacks on Ukrainian government websites, while others attempted to disrupt electricity distribution stations and to make communications, facilitated

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[1] Matthews, *Overreach: The Inside Story of Putin's War Against Ukraine*, 2022, 214.

by U.S. satellite provider *Viasat*, impossible within Ukraine. Soon after, waves of ballistic missiles aimed at Ukrainian airfields followed. Although Ukraine's air defences were not on high alert, only a portion of the missiles hit their targets. Several Russian missiles malfunctioned, as they did earlier during Russian operations in Syria. In addition, Ukrainian authorities had moved a substantial portion of their air fleet and air defence assets in the days leading up to the Russian invasion, leaving much of Ukraine's fighter aircraft and air defence systems intact. The tactical fleet of the Russian Air Force carried out attacks on the capital Kyiv and on Ukrainian command posts located near the Russian border. The Russian Ministry of Defence indicated that in total 75 aircraft had participated in the attacks.[2] That early morning of February 24th, marked the first time since World War II that sirens sounded in Kyiv to warn of air strikes, and residents had to seek refuge in basements of houses and subway stations.[3]

The cyber- and jamming attacks were also intended to create a secure air corridor through which troops could be quickly flown in to stage a coup. Russian authorities planned to infiltrate the Kyiv government quarters as quickly as possible with Special Forces to eliminate the Zelensky government. Russian Airborne Forces were to take control of the airfields around Kyiv, while units from *Rosguardia*,[4] were to move rapidly from Belarus across the road to Kyiv to take control of the necessary infrastructure in and around the city, and where it would wait for the link-up with mechanised units arriving from Belarus and Russia. A very bold plan for which Russia was short of troops from the start.[5]

The attack on *Hostomel* Airfield, a cargo airbase north-west of Kyiv, was initially successful for the Russians. The Ukrainian response was slow and a Ukrainian counterattack at 4 p.m. that afternoon was repelled by Russian airborne units although the airfield runway became unusable.[6] Simultaneously, the first units of Russian 35th Combined Arms Army (35th CAA) began to advance from Belarus toward Kyiv, but almost immediately encountered a major problem: only one major road was available. Shortly after the start of the operation, a non-moving Russian traffic jam of more than 60 km became a desirable target for dispersed

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[2] Cooper et al., *War in Ukraine, Volume 2: Russian Invasion, February 2022*, 37-38.

[3] Arutunyan, *Hybrid Warriors: Proxies, Freelancers and Moscow's Struggle for Ukraine*, 247.

[4] *Rosgvardia* was established in 2016. It is the National Guard of Russia whose focus in peacetime is border control and terrorism and crime-fighting and operates under the authority of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

[5] Sabbagh and Koshiw, "The battle for Kyiv revisited: The quick litany of mistakes that cost Russia a quick win"; Cooper et al., *War in Ukraine, Volume 2: Russian Invasion, February 2022*, 39.

[6] Sonne, Kurshudyan, Morgunov, and Khudov, "Battle for Kiyv: Ukrainian valor, Russian blunders combined to save the capitol"; Cooper et al., *War in Ukraine, Volume 2: Russian Invasion, February 2022*, 39.

Ukrainian units equipped with small commercial, unmanned aerial systems (UAS), armed with explosives.[7]

Russia's invasion of northern Ukraine soon began to lose its effectiveness. How different the 2014 annexation of Crimea had been for Russia, when Russian troops, in cooperation with Russian security services were able to seize an entire peninsula in a few days without a shot being fired. This swift and non-violent takeover by the Russians kept minds churning. Many Western nations no longer expected that war would still be waged in such a massive and physical manner within Europe today. It is equally striking how Russian authorities misjudged their 2022 invasion, even though Russian military authorities had thoroughly analysed the annexation of Crimea. As a result of this scrutiny, the director of operations of the Russian armed forces, Lieutenant General Andrei Kartapolov, published in 2015 about Russia's new-type warfare, which aimed to eliminate the opponent initially by non-military means and deception. Should this fail, measures would be intensified, and, in an ultimate case, Russian authorities would switch to classical methods of warfare and use the military to conquer territory on the one hand or defeat enemy forces on the other.

Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to examine whether Russia has indeed applied this new-type warfare during their invasion of Ukraine. It leads to the following central research question: Did Russian authorities effectively apply the concept of the new-type warfare prior to and during their 2022-2023 invasion of Ukraine?

This chapter is structured as follows: the first section explains the origins and construction of Russia's new-type warfare. The subsequent sections will discuss Putin's considerations and Russian activities prior to the invasion of Ukraine. And, although the introduction has already briefly indicated what took place in the first hours and days of the 2022 Russian invasion, the succeeding section will outline what took place during the entire first year of the war. The chapter ends with a conclusion answering the main research question.

2. Explaining new-type warfare

This section elucidates Russia's new-type warfare in more detail, and for that it is necessary to go back to the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Indeed, after this annexation, most political and military leaders in the West had no idea what exactly had happened. Lots of confusion and deception had taken place, creating a distorted picture of the whole annexation. It was a stealth take-over of the peninsula by Russian green men,

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[7] Meduza, "An uncertain fate: Was Russia's entire 35th Army destroyed near Izyum?"; Cooper et al., *War in Ukraine, Volume 2: Russian Invasion, February 2022*, 41-45.

while President Putin claimed, for almost two months, that the Russian Federation had nothing to do with it. The question that soon arose was how this rapid annexation could take place without a shot being fired in Crimea.[8] Western specialists initially thought they would find an answer in a 2013 article by General Valery Gerasimov, Chief of Staff of the Russian armed forces, but in this very article Gerasimov described how the West, led by the United States, had been conducting military operations for 25 years, including in Kosovo and Iraq. Gerasimov considered the article a starting point for a discussion on renewed Russian action during conflicts.[9]

From a reconstruction by Timothy Thomas, an analyst at the Foreign Military Studies Office at Fort Leavenworth, KS (USA), it is known that the Russian General Staff developed a penchant for so-called 'new-type warfare.' In a 2015 speech, Lieutenant General Andrey Kartapolov expounded on Russian new-type warfare. He is convinced that the United States and NATO are undermining global stability with their high-tech weapons systems. America's anti-Russia campaign should lead the United States to superiority that will keep it the only superpower in the world for a long time. In doing so, the United States primarily uses hybrid methods, seeking to create perceptions and information-psychological effects. Kartapolov called on the Russian Federation to also start developing advanced weapons systems soon, as the West was already way ahead of them. Moreover, according to Kartapolov, the Russian armed forces should start thinking about a creative deployment of these new weapon systems, the changed nature of armed conflicts, and the use of non-traditional methods during confrontations, which rest on a combination of direct and non-direct actions.[10]

According to Kartapolov, indirect actions should include covert activities aimed at stirring up internal problems among an opponent's population and the use of so-called 'third forces,' a cloaking term for organised and trained civilian cells that allow riots and demonstrations to spiral out of control, creating polarisation that slowly becomes unmanageable and threatens to tear societies apart. Kartapolov also called for an in-depth study of the West because Western nations often apply some form of what he called 'information pressure' by constantly accusing others of 'human rights violations, suppression, developing weapons of mass destruction and acting undemocratically.' These campaigns are supported by manipulated information to create a confrontation where an opponent and public opinion are fed with falsified, substituted, or distorted information. Kartapolov believed that the West creates ambiguity about who is fighting and for what reasons, making it difficult to distinguish truth from lies.[11]

[8] Galeotti, *The Weaponization of Everything*, 4-9.

[9] Galeotti, "I'm sorry for creating the Gerasimov doctrine."

[10] Thomas, "The evolving nature of Russia's way of war," 39-40; Kartapolov, "Lessons of military conflicts and prospects for the development of resources and methods of conducting them," 29-35.

[11] Thomas, "The evolving nature of Russia's way of war," 40; Kartapolov, "Lessons of military conflicts and prospects for the development of resources and methods of conducting them," 29-31.

If the resulting disruption of society does not yield sufficient results, the authorities may take further steps. Often, under the guise of preventing 'a humanitarian disaster' and 'stabilizing the situation,' they will then resort to military intervention, ultimately using classical methods of war. The intention then is to use a combination of intelligence, command & control, and means of destruction with the ability to engage the opponent from long distances. Eventually, attacks will also be carried out to destroy the opponent's forces and take full control of the area. Above all, the new-type warfare is mainly aimed at creating images. Kartapolov indicated that new-type warfare is about 80-90 per cent propaganda and influence operations and only 10-20 per cent violence. At the end of his speech, Kartapolov showed the diagram, as shown in Figure 8.1, and stressed again that asymmetrical and indirect actions needed to be implemented quickly in the training of Russian troops.[12]

Methods and Ways of Conducting a New-Type of Warfare

Achieving goals in new-type warfare in combination with the employment of military force or without it. Set of indirect actions 'hybrid methods'

Pressuring the enemy politically, economically, informationally, and psychologically	Disorienting the political and military leadership of the state-victim. Spreading dissatisfaction among the population.	Preparing armed opposition detachments and sending them to the conflict region.

Intensifying diplomatic pressure and propaganda to the world community

Covertly deploying and employing special operations forces, cyber-attacks and software effects, conducting reconnaissance and subversive acts on a large scale, supporting the internal opposition, and employing new weapons systems

Shifting to classical methods of waging war, using various types of weapons in combination with large-scale information effects

Seizing enemy territory with the simultaneous action against (destruction of) forces and targets to the entire depth of his territory	Employing precision weapons on a large scale, extensively using special operations forces, robotic complexes, and weapons based on new physical principles (NPP)

Liquidating centres of resistance with the help of artillery and air strike, delivering precision weapons strikes and landing of assault forces. Clearing out the territory using ground forces. Establishing full control over the state-victim

Figure 8.1: Graphic from Andrey Kartapolov's article 'Lessons of military conflicts and prospects for the development of resources and methods of conducting them: direct and indirect actions in contemporary international conflicts.' (Translated by Dr. Harold Orenstein)[13]

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[12] Thomas, "The evolving nature of Russia's way of war," 40-41; Kartapolov, "Lessons of military conflicts and prospects for the development of resources and methods of conducting them," 33-36.

[13] Thomas, "The evolving nature of Russia's way of war," 40; Kartapolov, "Lessons of military conflicts and prospects for the development of resources and methods of conducting them," 35.

This new-type warfare, although not under this notion, can be found in Russia's official strategy. Russia's 2015 national security strategy used the term 'strategic deterrence,' consisting of interconnected political, military, military-technical, diplomatic, economic and intelligence measures to prevent the use of force against Russia, defend its sovereignty and maintain its territorial integrity.[14] Today, the Russian Defence Ministry's official dictionary of military terms defines strategic deterrence as a system of military and non-military measures designed to dissuade the other side from using force against Russia at the strategic level. However, the Russian authorities constantly use strategic deterrence measures, in peacetime not only to deter but also to contain threats, and in wartime as a means of escalation management.[15] In this way, Kartapolov's new-type warfare can be considered as the practical refinement of Russia's strategic deterrence.

Remarkably, armed forces and security services from the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Poland, and Lithuania supported the transformation and training of the Ukrainian armed forces and intelligence service from 2014 and in subsequent years.[16] These states already had their wake-up call with the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and their primary goal was to reorganise Ukraine's armed forces. Before the annexation, Ukraine still had outdated armed forces organised along Soviet lines. Moreover, there was still a highly hierarchical Soviet culture in which submission prevailed. Especially in the way junior commanders dare to take more initiatives and responsibilities and thus seize opportunities on the battlefield, referred to within NATO as 'mission command,' the Ukrainian army has made great strides.[17] There was another reason why the nations had been supporting Ukraine since 2014, as Putin had hinted several times that if fighting was inevitable, Russia would strike first. Against this threat, Ukrainian armed forces, in their 2014 capacity, would be no match. Indeed, Russia intervenes by all means as soon as its interests are threatened and does not wait. The concept of 'pre-emption' occupies an important place in Russian conflict thinking today.[18]

European continental nations were particularly unwilling to recognise that the Russian authorities had been improving their armed forces over the last decade and a half, in terms of organisation, equipment, training and renewed doctrine to still be able to conduct classical combat operations as well, as shown in Figure 8.1:

[14] Kremlin Website, "Президент России. Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 31.12.2015 г. № 683, О Стратегии национальной безопасности Российской Федерации."

[15] Kofman, Fink, and Edmonds, *Russian Strategy for Escalation Management*, 7.

[16] *Українська трибуна*, "US, UK, Canada, Lithuania, and Poland reaffirm support for Ukraine amid Russian military activity."

[17] Detch, "How Ukraine learned to fight"; Gady, "Ukraine must shed its Soviet legacy, says a military expert."

[18] Thomas, *Russia's Conduct of War: How And With What*, 13-15.

shifting to classical methods of waging war. It should be noted that these European continental nations suffered immensely from two world wars and, moreover, during the Cold War, West Germany was the intended theatre where another bloody battle might be fought. The population and politicians did not want another unnecessary conflict with countless casualties. Moreover, these European nations and the Russian Federation were economically intricately intertwined, the European states being dependent on Russian gas. It did result in political, military, and economic leaders of these European continental nations mostly looking away from the latest steps in new-type warfare, physical warfighting.

Meanwhile, in a 2018 speech, General Valery Gerasimov endorsed the contours of Russia's new-type warfare by noting that the operational art had changed significantly since 1991, when an international coalition led by the United States fought against Iraq. Looking at this 1991 conflict, Gerasimov became convinced that the contribution of air power to destroying troops had become significantly more important and that deep encirclement of defensive positions and conducting the main attack around defensive lines were indispensable. According to Gerasimov, the 1991 conflict included a prolonged non-contact phase and a vigorous, short-term phase of so-called 'ground contact operations.' In his speech, Gerasimov attributed particular importance to this way of warfare. Unlike the rest of the Russian General Staff, he used the term 'new generation warfare' and labelled the Russian activities in Syria as such.[19] Since then, the terms 'new-type warfare' and 'new generation warfare' have frequently been used interchangeably in publications. To avoid confusion, this chapter continues to use the term 'new-type warfare.'

3. Putin's rationale

This section looks at the reasons why Putin decided to invade Ukraine. And while it is always difficult to fathom a person's mind to accurately determine his considerations, Putin's worldview should be considered very carefully. Putin had long coveted large parts of Ukraine and simply did not want to accept Ukraine as an independent state. Putin believed that parts of northern, central, eastern, and southern Ukraine belonged to his 'Russian Empire.' For centuries, many Russians have referred to this area as *Malorossiya*, Little Russia. The western part of Ukraine, which includes the regions of Volhynia and Galicia, has undergone different cultural development, and has also been part of the historical Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.[20]

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[19] Orenstein, "Russian General Staff Chief Valery Gerasimov's 2018 presentation to the General Staff Academy: Thoughts on future military conflict," 130-134.

[20] Davis, "The forgotten history of Poland and Ukraine; Ukraine was part of Poland for longer than it was inside Russia – and it is key to understanding Ukrainian nationhood."

*Malorossiy*a, on the other hand, was in the Czarist era part of the Russian Empire. Currently, many Russians consider it a part of the Greater Russian Empire and have always had a difficult relationship with Ukrainians. For instance, in the 18th century, on the orders of the Czar, Ukrainian language and culture were banned to create a dominant Russian identity in this region and to prevent *Malorossiya* from degenerating into an independent Ukraine.[21]

Today, these views still prevail. In early 2008, for instance, Putin's spin doctor at the time, Vladislav Surkov, managed to rekindle the discussion that Ukraine would not be an independent state. Putin promptly adopted Surkov's statements, repeatedly claiming at the April 2008 NATO Summit in Bucharest: 'Ukraine is not even a state! What is Ukraine? A part of its territory is in Eastern Europe, but another part, a considerable one, was a gift from us!'[22] In July 2021 the Kremlin published an article by President Putin himself in which he gave his version of the history and the relationship between Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus, a 'triune nation' as Putin called it. In the same article, he also notes that Russians and Ukrainians are one people, a single whole.[23]

Putin became increasingly convinced that large parts of Ukraine belonged to Russia, especially from the spring of 2020. That was when Putin completely isolated himself from the outside world in the presidential residence, *Novo-Ogaryovo*, to avoid being infected by the Covid-19 virus, which he was so afraid of. Putin radicalised during those two Corona years, he was no longer observed in the Kremlin and did not receive any opposition.[24] Eventually, in February 2022, Putin ordered Russian troops to invade Ukraine from four different directions, and when, after a month and a half, it turned out that this plan for a full-scale invasion of Ukraine was too ambitious, Putin at most adjusted the plan slightly.

As recently as 2014, Putin had intended to conquer 'only' the south and southeast of Ukraine, including Crimea. At the time, Putin believed in *Novorossija* or 'New Russia.'[25] This concept dates back to the 17th century when Czarina Catherine the Great annexed the south and southeast of what is now Ukraine to the Russian Empire.[26] Putin believed in 2014 that it was time to reunite the southern and south-eastern regions with Russia and restore history, especially also because many ethnic Russians lived there, Putin reasoned. Although the term ethnic-Russian is difficult to explain, as it is difficult to determine who belongs to this group, there

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[21] Lassin and Channell-Justin, "Why Putin has such a hard time accepting Ukrainian sovereignty."

[22] Düben, "There is no Ukraine: Fact-checking the Kremlin's history of Ukrainian history."

[23] Putin, Vladimir. President of Russia, "On the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians."

[24] Zygat, "How Vladimir Putin lost interest in the present."

[25] Plokhy, *The Russo-Ukrainian War*, 122-126.

[26] Montefiori, *Catherina the Great & Potemkin: The Imperial Love Affair*, earlier published in 2000, 291-293.

were significantly more 'self-identified Russians' in percentage terms living in the Donbas region and southern Ukraine at that time than elsewhere in Ukraine.[27]

Following the annexation of Crimea, in April 2014, Russian authorities tried to incite sedition in cities in the Donbas region and as far south as Odesa to create polarisation among the population. Russian authorities hoped that self-proclaimed Russians in southern and south-eastern Ukraine would support the uprisings and push for secession from this region, but a *Novorossiya* under Russian control did not emerge. However, the Ukrainian authorities did begin to lose their grip on the region, and discord between Russia and Ukraine began to focus on the Donbas region. Russian authorities have always denied their involvement in the armed conflict in the Donbas region, dubbing it a 'civil war.'[28] Even after the conclusion of a second Minsk Agreement in February 2015 with the parties involved, after the first one was quickly breached, the Donbas region remained very unsettled, and a frozen conflict emerged.[29] It was ultimately the prelude to the war that began on 24 February, 2022.

4. Russia's activities prior to February 2022

Having explained Russian new-type warfare and Putin's considerations for the invasion in Ukraine, it is now interesting to consider what Russian activities and events preceded the invasion of Ukraine. These earlier activities provide insight into the extent to which new-type warfare was applied by the Russian authorities. In retrospect, in the run-up to the large-scale invasion of Ukraine, over the period 2015-2022, it became clear that Russia was preparing itself for a serious confrontation with Ukraine. It was also the period in which Putin became increasingly convinced that he wanted to put not only *Novorossiya* under Russian control, but also the other parts of Ukraine that were part of *Malorossiya*. Putin managed to use all instruments of power, also known as DIME,[30] in this process. It is in line with new-type warfare, in which authorities first apply non-military measures to undermine an opponent and disintegrate society, and if that proves to be not enough, then proceed to deploy military means. Gradually, the Russian authorities tried to dissolve Ukrainian society.

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[27] Arel and Driscol, *Ukraine's Unnamed War: Before the Russian Invasion of 2022*, 61.

[28] Idem., 143-144.

[29] Puri, *Russia's Road to War with Ukraine: Invasion Amidst the Ashes of Empires*,157-158.

[30] DIME stands for Diplomatic and political measures, Information, Military and Economic measures. The armed forces of the United States and NATO regarded the various measures mentioned in this acronym as the instruments of power of a nation or an alliance.

On the political front, Putin deliberately allowed the conflict in the Donbas region to continue to weaken Ukraine's position internationally. Indeed, neither the EU nor NATO, which previously indicated that Ukraine could join their alliance, are willing to accept a new member embroiled in an armed conflict. Russian authorities meanwhile continued to deny any involvement in this conflict, but there are strong indications that operators of the GRu, Russia's military intelligence service, knew how to organise and direct the mosaic of different forces, such as militias, Russian volunteers, foreign fighters and Private Military and Security Companies, including the Wagner group.[31] On the economic front, Russia had made not only Ukraine but also many other European nations highly dependent on Russian energy supplies.[32] And, despite low oil and gas prices, Russia managed to accumulate a substantial financial reserve of about $600 billion obtained from energy revenues. Although on the other hand, about $330 billion of Russian state and oligarchic assets were registered with Western financial institutions and frozen after the invasion. Nevertheless, the remaining reserves gave the Russian economy a significant financial cushion prior to the invasion.[33]

Seeking justification for an invasion of Ukraine, the Russian authorities not only stepped up their political and economic pressure on Ukraine, but they also spread distorted information worldwide about Ukrainian violations of the Minsk Agreement on the conflict in the Donbas region. Besides, Russian authorities accused Ukrainian authorities of committing genocide among the ethnic-Russian population living in the Donbas region. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky was dismissed as a drug addict and Zelensky's government was allegedly made up of Nazis.[34] Russian state television regularly showed footage of Ukrainian troops wearing swastikas and drew comparisons to the 'Great Patriotic War,' Russia's notion for World War II, as they did in 2014 during the annexation of Crimea.[35] On top of this, Russian authorities were wary of information from outside. Ever since 2014, media with foreign links have had to clearly warn during their broadcasts and in their coverage that they were produced by 'foreign agents,' analogous to a warning on a packet of cigarettes indicating that smoking is very harmful to a person's health.[36]

And if it were not enough, a series of unexplained explosions took place at major munitions depots in Ukraine during the said period, including at Svatove (Luhansk region), Balakliya (Kharkiv region), Kalinyvka (Vinnytsia region) and Ichnia (Chernihiv region). As a result, a large part of the Ukrainian armed forces' strategic

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[31] Blanc et al., *The Russian General Staff: Understanding the military's decisionmaking role in a "besieged fortress"*, 71.

[32] Bella et al., *Natural gas in Europe: The potential impact of disruptions to supply*, 7.

[33] Rácz, Spillner, and Wolff, *Russia's war economy: How sanctions reduce military capacity*, 3-4.

[34] OECD Website, "Disinformation and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine."

[35] Giles, "Information operations," 20-21.

[36] Giles, *Russia's War on Everybody, And What It Means for You*, 37-38.

ammunition stocks, especially tank and artillery ammunition, were lost. The Kremlin denied any involvement, while many Western countries previously attributed it to careless actions by the Ukrainian authorities.[37] However, it is now strongly suspected that Russian secret services played a prominent role in these explosions.

A succession of events and incidents followed from early 2021, beginning with Margarite Simonyan, who in January 2021 called for the Donbas region to be returned to 'Mother Russia.'[38] Russian officials immediately replied that Moscow had no such plans. Still, Simonyan's words had weight. As editor-in-chief of Kremlin's prestigious network RT and international news agency *Rossiya Segodnya*, Simonyan is a front-runner in Putin's news machine. Although Simonyan spoke in a personal capacity, it was highly unlikely that she made these statements without the knowledge of the Kremlin. The timing of the message was also striking. President Biden had just taken office, and it is plausible that Simonyan's comments were intended to test how the United States and the West would react to a Russian annexation of the Donbas region.[39]

In February 2021, the media platforms of pro-Russian Ukrainian business tycoon Viktor Medvedchuk were taken down by the Ukrainian authorities, citing fraud in these companies as a reason. The television channels, *112 Ukraine*, *NewsOne* and *ZIK*, belonging to these platforms were able to draw strong attention to the interests of the Russian Federation in Ukraine. The Russian authorities were annoyed by this decision and announced the sudden deployment of 3,000 Russian paratroopers along the border with Ukraine. It turned out to be the start of a huge Russian troop build-up along the border with Ukraine in 2021. Russian Minister of Defence, Sergei Shoigu, initially indicated that it was only an exercise near Ukraine.[40]

Likewise, in May 2021, the Ukrainian government placed Viktor Medvedchuk under house arrest. President Putin, a friend of Medvedchuk, took exception, accusing Ukrainian authorities. The US intelligence services, however, applauded the Ukrainian measures because they suspected Medvedchuk of planning a coup against the Zelensky government. It turned out not to be the only coup attempt against the Zelensky government. In the fall of 2021, another pro-Russian Ukrainian oligarch, Rinat Akhmetov, called for a coup attempt and offered a $1 million reward, which was later confirmed by US intelligence.[41] Cyber operations intensified prior to the war in Ukraine.[42]

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[37] Cooper et al., *War in Ukraine, Volume 2: Russian Invasion, February 2022*, 34.

[38] Puri, *Russia's Road to War with Ukraine*, 194.

[39] Medalinskas, "Kremlin TV chief: Russia must annex east Ukraine."

[40] Matthews, *Overreach*, 188-191; Plokhy, *The Russo-Ukrainian War*, 141.

[41] Shuster, "The untold story of the Ukraine crisis"; Hide, "Ukraine's president alleges coup attempt involving country's richest man."

[42] For more background information see: Paul Ducheine, Peter Pijpers and Kraesten Arnold with their chapter 'Assessing the Dogs of Cyberwar' in this book.

The Russian authorities also committed other anti-Ukrainian activities. According to insiders, the FSB, Russia's largest security service, received orders to prepare for an invasion of Ukraine as early as July 2021.[43] Then, in autumn 2021, Russian intelligence operators carried out various sabotage and subversive activities to destabilise Ukrainian society and overthrow the Zelensky government to make Ukraine an easy target. It would give the Russian authorities a legitimate reason to intervene, they believed. Analogous to the 2014 annexation of Crimea, the Russian secret services deployed sleeper agents in Ukraine in the years leading up to the war. Their purpose was to organise and train pro-Russian people in Ukraine to carry out subversive activities. Other Russian sleeper agents had to integrate into the Ukrainian armed forces and Security Services with the aim of pressuring high-ranking Ukrainian officials to secretly work for the Russians.[44]

In the months immediately preceding the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Russian secret services sent some of their operators to eastern Ukraine to carry out false flag operations. These agents were trained in urban warfare and to sabotage Russian-backed separatists waging war against Ukrainian forces in the Donbas region and provoking border incidents involving Russian troops at the border. Meanwhile, Russian authorities, especially through Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, insisted they had no intention of invading Ukraine.[45] A week before the Russian invasion, Kremlin-appointed leaders of Donetsk and Luhansk, Denis Pushilin and Leonid Pasechnik, published a video message demanding the immediate evacuation of the civilian population due to 'Ukrainian aggression.' Subsequent investigation showed that the videos had already been recorded two days before the publication date, which makes the announced urgency questionable.[46]

In short, President Putin had been preparing for a confrontation with Ukraine for some time. Simonyan's appeal, the entire troop build-up, the sabotage and subversive activities, the glorified coup attempts, along with Pushilin and Pasechnik's video messages appeared to be part of a larger Russian campaign to frighten people in the Donbas and gradually prepare Ukraine for a Russian invasion. They also constitute precisely the first steps in the larger framework of new-type warfare. These first steps, however, did not come to fruition, and therefore the Russian authorities had to start scaling up to 'classical methods' of warfare.

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[43] Watling, Danylyuk, and Reynolds, *Preliminary Lessons from Russia's Unconventional Operations During the Russo-Ukrainian War, February 2022 – February 2023*, 4.

[44] Saito and Tsvetkova, "The enemy within"; Sonne, Ryan, and Hudson, "Russia planning potential sabotage operations in Ukraine, U.S. says."

[45] Saito and Tsvetkova, "The enemy within"; Sonne, Ryan, and Hudson, "Russia planning potential sabotage operations in Ukraine, U.S. says."

[46] Herszenhorn, "Ukraine and West see false flags flying as pro-Russian separatists urge civilian evacuation."

5. Russia's classical warfare

The introduction has already painted a picture of the battle of Kyiv. Initially, the Russian forces seemed to be successful, but soon things went the other way. As early as November 2021, an accumulation of mistakes and misjudgments occurred. In late November 2021, three months before the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, US ambassador John Sullivan and CIA director William Burns met with Nikolai Patrushev, the secretary of the Russian Security Council in Moscow in which they indicated that they were aware of Russia's plans of attack for Ukraine. The US delegation's remarks inconvenienced Putin, as only a few confidants were aware of Putin's plans. Putin decided to keep quiet about his plans to his own military and most of Russia's political and government leaders. They did not hear what was intended until a few days before the invasion began.[47]

This deprived Putin's military commanders of proper preparation for the invasion of Ukraine, which soon became clear. The initial plan was to invade Ukraine from four different directions, and Russian authorities expected it to be a 10-day walk-over. The Kremlin continued to believe in their own plan for a long time, but it turned out differently. As said before, after just a month and a half, they had to abandon northern operations targeting the Ukrainian capital. The Russians were not able to properly protect their troops against the Ukrainians who acted in small formations and successfully managed to use miniature commercial UASs. Moreover, they could not logistically support the northern operations.[48] In addition, the Russians failed to establish effective land-air cooperation, resulting in Russian combat units on the ground lacking essential air support.[49] In the Russian armed forces, the army is the dominant service, as most of the fighting in Ukraine also shows. Russian doctrine assumes that in a confrontation on the ground, the decisive battle will be fought with artillery to break up the opponent's units and deprive them of freedom of manoeuvre.[50]

Commandship within the Russian armed forces also left much to be desired. Initially, there was no Russian commander-in-chief leading the 'special military operation,' as Russian authorities still officially called the invasion. Putin wanted to take all the credit and was convinced that Ukraine could be taken within 10 days.

[47] Belton, "The man who has Putin's ear – and may want his job: Russian security chief Nikolai Patrushev is one of the Russian president's few close advisers"; Massicot, "What Russia got wrong: Can Moscow learn from its failure in Ukraine?"

[48] For more background information see: Thijs Cremers, Paul van Fenema, Gert Schijvenaars and Sieds Haitsma with their chapter 'Russian Military Logistics and the Ukrainian Conflict' in this book.

[49] Zabrodskyi, Watling, Danylyuk, and Reynolds, *Preliminary Lessons in Conventional Warfighting from Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: February – July 2022*, 34-43.

[50] Galeotti, *Putin's Wars: From Chechnya to Ukraine*, 326-327.

Following the withdrawal of the northern operations, that changed, and several generals passed through the ranks, all briefly leading Russian forces in Ukraine for a few months, including Alexander Dvornikov, Gennady Zidkho and Sergey Surovikin. From mid-January 2023, General Valery Gerasimov led the operation in conjunction with the post of chief of staff of the Russian armed forces, a position he has held since 2012.[51] Such a quick change of commanders does not guarantee a solid Russian control of the war. After taking office, Gerasimov quickly made it clear that he saw no role for the Wagner Group, a PMSC owned by Yevgeny Prigozhin, even though it was the only unit on the Russian front that was slowly but surely gaining ground in the autumn of 2022.[52] It is also noteworthy to mention, as the deployment of a PMSC fits perfectly into the new-type warfare model, where fighting with a regular armed force is just one of the options to overpower one's opponent. Until May 2023, the Wagner Group fought fiercely for the town of Bakhmut in Donetsk, a place of no strategic significance, with many casualties, but it has since been relieved. The rest of the Russian attack had lost momentum and the Russian army in south-east Ukraine completely stalled.[53]

6. Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the following research question: Did Russian authorities effectively apply the concept of the new-type warfare prior to and during their 2022-2023 invasion of Ukraine? The answer is: Yes, they did, but not successfully!

The framework of new-type warfare consists of several steps and builds up from disrupting an opponent by non-military means, such as economic measures, spreading manipulated information and propaganda, and cyberattacks to eventually full-scale war with the Russian armed forces and private military companies. Each time a step proves unsuccessful, the possibility exists for the Russian authorities to then scale up.

Turning specifically to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, it was Putin who initiated planning for the invasion from 2021, although he developed intentions to take control of large parts of Ukraine long beforehand. Already in the period 2015-2022, Russian authorities had put political and economic pressure on Ukraine, meanwhile they built up a large financial reserve from energy revenues, necessary to pay for the war. Then, with emotional evocations from the Donbas made by

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[51] Baily and Stepanenko, "Russian offensive campaign assessment."

[52] For more background information see: Thijs Cremer and Han Bouwmeester with their chapter 'Commercial warriors on the battlefield' in this book.

[53] Kurmanaev, "Russia replaces commander for Ukraine war, as signs of dissension grow."

RT's editor-in-chief Margarite Simonyan, a steady troop build-up under the guise of an exercise, and with all kinds of sabotage and subversive activities and false flag operations, and video messages from pro-Russian Donbas leaders, the Russian authorities tried to disrupt Ukrainian society in the second half of 2021 and the beginning of 2022 but failed. Ukrainian authorities reacted swiftly. Consequently, Russian authorities switched to 'classical methods' of warfare. Commanders were given hardly any time for thorough preparation, which turned out to be an error by Putin. The attack proved unsuccessful and soon got bogged down in south-eastern Ukraine. Putin would have liked this to have been different but made quite a miscalculation. Both the non-military and military parts of the new-type warfare did not work out well during the take-over of Ukraine.

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CHAPTER 9

Russian Military Logistics and the Ukraine Conflict: Analyzing Dynamics of Multilevel Alignment

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Abstract

On February 24, 2022, Ukraine faced a multiple front, Russian invasion. The invasion however, seemingly because of poor planning and the lack of logistic and sustainment capacity, failed to achieve the initial objectives. As war is inherently linked to uncertainty, attaining logistic objectives is challenging. Against this background, this chapter aims to understand the logistical rationale behind the Russian military operation and how it materialises from a strategic level to the tactical level. By using a multi-level framework to analyse the Russian operations, this study portrays that logistics therefore, like land operations, requires a comprehensive approach from the tactical to the strategical level. In short, we show the necessity and complexity of aligning operations to cope with hostility.

Keywords: Levels of logistics, Align operations, Comprehensive approach

1. Introduction[1]

Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24th, 2022, on multiple fronts to establish Russian dominion in at least several provinces where separatist movements were sympathising with Russia and contesting Ukrainian government control. Given the apparent overwhelming imbalance in military size and capability between Ukraine and Russia, this operation was expected – both by Russian leadership and

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* The authors have equally contributed to the chapter.

[1] This chapter was written using a Western lens on the conflict raging in Ukraine. The knowledge and assessments were made by western researchers by using western research and literature. We are aware of substantial differences between our socialisation and Russian perspectives. It is very well possible that the Russian way of (kinetic) warfare as we see it today is only a small part of a bigger Russian picture. In Western society using the M of DIME is a last resort whereas it might be just a minor tool in Russia's toolbox. Our focus on kinetic warfare distracts our attention from the other tools in the toolbox that may ultimately have a greater effect.

external observers – to last no more than a few weeks. However, the initial attack failed to achieve its stated objectives, in part because of poor planning and lack of capacity in logistics and sustainment.[2] Vivid imagery included the Russian convoy in the vicinity of Kyiv.[3] Russian leadership seemed puzzled by the lack of success of the presumed quick and contained 'special military operation,'[4] and shifted to new fronts in the Ukraine's south eastern provinces. How was this operational and logistics struggle possible? Why did the armed forces of the Russian federation not live up to their expectations? What went wrong? Understanding the operational-logistics challenges of Russia seems increasingly urgent.

Commonly, military logistics is considered a problem of supply chains, transportation, sourcing and technology/ asset management, often tied to specific operations.[5] This approach lacks a strategic and systemic perspective on military logistics,[6] with strategic including societal embeddedness in production structures.[7] With prolonged and (near) peer wars like the present one in the Ukraine, new insights are required to contextualise military logistics,[8] without ignoring its traditional role and conceptualisation.

In this chapter we therefore seek to understand the logistical rationale behind the Russian military operation and how it has logistically materialised across multiple levels. Our generalised objective is to enable systematic, multilevel analysis of a warfighting party's logistics. We confined our study to Russian military logistics, rather than Western, NATO or Ukraine logistics. The latter forms of logistics tend to receive ample attention, while new insights into Russian military logistics clearly matter to Western policy makers and planners.

We adopt a multilevel framework common in business and military operational studies. Levels include strategic-operational-tactical (military version), which resembles strategic-tactical-operational levels in business studies. Within and across the levels, strategies, plans, resources, and activities are coordinated ('aligned'). We transpose the multilevel framework towards military logistics,[9] enabling zooming in and out of logistical processes of relevance to military operations.

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[2] https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA2033-1.html.

[3] Lister, Murphy, Mezzofiore, and Alkhaldi, "The 40-mile-long Russian convoy near Kyiv has moved. Here's what it means for the Ukrainian capital."

[4] Martin and Maynes, "Putin justifies Ukraine invasion as a 'special military operation.'"

[5] Kress, *Operational Logistics: The Art and Science of Sustaining Military Operations*; Smith, *Defence Logistics*; Yoho, Rietjens, and Tatham, "Defence Logistics: An Important Research Field in Need of Researchers."

[6] https://www.cfc.forces.gc.ca/259/290/24/192/Davis.pdf.; https://open.spotify.com/episode/5YcDJr4 GayA8yZpza8LopRc

[7] Rodnikov, "Logistics in command and mixed economies: The Russian experience."

[8] https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/ukraine-war-has-found-maa chinery-western-governments-wanting.

[9] Note that our framework for military logistics differs from multilevel (aggregation-based) distribution; Smith, "The mandate to revolutionize military logistics."

We try to find answers on how logistics and Russian land operations inter-relate, interpreting logistics as a comprehensive phenomenon, from battlefield combat logistics up to strategic sustainability, including sourcing and production capacity. We gradually build towards the Ukraine case itself by (1) examining two historical cases on Russian logistics to verify the framework. (2) We then analyse the transformation of the Russian armed forces, with a focus on logistics, from the Soviet era to the present by looking again at the multilevel framework presenting the development of the strategic political vision and its derivative at the strategic military level. This is followed by a section in which we seek to improve our system-atic understanding of Russia's warfare from a logistics lens, by analysing Russia's multilevel logistics in the Ukraine conflict. We finalise this chapter by discussing implications for military practice and research.

2. Connecting the levels of warfare: Towards a framework for systematic military logistics analysis

Modern day military theory divides warfare into three levels, strategic, operational and tactical,[10] founded in the Napoleonic Wars, and formulated by the Prussians during the Franco-Prussian War. Subsequently, at the Frunze academy in Moscow,[11] it was thoroughly developed by the Soviets until the Russian Revolution.[12] It came to maturity as this three-level model after the Israel wars and Vietnam. These three levels are considered a generic framework to define, clarify and prescribe the correlation between national objectives, operational approach, and tactical tasks, involving political, civilian, and military actors. Simultaneously it provides clarity about the roles played by the distinct levels and thus in a way establishes a certain accountability relationship (Shunsaku, 2021).[13]

In a military sense, the levels clarify the role played by each level of command and headquarters and can be seen as the creation of strategy, the synchronisation and sequencing of battles and engagements. Simply stated, the strategic level is the field where political end states meet the military ends. At the operational level, these ends are translated into campaigns which lead to activities executed at the tactical level – making for complex cross-level dependencies across diverse communities of actors.

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[10] Bellamy, *Trends in Land Warfare: The Operational Art of the European Theater. Defence Yearbook 1985*; Newell, "Modern warfare: Balancing the ends, ways and means."

[11] https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP82-00047R000300570006-9.pdf.

[12] Nicosia, "Deep operations in the 21st century"; Baxter, *Soviet Airland Battle Tactics*; Hemsley, *Soviet Troop Control: The Role of Command Technology in the Soviet Military System*; Scott and Scott, *The Soviet Art of War Doctrine, Strategy, and Tactics.*

[13] https://faculty.cc.gatech.edu/~tpilsch/INTA4803TP/Articles/Three%20Levels%20of%20 War=CADRE-excerpt.pdf.

The strategic direction of a nation heavily influences the type of logistical demands. In the Russia-Ukraine war the differences between a Russian focus on attrition warfare and a more western oriented Ukrainian focus on manoeuvre warfare also show a different logistical system. Attrition warfare is focused on numbers and mass. It leads to huge demands in personnel and materiel, as epitomised in the Ukraine war. Manoeuvre warfare, seeking an enemy's system collapse, depends on supporting sophisticated weapons and technology. Military organisations can choose and finetune their strategic direction(s) to meet political expectations. Usually, military organisations have multiple strategic directions to cater to a variety of (legally stipulated) strategic tasks.[14] A military organisation's preferred strategic direction matters since it guides use of scarce resources, and it structures the organisation and its capabilities.

To meet all national requirements military organisations tend to struggle with the political leadership in order to combine different strategic directions and translate these unequivocally into organisational capabilities. A lack of proper political guidance, interpretation, intraorganisational politics and bureaucracy are negatively influencing the transformation of the military organisation and to assess their real (continuous) fighting power.[15] Besides, military leadership continuously seeks to balance between hot or real-life operations and cold or all-preparatory activities within the organisation.[16]

Like the division of warfare into three levels, (military) logistics as a derivative of military power is also to be separated into strategic, operational, and tactical levels (Figure 9.1):

- On the strategic level we use the word *Sustainability* that can be considered the bridge between the nation's (or coalition's) industrial base and its forces in the theatre of operations.[17] This means a nation's political and public will and capacity (personnel and materials, proper funding, a national force structure and (access to) a (war)industry) to endeavour a conflict or a war. To be able to sustain a war, a nation depends on its own or international/coalition war industry and the resources available.

- The *operational level of war* identifies the theatre of operations. We refer to this level as *sustainment* of operations, which is the comprehensive provision

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[14] MoD, "Netherlands Defence Doctrine."

[15] Fetterly, "Defence business planning in Canada"; Krepinevich Jr, "National security strategy in an era of growing challenges and resource constraints"; Soeters, Van Fenema, and Beeres, *Managing Military Organizations: Theory and Practice*; Sookermany, *Handbook of Military Sciences*; Pfeffer and Sutton, *The Knowing-Doing Gap: How Smart Companies Turn Knowledge into Action*; Galeotti, *Putin's Wars: From Chechnya to Ukraine.*

[16] Sookermany, *Handbook of Military Sciences.*

[17] Kress, *Operational Logistics: The Art and Science of Sustaining Military Operations.*

Levels of military logistics

Unpacking levels:
Military logistics cycles

Political actors

Military actors

Cross-level communications

Strategic level:
Sustainability

Operational level:
Sustainment

Tactical level:
Logistics

Strategic **sustainability** problems, analysis, strategic directions, sourcing and implemention

Operational **sustainment** and ongoing organisational transformation (ideas, people, technology, processes)

Logistics for supporting tactical level operations, and adaptation of capabilities

Dynamic evolution over time, impact of decision making across levels

Figure 9.1: A framework for systematic military logistics analysis

of personnel, logistics, medical and general military engineering (MILENG) support required to maintain combat power throughout all phases of the operation.[18] The warring party who can sustain operations longer than his opposing foe will eventually win the battle.

- The tactical level is called *logistics*, enabling/ supporting tactical activities, such as food, water, ammunition, additional equipment and fuel, maintenance repair and overhaul and medical care. The purpose of logistics is to prevent the fighting units from reaching their culminating point[19] and to maintain the initiative and momentum during battle.

[18] NATO, "NATO Standard AJP-3. ALLIED JOINT DOCTRINE FOR THE CONDUCT OF OPERATIONS (version 1), C," 1-24

[19] Culminating point: Prussian military strategist Carl von Clausewitz described it as the moment when the remaining strength is just enough to maintain a defence and wait for peace. Once past, the chance of victory would be foreclosed unless an enemy yielded without engaging in decisive combat. An enemy would prevail if it chose to fight. Culmination could be characterised as a point reached by attackers or defenders in terms of time and space after which stated objectives can't be accomplished, and continued efforts to reach them would significantly heighten the risk of failure or defeat. This point is reached when there is a decisive shift in relative combat power (https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/operation-barbarossa-and-germanys-failure-in-the-soviet-union).

Our framework invites dynamic theorising on decision making across levels. At the strategic level, political and military directions impact logistics, such as the trade-off between efficiency and effectiveness. Social and political factors like the fall of the Iron Curtain have led to a reduction of defence budgets ('peace dividend') and a shift away from preparing for large-scale war. Political attention and military organisations' efforts were geared towards expeditionary operations with different capabilities and tactics.[20] Strategic logistics, Combat Support and Combat Service Support became focused on such operations far from home bases and with asymmetrical opponents and permissive airspace. Effectiveness can only be achieved through certainty of supply in war. On the tactical level a major criterion to be successful in the mission execution is effectiveness.[21] So, cross-level decision making orientation tends to be paradoxical.[22]

According to Jablonsky (1987) strategic logistics are characterised by a stable environment and macroscopic view, whereas logistics at the tactical level face volatility with a microscopic view. Efficiency as part of the strategic level considers the economic cost of effectiveness. Due to limited financial resources decision makers are faced with choosing between competing alternatives with long-term consequences.

3. Prelude 1: Two historic Russian cases

In 1832, Napoleon Bonaparte left Russia beaten after his troops found the capital city of Moscow burnt to the ground by its own citizens. More than a century later, Adolf Hitler had his divisions march up to the gates of Moscow in 1941 (operation Barbarossa),[23] when he experienced similar difficulties and was forced to retreat involuntarily. Like Napoleon, he experienced the vastness of the country, the harsh climate and terrain, and the unbreakable will of a mostly hostile population. Miscalculation of the importance of logistics to operations strongly contributed to these defeats. We see that the Russian Invasion in Ukraine in 2022 shows some of the same characteristics for the aggressor (the Russian Federation) and the defender (Ukraine). Did the Russian Federation make any miscalculations regarding supporting their invasion? And if they did, what miscalculations did they make and on what level? Using our framework, we consider two Russian cases through a Western lens (Figure 9.2).

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[20] Simon, "NATO Expeditionary Operations: Impacts Upon New Members and Partners."

[21] Kress, *Operational Logistics: The Art and Science of Sustaining Military Operations*.

[22] Smith and Lewis, "Toward a theory of paradox: A dynamic equilibrium model of organizing."

[23] https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/operation-barbarossa-and-germanys-failure-in-the-soviet-union.

Levels	Case 1 *Logistics of the armed forces of the Soviet Union in WO II*	Case 2 *Logistics during The Soviet-Afghan War 1979-1989*
Strategic: Sustainability	• The Soviet political top was prepared to dedicate national resources for a proper build-up of its armed forces and to maintain its fighting force • After operation Barbarossa, the government was forced to evacuate hundreds of factories and thousands of workers to the eastern parts of the country • Large scale, simple goal setting and planning • Soviet Union was able to sustain its necessary military effort • Major UK-US support in a so called lend-lease construct • No general collapse of moral, all effort (man and machine) dedicated to Russian army	• The political will of the Soviet leadership was far from united. • The war in Afghanistan influenced Russian society, its industry and economic system. The costs of the war rose faster than the total of defense spending in Russia. • The Soviets were able to contain the costs due to conservative tactics, old stocks, short supply lines, and Afghan government support • The Soviet Union was physically able to sustain the war in Afghanistan with sufficient hardware • The moral component: political/public will and public (international) opinion was much harder to sustain
	⇕	⇕
Operational: Sustainment	• The Soviet Union produced around enormous quantities artillery pieces, aircraft, tanks and self-propelled guns • Between the war years of 1941 and 1945, Russia lost between 25+ million soldiers and civilians, and enormous quantities of military materiel. • Stalingrad, as an example of annihilation, laid the foundation for further Russian campaigns to push back the German troops • Learning from the past failures and battles, planning now included improved intelligence gathering and a focus on centralization and coordination • Centrally coordinated transport was based on the so called poor-man's-logistics, the horseback, and on the use of trains and railway	• Training of commanders and personnel was considered vital and was done on a regular basis • The Soviet Army was able to maintain combat power in the area of Operations (Afghanistan) due to Lines Of Communication (LOCs). • To secure the LOCs (East and West) the Soviet army deployed 29 battalions in total. According to Soviet planning, an estimate of 30+ divisions would be required to control Afghanistan. In reality the number of deployed units never exceeded the equivalent of 5-6 divisions • The Soviets depended on roads, this required major efforts. During the several phases of the war the Soviet army built/ improved a large number of military garrisons for widespread operations
	⇕	⇕
Tactical: Logistics	• Advantage of fighting on home soil until 1944, i.e. easier to obtain resources via interior lines and civilian facilities • For the front units to be supplied, the armed forces took care of mobile reserve stocks of equipment and supplies • Russian units at the tactical level needed less logistical and service capacity (delivering to divisional reloading points) • The set 'supply' standards for day-to-day could not meet up their expectations leading to hamper military (offensive) operations.	• Some 85% of all the Soviet forces in the Afghanistan theatre were providing basic security (support). • Difficulties in combat service support stemmed from the dispersion of the several divisions over multiple garrisons and so called strong points on the LOC. • Providing logistic support was difficult due to attacks, geographical and climatological circumstances and road conditions.

Figure 9.2: Systematic military logistics analysis of two historic cases

3.1 Logistics of the armed forces of the Soviet Union in WO II

In the years following the end of WW I and prior to the outbreak of WW II, Russia's dedication to a war economy was telling.[24] Although Russia was considered a less developed country in the eyes of many western European powers, the nation managed to keep track with the other emerging super power, Germany.[25] At the start of the 1930s the Soviet economy was less industrialised and more labour intensive but started with an advantage over Germany's war industry. This advantage turned into a backlog on Germany's war industry. Although Russia could not keep up with the speed of the more industrialised countries (Germany, Great-Britain, or the US), its prewar efforts not only led to an army with a significant equipment stock (quantity over quality), but also to the establishment of specialised defence industry intricately connected to its civilian industry. The centralised communist system which was carefully built up had to ensure its integrity when encountering external shocks and disruptions, e.g. a world war or conflict, and thus preventing system collapse as happened during WWI.[26]

The case study of Soviet logistics in WW II shows a system in which all levels of warfare seem united and interact with each other. At the strategic level of sustainability, the support of the war through industry, political will and morale plays a significant role. At the operational level, the means of transportation and the supply throughout the entire theatre of operations are visible in the Russian modus operandi. However, there is no strict separation between the several levels of warfare (strategic-operational and tactical) and in some cases, they might overlap with each other. This also implies that there is not always a clear distinction between sustainment and logistics. The so-called 'last mile' from the field army rear to the divisional reloading points was based on a system of delivery, which was the opposite of the German division which had to use its own men to bring forward all its equipment and supplies from the Army depots. Although the Russian war economy and its logistical system to sustain the Soviet cause was not flawless and from time to time even endangered Russian operations, they learned from their first encounter with the German Army in 1941 and changed their structures and systems into a centralised logistic approach trying to overcome logistic problems. This centralised approach had its disadvantages, e.g., inflexibility, especially below army level, but it paid off for the Russian way of war. Its resilience from a national level down to the single logistician is commendable. Therefore the Soviet army cannot be considered as an army which turned the tide of the war solely by its quantity and its leaders' negligence for loss of lives.[27]

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[24] Harrison, "The Soviet Union: The defeated victor."

[25] Idem.

[26] Idem.

[27] Dunn, *The Soviet economy and the Red Army, 1930-1945*, 64

3.2 Logistics during The Soviet-Afghan War 1979-1989

The previous case study showed how on the distinct levels the Soviet logistical system was tested at the beginning of 1941, then was reorganised, and eventually supported the advance of the Red Army into Nazi Germany until it reached the gates of Berlin. In the present case study, a bird's eye look at the Soviet operations in Afghanistan will provide insights in its 'logistical' system in the period of a decade (December 1979 – February 1989) during the Cold War era.

In 1979, after a period of great turmoil in the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA), Soviet General Secretary Brezhnev decided to invade Afghanistan to prevent the country from further spiraling down in a civil war to restore the nation's integrity. Finally, on the 12th of December 1979 Moscow decided to use military force and to invade the DRA.[28] The invasion of the Soviet Union's 40th Army on Christmas Eve was thoroughly planned and well executed.[29] The Soviets planned to stabilise the political situation by restoring power to the government and to strengthen the army after large-scale desertion which decimated the army by more than 50% by the end of 1979. The last objective then was to withdraw most of the Soviet forces within three years. However, with a nation on fire, a demoralised DRA army, and a probable defeat after withdrawing the Soviet forces, the Polit bureau found itself in a catch 22 situation.[30]

Until 1985, the Soviet political leadership had seemed unable to decide over the faith of Afghanistan. Only when Gorbachev came to power in 1985 did the issue of Afghanistan seem to become important again. He began negotiations to withdraw Soviet forces and on 15 February 1989, the 40th Army completed its withdrawal after nearly 10 years of fighting one of the Soviet Union's longest counter insurgencies up to then.[31] Figure 9.2 details our analysis of the conflict across the three levels.

Taking everything into account, it can be said that the Soviets were initially not prepared for the war in Afghanistan but were able to better adapt to the circumstances as the war progressed. They managed to learn from the failures in the first years and rebuild their combat units and a more fitting logistic system capable of supporting a different type of war.[32]

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[28] Dudik, "The Soviet-Afghan War: A superpower's inability to deny insurgent sanctuary."

[29] Dudik, "The Soviet-Afghan War: A superpower's inability to deny insurgent sanctuary," 6.

[30] Grau and Jalali, "The Soviet-Afghan War: Breaking the hammer and sickle."

[31] Idem.

[32] Dudik, "The Soviet-Afghan War: A superpower's inability to deny insurgent sanctuary," 14.

4. Prelude 2: Transformation of the logistics of Russian armed forces since the Yeltsin era

The turbulent period which led to the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1989 saw an army in decay. The legacy of the 1979-1989 Afghanistan war, the destructive wars in Chechnya, the restructuring due to the independence of several republics, budgetary problems, lack of personnel and outdated equipment[33] in combination with a lack of vision did not add to stability in the armed forces. It was Vladimir Putin who realised that to achieve political goals the armed forces must be a credible and a combat ready extension of the strategic political structure. This also meant a different view on sustainability and sustainment. Alignment seemed necessary between on one hand the nation's political and public will and capacity (resources in personnel, materials, and knowledge), funding, a national force structure and a (war)industry to endeavour a conflict or a war. On the other hand, there was the need to support the armed forces personnel, logistics, medical and general military support (sustainment) required to maintain combat power throughout all phases of operations.

The development program of the armed forces 2001-2005 and the issuing of several security doctrines starting in 2000 to 2021 saw a shift to operations not only outside the Russian Federation. The domestic, political and social situation in the nation as a matter of state security[34] required a military response.

Different insights on military thinking changed the vision of the armed forces: the objectives that had previously been viewed as attainable by direct military action alone could now be achieved by combining organised military violence with a greater emphasis on economic, political, and diplomatic activity, a combination called New Generation Warfare (NGW) and coined by General Valery Gerasimov. By changing the security doctrine, the structure of the Russian armed forces also needed to change, implicitly changing the way how these forces had to be sustained from the strategic (sustainability), through to the operational (sustainment) and the tactical (logistics) level.

Not only had the command structure to be changed to meet the strategic military goals, but also the materiel component urgently needed an update as a part of the new armed forces and its sustainability strategy. Approximately 20 percent of the materiel of the Russian armed forces was up to standards whereas 70 percent of the weaponry of the NATO-countries was modern. The existing problem became even more urgent because of a lack of production of military equipment. For example, between 2000 and 2004, the Russian Army received only fifteen new tanks from

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[33] Barrie and Hackett, *Russia's Military Modernization*, 13.

[34] https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/russia/doctrine.html.

a total number of 23,000. Similar numbers applied to other conventional weapon systems for ground, air, and naval forces. This lack of investment in conventional arms seemed to be caused by problems with the Russian military industrial complex (MIC), the declining budget and investments in nuclear deterrence.[35]

The answer to these problems came in 2008. The New Look program (under President Medvedev) was initiated to transform the armed forces into a modern combat-ready force. It was a reaction to the inferior performance of the Russian armed forces during the war in Georgia. Supported by earnings of oil and gas yields, the State Armament Program of 2011-2020 proved important in realising the desired equipment modernisation ambitions. Russia's ground forces have changed significantly since the New Look began. New equipment has arrived, but not in the quantities required. Instead, there has been a focus on modernising platforms already in service and the integration of more precise and longer-range weapons. The land forces' greatest change has been made in terms of organisation and personnel. In the New Look's early years, authorities planned to transform the ground forces so that their principal unit of action became the brigade, with the intention to produce self-sustaining mobile formations, including their own logistical support units, which were believed to be needed on Russia's future periphery conflicts. However, personnel recruitment did not keep pace with the sustainment ambition. Battalion Tactical Groups (BTGs) (an idea dating back to the 1990s) were introduced in 2012 to generate effective combat power into battalion-sized formations, comprising combat and combat support assets. Lessons learned from experimentation and the Ukraine conflict as well as growing tension with NATO made it necessary to be able to provide higher-level combat support, like heavy artillery. This led to a reintroduction of the divisional level and formations.

The Russian armed forces operational concept, inherited from the Soviet Union era, was modernised during the already mentioned New Look transformation in 2009. Because the logistic system to support the combat and combat support units was still based on the 'echelon principle,' Russia replaced the obsolete Soviet logistics system with a leaner one, involving significant downsizing and the use of outsourcing (by using private companies). This new sustainment concept was initiated but untested in combat operations. Analyses of the renewed logistical system as operated in Ukraine led to the conclusion that 'the future development of Russian military capability asserts that the main restriction of the Russian armed forces will not be availability of forces, but logistics.'[36] A remnant from the Soviet era is a strict hierarchical, top-down, structure of operational planning and working. Logistics is not incorporated in this operational planning process. The

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[35] De Haas, "NAVO en Rusland na de Lissabon Top," 12.

[36] Westerlund and Oxenstierna, "Russian military capability in a ten-year perspective," 141.

logistics planning often follows predefined principles, well-exercised scenarios, and calculations of ammunition consumption, attrition, and so on.

Logistics on the army group and brigade levels are standardised and largely follow the same principles as they did in the Soviet era.[37] During the Soviet era, the concept for offensive operations was based on the 'echelon principle,' according to which one echelon fought till exhaustion while another was readied to be deployed to the frontline. Once replaced, the first echelon would reorganise and be refitted with personnel, equipment, and consumables to again be combat ready. The logistics echelon principles build on army groups supported by one or more Material Technical Support brigades (MTS). Because the fighting units still have limited organic (own) logistics capacity (trucks, drivers, handling equipment) to regain supplies from the rear, they heavily depend on the MTS for strategic and operational logistics. As already mentioned, the echelon principle was released but a new system was not yet in place when the Ukraine war started. Looking at today's Russian ground forces they do not seem to have the capability to mobilise and sustain a multi-echelon force for a long-lasting war, which means that deployed forces do not have a second echelon and must fight until exhaustion. There is only one opportunity to secure a victory.[38] Alternatively, Russia is not willing to commit more troops to prevent loss of public support. Currently, Russia still maintains its peacetime-economy and is not (yet) obliged to switch to a war economy, although current information suggests a substantial surge of security spending.[39]

5. The Ukraine conflict: Russian logistics phases of the conflict[40]

We can now embark on our analysis of the present Ukraine war.

Phase 1. Prior to the conflict in Ukraine the Russian armed forces began with a massive build-up of troops near the Ukrainian border. Russian Authorities addressed that this deployment of troops was part of exercises, Zapad 2021.[41] This was the period end of 2021 and beginning of 2022, to 24th of February. Until that

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[37] Grau and Bartles, "The Russian way of war: Force structures, tactics, and modernization of the Russian ground forces."

[38] McDermott, "Russia's strategic mobility – Supporting "Hard Power" to 2020?" 32.

[39] https://www.economicsobservatory.com/ukraine-whats-the-global-economic-impact-of-russias-invasion.; https://www.bruegel.org/analysis/russian-war-economy-macroeconomic-performance.

[40] When we turn to Russia in the context of the Ukraine conflict to empirically examine these insights, we must note that the conflict is ongoing, and information is incomplete and possibly incorrect. Propaganda efforts are likely within and beyond Russia's borders.

[41] Skoglund, Listou, and Ekström, "Russian logistics in the Ukrainian war: Can operational failures be attributed to logistics?"

specific moment, many of the Russian Military Forces at operational and tactical level were not expecting to cross the border with Ukraine, as part of the Special Military Operation. This was how the Russian Government explained the violation of the Ukrainian sovereignty. When an army is expecting to be part of an exercise, there is always an end-date attached to that exercise. This means also that the majority of the logistic capability is planning on a re-deployment of that exercise instead of moving forward and going to prolonged war.[42] Also supplies and technical support are planned to return to Home Base. When transitioning from exercise to war, the conditions and dynamics of logistics normally change. Logistical demands are a function of the selected Course of Action (COA) and the dynamics of the war. The requirements for the re-supply of ammunition, spare parts, and other supplies are inherently unpredictable. A full-scale war includes casualties and damaged equipment, leading to increased demands for transportation, medical treatment, and maintenance. Russia seemed to have ignored lessons from the past when planning this deployment: political objectives were not aligned with sustainability and sustainment principles. Factors at play include misjudging the will of the Ukraine population and underestimated time, and space and force dimensions. These latter include increasingly stretched Lines of Communication (LOCs) supply lines when Russia invaded the Ukraine from multiple directions.

Phase 2. The plans for an invasion have been known already at some levels in the command chain, yet logistics was apparently not part of that decision-making process. If most of the logistics plans for Zapad-2021 were made for the exercise, shifting from exercise to a war would create a logistics vacuum after the intended ending of Zapad-2021. Even if there existed aggregated plans for transport and sustainment for the invasion, there would be no time for maintenance and refurbishment of equipment used during the exercises. Furthermore it is observed that the small number of trucks and the failure of trucks (a structural flaw of the current force composition) has been hampering the speed of operations (like WW II). Operational units lacked transportation capacity.

Phase 3. The Russian war in the Kyiv region was apparently planned to be short. As the first step in the operation, the taking of the Antonov Airport (an operation typically depending on advantage), failed. Logistics were suddenly required to play a different role in a different operational setup. So, logistics had to adapt their plan again. We can assume that there existed a (limited) logistics plan to support the chosen COAs when the operation started on 24th February 2022. The Kyiv COA was to replace the political leadership of Ukraine within a few days. Taking the Antonov Airport in Hostomel near Kyiv through an airborne operation was a crucial

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[42] Van Kampen, Van Fenema, and Grant, "Getting there and back: Organizing long-distance military logistics with customers in mind."

component of this plan. The Russians probably planned to use this airport as a logistical hub. This observation would support the assumption that the war would be over in a few days, typical of a strategic direction focused on advantage rather than attrition. If that is true, the operation did not have to put much effort into logistics other than ensuring that the forces involved could bring along all the equipment and supplies for the initial phase.[43] Typically, Russian forces carry supplies for three to five days.[44] Fuel and ammunition are the volume drivers, and a short operation would reduce the required volumes significantly. The follow-up logistics would have been coordinated from Hostomel or another suitable position once the Russian troops had gained control of the area. When this COA failed, after multiple attacks on the airfield, it appears that there was no contingency plan for the forces.

Phase 4. Since the Russian general staff tends to give detailed orders instead of an operational intent, commanders on the tactical level did not know what to do. These commanders did not have the capabilities to adapt to changing unforeseen situations. Tactical level units typically have only 3-5 days of supply, contradicting attrition warfare. Changing towards that type of warfare proved difficult. Russian forces had sufficient time to prepare operations in the eastern and southern parts of Ukraine after years of support to the separatists in the Donbas region and Crimea. But here, too, the war proved to be more difficult than expected. Also, in the eastern and southern parts of Ukraine, the question can be raised again: to what extent was logistics involved in the planning process of going to war against Ukraine? A comprehensive operational plan seemed to be lacking on the Russian side, let alone integration of strategy, operation, and execution. Initially only one echelon was employed in the south-eastern part of Ukraine. This put heavy strain on the logistics, since the combat forces started to run out of supplies after four to five days. Adding to this, resupplying the force by road required more logistics vehicles in decent shape than the combat units and the MTS could provide. This means that troops in combat were to be supported directly, instead of units withdrawn from combat when two echelons were used. On the levels of logistics and sustainment, integrated planning and execution were lacking (e.g., transferring from railroad to road). The loading and unloading of cargo trains is a labour-intensive and time-consuming operation, which means that logisticians want as few railheads as possible. Handling equipment, storage transfer facilities and knowledge are required to facilitate all activities. From the railheads, supplies are distributed by trucks.[45] New

[43] Skoglund, Listou, and Ekström, "Russian logistics in the Ukrainian war: Can operational failures be attributed to logistics?"

[44] Grau and Bartles, *The Russian Way of War: Force Structures, Tactics, and Modernization of the Russian Ground Forces.*

[45] Barnett andMcCarthy, "Russian logistics and sustainment failures in the Ukraine conflict status as of January 1, 2023."

distribution hubs would be established inside Ukraine as the Russian campaign was supposed to progress. The logistics principle was built on railway distribution as close to the combat units as possible, and wheel-based distribution for the last mile only. But the capacity for this final distribution by road was, evidently, too limited. But transferring from railroad to road supply is easier to conduct within a country's own territory rather than in conquered territory with limited facilities. Furthermore, logistics effectiveness decreases as the distance that must be covered increases.[46] The importance of the design of log-units and the number of (manned) trucks available came to the fore. If logistics are not aligned with the operational pace, supplies ordered to close the gap will eventually surpass the needs of the combatants. This stems from a tendency to order more than required, to cover for uncertainties in distribution time, supply opportunities, and actual demand. Consequently, fighting units receive too much supply at the wrong time and place, which could congest supply lines and fill up storage capacity.

5.1 Initial interpretation

Russia has struggled to devise its security strategies and capability portfolio, embracing a number of strategic directions with their own technology and logistics implications,[47] including international independence,[48] nuclear deterrence,[49] combining technology-enabled advantages[50] with prolonged massive-scale warfare,[51] and influencing capabilities.[52] The country has embarked on a path of transformation but seems to be challenged to refine and materialise its strategic direction. Specifically, in the present era, the Russian Army works with echelons where army groups are being supported by one or more Material Technical Support brigades

[46] Prebilič, "Theoretical aspects of military logistics."

[47] https://militairespectator.nl/artikelen/russische-nucleaire-doctrine-een-inkijk-diepliggende-angsten#_ftn17.

[48] Trenin, "The revival of the Russian military: How Moscow reloaded."

[49] https://www.marshallcenter.org/en/publications/marshall-center-papers/transformation-russian-military-doctrine-lessons-learned-kosovo-and-chechnya/transformation-russian-military.; https://militairespectator.nl/artikelen/russische-nucleaire-doctrine-een-inkijk-diepliggende-angsten.

[50] This makes the tension between scale and innovation notable: for a given budget, choices must be made between the number of assets to be upgraded and the level of technology improvement.

[51] During World War 2, the US seemed to be able to combine advantage with mass, https://eh.net/encyclopedia/the-american-economy-during-world-war-ii/.; although Germany had a scientific and technological edge in some areas; O'Reagan, *Taking Nazi Technology: Allied Exploitation of German Science after the Second World War*.

[52] Bouwmeester, "Krym Nash: An analysis of modern Russian deception warfare."

(MTS).[53] For transportation they heavily rely on the railway system,[54] and for fuel and water on transportation through pipelines.[55] This leads to limited capacity in operations with the result of less freedom of movement in choosing how to operate. With this limited capacity it is also difficult to execute the loading and unloading of trains, because this requires a lot of capacity. In the design of the Russian armed forces it seems there is only limited room for support. The Russian Army operates with fewer support soldiers than other military organisations, a different so-called tooth-to-tail ratio. It is estimated that a Russian Battalion Tactical Group has a strength of 700–900 soldiers. About 150 out of this number can be considered as logistic capacity where they can get support from larger units. The U.S. Army deploys 10 support soldiers for every combat soldier,[56] according to retired Lt. Col. Vershinin, whose career with U.S./NATO forces included building logistical models.[57]

The translation from strategy to a military force that can execute this strategy is essential. Besides that, the Russian Military Leadership underestimated the will and ability of the Ukrainian armed forces to fight. The Russian Military capability had a marginal logistical support, so the Russians were depending on quick victory and success (affirming the strategic direction of advantage). As we know now, this quick victory was not reached, and the problems of the Russian armed forces grew rapidly. Shifting from advantage to for instance attrition is a major challenge. The support units were not able to give support to ensure a victory in a brief time. The problems were made even bigger by seemingly not having an integrated operational planning process where logistics was involved. The shortcomings of Russian logistics are due to previous reductions, insufficient maintenance, an untested logistical system (partly based on outsourcing), and the fact that logistics is not an integrated part of Russian decision-making at every level. But for the most part, the operational failures are associated with unrealistic planning assumptions. The operation was not over within the expected limited number of days; it escalated to a full-scale war presenting logistics with challenges it was not prepared for.[58] Russian logisticians have demonstrated an ability to adapt and

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[53] Skoglund, Listou, and Ekström, "Russian logistics in the Ukrainian War: Can operational failures be attributed to logistics?"

[54] https://debalie.nl/programma/1-jaar-oorlog-in-oekraine-24-02-2023/; https://debalie.nl/programma/1-jaar-oorlog-in-oekraine-24-02-2023/.

[55] Skoglund, Listou, and Ekström, "Russian logistics in the Ukrainian War: Can operational failures be attributed to logistics?"

[56] https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/03/30/russia-military-logistics-supply-chain/.

[57] Skoglund, Listou, and Ekström, "Russian logistics in the Ukrainian War: Can operational failures be attributed to logistics?."

[58] Zabrodskyi et al., "Preliminary lessons in conventional warfighting from Russia's invasion of Ukraine."

support this escalation, particularly on the east and south-east fronts, principally, perhaps, because of the access to a working railway system, and because the war now follows an established stratagem reminiscent of an earlier embraced strategy of attrition: destroying everything before slowly moving forward. This finds its origin in the Cold War.[59]

5.2 Analysis

Types of war and logistics. When reflecting on the Ukraine war, Russia switched from an exercise towards an advantage-based operation to capture Kyiv and control the Ukraine. This seemed to rely on the Russian playbook for capturing neighbouring countries[60] in order to bring back the desired geopolitical situation from before 1989.[61] Once this effort failed, it was forced to a more traditional mass-scale and prolonged type of warfare that it strategically no longer strived for and its armed forces not organised, trained and equipped for.[62] In a logistical sense, moving around the Ukraine and relying on rail implied a massive logistics effort. Russia's military organisation struggled to follow and support the massive-scale multi-front attacks. These continuously demanded elevated levels of materiel, ammunition, fuel, and personnel – including challenges of coordinating resources with the Wagner group. In addition, massive scale operations were interspersed with some advantage-based efforts such as the use of hypersonic or precision missiles; these efforts required sophisticated weapons, production and possibly logistics.

Strategic walk and talk. Strategic directions differed from the de facto operation that evolved in the Ukraine. For instance, dependence on other countries increased for technologies like drones. An undesirable mobilisation and training of civilians (including prisoners) was necessary, as well as hiring PMCs like the infamous Wagner Group military, and military units of the Chechen Republic under Kadyrov. These sourcing options complemented Russia's regular military. Dependence on production capacities in former Soviet Union countries also became more notable. Specifically, logistics vulnerabilities included integration with operational plan-ning and manoeuvre processes, upstream production capacity and availability of

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[59] Skoglund, Listou, and Ekström, "Russian logistics in the Ukrainian War: Can operational failures be attributed to logistics?."

[60] https://militairespectator.nl/sites/default/files/bestanden/uitgaven/inhoudsopgaven/milii taire_spectator_5_2023_selhorst.pdf

[61] https://worldcrunch.com/focus/russian-army-failure.

[62] Skoglund, Listou, and Ekström, "Russian logistics in the Ukrainian War: Can operational failures be attributed to logistics?."

advanced technologies, and multimodal switching. The vulnerabilities showcase a mixture of logistics problems associated with multiple strategic directions.[63]

6. Implications for practice: Dilemmas

Evaluating the transformation of the Russian armed forces from the breaking up of the Soviet Union up to the present situation we see that the Soviet armed forces and its principles were getting obsolete and that the sudden and chaotic emergence of the Russian Federation armed forces resulted in a non-compliant and not combat ready force. Without a clearly related political and military strategic vision, enough adequate resources (budget, personnel, materiel, doctrine, and organisation) and sharp vision on sustainability, sustainment and logistics and its interactions, it is impossible to have armed forces that give enough substance to the political and military strategic goals of the Russian Federation. At the same time, one can note the risk of choosing for a particular type of warfare and shaping a force that loses relevance in modern/future combat. The conflict will therefore lead to strategic reflections on the validity of pre-Ukraine embraced directions, and a renewed effort to communicate and learn across-levels. At present, the complex operation re-activates latent routines befitting a large-scale and prolonged type of warfare.[64] It is likely that these routines can be reactivated in a (sufficiently) effective manner and will be combined with the more contemporary strategic directions mentioned.

In the longer term, the Russian Federation will try to rejuvenate its 'revival.'[65] It may consider a new mixture of multiple strategic directions to avoid betting on operations that do not play out according to expectations. This will further confront decision makers (again) with pressure to deal with scarce resources and a variety of sourcing/logistics concepts and capabilities (including reliance on Private Military Companies like Wagner). It will push leadership to improve transformation effectiveness,[66] enhance performance by its industry,[67] and explore opportunities for economic growth.[68] The strategic dilemma will stretch beyond the military's boundaries. In Russia and on the western side, discussions on industry capabilities,

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[63] https://worldcrunch.com/focus/russian-army-failure.

[64] Van Fenema and Romme, "Latent organizing for responding to emergencies: Foundations for research."

[65] Renz, *Russia's Military Revival.*

[66] McDermott, *The Transformation of Russia's Armed Forces: Twenty Lost Years.*

[67] https://www.fpri.org/article/2020/04/russias-defense-industry-between-political-signifii cance-and-economic-inefficiency/.

[68] Oxenstierna and Wannheden, "The Russian economy and military expenditure in light of the war in Ukraine and economic sanctions."

logistics depth and reduction of international dependence gain prominence.[69] In a broader sense, Russia faces challenges of sustaining political legitimacy when combining defense investments with its population's real income given a limited national income and sanctions.[70]

7. Implications for research, and conclusion

We conclude with directions for further research.

Multilevel Thinking and Evolution of Time. The Ukraine conflict illustrated how military forces fighting in the present are deduced from earlier choices and invest-ments. With multilevel thinking, attention can be paid to temporality;[71] after all, strategic agency concerns opportunities for future states of the organisation.[72] At any moment, the military that fights is a product of multilevel processes, including lengthy technology life cycles, expectations in the political arena, and financial resources. Researchers can explore how (problematic) transition of armed forces – including their resources and logistics – can be understood against the backdrop of shifting understandings of desired capability mixes.

Strategic direction and operational-tactical adaptation. This case illustrates the dynamics of strategies that change, or one could say drift,[73] in interplay with opera-tional-tactical adaptation. Russia and the Ukraine keep trying new technologies and operational concepts in offensive and defensive manners. Our multilevel framework can afford researchers with new directions for research, such as activation of verti-cal and horizontal coordination. Despite properties of bureaucracies, more energetic processes seem required to win a present fight and prepare for future ones.[74] Such processes encompass vigorous multilevel learning[75] and adoption of analytics.[76]

Challenges of vertical alignment. Zooming out, our study can be further related to ideas in business administration on coordinating/aligning strategic and organisational processes. A common theme is reducing 'dissonance' or improving configurational fit (1) between an organisation and its environment, and (2) across

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[69] https://twitter.com/hansdamen/status/1661728409872134146.

[70] Oxenstierna and Wannheden, "The Russian economy and military expenditure in light of the war in Ukraine and economic sanctions."

[71] Emirbayer and Mische, "What is agency?"

[72] Sminia and Valdovinos, "Implementing strategy and avenues of access: A practice perspective."

[73] Voronov, Glynn, and Weber, "Under the radar: Institutional drift and non-strategic institutional change."

[74] Quinn and Dutton, "Coordination as energy-in-conversation."

[75] De Waard et al., "Learning in complex public systems: The case of MINUSMA's intelligence organization."

[76] Morgan et al., "Military applications of artificial intelligence."

and at multiple organisational levels within organisational boundaries.[77] For instance, business model literature advocates alignment of customer oriented processes, internal activities and sourcing.[78] Others refer to the interplay of external and internal capabilities,[79] resource management for value creation,[80] or the interplay of market requirements and operational resources (operations management).[81] In a normative sense, organisations are encouraged to attempt to match their primary and supportive processes to strategic demands. Similarly, business organisations tend to choose between for instance serving mass versus niche markets.[82] Researchers can problematise the extent to which these ideas apply to the military, which must be prepared for any type of traditional, current and future unknown warfare.[83]

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[77] Benbya, Leidner, and Preston, "MIS quarterly research curation on information systems alignment research curation team"; Bacharach, Bamberger, and Sonnenstuhl, "The organizational transformation process: The micropolitics of dissonance reduction and the alignment of logics of action"; Storbacka and Nenonen, "Scripting Markets: From value propositions to market propositions."

[78] Foss and Saebi, "Fifteen years of research on business model innovation: How far have we come and where should we go?"

[79] Wilden et al., "Dynamic capabilities and performance: Strategy, structure and environment."

[80] Sirmon, Hitt, and Ireland, "Managing firm resources in dynamic environments to create value: Looking inside the black box."

[81] Slack, Lewis, and Bates, "The two worlds of operations management research and practice: Can they meet, should they meet?"

[82] Porter, *Competitive Strategy: Techniques for Analyzing Industries and Competitors*.

[83] Van Fenema and Soldaat, "Restrategizing digitalization in the military."

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CHAPTER 10

Explaining Stalemate from a Corbettian Maritime Perspective

Henk Warnar

Abstract

Many were surprised that in Ukraine a long regular large-scale attritional war emerged, that directly or indirectly involved all great powers. In June 2023, this war was in a stalemate. It is argued that this situation could be explained using Corbett's classic limited war theory. Such an analysis makes clear that, although the war is primarily a matter of ground warfare, the maritime domain plays an important role, particularly when the war is seen in the larger context of great power competition.

Keywords: Naval warfare, Limited war, Corbett

1. Introduction

After one year and four months of the Ukraine war, parties are still far from their desired end state and predicting the outcome is difficult. The conflict that had in fact already started in 2014, displays a regular war between belligerents and allies that are much more equal in strength than those in many previous wars such as the Falklands conflict and the Gulf Wars. To understand such conflicts, it is wise to consider classical theories and related scholarly work. Although most fighting occurs on land, and naval action is limited, the maritime domain and its physical characteristics still play an important role in shaping the course of war. This chapter analyses the conflict as a limited war between the West, in support of Ukraine and Russia. Its method is inspired by British naval historian and maritime strategist Sir Julian Corbett (1854-1922) whose death, a little more than a hundred years ago is marked by a series of conferences in the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States of America.[1] Corbett's work contains principles that have been valid throughout history until contemporary times.[2] It is attractive due to its

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[1] https://www.kcl.ac.uk/research/corbett100

[2] Mackinnon, "Rediscovering Corbett: A practical appraisal of some principles of maritime strategy."

approach considering naval, land and economic warfare but also asymmetrical relations such as maritime versus continental, great versus smaller powers and alliances, resembling the Ukraine war.

In many studies, new weapon technologies such as the use of unmanned systems receive much attention. Some argue that shore-based missile systems and drones will make navies useless.[3] It may appear that for future wars, it would be best to focus on attrition land warfare. This chapter investigates the question what role the maritime domain fulfils in this war. It argues that specific geographical space dimensions are more important than generally acknowledged and that limited war theory helps to understand connections between the different domains and the current stalemate.

The first part of this chapter will outline his principles and theories that are used in this analysis. Then, a summary of maritime events and actions will be provided. The third part will consist of the Corbettian analysis to be followed by a conclusion on how this explains the stalemate nature of the war as of August 2023.

Russia's logic of strategic reasoning and its considerations in military planning are unknown to the author. Therefore, a Corbettian logic including Russia's objectives will be constructed. The theory applied in this chapter is academic and may be different from how the decision processes in each of the countries really evolved. Such theory may not be suitable to discover the 'truth' but it will help to discover and understand the nature of the war.

2. Corbett's theory

Late 19th century, naval thought started to flourish. Although basic concepts such as Command of the Sea had already existed for many years, and writers such as the American Captain Mahan had brought naval thought to the attention of a wide audience, Corbett, of who *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy* published in 1911 is best known, was arguably the first to provide a comprehensive theoretical overview, grounded in historical research, and put the conduct of naval warfare in the context of war in general.[4] Corbett understood that a decisive battle, despite its desirability could only be achieved in specific and often exceptional circumstances and that it was only a method to achieve other objectives, always related to events and objectives ashore. A blockade could often achieve similar goals and more certain outcomes. A battle could provide Command of the Sea but a weaker opponent would usually wisely avoid battle and dispute this command by minor counter

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[3] Payne, "Navies – useless in great power conflict."

[4] Corbett, "Some principles."

attacks, or the ineradicable threat of a 'fleet-in-being.' As a result, Command of the Sea will normally be in dispute. The sea cannot be occupied. Its command is a matter of 'relative dominance' and should not be understood as categorical absolutes. It's a 'degree of leverage,' not as an end in itself but a method in the context of ulterior objects beyond the primary objectives related to the opposing fleet.[5] Concentration of effort to support ulterior campaign objectives is therefore more important than concentration of force in support of specific operations.[6]

The ulterior object could be related to the protection of one's own trade or the defense of own territory but Corbett's largest contribution to war studies consists of his limited war theory. Corbett carried on Clausewitz's suggestion that his book should be revised to reflect that there are two types of war. One type to overthrow the enemy and another type merely to make some conquests [...] either for the purpose of retaining them permanently, or of turning them to account as matter of exchange in the settlement of a peace.'[7] Inspired by Clausewitz's interpretations by the German military historian Hans Delbrück, Lieutenant General Rudolf von Caemmerer, and Rear-Admiral Kurt von Malzahn, Corbett developed a limited war theory that could be applied in a maritime strategy and more specifically in Baltic war plans that Corbett and the British Admiral Fisher developed to counter Germany.[8] Limited war should be distinguished from unlimited war in which the existence of the state is at stake, all resources are mobilised and the unlimited political aim includes the annihilation of the opponent's army. A state that opposes stronger competitors will avoid such unlimited wars. Instead, a limited war is a method that could still contribute to more unlimited objectives without putting its own survival at stake.

This classic limited war theory should be distinguished from contemporary Cold War limited war theory as discussed by Rothman and Rouvroije in this volume. Although both theories analyse the limited nature of means and objectives, contemporary theory has more focus on the limitedness of the means, and is more gradual in approach, studying escalation mechanisms, whereas classical theory is more centred on the objective and includes a more binary interpretation.

The key concept in Corbett's limited war theory is the Clausewitzian concept of the opponent's Will[9] that could be exploited when a limited object is seized. After seizure of a limited territorial object, an island, a port or piece of land, two

[5] McCranie, *Mahan, Corbett,* 109-10.

[6] McCranie, *Mahan, Corbett*, 146-9.

[7] Clausewitz, "On war, notice (Nachricht)" 10th July, 1827.

[8] Lambert, "The British way of war: Julian Corbett and the battle for a national strategy," 142-3, 58.

[9] To distinguish the Clausewitz concept from the verb 'will' the former's first letter is written as a capital.

possibilities exist. The defender's Will could be insufficient to mobilise force to take back the object and the fait accompli is successful. Corbett labels this situation as 'limited by politics.' Conversely, if the object is perceived as valuable enough to accept war, a situation exists that Corbett, referring to Clausewitz, called 'limited by contingent.'[10] In this scenario the usually relatively small force, the contingent, that seized the object will become what Corbett described as a disposal force acting in a larger campaign of potentially a more unlimited setting. In favourable conditions such a disposal force could achieve effects beyond their size or as Napoleon once lamented: '30,000 men in transports at the Downs [...] can paralyze 300,000 of my army.'[11]

The conditions to allow limited war are largely determined by geography and space and particularly a sea can fulfil these demands.[12] Firstly, the homeland needs to be safe from a counter stroke. England, separated from the continent by sea, was well protected against invasion by continental powers. This condition made limited war difficult to achieve in continental wars in which determent opponents can counterattack, inducing these wars to escalate. Secondly, the sea around the homeland and the seized object needs to be commanded. Not only for reasons of territorial defense, but involvement of naval forces will also support economic warfare that will tear down the enemy's sustainability. Thirdly, the theatre of operations should be isolated. This could partly be achieved by a navy commanding the sea but as ports are particularly vulnerable to attack from ashore, fortifications, defensible objects and allied land forces could fulfil this requirement as well. Because limited war is preferable for countries that have relatively small armies, alliances with other nations are a prerequisite for successful limited war. Diplomacy should therefore serve both military and economic purposes.

According to Corbett, limited war should be conducted in three distinct phases. In phase one, a territorial object is taken by naval force and the expeditionary disposal force. The second defensive phase is meant to solidify control of this object. In order to exploit the advantages of defence, a system of impregnable fortification is built. This could seduce an enemy, that is driven by its escalating Will, to fight towards its own destruction. Naval forces should expand local Command of the Sea to a more general type of command. In the third and final phase, a switch to the offense is made to increase pressure on the enemy to enforce or facilitate a negotiated settlement. Ultimately, the ulterior objective is this political settlement,

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[10] Corbett, *Some Principles*, 61.

[11] Corbett, *Some Principles*, 69.

[12] For a full explanation of this theory see: Corbett, *Some Principles*, 41-91. and McCranie, *Mahan, Corbett*, ch 13.

not the destruction of the enemy's forces. The textbook example Corbett used was the Russo-Japanese war, in which the Korean peninsula and Port Arthur was the territorial object and the Russian army and navy were drawn into destruction culminating in the battles of Mukden and Tsushima.

3. Events at sea

Although Western countries had not anticipated the Ukrainian war as it unfolded, this war cannot be properly understood without considering the 2014 annexation of Crimea by Russia. Many western observers saw this and the Syria intervention as geopolitical southward expansion, obtaining naval and air bases at the Black Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean.[13] Less attention was given to how Moscow had been conducting grey zone coercive policies towards Ukraine including economic pressure since the 2014 intervention.[14] For example, the Russian FSB Coast Guard apprehended Ukrainian shipping to and from Ukrainian ports of Mariupol and Berdiansk before obtaining a permit to pass through the Kerch Strait that caused economic damage by delays which by annual average varied between 28 and 79 hours from July 2018 and January 2022.[15] On the 25th November, 2018, while simultaneously blocking the Crimea Kerch bridge passage with a Russian merchant vessel, Russian coastguard vessels driven by men in uniforms without insignia, seized three Ukrainian small naval crafts and locked up their crew as terrorists in Russian cells.[16]

In the years that followed 'incidents' such as these in 2014 and 2018, NATO paid more attention to the Black Sea by increasing ships' port visits and participation in exercises; it established initiatives such as a Regional Maritime Coordination Function in regions such as the Black Sea, but in multi-year numbers it never equaled the higher numbers that coincided with intense NATO presence in the nineties during the operations centred around the Former Republic of Yugoslavia. Russia, after all, is a nuclear armed empire and not a fragment of the South Slav project.

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[13] Gurjar, "Russia returns to the Indian Ocean: Exploring the expanding strategic presence"; Blank, "Gunboat diplomacy à la Russe: Russia's naval base in Sudan and its implications."

[14] Kormych and Malyarenko, "From gray zone to conventional warfare: the Russia-Ukraine conflict in the Black Sea."

[15] Klymenko, "Russia's economic war against Ukraine in the Sea of Azov."

[16] Lewis, "Russia's continued aggression against Ukraine."
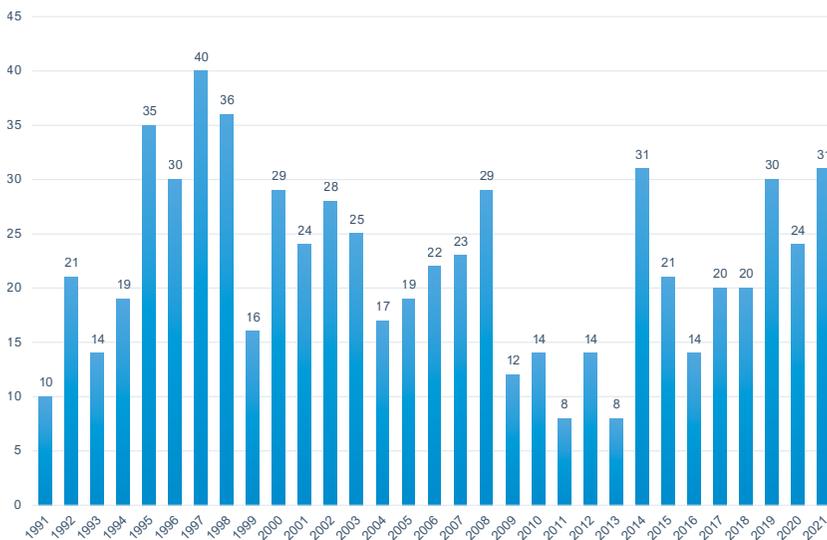
Figure 10.1: Number of NATO non-Black Sea States' warships that visited the Black Sea, since the collapse of the Soviet Union (1991-2021).[17]

Immediately preceding February 2022, both Russian and NATO fleets accumulated in the eastern part of the Mediterranean at levels not seen since the Yom Kippur conflict in 1973.[18] On the 26th February, Russia had gathered in the Eastern Mediterranean 2 Kilo class submarines, 2 Cruisers, 4 Frigates and Destroyers, 1 Corvette and 6 smaller naval vessels.[19] In the Black Sea, on the 2nd of March it had deployed: 4 Kilo class submarines, 1 Cruiser (Moskva), 2 Frigates, 1 Corvette, 6 Amphibious vessels and several auxiliaries.[20] In total, in February both Russia and NATO claimed to have each around 120-140 warships at sea in European and surrounding waters.[21] For NATO this included three carrier groups of the US, France and Italy, soon to be followed by the brand new British Carrier HMS Prince of Wales.

[17] BlackSeaNews and Studies, "The 2021-January 2022 presence of non-Black Sea NATO states' warships in the Black Sea."

[18] Warnar, "Maritieme manoeuvres tijdens landconflict Oekraïne, Russische en westerse vlootbewegingen, nu en in 1973."

[19] Lokeren, "Russian navy – news and analysis."

[20] Sutton, "Massive Russian navy armada moves into place off Ukraine."

[21] Bosbotinis, "The role of naval forces in Russia's war against Ukraine and its implications." Russian Federation, "Ships of Russia, Iran and China have worked out the organization of rescue at sea and countering piracy during the CHIRU-2022 exercise in the Arabian Sea."

In contrast to 1973, NATO's deterrence could not prevent Russia's invasion.[22] After the invasion of the Ukraine, NATO moved its fleet to northern Europe to participate in exercises such as Cold Response aiming to de-escalate and simultaneously deter Russia from expanding the conflict to Eastern European or Baltic states.[23] In contrast, Russia's fleet destroyed most of the Ukrainian naval force in the first week of the naval war. The Ukrainians scuttled their only large combatant Hetman Sahaidachny around the 27th February amid reports of Russian tanks approaching Mykolaiv. Using missiles, the Russians destroyed 4 of Ukraine's 10 patrol and gunboats, 11 of its 13 miscellaneous craft and its only amphibious vessel.[24]

Russia had gained Command of the Sea and used it to enforce a blockade although it wasn't formally declared as such.[25] Nevertheless, it ground merchant shipping to and from the Ukraine to a halt. By the 1st of March, 3 Merchant Vessels (MV) had been hit by missiles, and two had been captured by Russian Warships.[26] On the 2nd of March a Bangladeshi MV was hit by a missile,[27] and a day after that an Estonian MV hit a mine.[28] The Russian FSB reported that around 420 mines would float around.[29] The fear of mines would prevent shipping until summer when as part of the grain initiative, safe routes were created. Although this deal allowed some shipping until summer 2023, mines remained a threat throughout.

Russia also used its Command of the Sea to support its land operations. Most importantly, it freely launched missiles from its surface vessels and submarines.[30] Also, it could freely supply goods and troops around the Sea of Azov and it could threaten an amphibious landing. To support this threat, on the 15th of March it conducted a demonstration of an amphibious move towards Odessa.[31] The coastal environmental conditions were unfavourable for a landing but the threat would bind Ukrainian forces near Odessa. This effect however was limited. Ukrainian forces near Odessa never exceeded much more than a brigade. This force and Ukrainian advantage of defence was probably too strong for Russian invading amphibious forces that will not have exceeded the size of a brigade.

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[22] In the final phase of the 1973 conflict, Brezhnev, after a series of conventional escalation steps, threatened to conduct an amphibious invasion in Egypt, but after US deliberate escalation by nuclear preparations Moscow backed off.

[23] Naval News, "HMS Prince Of Wales to lead NATO task force in the Arctic."

[24] Mitzer, "List Of naval losses during the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine."

[25] Fink, "Naval blockade and the Russia–Ukraine conflict."

[26] Skytec, "Russian invasion of Ukraine, Black Sea report."

[27] Maritime Executive, "Bangladeshi ship hit in attack near Mykolaiv, killing one engineer."

[28] Ozberk, "Estonian cargo ship sinks off the coast Of Odessa."

[29] Dunlap, "Guest Post: Prof. Pete Pedrozo on 'Dangerous waters: Use of naval mines in the Russia-Ukraine conflict.'"

[30] Bronk, "The Russian air war and Ukrainian, requirements for air defence."

[31] Ozberk, "Russia's amphibious operation dilemma."

Russia's Command of the Sea would not last very long as Russian naval assets appeared vulnerable to attack from ashore. On the 22nd March, 2022, a Raptor assault boat near Mariupol was hit by an anti-tank missile. On the 24th March a landing ship, moored alongside in Berdyansk was destroyed by long range artillery; and the heaviest loss occurred on 14th April when cruiser and Russian flagship Moskva was sunk by 2 Ukrainian Neptune anti-ship missiles launched from ashore most likely supported by foreign targeting information.[32] It appeared that 2 days before, frigate Admiral Essen was successfully defended against a possibly comparable attack by shooting down a Ukrainian Bayraktar TB2 drone.[33] Detailed information on why Moskva was lost, is not available but a lack of both material and operational readiness seem to be the most plausible explanation.

The effects of the sinking were severe for Russia. Moskva had an important task in command and control and air defense. Its loss meant that Ukrainian unmanned systems obtained much more freedom to operate. Russia made attempts to install Surface to Air missile systems on Snake Island but the transporting vessels engaged in this operation were defenceless against at least three successful Ukrainian attacks using drones and/or anti-ship missiles.[34] When Moscow gave up Snake Island, it paved the way for the grain initiative that was agreed on 27th July, 2022 and allowed some merchant traffic to resume trade via the sea.[35]

Ukrainian drones could now conduct or support attacks on Crimea. On 10th August, Ukraine could attack Saky airbase wiping out half the number of aircraft of The Black Sea Fleet's aviation regiment.[36]Later on 20th August it could attack the Naval Headquarters in Sevastopol; and on 29th October both air and surface unmanned systems conducted a raid on Sevastopol naval base. The unmanned systems managed to hit a frigate, possibly the new flagship Admiral Makarov, at sea and a mine countermeasures vessel.[37] This type of low-cost attack capability may not herald a new era in naval warfare, as similar trends have existed before in history, but it is an important method for navies that are low in numbers to create a mass in attack, which is important in naval warfare that is characterised by attrition.[38]

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[32] Sutton, "Russian navy's 5 significant losses In the Ukraine war so far."

[33] Navy Recognition, "Russian frigate Admiral Essen destroys Ukrainian Bayraktar TB2 UAV."

[34] Ozberk, "Russian Serna-Class LCU becomes the new victim of TB2 drone." Sutton, "How the Russian navy is losing dominance: The curse Of Snake Island." Ozberk, "Ukraine strikes Russia's Vasily Bekh rescue tug with antiship missiles."

[35] Derix, "Hoop op tarwetransport uit Oekraïne door nieuwe krachtsverhoudingen Zwarte Zee."

[36] Reuters, "Half of Russia's Black Sea fleet's combat jets out of operation, Western official says."

[37] Ozberk, "Analysis: Ukraine strikes with Kamikaze USVs – Russian bases are not safe anymore."

[38] Kaushal, "Ukraine's uncrewed raid on Sevastopol and the future of war at sea."

Having lost command of the western part of the Black Sea, Russia was forced to withdraw naval assets to safer havens. Amphibious ships were moved to Novorossiysk in May, and in September the missile shooting Kilo submarines were moved to this port as well.[39] Russian naval Frigates and Corvettes, often equipped with improvised Pantsir ground-based air defense systems, lashed to the helicopter deck, were deployed as a coastal defense ring around Sevastopol.[40] These operations only allowed occasional land attack missions.

The poor performance of Black Sea fleet ships, among which Moskva was an old vessel, tells us little about other Russian Naval capabilities. In recent years Russia has re-built its submarine fleet. It operates new Borei class ballistic missile submarines, Yasen guided missile submarines to attack NATO warships, Akula attack submarine to track and target NATO submarines and one Belgorod special mission submarine that can be used to target western infrastructure.[41] For example Russia's demonstration, supported by video imagery, in March 2021, of three submarines breaching the polar ice, indicates a high capable and ready submarine service.[42] It is this threat that will worry Western commanders. Russian air and land forces may be worn out, it's Northern and Baltic fleets are not. Moscow, understanding the importance of Western support to the Ukraine, could use its fleet to undermine NATO solidarity and determination by creating minor crises at sea that NATO should be able to manage. ICEX 2022 in which two US submarines breached the polar ice cap, should be seen in this context but many other incidents would follow.[43] In June 2022, a Russian warship violated Danish territorial waters near Bornholm, in response to the Danish delivery of Harpoon anti-ship missile systems.[44] In October Nordstream-2 pipelines between Denmark and Norway exploded allegedly sabotaged by Russia although the true perpetrators are still unknown. In November, the NATO taskforce sailing near Gdansk and Kaliningrad but well outside any territorial waters was harassed by Russian aircraft.[45] In each of these incidents, NATO forces reacted in a de-escalating manner but nonetheless demonstrating Western resolve and capabilities. For example, on 21st November,

[39] Mongilio, "Russian navy moving kilo attack boats to safety from Ukraine strike risk, says U.K. MoD."

[40] Chacko, "Why are Russian Navy ships equipped ground-based air defense systems – Tor and Pantsir?"

[41] Military Balance, "Chapter Five: Russia and Eurasia."

[42] Davies, "A very cold war: Three Russian nuclear missile-carrying submarines surface in the Arctic Circle in fresh show of strength."

[43] Naval News, "U.S. navy kicks off ICEX 2022 in the Arctic Ocean."

[44] Guardian, "'Unacceptable': Russian warship accused of violating Danish waters."

[45] Karremann, "Russische vliegtuigen vlogen laag langs Nederlands fregat en andere NAVO-schepen in Oostzee."

2022 it had 5 carrier groups operating at sea, i.e. FS Charles de Gaulle, ITS Cavour, HMS Queen Elizabeth, USS George H.W. Bush and Gerald R. Ford.[46]

Unfortunately, at the southern edge of the theatre, weak Russian naval performance in the Black Sea provided only little relief to the Ukraine. Although the Montreux convention precluded Russian naval reinforcement via the Bosporus, it could still use the strait for its supply of military equipment.[47] Ukrainian shipping was still hampered by Russian interference e.g., early 2023, 60 merchant vessels were still stranded in Ukrainian ports.[48] Also, export of agricultural products provided for only half of Ukrainian export, the other half being metallurgy machinery. Although in February 2023, a Ukrainian wharf was still able to deliver a new gunboat, in economic senses this sector's export had stopped.[49] Russia is not only putting pressure on Ukraine but also other Black Sea states such as Georgia, Bulgaria and Turkey. Fearful of Russian revanchism, these states are very careful in their posture towards Moscow underlining the regional leverage that the war still provides to Russia.[50] In particular Georgia is stuck in an isolated position.[51]

From June 2023, Ukraine launched a counter-offensive on land that turned out to be difficult to create substantial progress as Russia forces could benefit from its deep field fortifications. At sea, Russia continued its policy to isolate Ukraine and harass NATO-ships. On 11th June, in the Baltic, NATO forces, including Dutch warship Van Amstel, were harassed by Fencer aircraft while conducting exercise BALTOPS.[52] In July 2023 after wheat prices had more or less stabilised, Moscow withdrew from the grain-deal and increased economic pressure on Ukraine by attacks on agricultural and port infrastructure in Odesa and mining operations at sea.[53]

4. Analysis

In this section, events from both the Russian and Western perspectives will be put into Corbett's limited war framework. Each side followed the phases as described above. Although Russia could benefit most from limited war characteristics, and for Ukraine the war was mostly unlimited in nature, from a Western perspective

[46] Lokeren, "VS experimenteert met licht vliegdekschip-concept."

[47] Sutton, "Russian ship loaded with military equipment enters Black Sea." Also see Fink's chapter 'Contraband of war at sea' in this volume.

[48] IMO, "Maritime security and safety in the Black Sea and Sea of Azov."

[49] Grotnik, "Ukraine's final Gyurza-M-Class gunboat starts factory trials near Kyiv."

[50] Aronsson, "The inhospitable sea, towards a new U.S. strategy for the Black Sea region," 28.

[51] Melvin, "A new security order in the Black Sea: The role of Georgia."

[52] Baltic Times, "NATO's interceptions of Russian planes over Baltic Sea."

[53] Lagrone, "Russia lays mines in Black Sea to block Ukrainian ports, NSC says."

the war was a limited conflict. Table 10.1 summarises how the most important limited war concepts manifested themselves for each perspective.

Concept	Western allies in support of Ukraine	Russia and allies
Political and ulterior objective	Liberal democratic world order	Autocratic conservative order
Territorial object	Ukraine state	Crimea, Donbas south-eastern coastal region
Isolation mechanisms • Defense homeland • Defense territorial object	Atlantic Ocean (for US) Deterrence Ukraine land defense trained by allies	Deterrence Command/ Sea Denial Russian land defense
Disposal force	Ukraine armed forces supported by allies and NATO 3 Tier forces including amphibious capabilities*	Russian and Wagner deployed forces
Counterstrike	Not intended	Minor attacks or harassment to undermine Western cohesion
Allies	NATO and EU	China, Iran, other independent countries
Economic methods	Sanctions	Naval Blockade

Note: *NATO forces operate forward deployed but are not actually deployed as disposal force but act as a deterrent force, able to react to Russian aggression.

Table 10.1: Overview of limited war concepts in the Ukrainian war

In this conflict Corbett's limited war phases can be recognised on both sides. Russia's annexation of Crimea can be seen as a phase 1, followed by phase 2 economic isolation after which Russia hoped that the advance to Kyiv would be the final blow. Obviously, this turned out to be a miscalculation as the West in support of Ukraine conducted a similar strategy that will be explained first.

Western support gradually turned Ukraine into a territorial object that became part of a limited East-West war. The West didn't militarily occupy Ukraine but planted – limited conflict phase 1 type – ideological seeds by political support, for example expressed by members of the European Parliament that attended the people's revolt and protests at Maidan Square in 2013. The US and many European countries have annually conducted training by Sea Breeze exercises since 1997. The

Ukrainian frigate, 'Hetman Sahaydachnyy' was integrated in the NATO Operation Ocean Shield to combat piracy near Somalia. This support should not be seen as provocation for war but integration of Ukraine in Western security structures; it weakened the Russian position. After the Crimea annexation and the start of military operations in Eastern Ukraine, NATO's position was too weak to facilitate a strong reaction but particularly the US did invest in training the Ukrainian armed 'disposal' forces and NATO increased its deterrent patrols by the Standing Naval Forces although it could not sustain intensive patrolling for a longer period. This defensive western posture and Ukraine's tilt towards the EU was used as a justification for the Russian intervention in February 2023. Ukraine's disposal forces supported by the West absorbed the Russian attacks in 2022 and this can be considered as part of limited war phase 2 from a Western perspective.

NATO's deterrent fleet in the Mediterranean was not strong enough to deter Russia from this invasion. Post-Cold War reduction of NATO armed forces had dispelled such power. However, it is also unclear what NATO force level would have deterred Russia from this type of aggression. The origins of Russia's intervention are more likely to be found in Russian domestic policies and nationalism rather than in a breach of a security dilemma.[54] As NATO countries communicated, the fleet at sea was meant to signal deterrence messages related to NATO-members homeland, not directly Ukrainian territory. NATO clearly stated that it would not embark on military operations in reaction to a Russian invasion because it feared nuclear escalation. NATO applied a policy of de-escalation and diplomacy.[55] After Russia had invaded, deployment of NATO's readiness forces were specifically aiming to ensure the security of its own member states and not to directly react to Russia.[56] A defensive NATO-posture was made visible by NATO sea forces conducting exercises in the Baltic Sea Region, particularly to assure security of its East European members.

Although deterrence hadn't worked, training the Ukrainian armed forces paid off as it resisted the February 2022 attack on Kyiv. This attack turned out to be not only a miscalculation by the Russians but also a display of Ukrainian forces, much more capable than those that fought in 2014-2015. Also, after revision of the Russian strategy, Ukraine could withstand Russian offensive operations in the East and South. Russia got stuck in unsuccessful attrition warfare that forced it to partly mobilise and consumed so much of its resources that it became dependent

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[54] Kolstø and Blakkisrud, *The New Russian Nationalism.*

[55] Stoltenberg, "Press conference by NATO Secretary General following the second day of the meeting of NATO Ministers of Defence."

[56] Stoltenberg, "Press conference by NATO Secretary General following the extraordinary virtual summit of NATO Heads of State and Government."

on support by allies such as China and Iran.[57] Russia was wise enough not to push ahead of its culmination point but had lost much of its great power status and was, more or less, turned into a vassal to China. Nevertheless, after escalation to this level of war, a retreat to the pre-February 2022 position had been cut off, so, unless Russia's political regime collapses as it did in 1917 and 1991, a political agreement to end hostilities cannot be expected soon.

Earlier, in 2014, the Crimea annexation provided Moscow a territorial object as an easy limited war phase-1 catch made possible by textbook deception displayed at the preceding Olympics. In phase 2, Russia attempted to isolate the Ukraine from the West. To this end it applied non-military methods and economic warfare hampering Ukraine trade passing the Black Sea. As a result, the Ukraine's per capita GDP hardly grew, whereas comparable other countries such as Belarus and Russia have seen this indicator rise significantly since 2004 (see the graph in Figure 10.2 below). Economic coercion and political intimidation all supported the message that Ukraine's future was in Russian hands.

Figure 10.2: Per Capita GDP in US$ at current price of world-index: Russia, Belarus and Ukraine.[58]

[57] Erickson and Collins, "Putin's Ukraine invasion: Turbocharging Sino-Russian collaboration in energy, maritime security, and beyond?"

[58] IMF, "IMF Data mapper."

Other than relatively mild sanctions towards Russia, the West until 2022, showed little or no intent to intervene in either Ukraine or the nearby warzone of Syria. Moscow's interpretations will have been that the western Will was more driven by cheap gas imports rather than a desire to interfere with Russia's adventures abroad. NATO created the impression that it assumed Russia's re-establishment of strategic positions consisting of naval and air bases at Crimea and Syria, similar to Cold War years, were foregone and irreversible facts that would hopefully satisfy Moscow's security desires. Moscow's switch to the offense and its initial plan for a quick and decisive – limited war phase 3 type – fall of Kyiv and collapse of Ukraine as an independent state would have completed Moscow's desired ulterior end state in which the old Russian empire would be more or less restored, establishing a firm cultural and autocratic political grip that would not tolerate regions to defect and embrace perfidy western progressive liberalism. In this war the real Russian intent had clearly emerged and it changed the game. However, Moscow had hugely underestimated Ukrainian resistance and overestimated its own capabilities. The siege of Kyiv turned into a disaster. Moscow changed its short-term war aims from a quick collapse of the Ukrainian state into the occupation of expanded territories in the Donbas and the south-eastern coastal region. Phase 3 was turned into another phase 1, occupying segments of Ukraine, but with a completely different, much firmer western posture. Nevertheless, the occupied industrial coastal zone, in combination with Command of the Black Sea provided Moscow a powerful territorial object that was solidly fortified by defensive system of trenches and the river Dnepr. This forced the Ukrainians on the offensive, which was difficult to accomplish and could therefore still contribute to Moscow's long-term ulterior objective.

At sea, Russia, in February 2022, had secured Command of the Black Sea by elimination of the Ukrainian Navy through a kind of decisive battle. This command isolated Ukraine's coastline. More specifically, it enabled Russian naval forces to support land operations and most importantly, to strangle Ukraine's economy. Russia allegedly deployed mines and presence of naval forces to deny merchant shipping acces to Ukraine. The main economic drivers for Ukraine, that is export of agricultural and steel industrial production had come to a halt. These exports normally left the country by sea but merchant shipping to and from Ukraine via the Black Sea had been entirely stopped. This strategy of economic warfare including attacks on energy infrastructure could be seen as a continuation of pre-2022 strategy of economic harassment and isolation at sea, but at a much more intense level. Kormych noted this continuation as well but argued that a wider framework to include regular and economic warfare rather than just grey or hybrid warfare should be applied to explain the ongoing war.[59] Specifically, the occupation of the

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[59] Kormych and Malyarenko, "From gray zone to conventional warfare: the Russia-Ukraine conflict in the Black Sea."

south-eastern industrial area and the port of Mariupol, important for metallurgic industry, provided Moscow great advantage. Without this coastal region Ukraine's economic viability is questionable.

This blockade could be so effective because NATO, including three member-states along the Black Sea, had given up any attempt to dispute Russian control of this sea. This was largely caused by the Montreux-treaty regarding entrance of shipping to and from this sea via the Dardanelle strait. Shortly after the outbreak of the war, Turkey denied in accordance with this treaty, belligerent military shipping through this strait. Although the treaty does not prescribe Turkey to deny access to non-belligerent warships, NATO decided to withhold requesting access in fear of escalation.[60]

Interestingly, the effectiveness of the blockade wasn't much reduced when Russia lost Command of the Sea after sinking the Slava-class flagship Moskva. This case illustrates the principle that the loss of Command of the Sea does not yet mean that this command is transferred to the opposing party. In fact, a situation arose in which both belligerents could dispute or deny the opponent's effective utilisation of the maritime domain. The Russians were forced to withdraw its missile launching ships and submarines to the eastern part of the Black Sea and the Crimean peninsula came under drone attacks launched from the sea. Ukraine could benefit from a wheat deal but this supported only a small portion of its economy. Russia's presence was still strong enough to paralyse its flow of other commodities and military supplies and the Sea of Azov was still commanded by Russia. Note that Russian submarines still posed a considerable threat to any kind of shipping, military or civilian. The grain deal provided some relief to Ukraine's economy, but Russia could still use any extension of the deal's period of validity to negotiate better arrangements for its own economy e.g. own export of products such as fertilizers. Also flow of agricultural commodities was de facto diverted from its original African destination to Europe, causing friction in European markets, potentially undermining Europe's cohesion. Most exports supported by the grain initiative flowed to China (by far), followed by Italy, Spain, the Netherlands and Turkey.[61]

The effectiveness of the blockade reflected the geographic circumstances in combination with the Montreux regulations. The Black Sea could therefore easily be used to isolate Ukraine's economy to a significant extent whilst Western nations could not react to either support Ukraine from the sea or constrain Russia's freedom of manoeuvre at sea. Obviously, this isolation was far from complete. Traditional, but nonetheless valid, continental criticism holds that countries such as Ukraine can be supplied by air, roads and railroads.[62] This provided essential largely mili-

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[60] Pedrozo, "The Russia-Ukraine conflict: Blocking access to the Black Sea."

[61] UN, "Black Sea grain initiative joint coordination centre."

[62] McCranie, *Mahan, Corbett,* 244.

tary goods, but this could not relieve the economic burden. Western support was strong enough to prevent Ukrainian forces having to retreat, but so far not strong enough to drive the Russians out of their country. In the short-term, survival of the Ukraine seems safe but the long-term economic survivability without the coastal industrial region near Mariupol is less certain. Western support plans for post-war reconstruction are optimistic on this matter but Moscow's perception would differ.

The confrontation of the mutual phase 2 has so far resulted in a stalemate. Various factors made this happen. Common to all factors is that they reflect that both sides apply a limited war strategy. Firstly, the structure of two allied blocks in which Great Powers cannot risk escalation of the war beyond Ukrainian territory but also cannot allow too much of a defeat by their vassal state to creates a situation in which neither side is likely to be defeated and therefore upholding the incentive for the other side to continue fighting. China's role is significant. Wars normally don't wipe countries from the map, but do alter power relations. Comparable to how WWII turned the United Kingdom from a Great Power into a power subordinate to the US, this war seems to degrade Russia from a European Great Power into a state dependent on China, providing China an opportunity to display Great Power behaviour in Europe.

Secondly, both sides apply economic warfare. Although both sides suffer, pain for Russia exceeds Western pain.[63] This will not change the direction that Putin is heading but it will degrade his ability to fight. 'Russia's defense industry has had to either stop or downgrade the manufacturing of several high-tech weapon systems.'[64] Nevertheless, if there is one country that can absorb losses, it's autocratic Russia. As a result, Russia is unlikely to suffer annihilating defeat, but it will cause the conflict to drag on.

Thirdly, Russia strongest trump card is the geographic advantage of the Black Sea. This facilitates isolation of Ukraine and still allows supply via the sea of its own forces. Ukraine forces may enjoy more sustainable and effective support from their allies, but Russia has the advantage of the defence and Ukraine cannot use the sea for substantial power projection beyond harassing drone attacks. The effect of the Russian blockade might not be decisive in the short term, but it takes only limited Russian naval efforts and the West cannot easily undo this blockade. Re-entrance of the Black Sea by NATO warships will probably only be considered when an acceptable low risk of escalation occurs e.g. after a significant withdrawal of Russian forces.

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[63] Sonnenfeld et al., "Business retreats and sanctions are crippling the Russian economy."

[64] Rácz, Spillner, and Wolff, "Russia's war economy: How sanctions reduce military capacity," 10.

Fourth, although new drone technology improved both Russian and Ukrainian capabilities, it didn't help either side to get beyond the level of denial. The number of Ukrainian drone attacks gradually increased in number, impact and range but it couldn't solve the problem of Ukrainian isolation in the Black Sea. Russia could enhance pressure on shipping to and from Ukraine by mining and boardings when the grain deal was halted in July and August 2023. Limited war and mutual denial at sea seem to be two sides of the same coin.

Lastly, a stalemate could be broken by a counterstrike in another theatre. Nonetheless, NATO is unlikely to conduct such a strike in fear of escalation. For the same reason, the West will not allow Ukraine to seriously expand the war to Russia's territory. Russia could use its Northern or Baltic Fleet for a counterstrike. The army is worn out after 16 months of war but naval forces, including Russia's strongest asset – its submarine force – is still entirely intact. Russia could use these capabilities to provoke a crisis aiming to undermine the EU's cohesion.[65] However, such a counterstrike may be unlikely to create Russian advantage because so far the EU's and NATO's cohesion has proven strong during the series of incidents in the fall of 2022 and western navies at sea provide a vigilant reaction force to such crisis as demonstrated in NATO and JEF exercises.[66] NATO capabilities allow it to operate within Russian A2AD bubbles in which Russian forces can certainly constrain NATO fleets but NATO forces at sea have flexibility in their reaction and space to manouevre so it will be difficult for Russia to conduct a counterstrike within their range of escalation options without running into nuclear war.

Under the circumstances that both sides fight a limited war, the nature of the conflict will be one of attrition that will end if one party can no longer sustain the effort. At the end of WWI, the German army was not defeated but its position was hopeless, in large part, due to the fact that after the Battle in Amiens in August 1918, the allied armies could fight with a larger number of tanks whilst the Germans could not keep up with this development caused by the enduring British blockade.[67] At the end of WWII, the US could win the Pacific War due to its industrial capacity that outnumbered the Japanese. An alternative could be that both sides overrun their capacity to sustain but also refuse to agree on anything more than a ceasefire, as occurred at the end of the Korean war.

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[65] Cropsey, "Naval considerations in the Russo-Ukrainian war."

[66] Standing Naval Maritime Group 2 operating in the Mediterranean throughout. Exercise Joint Viking March 2023 under construction of the British led Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) in Norwegian artic region. Nato forces participating in Baltops in June 2022 and a Finish exercise in November 2022.

[67] Afflerbach, Buckley, and Summers, *On a Knife Edge: How Germany Lost the First World War*, 352.

5. Conclusion and outlook

Down to June 2023, the Ukraine war has displayed a stalemate pattern because both sides apply limited war strategies and despite the heroic, vigilant and innovative war efforts of the Ukrainian people, no party has been strong enough to defeat the other. For both Ukraine and Russia, support by other Great Powers is essential to achieve victory. However, the US, Europe and China also have a vested interest to prevent wider escalation of the conflict. Western countries cannot effort such a military escalation and for China economic interests will be better served by stability.

In limited wars the sea and its geographic features have specific functions, and this is confirmed by the Ukrainian war. The Black Sea was important for Russia to isolate Ukraine both militarily and economically. Navies contribute to these areas by constabulary and crisis management operations.[68] Other European waters such as the Baltic Sea Region, North Sea and Norwegian waters, provide important theatres in which Russia's counterstrikes need to be managed. The application of Corbett's limited war theory illustrates that his principles are still valid. The value of the theory may not be to provide a detailed script for war, but it helps to understand belligerent interaction, and illustrates the role of the sea in limited conflict and the need to involve all joint domains and economic warfare in the study of contemporary war.

In the future, Ukrainian forces supported by the West might be able to achieve a successful phase 3 switch to the offensive, if the Russian army collapses or if the political regime collapses. In a long-lasting war of attrition, it's the power to sustain that will determine outcome. Economic warfare has a major share in this. Although Russia, with its Ukrainian blockade, could benefit from geography in the first year of the war, in the long run other factors such as sustained political Will and the West's sanctions and wider economic isolation policy will increase in impact.

Another, possibly more likely, scenario would be a cease fire and the continuation as a frozen conflict as it had been since 2014. In the latter case, what matters most, in whatever type of ceasefire agreement, will be the final location of the frontline. This location will be determined by the action on the ground but allied great power support will determine how hard each side can push and how deep the maximum acceptable loss of its client state will be. In short, a system of rules that was equally valid in the Cold War.[69] These 'Rules of the Game' included four factors that constituted the result of a crisis: 1. strategic power balance, 2. local

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[68]   Compare Kaushal, "Navies and economic warfare: Securing critical infrastructure and expanding policy options," 21-2.

[69]   McConnell and Kelly, "Superpower naval diplomacy in the Indo-Pakistani crisis."

power balance on the ground, 3. the extent to which a great power signaled its Will to the other side and 4. the principle of 'Faute de mieux' or 'power of possession.' From a maritime perspective particularly factors 1 and 4 are relevant. One, the importance of Great Power balance and how these powers meet and handle crisis at sea; and four, the strength that Russia can obtain from possessing the Crimean Peninsula and the Mariupol industrial coastal region. These Cold War analogies illustrate the value of these limited war theories but this chapter also illustrates that early versions of this theory as developed by Corbett still have value today. So, it's not specifically the Cold-War lens that is required to understand today's war, but the enduring classic principles of war that will help us out.

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All Quiet on the Northern Front? Limited War and Covert Action in the Russian-Ukrainian War

Maarten Rothman & Martijn Rouvroije

Abstract

While war rages in southern and eastern Ukraine, its northern border with Russia has been mostly quiet after Russia's withdrawal from its attack on Kyiv. This chapter investigates how both parties limit their actions on this front. Drawing on insights from limited war theory and research on covert action, as well as on data from the ACLED database, we show that the line at the border can be crossed to some extent without lasting escalation. Even as incremental shifts in the types of cross-border activities change the balance in Ukraine's favour, each step is tailored to avoid triggering a reflexive escalatory response.

Keywords: Limited war, Escalation, Brinkmanship, Implausible deniability, Covert action, Special operations

1. Introduction

Maps of the Russia-Ukraine war commonly show frontlines running from the Black Sea to the Russian border in the northeast. The stretch of the Russian-Ukrainian border across the oblasts Chernihiv, Sumy and Kharkiv, some 500 km long, is not drawn as a frontline. It is merely a border. This is strange. When two countries are at war and one of them at least has crossed the border in an offensive operation against the other's capital, it seems justified to consider this stretch as a frontline as well. But of course, the maps are right, at least in the sense that there has been little fighting there since the failed Russian offensive against Kyiv. In March and April 2022, shortly after their successful defence of Kyiv, Ukrainian troops liberated the occupied areas in northern Ukraine, halting right at the Russian border. After the successful Ukrainian offensive to liberate Kharkiv in September 2022 as well, Ukrainian troops again halted right at the border.

Naturally attention has focused on the areas with the heaviest fighting in southern and eastern Ukraine. In this chapter, we will do the opposite. We direct

our attention to Ukraine's northern border with Russia, where there is curiously little fighting. Our interest lies in the limitations Ukraine has imposed on its armed forces, whether or not they were reciprocated. In the winter of 2022-2023 Russia drew together a large number of troops in Belarus, again threatening an offensive from the north. Thus, while Russia gets the benefit of not having to defend against a counterattack across this stretch of the border, Ukraine is not guaranteed the same. Meanwhile Ukrainian missiles and drones have attacked some military targets inside Russia which were directly relevant to the war inside Ukraine: airfields, military depots, some railroad infrastructure. There have also been reports of Ukrainian covert action inside Russia. As we were writing, in May 2023, Ukraine-backed rebels made an incursion into Russia's Belgorod province. Since then, Ukrainian drone attacks have also targeted Moscow.

These events present an opportunity to delve into the intricacies of covert action in a limited war context. It shows that the line at the border is not absolute, it can be crossed to some degree. Even boots on the ground will not necessarily negate the benefits of self-limitation. The question, then, is how far the limit can be stretched.

We will investigate the Ukrainian self-limitation and its possible exceptions with the help of limited war theory and theories on covert action (including on the strategic utility of special operations). Our aim is to explore a central tension in the theory between using every opportunity for military advantage and the political cost of doing so, between the limitation and the temptation to stretch it. We consider, therefore, whether or to what extent Russian and particularly Ukrainian forces are operating across the seemingly quiet northern front.

The next section outlines limited war theory and discusses its application to the role of NATO and Western countries. The one after that summarises suspected Ukrainian activities inside Russia, using data from the *Armed Conflict Location and Event Dataset* (henceforth: ACLED).[1] In the fourth section we analyse the data, focusing particularly on the role of ambiguity and bargaining. We concluded our study in June 2023 as the Ukrainian counter-offensive began.

2. Limited war, Russia and NATO

Limited war theory developed during the 1950s and -60s, as theorists sought to explain how belligerent countries could fight wars while reducing the chance of unwanted escalation. In the Cold War context this referred first of all to vertical escalation to ever more destructive weapons, particularly nuclear weapons. Perhaps as a corollary of this, it also included horizontal escalation, meaning other countries being drawn into the war. Prominent theorists of limited war

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[1] Raleigh, Linke, Hegre and Karlsen, "Introducing ACLED," 651-660.

were Thomas Schelling, Herman Kahn, Richard Smoke and Robert Osgood. More recently Lawrence Freedman, Forrest Morgan and Donald Stoker have written on the subject.[2] Early theory development focused on the contrast to total war, the tacit bargaining between parties in a limited war (Schelling's contribution), detailing steps on the escalation ladder (Kahn), and devising strategies under limited war conditions. Each of these generated heated discussion, but probably the most contentious debate focused on the relative importance of limited war goals versus limited means, which has not been resolved to date. For example, while Freedman and most other theorists view means and goals as equally important, Stoker takes the view that wars are limited because of their goals, irrespective of their means; that is, he argued that limited wars can be fought with overwhelming means.[3]

By contrast, we suggest that the Ukraine war had, from the Russian side, the not very limited goal of regime change in Ukraine but still has been fought with limited means. From 2014 to 2022, Russia used proxy forces or disguised its soldiers as such. The invasion in February 2022 drastically escalated the means, but with the switch to operations only in the southeast Putin seems to have given up on regime change, paradoxically limiting his goals shortly after expanding the means from destabilisation operations to full-scale invasion. Ukraine, even while fighting for survival, restricts most of its activities to its own territory. These considerations suggest a complicated relation between limitations of goals and means, which will be a recurring theme in this article.

Typical examples of limited wars in the Cold War context include the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. In each of these one of the world's superpowers accepted restraints on its military operations in order to forestall intervention by the other superpower. Or rather, more direct forms of intervention, as the other in each of these cases provided support to the side fighting their competitor. Many Cold War conflicts were thus turned into proxy wars. The important thing to note is a form of reciprocity between the superpowers, where one limited the scale or geographic scope of its operations while the other refrained from fighting the other directly.

It will be clear that both concerns are relevant to today's Russia-Ukraine war. Both Russia and NATO seem determined not to fight each other directly. Putin did portray the war as a civilisational struggle with the West, and repeatedly – but implicitly – threatened nuclear war if NATO should intervene. Russia also on

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[2] Schelling, *Arms and Influence*; Kahn, *On Escalation: Metaphors and Scenarios*; Smoke, *War: Controlling Escalation*; Osgood, *Limited War Revisited*; Freedman, "The theory of limited war," 201-223; Morgan, Mueller, Medeiros, Pollpeter and Cliff, *Dangerous Thresholds: Managing Escalation in the 21st Century*; Stoker, *Why America Loses Wars.* For application to an earlier phase of the war in Ukraine, see: Freedman, "Ukraine and the art of limited war," 7-38.

[3] Freedman, "The theory of limited war," 201-223; Stoker, *Why America Loses Wars.*

several occasions warned of dire consequences should NATO increase its military aid to Ukraine. But Russia did not undertake tangible efforts by its nuclear forces up to the Belgorod raid in May 2022 and has so far refrained from direct military action against NATO.[4] Russian operations against NATO members have been limited to sabotage or espionage, where a certain degree of plausible deniability applies.

In turn, NATO downplayed an incident in November 2022 where a Russian missile landed in Poland, after being hit by Ukrainian air defences.[5] The pattern of Western military support to Ukraine is a careful gradual upscaling of the systems delivered, while gauging whether each step triggers a stronger Russian response. It is deliberately not channeled through NATO, both to involve non-members and to avoid giving the impression that Ukraine is fighting NATO's war. While Putin is keen to portray the conflict as a proxy war between NATO and Russia, Western leaders instead emphasise that Ukraine is fighting for its own survival and territorial integrity and retains full control over its strategic, operational and tactical decisions.

It is not quite so clear why Ukraine would stick to this script. Although it received massive military support, it is fighting alone and thus bearing the brunt of the war's costs. NATO forces would be very welcome on the battlefield. The explanation is that direct NATO involvement risks vertical escalation, which would target Ukraine as well. By raising the stakes, it could also complicate a future peace settlement. While membership, either in NATO or in the EU, would probably shield it from another invasion, it is far from certain that it would end the present one. Ukraine's leadership therefore uses the opportunity to extract promises of membership in the near future, after the present war ends. If it happens, Ukraine is unlikely at least to have to play the proxy again in the next war.

3. Cross-border events

We will set the interaction between NATO and Russia aside for the rest of this paper (except for the conditions set by NATO on the weapon systems it supplies to Ukraine, which we will encounter again later). Limited war theory also offers tools to analyse processes between the combatants themselves. For the purposes of this paper, these are more relevant. We'll first take a closer look at events on the border.

In order to build a general picture of events that occurred within the territory of the belligerent countries, the ACLED database was consulted.[6] The dataset allows for filtering on type of event, actor types, location, and fatalities, as elaborated below. One must take into account some limitations when employing the ACLED database.

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[4] De Dreuzy and Gilli, "Russia's nuclear coercion in Ukraine."

[5] NATO, "NATO allies address the explosion in the East of Poland."

[6] Raleigh, Linke, Hegre and Karlsen, "Introducing ACLED," 651-660.

Because it is based on inputs from media sources, event inclusion can be skewed along reporting salience towards audiences, undetected and unreported events by definition remain unaccounted, the dataset might lack coding consistency across contributors and theatres, and geolocation data precision can be inconsistent.[7] Nevertheless, we consider the insights drawn from this ACLED dataset as indicative evidence at a macro scale concerning cross-border activities along the northern Ukrainian-Russian border.
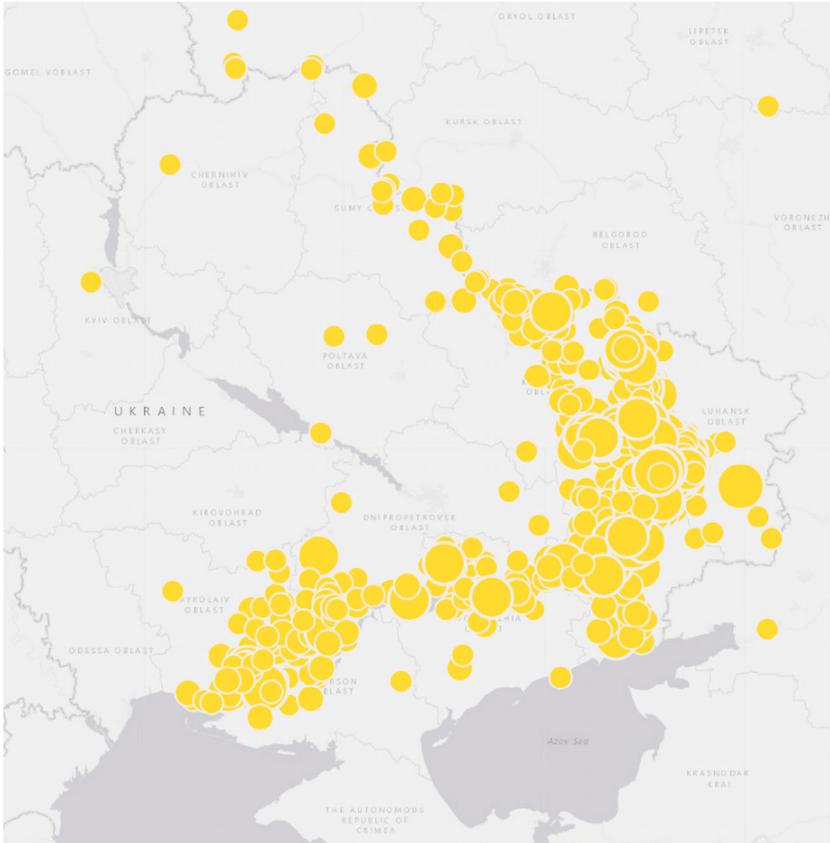
Figure 11.1: Russia and all of Ukraine battles event data map[8]

Data from the ACLED (2023) Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project concerning the period from the 24th of February 2022 until the 16th of June 2023, yielded 1,269

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[7] Eck, "In data we trust?" A comparison of UCDP GED and ACLED conflict events datasets," 124-141.

[8] Yellow indicates events coded as battles. Time period from 1st of April 2022 up to 16th of June 2023. Figure taken from ACLED Database Dashboard.

events along the northern border of which 1,163 occured on Russian soil and 53,680 in Ukraine of which 106 in Crimea.[9] We limited the time period so as to end at the Ukrainian counteroffensive of 2023 but included a short period after the Belogorod raid which can be considered its preliminary phase. The figure above shows the occurrences of battles on Russian and Ukrainian territory after the Russian retreat from Northern Ukraine at the end of March 2022. The difference in event density shows that fighting occurs predominantly in the Southern and South-Eastern fronts with a noticeably lower density of fighting along the Northern Ukrainian-Russian border.

For our next step we excluded from the overview the Ukrainian frontline oblasts (Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Donetsk and Luhansk) where large-scale conventional military activity and operations are taking place. This gives us a clearer view of activities on Russian soil (including Crimea, unilaterally annexed in 2014)[10] and their response. The relevant data filters were set to the following parameters:[11]

Event Type	Sub-category	Targeting:	
		Russian territory	Crimea
Battles	Armed Clash	35	0
Explosions / Remote Violence	Air/Drone Strike	125	21
	Grenade	1	0
	Remote explosive/landminde/IED	21	7
	Shelling/artillery/missile attack	739	23
Strategic Developments	Disrupted Weapons Use	90	53
	Looting/Property Destruction	152	2
Total Russia	All regions	1.163	-
Subtotal Ukraine	Oblast Crimea	-	106
	Oblasts Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Donetsk and Luhansk	-	36.324
Total Ukraine	All regions	-	53.680

Table 11.1: Data overview[12]

⁹ ACLED, "Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project."

¹⁰ It is the authors' opinion that Crimea has been illegally annexed by the Russian Federation and its inclusion in the dataset should not be interpreted as it being part of Russia. Crimea is included in the dataset for its special military operational status in that large-scale conventional operations have not yet occurred on the peninsula, as the frontline has not reached the Crimean shores or borders yet, although numerous incidents did occur which are of interest to this study.

¹¹ In case no criteria are mentioned, no filter was selected as was the case for 'fatalities, actor type, interaction.'

¹² This parameter 'Strategic Developments' contains events categorised as: agreement, arrests, change to group/activity, disrupted weapons use, headquarters or base established, looting/property

The results are plotted on the following map. Green indicates events coded as disrupted weapons use and looting/destruction of property. Yellow indicates events coded as battles. Red indicates events coded as explosions & remote violence and subcategorised as: air/drone strike, grenade, remote explosive, landmine, IED or shelling, artillery or missile attack.
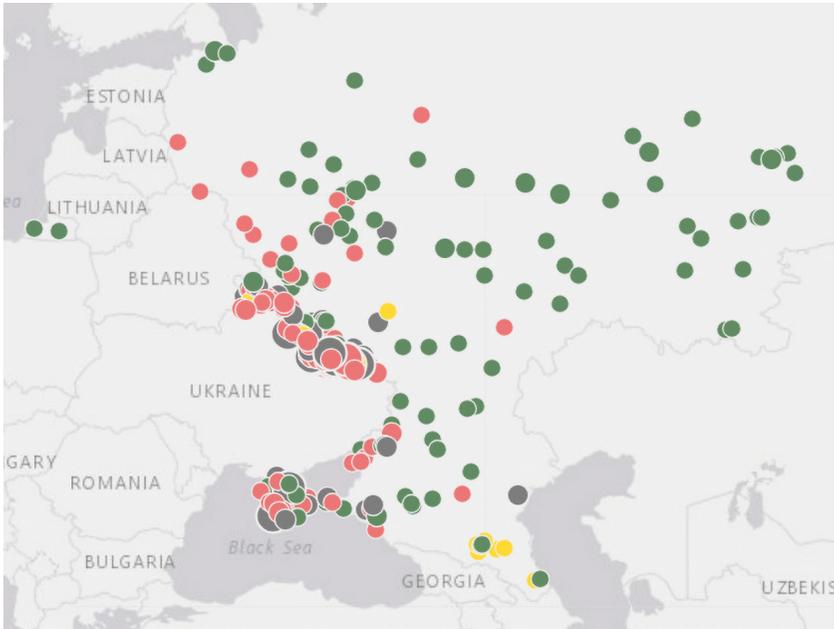
Figure 11.2: Russia & Crimea event selection map[13]

From all types of events across the whole of Ukraine and Russia, the most numerous concern indirect or long-range fire consisting of artillery or missile attacks. Most of the disrupted weapons use concerns the employment of Russian air defences against airplanes, helicopters or drones, sometimes even against Russian airframes. The majority of looting and property destruction events involve arson and generally are considered to be civilian acts of protest. However, this category

destruction, non-violent transfer of territory, other. The excluded categories from this parameter were excluded due to the analytical focus on covert actions and incursions of military nature. The most notable exclusions due to their categorisation as 'other' are several Russian military aircraft incidents and crashes that occurred in Ryazan on 24/06/2022, Krasnodar on 17/10/2022 and Irkutsk on 23/10/2022. 'Disrupted Weapons Use' concerns mostly Russian air defence employment. Included in the dataset are indications of probable incursions of Russian airspace, although in several events Russian air defences targeted Russian air assets.

[13] Figure taken from ACLED Database Dashboard.

also includes instances of sabotage of railways, power lines and bridges which are of special interest to this study.

The data show that the majority of armed clashes along the northern front consist of artillery fire or small arms attacks on Russian military or law enforcement personnel. The frequency of armed clashes diminished greatly following the September 2022 Kharkiv counteroffensive and the character of armed clashes morphed into minor border clashes or Russian internal security matters.

Regarding the category of explosion and remote violence, the majority of instances concern artillery or missile attacks, followed by air or drone strikes and with remote explosives, landmines or IED's being less numerous.[14] Since Russia's retreat from Kyiv, there have been continuous cross-border artillery attacks into Russia by Ukrainian forces. After an initial peak in May 2022, intensity dipped through the summer and increased again during October 2022 at an intensity that has been maintained since.[15] It is noteworthy that air and drone strikes along the northern border increased during April and May 2023 compared to 2022 and the first quarter of 2023.[16]

The ACLED category of 'disrupted weapon use' on Russian soil mostly concerns the defensive interception of Ukrainian drones, missiles or aircraft in the border oblasts.[17] Moreover, this category includes the 3th of May interception of two drones above the Kremlin and the interception of several drones on a route towards Moscow. The ratio of Russian defensive interception vis-à-vis Ukrainian air and drone strikes is 0.7:1 above Russian territory, 2.5:1 above Crimea and 0.1:1 above the Ukrainian oblasts of Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Donetsk and Luhansk, which is an indication of Russia's air defence density and priorities across regions.[18]

Events occurring in the category of 'remote explosives, landmines or IEDs' is rather limited in comparison to the more frequent use of long-distance conventional weapons and munitions along the northern border.[19] However, this category includes

[14] Respectively: 446, 67 and 20 events on Russian territory as depicted in maps in Annex B.

[15] 14 in April 2022, 23 in May, 8 in June, 22 in July, 9 in August, 22 in September, 48 in October, 47 in November, 31 in December, 32 in January 2023, 48 in February, 50 in March, 44 in April, and 42 in May up until the 19th, in the oblasts Bryansk, Kursk and Belgorod.

[16] 13 in 2022, 11 in 2023's first quarter, 16 in April 2023 and 12 in May 2023 (up to the 19th) in the oblasts Bryansk, Kursk, Belgorod and Voronezh.

[17] Category totalling 90 events from the 24th of February 2022 up until the 16th of June 2023 above Russia.

[18] The ratio for the Ukrainian oblasts of Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Donetsk and Luhansk is: 281x disrupted weapons use vis-à-vis 2.277x air and drone strikes, which yields a 0.1:1 ratio.

[19] This category counts only 20 events across all of Russia. However, some cases of ACLED inconsistent coding can be identified in this category where the destruction of railway infrastructure is categorised in the use of 'remote explosives, landmines or IEDs' whilst it generally is coded within the 'looting and destruction of property' category

some salient events such as the car bombing of Alexander Dugin's daughter Darya Dugina in Moscow on August the 20th 2022, an Ostrov military airfield explosion damaging several Russian helicopters on the 31st of October 2022 and the targeted bombing of blogger Vladlen Tatarskiy in St. Petersburg on the 3rd of April 2023. These events occurred far from the Northern Ukrainian-Russian border whilst most other, much less prominent but border-related events concern landmines, IEDs and unexploded ordnance except for the 2nd of March 2023 cross-border attack carried out by the Russian Volunteer Corps in the Bryansk oblast.

Aside from artillery attacks, looting and property destruction is the most frequent category of violence occurring on Russian territory, though most concern minor arson and vandalisation events that do not influence the frontline.[20] The more interesting cases concern sabotage of railway tracks, railway relay cabinets and general electrical grid infrastructure. However, most of these sabotage acts occur in the Kursk and Bryansk oblasts. The ACLED data shows a period of increased activity in Kursk and Bryansk from July to September 2022, probably in support of the September 2022 Kharkiv counteroffensive. Nonetheless, these regions are of minor importance to the Russian supply lines towards the Southern front. Russian railroad maps show that railway logistics towards the Russian annexed Ukrainian oblasts of Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Donetsk and Luhansk can be run through the Russian cities Voronezh or Volgograd and it would be improbable that logistics would run through the Bryansk and Kursk or even the Belgorod oblast railway networks.[21] These acts of sabotage do not seem to occur on a sufficient scale and scope to yield a significant cumulative attritional effect on Russian logistics, centres of gravity or other war efforts.[22]

The incursion on 22nd May 2023 by paramilitaries into Belgorod oblast merits special consideration. Two pro-Ukrainian rebel forces, the Russian Volunteer Corps and the Freedom of Russia Legion, launched a raid in the Belgorod oblast from the bordering Ukrainian Sumy oblast. They crossed the border with several tanks, armoured personnel carriers and armoured vehicles, temporarily capturing villages and terrain in the direction of the town Grayvoron.[23] Ukrainian officials stated that there was no direct Ukrainian involvement and that the raid was carried out by rebel Russian forces. Video footage of the rebel forces showed that they were wearing uniforms, weapons, equipment and even military vehicles typically associated with

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[20] 152 events in all of Russian territory of which 31 consist of acts of sabotage of railway or power infrastructure. Note that due to inconsistent coding in the ACLED dataset similar sabotage events are sometimes coded in other categories.

[21] Russian railroad map source: Popov, "Railroad maps of Europe and Russia."

[22] Kiras, *Special Operations and Strategy*, 16-17, 32-34, 61 and 113-117; Blocksome, "Conceptualizing strategic sabotage," 11- 21.

[23] Institute for the Study of War, "Russian offensive campaign assessment, May 22, 2023."

the West.[24] The event prompted many complaints about a lack of border security from Russian officials, milbloggers and Wagner Group owner Yevgeny Prigozhin.[25] In response, Russian authorities launched a 'counterterrorism operation' and evacuated Russian civilians from the vicinity of the incursion. Furthermore, the governor of Belgorod oblast announced the creation of seven territorial defence battalions of 3000 people in total, already equipped and combat ready.[26]

The data show that, between Russia's retreat from northern Ukraine in April 2022 to the Ukrainian Kharkiv counteroffensive of September 2022 and from that time until May 2023, operations along the northern Russian-Ukrainian border were limited in scale, geographic scope, and in strategic effect, especially in comparison to the major offensives occurring in the Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. The biggest incident was the Belgorod incursion, which we will analyse in some more depth in the next section.

4. Analysis: Covert action and bargaining in limited war

The incidents described above fall below the threshold of conventional warfare and are in our opinion best described as covert action. The term 'covert action' describes operations where the activity is detected but the responsible sponsor is unknown.[27] It encompasses a plethora of possible actions relatable to different categories of actors, like: resistance organisations, guerrilla, paramilitary, unconventional, intelligence agencies, or special operations forces. Some of these actors are agents of the belligerent states operating under conditions of secrecy, while others are at least nominally independent but may receive guidance from them. In each case attribution is difficult, it introduces ambiguity, so that covert action can occur in areas outside of declared combat zones without necessarily triggering a reflexive escalatory response.

Similarly, the term 'special operations' emphasises the operation, irrespective of the type of forces that executed the operation[28] or the ultimate party that commands or supports those entities.[29] An operation can be deemed a military special

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[24] The Guardian, "Ukraine – 'You will see us again.'"

[25] Institute for the Study of War, "Russian offensive campaign assessment, May 23, 2023."

[26] Institute for the Study of War, "Russian offensive campaign assessment, May 25, 2023."

[27] Kilcullen, "The evolution of unconventional warfare," 62.

[28] Rubright, "A unified theory for special operations," 20-26.

[29] Uniformed military special operations are attributable to their fielding nation, although not all operations might be detected or attributable. Paramilitary operations and incursions would be attributable to a nation if they receive recruiting, training, arms, equipment, financing, supplies or other support such as encouragement, aid, direction or command. As described in the Case Concerning

operation when the operation fulfils a need of military force to its military or political patron that is unfulfilled by regular or conventional forces because their force design places limits on their applicability, feasibility and legality.[30] Not all cross border activities into Russia were executed by uniformed Ukrainian military special operations forces, but they can nevertheless be conceptually categorised as special operations according to this definition due to the operation's merits. Many events that can be characterised as covert action, can be performed by multiple actors and though special operation's conceptualisation can overlap with covert action, it does not directly imply the involvement of uniformed special operations forces.[31] This level of ambiguity concerning covert action and special operations into Russian territory is central to the limited intensity along the northern front.

Recently, David Kilcullen made the role of ambiguity explicit in a framework he named 'liminal warfare.'[32] He notes that the ambiguous zone is the result of the possible discrepancy between policy makers' responses and the threshold of attribution provided by intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities. Policy makers' possible responses are especially limited where attribution remains uncertain, even in cases of implausible deniability (an implicit reference to the earlier 2014-2022 phase of the Russia-Ukraine conflict),[33] because responses remain subject to domestic and international requirements for proof to gain support for the proposed response. Kilcullen argues that the decision to escalate is inherently political.[34] Although he does not connect these ideas to Schelling's conception of tacit bargaining, they fit together nicely. Because the mode of operation of paramilitary units is designed to provide a level of uncertainty of attribution, any response to such ambiguous action entails a political choice that showcases the respondent's willingness and capacity to either escalate or deescalate and consequently also highlights the road not taken.

Military and Paramilitary Activities in and Against Nicaragua: Nicaragua v. United States of America (1986) International Criminal Court Judgement of 27 June 1986, 8-9.

[30] Titulaer, "Special operations (Forces) explained," 92-99. Note that this approach includes three aspects of special operations: the relational aspect of special military operations vis-à-vis conventional or normal military operations, the aspect of inherent traits of the forces that execute special operations, and the aspect of the special operation's utility to the military or political principal actor.

[31] Gentry, "Intelligence services and special operations forces: Why relationships differ," 647-686.

[32] Kilcullen, "The evolution of unconventional warfare," 68-69.

[33] Cormac and Aldrich, "Grey is the new black: Covert action and implausible deniability," 477-494.

[34] Kilcullen, "The evolution of unconventional warfare," 68.

Liminal warfare
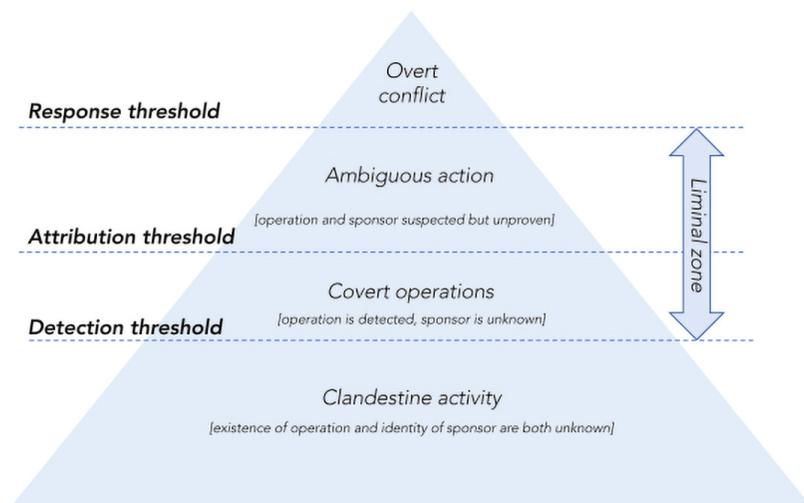
Figure 11.3: David Kilcullen's conceptualisation of 'Liminal Warfare'[35]

Thomas Schelling described limited war as tacit bargaining between the combatants where the application of violence acts as a demonstration of one's will and capacity of action to increase credibility of future threats of force.[36] Tacit because no explicit communication is required, actions may speak in place of words. The assumption is that both sides are interested in preventing certain forms of escalation. If one side is not interested, no bargain can be struck. It may be possible, though, to show one's opponent why they should be interested. To this end one would temporarily set aside the self-imposed limitations, inflict sufficient pain to induce a change in the opponent's behaviour, while quickly re-imposing them if the other side responds properly.

This is unlikely to be the main motivation for the Belgorod attack, however, as the overview in the section above indicates that Ukraine conducts more operations there than Russia does on Ukraine's border oblasts (with the possible exception of artillery attacks). Instead the timing suggests a connection with the offensive along the southern front starting shortly afterwards. The attack would serve as a distraction, leading Russia to redirect its troops to defend against future incursions. As troops are shifted north, other sections are necessarily weakened, not only by a reduction in numbers but also because the units filling the gaps are unfamiliar

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[35] Kilcullen, "The evolution of unconventional warfare," 68-69.

[36] Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 11.

with the terrain. In addition, units in transition are out of position and take up logistics capacity. If this was the intent of the attack, it applies Colin Gray's idea that the strategic utility of special operations lies in their economy of force. The incursion required only a low material investment in rebel capacities and could have had a disproportionate impact.[37] This tangible battlefield effect would have been a considerable operational effect. However, it was not successful. Though it did pose a dilemma which for a short period diverted the attention of Russia's security apparatus, it seems Russia countered with local forces and did not shift considerable units from the front inside Ukraine northwards.

A more lasting effect comes from Ukrainian drone raids on Moscow, which began around the same time as the Belgorod paramilitary raid. Russia was thus faced with two escalations at once. It did not have an equally effective response to the drone attacks. As the rebel forces retreated into obscurity, drones continued to strike at high visibility targets in Moscow. That is a significant change, as it allows Ukraine to remind Muscovites of the costs of the war and the unimpressive record of Russia's military. The escalation can be seen as a form of brinkmanship, effectively calling Putin's bluff and challenging him to respond.[38] While further escalation could hurt Ukraine, it's difficult to conceive of a way for Russia to increase the hurt, given the drones and missiles it was already throwing at Ukraine. The nuclear option is clearly disproportionate and politically unpredictable but a conventional response does not seem to be forthcoming. It might seem that the incursion and the drone raids break the logic of limited war but they do not. The brinkmanship is part of a process of tacit bargaining, through which Ukraine explores how far it can go with attacks inside Russia.[39]

The Belgorod raid straddles the threshold of attribution as these rebel forces originated from Ukrainian territory and employed such a wide and uncommon variety of Western equipment that it's inconceivable that the Russian Volunteer Corps and Freedom of Russia Legion did not receive arms, equipment, supplies or other support from Ukraine. Though Russia was undoubtedly aware of Ukraine's involvement, official Ukrainian ambiguity (a combination that Cormac and Aldrich call implausible deniability)[40] at the same time signaled Ukraine's ability to escalate and gave Russia an excuse not to escalate in its turn. It responded with internal security measures and reassurances to the Russian people and did not escalate along the northern Ukrainian-Russian border. This limited Russian response

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[37] Colin Gray's *Economy of Force* master claim for strategic utility of SOF: Gray, *Explorations in Strategy*, 168-174.

[38] Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 47.

[39] Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 91.

[40] Cormac and Aldrich, "Grey is the new black: Covert action and implausible deniability," 477-494.

therefore demonstrates that Ukraine can perform operations, even with a level of implausible deniability, on Russian soil without triggering escalation. After Russia's measured response to the incursion, ambiguity or lack of direct attribution allowed both sides to once again limit operations there.

Not all limitations are due to a bargain. Some may be due to threats or to conditions set by third parties. Ukraine may, for example, have accepted constraints on its area of operations due to the Russian nuclear threat. We think, however, that this threat lacks credibility, as a nuclear response to cross-border incursions would be quite the overreaction. Conditions set by Western countries on the weapons they supply may be another reason, but their response to the Belgorod incursion did not support this argument; Western governments quickly stated that Ukraine had the right to defend itself in the way it deemed best.[41]

Domestic and international political considerations provide several good reasons for Ukrainian self-limitation. First, the liberation of its own citizens from Russian occupation takes precedence. Fighting a clearly defensive war plays well in international media as well. The self-limitation also helps refute Putin's narrative of a supposed Ukrainian threat to Russian interests.[42] In addition, there is the operational benefit of a shorter frontline allowing concentration of resources. We note that the reasons listed here are one-sided. No reciprocity is required to gain the military and political benefits of self-limitation.

And yet, Russian forces did reciprocate after a fashion. As the data shows, they too limited operations along this stretch of the border. All events on Russian soil only consist of 2% of the total event dataset, not all of which are combat-related (for example including acts of vandalisation). Compared to the 66% for events in the Oblasts Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Donetsk and Luhansk, the northern Ukrainian-Russian border oblasts of Kharkiv, Sumy and Chernihiv account for 23% of all events in the dataset.[43] After Russia's retreat from its north-eastern approach towards Kyiv

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[41] U.S. State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller: 'As a more general principle, […], we do not encourage or enable strikes inside of Russia, and we've made that clear. But as we've also said, it is up to Ukraine to decide how to conduct this war.' US Department of State, "Department Press Briefing, May 23, 2023."

[42] It should be noted that the incursion could be portrayed by Russia as evidence that its national sovereignty and territory is under attack from Western-backed Ukraine. As at least one of the rebel groups can be linked to far-right extremism, it could also harm Ukraine's image in the West and play into Russia's narratives of de-Nazifying Ukraine, a narrative that draws upon a mythologised image of the Second World War as Russia's great patriotic war. On the other hand, the incursion can be read as an ironic reversal of Russia's use of separatist 'people's republics' in 2014. The rebel operation's mirroring of Russia's employment of 'green men' can be read as an attempt to boost Ukrainian morale and humiliate Russia by showcasing its incompetence in protecting its borders. See Gray, *Explorations in Strategy*, 175-178.

[43] Oblasts: Kharkiv 8208 events equaling 16% of total Russia and Ukraine dataset, Sumy 2561 events, 5% and Chernihiv 923 events, 2%.

at the end of March 2022, the Sumy and Chernihiv oblasts have been exclusively targeted by air, drone and artillery strikes that account for 94% of events in those oblasts. Air, drone and artillery strikes account for 90% of events in the Kharkiv oblast where fighting occurs almost exclusively on the Karkhiv-Luhansk frontline since the successful Ukrainian counteroffensive in September 2022. The Kharkiv oblast-Russian border region predominantly experiences artillery and mortar shelling with incidental air or drone strikes.

One reason for this is probably that the Russians too needed to concentrate forces on the active front inside Ukraine, where they were suffering severe losses. As mentioned above, Russia did threaten to reactivate the northern front by gathering troops in Belarus in the winter of 2022-2023. But these were barely trained recruits with inadequate equipment. The threat was not taken very seriously and, indeed, never materialised. Aside from this feeble attempt to force Ukraine to guard Kyiv, thus holding back part of its armed forces from the active front, the northern front stayed mostly quiet until May 2023.

5. Conclusion

That the war between Russia and Ukraine is a limited one, is not entirely obvious. Certainly, Russia seems to fight without much restraint – at least since February 2022. That escalation was, however, preceded by an eight-year period during which Russia, too, acted within certain constraints. Only in 2022 did Russia switch from reliance on proxy forces, augmented with quite of lot of its own, to a full-scale invasion of its own.

We suspect that Putin escalated to full-scale invasion because the pre-2022 limited war failed to achieve its strategic goal: to force a change of regime on Ukraine. After the 2004 Orange Revolution, Putin managed to manoeuvre Yanukovych back into power; but after the Euromaidan and the annexation of Crimea, the pressures of the dirty war in the Donbas did not yield a similar result. Ukrainian forces contained the fighting to the territory directly bordering the so-called 'people's republics.' The war, and other pressures applied by Russia, did not destabilise the Ukrainian government or prepare the way for a political party friendly to its interests to win elections. It is possible that due to the transformation of Ukrainian forces time was running out for Putin, or maybe just his patience.[44]

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[44] Lanoszka and Becker conclude that the pre-2022 levels and quality of military assistance from Western nations to Ukraine was insufficient to change the balance of power between the Ukraine and Russia. Lanoszka and Becker, "The art of partial commitment: The politics of military assistance to Ukraine," 189; Sanders describes Ukraine's military development in the period 2016-2022 and details

The substantial forces deployed, in combination with the goal of regime change, moved the 2022 invasion beyond the bounds of limited war but its failure was followed by a more limited set of war goals, while Russia's still substantial forces were now deployed among a narrower front. Regime change was not on the cards anymore, only annexation of four regions in south-eastern Ukraine and recognition of the 2014 annexation of Crimea. The war thus moved from unlimited goals with limited means to unlimited in both respects to limited goals with not so limited means (although Russia always held a part of its military forces back, probably to guard its other borders and internal security).

Ukraine, for its part, appears to fight a cleaner war, in part probably to spare the civilian population in the war zone. It has also clearly limited its operations to its own territory. As a result, there was little fighting along the stretch of the border liberated in April and September 2022. Yet, as we have seen, the northern 'front' wasn't entirely quiet. Drones, rockets and artillery fire did cross the border, and there were several incidents that fit the label of covert action. Between September 2022 and May 2023, these incidents didn't lead to escalation due to both the use of ambiguity and the political will on both sides to keep operations in this sector limited. It's this relative quiet, reflected in the neglect of this front by the media, that gave an element of surprise to the incursion by Ukraine-backed rebels into Belgorod oblast. This incursion, alongside drone attacks deeper into Russia, threatened to change the dynamic. The threat probably intended to force Russia to redirect troops, thereby disorganising its order of battle just prior to the Ukrainian offensive along the southern front inside Ukraine, but it was not effective in drawing Russian troops away from the southern front. At the time of writing, we have not seen further incursions on this scale.

A reason why Ukraine is able to incrementally shift the limits of the conflict is due to the uneven bargaining between Russia's threat to escalate, both conventionally and nuclear, against Ukraine's smaller threats by sabotage, raids and drone strikes on Russian territory. Russia's threat of renewed mass mobilisation or nuclear retaliatory response incur such great costs nationally or internationally that these threats are difficult to divide into smaller, more manageable threats. Therefore it is difficult for Russia to convey credibility that it is truly willing to carry out those threats.[45] Ukraine manages to upend the apparent disadvantage

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challenges that Ukraine faced in pursuing its military reform. Sanders, "Ukraine's third wave of military reform 2016-2022 – Building a military able to defend Ukraine against the Russian invasion," 312-328.

[45] Schwarz and Sonin theorise bargaining inter-war equilibria between two actors who threaten war in times of peace. They show that a potential aggressor's bargaining power increases if he can make the threat divisible. The application of the divisible threat characteristic to Ukraine's actions is

of capabilities by threatening seemingly stronger Russia with incremental small encroachments on its red lines. Through this intra-war brinkmanship Ukraine for instance managed to gain the freedom of action to increase its drone strikes on Moscow from the end of May up to a point where it can become regular military conduct that does not result in Russia significantly escalating.

Our conclusion therefore is that the Russia-Ukraine war displays several elements of limited war, regarding the role of NATO, the limitation of major combat to Ukrainian territory, and the choice of means for actions tailored to keep the northern front quiet. The only significant exception was probably meant to distract before an offensive on the southern front and did not lead to more than momentary activation of the northern front.

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an extension of their theory into the realm of intra-war bargaining. See: Schwarz and Sonin, "A theory of brinkmanship, conflicts, and commitments," 163-183.

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CHAPTER 12

Assessing the Dogs of Cyberwar: Reflections on the Dynamics of Operations in Cyberspace during the Russia-Ukraine War

Kraesten Arnold, Peter Pijpers, Paul Ducheine, & Peter Schrijver

Abstract

The attention to the Russia-Ukraine armed conflict is dominated by the physical devastation it causes. While this seems obvious, the armed conflict is not just a war between two states, but rather a wider conflict where (non-)state actors use numerous instruments of power in various dimensions and domains – including cyberspace – to pursue their interests. Apart from initial success, Russian cyber operations are generally viewed as unsuccessful nuisances, not least due to Ukrainian defences and resilience. Based on an analysis of the current state of cyberwarfare, the authors argue that cyber operations are not just tedious hindrances but also create operational or even strategic impact, hence comply with their purpose.

Keywords: Cyberspace, Russia-Ukraine war, Cyber operations, Digital influence operations, Strategic effects

> *War is about killing people*
> *and destroying things.*[1]

1. (Cyber)war in Europe: An introduction

War is back Europe. However, the Russia-Ukraine armed conflict is not just a war between two states; it is a wider conflict where (non-)state actors use numerous instruments of power in various domains and dimensions to pursue their interests. Although the physical devastation clearly overshadows all other activities, cyberwarfare is definitely taking place.

Multiple destructive cyberattacks supported Russia's military advance before and at the initial stages of the 24th February 2022 invasion. In over a year, a variety of 2776 cyber activities took place.[2] However, due to – *inter alia* – Ukrainian

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[1] Freedman, *REAIM Conference Key-Note Speech, the Hague, 15 February 2023.*
[2] Cyber Peace Institute #Ukraine.

resilience and faltering Russian physical operations, cyber operations are generally viewed as unsuccessful. Although the dogs of cyberwar were unleashed, it appears they refrained to bark, let alone bite.[3] That is, at least at first sight.

The war-related cyber operations appear less successful at face value. However, when looking at the objective of such activities, it can be argued that cyber operations did serve their purpose. On 23rd February 2022, Russia attacked the 'Viasat' satellite internet connection, creating a digital vacuum hampering Ukrainian forces and services in their defence.[4] Moreover, the value of 'soft-cyber' or digital influence operations on both sides of the war and of the wider conflict, cannot be overestimated. These activities go well beyond the Ukrainian battlefield.[5] Whereas Russia has to hush domestic audiences and prevent its population from turning against the war or the regime, Ukraine needs to engage its allies in the free world. For Ukraine, international support is its lifeline and thus the centre of gravity, but consequently also its Achilles' heel.

This chapter addresses what kind of (cyber)war was envisaged and what sort of cyber activities and effects were actually observed on both sides.[6] This analysis will be preceded by a brief perspective on the utility of cyberspace for military operations in general and an overview of the different types of military operations in the information environment. The penultimate section will attempt to determine whether Russia's cyber-offensive failed or Ukraine's defences prevailed, and to assess the strategic value of the various types of operations. This chapter concludes with a view to future conflicts.

2. The utility of cyberspace for military operations

With the dawn of cyberspace, including the Internet and its social media platforms, our societies have become ever more digitalised. Digital processes in all its forms have become the nervous system facilitating everyone's daily life. Individual citizens, companies or governments utilise this digital interconnectedness

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[3] Kostyuk and Gartzke, "Why cyber dogs have yet to bark loudly in Russia's invasion of Ukraine." The phrase related to the dogs of war stems from Shakespeare's Julius Caesar.

[4] Kaspersky Lab, "Evaluation of cyber activities and the threat landscape in Ukraine takeaways from Kaspersky for international discussions on stability in cyberspace."

[5] Bateman, "Russia's wartime cyber operations in Ukraine: Military impacts, influences, and implications," 43-44; Helmus, "The Ukrainian army is leveraging online influences. Can the U.S. military?"

[6] Based on the sources available. Not all variances in CEMA-operations were observed or reported on during the war, e.g. EW operation or hard-cyber operation from the Ukrainian side.

incorporating a growing range of objects and services for numerous facets of life and society.[7]

While there are many communicative and commercial benefits, our digitised society is both a blessing and a curse.[8] All of these facets and objects have become susceptible and vulnerable to exploitation. Digital data and interconnectivity facilitate intelligence-gathering in enormous amounts over long distances. Furthermore, malign actors may abuse the attributes of social media and penetrate the very capillaries of our society to target specific audiences and spread toxic disinformation, or merely withhold information and give alternative views. Not only transboundary, but also within national boundaries to control one's citizens.[9]

Thus, both benevolent and malicious social interaction entails an ever-larger digital composite, to the extent that some social interaction is 100% digitalised. Unavoidably, warfare, being a rare niche exponent of social interaction, will become digitalised as well. The fact that by now some thirty odd states have established cyber commands within their armed forces, supports this expectation.[10]

Of old, military operations were conducted in the physical dimension (such as the Battle of Waterloo) as well as in the cognitive dimension. The latter often combining physical and cognitive elements into classic deception operations such as the Trojan Horse and WWII's Operation Mincemeat, and the modern 2014 Green Men in Crimea.

With the inception of modern technology new proponents of physical operations – such as electronic warfare (EW) using a facet of the physical dimension, i.e., the electromagnetic spectrum – supplemented the classic or well-known repertoire. With the inception of digital technology, a virtual dimension came to avail, leading to the development of cyber operations alongside EW. Nowadays, cyber and electromagnetic activities (CEMA) are often named together as complementary action (see Figure 12.1).

Ultimately, activities in a conflict or competition are meant to impose one's will on opponents or audiences by leveraging or supporting a cognitive, virtual or physical effect – directly or indirectly. This is achieved through actions or operations in the cognitive, virtual and/or physical dimension: i.e. by manoeuvring,[11] and the

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[7] Haaster, "On cyber: The utility of military cyber operations during armed conflict"; Keulen, "Digital force : Disrupting life, liberty and livelihood in the information."

[8] Smeets, "The Strategic Promise of Offensive Cyber Operations," 105.

[9] Lam, "The People's Algorithms: Social Credits and the Rise of China's Big (Br)Other," 81-84; Shires, The Politics of Cybersecurity in the Middle East.

[10] Smeets, *No Shortcuts: Why States Struggle to Develop a Military Cyber-Force.*

[11] Pijpers and Ducheine, "'If you have a hammer': Shaping the armed forces' discourse on information maneuver," 1165-1167.
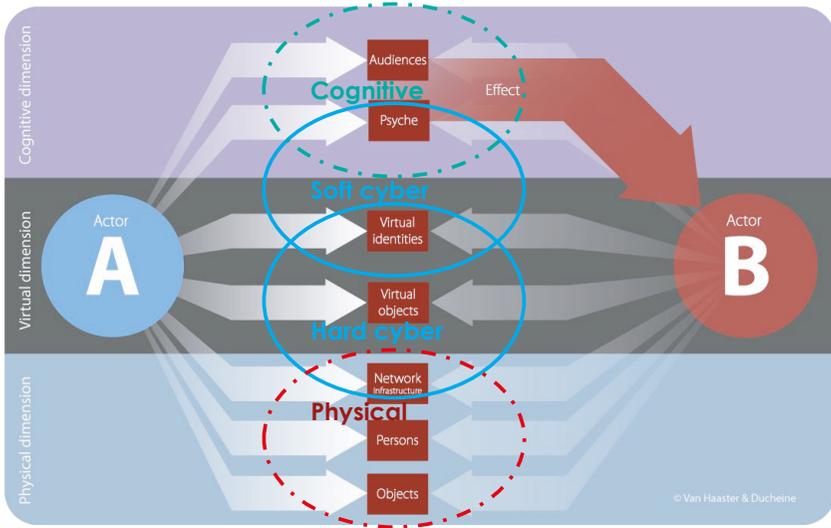
Figure 12.1: Operations in the information environment

result of a longer process; whether undertaken by a joint force, land, sea, or air, or by another agency (such as an intelligence & security service).

The prerequisites for these operations or activities are intelligence and understanding. By observing the cognitive, virtual and/or physical dimension, situational awareness and understanding is gained.[12] This understanding is fed into the (rest of the) planning and the decision-making process (Figure 12.2).[13] Once a decision is made, coordination and orchestration are required to task troops. This is part of the command and control process. Thereafter, action is taken, and results are observed and evaluated. This generic process (observe, understand, decide, orchestrate, act) resembles the OODA-loop[14] and is described in modern publications on i.a. Multi-Domain Operations.[15]

Thus, cyberspace facilitates digital intelligence gathering into virtual capabilities, among others through scanning or copying data confined in virtual repositories. In addition, it offers insight into motives and sentiments through analysis and roaming virtual expressions. Moreover, in a digitised society, many

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[12] DCDC, "JDP 04 2nd Edition – Understanding and decision-making."

[13] Pijpers and Ducheine, "'If you have a hammer': Shaping the armed forces' discourse on information maneuver," 1169-1170.

[14] Osinga, "Science, strategy and war: The strategic theory of John Boyd."

[15] United Kingdom Ministry of Defence, "Multi-domain integration (Joint Concept Note 1/20)."
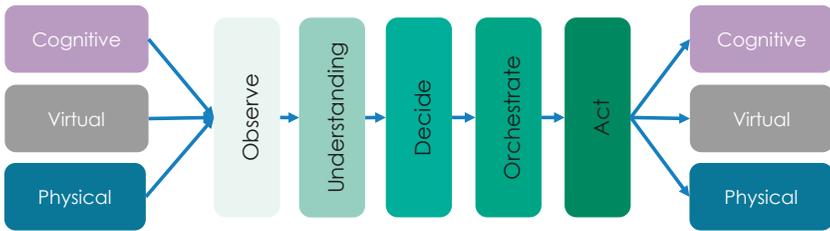
Figure 12.2: Manoeuvring in the Information Environment

physical objects can be tracked or accessed via cyberspace offering insight into the location and/or status of equipment or services.

For the purpose of this chapter, and as they are described elsewhere in this volume, intelligence activities will not be included.[16] Given the cyber-related scope of this chapter, physical activities (e.g. airstrike or ground forces assault) will not be covered here either.

To assess the potential effect of CEMA in the Russia-Ukraine war, a conceptual frame is provided on activities and effects. Ducheine et al.[17] argue that the dawn of cyberspace has invigorated existing activities, but also enabled a new one. Apart from digital intelligence gathering, activities involving the use of cyberspace can entail (i) cognitive or influence operations using cyberspace as a vector,[18] and target the cognitive dimension, entailing content, words, memes and footage as a 'weapon.'[19] New are the (ii) virtual operations that undermine or subvert cyberspace itself ('hard cyber operations') with binary code, in order to modify or manipulate data, and to degrade or destroy the ICT infrastructure, resulting in (virtual and/or physical) effects *in* cyberspace. As communication via cyberspace (both cabled and wireless) is highly dependent on the electromagnetic spectrum, (iii) physical Electronic Warfare (EW) can be used to undermine the use of drones, artillery and command and control systems.[20]

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[16] For the intelligence dimension of the Russia-Ukraine war, see Chapters 3, 4 and 5.

[17] Ducheine, Haaster, and Harskamp, "Manoeuvring and generating effects in the information environment"; Pijpers and Arnold, "Conquering the invisible battleground"; Ducheine, Arnold, and Pijpers, "Decision-making and parliamentary control for international military cyber operations by The Netherlands Armed Forces."

[18] Whyte and Mazanec, *Understanding Cyber Warfare: Politics, Policy and Strategy,* 100-101.

[19] Lupion, "The gray war of our time: Information warfare and the Kremlin's weaponization of Russian-language digital news," 329-330; Walton, "What's old is new again: Cold War lessons for countering disinformation"

[20] Theohary and Hoehn, "Convergence of cyberspace operations and electronic warfare effects."

The potential and actual impact of cyber activities is widely debated; some scholars argue that cyberwarfare will equal regular warfare,[21] while others argue that cyber means will never reach the threshold of war.[22] Since most cyber operations, whether during an armed conflict or beyond, will not reach the threshold of force, labelling these cyber operations based on their effects might be more appropriate.[23] Gartzke & Lindsay state that cyber activities, such as digital influence or hard cyber operations, have the effect of mere hindrances or nuisances. They may support campaigns in other (i.e. land, sea, air, space) domains, or could have a strategic impact.[24] While a strategic effect is possible in theory, they shelve it as a myth.[25]

Another take on the impact of cyber operations is articulated by Smeets (& Harknett) stating that cyber activities can be enablers or force-multipliers for conventional capabilities or a strategic alternative to war, hence an independent asset achieving strategic outcomes without the need of armed attack. Strategic in this sense means that the intent of the operation is 'to shift the relative balance of national power among states.'[26] Smeets makes a distinction between cyber capabilities countering values and countering force.[27] The former includes targeting national assets which can include vital infrastructure such as the 'Stuxnet' attack,[28] while the latter involves targeting operationally relevant assets including the attack on Syria's Air Defense System with the 'Suter program'[29] or a distributed denial-of-service (DDOS) attack.

Based on the academic discourse above, three main effects of cyber operations can be distinguished (Figure 12.3). Firstly, the cyberattack with a severe strategic impact changing the balance of power between states. Examples would be the manipulation of nuclear command and control systems or 'disconnection from the Internet.' Strategic cyber operations with such far-reaching consequences have not

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[21] Stone, "Cyber war will take place!"

[22] Rid, "Cyber war will not take place"; Valeriano, "War is still war: Don't listen to the cult of cyber."

[23] Smeets, "The strategic promise of offensive cyber operations," 90; Harknett and Smeets, "Cyber campaigns and strategic outcomes," 558.

[24] Lindsay and Gartzke, "Coercion through cyberspace: The stability-instability paradox revisited," 179-203.

[25] Gartzke, "The myth of cyberwar: Bringing war in cyberspace back down to earth."

[26] Harknett and Smeets, "Cyber campaigns and strategic outcomes," 535.

[27] Smeets, "The strategic promise of offensive cyber operations," 93-96.

[28] Referring to Operation Olympic Games ascribed to the US' and Israel's effort to sabotage Iran's nuclear program (2007-2010). Sources: Robert Langer 'To kill a centrifuge' and David Sanger *Confront and Conceal*.

[29] Referring to the Israeli 2017 Operation Orchard, see for example Soesanto, "A digital army: Synergies on the battlefield and the development of Cyber- Electromagnetic Activities (CEMA)," 29-30.

yet been witnessed, although the 2010 Operation 'Olympic Games' (a.k.a. Stuxnet) that targeted an Iranian uranium-enrichment facility, or the cyber operations that affected the 2016 US presidential elections may come close. Secondly, cyberattacks that support operational level military or even diplomatic campaigns. Intelligence and reconnaissance operations (or 'cyber espionage') to support military operations are obvious examples.[30] Other supportive operational level cyber activities could involve 'ransomware' and 'wiperware'; malicious software aimed at data encryption and/or data destruction respectively. Supportive cyberattacks also include manipulation of parts of the Internet. Thirdly, cyberattacks depicted as nuisances, neither causing 'death and destruction' nor directly supporting a military campaign, and without strategic impact. Prominent examples thereof are DDoS-attacks, defacements, phishing and hack-and-leak operations. Furthermore, these cyber-hindrances may also encompass mobilising support (via social media), calling for resistance, libeling and defaming.
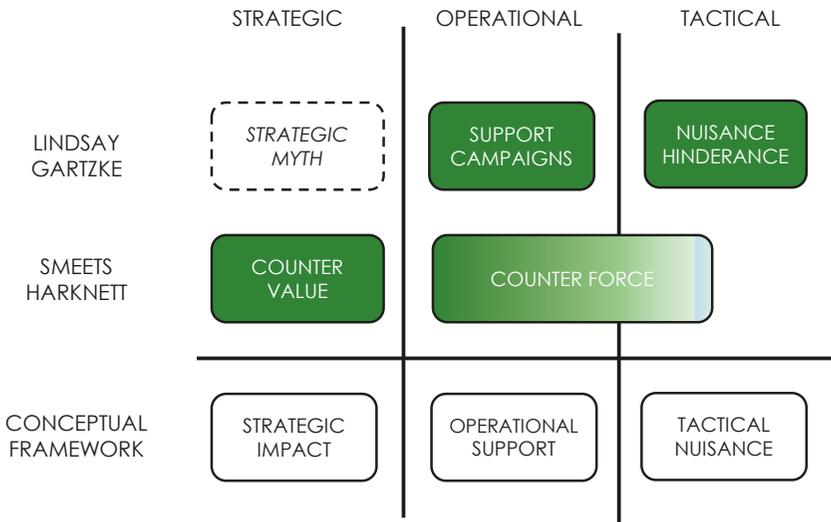

Figure 12.3: Effects of cyber operations

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[30] Bowen, "Russian cyber units."

3. The expected cyberwar

For many (outside of Ukraine), the Russian 2022 invasion in Ukraine came as a surprise. Maybe not that it happened at all – the conflict had been boiling for a decade – but rather the manner in which it escalated.

The envisioned war was thought to resemble a cyber equivalent of the Russian annexation of Ukraine's Crimea in 2014.[31] Instead, Russia used brute physical force violating the sovereignty of Ukraine and breaching the peremptory rule of the prohibition of the use of force. Quite different from previously more sophisticated and subtle Russian operations to curb the will of its opponents, such as during the 2015 and 2016 cyber operations crippling Ukraine's power system, or the 2017 'NotPetya' cyberattack on the Ukrainian fiscal system.[32]

The question is, whether this expectation of a cyberwar was a valid one, or not.[33] For academics, a crucial moment of self-reflection. After introspection and validation, based on the digitised state of modern society, Russia's intentions and cyber track record, as well as the trend to establish cyber commands within armed forces worldwide, the expectation seemed fair and valid.

3.1 Russian intentions

With the inception of cyberspace, a new arena of engagement was added. According to Rid,[34] Russia has embraced the digitalisation of the information environment to refine its 'Active Measure'-doctrine. Russian Active Measures rely on manipulative influencing techniques referred to as reflexive control[35] i.e., 'conveying to a partner or an opponent specially-prepared information to incline him to voluntarily make the predetermined decision desired by the initiator of the action.'[36]

Since the presidency of Vladimir Putin, Russia's intent has been to challenge the Western dominance and offer an alternative view on international relations and law.[37] Moreover, Putin argues that Russia is a global power that needs to be reck-

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[31] Polyakova and Boyer, "The future of political warfare: Russia, the west, and the coming age of global digital competition the new geopolitics," 1.

[32] Soldatov and Borogan, "Russian cyberwarfare : Unpacking the Kremlin's capabilities," 22-29; Baezner and Robin, "Cyber and information warfare in elections in Europe," 6-7.

[33] Pijpers, Ducheine, Arnold, "The next war would be a cyberwar, right?"

[34] Rid, "Disinformation: A primer in Russian active measures and influence campaigns."

[35] Thomas, "Russia's reflexive control theory and the military," 238-243.

[36] Ajir and Vailliant, "Russian information warfare : Implications for deterrence theory," 72-73; Giles, "Handbook of Russian information warfare," 19.

[37] Zaporozhchenko, "The end of 'Putin's Empire?' Ontological problems of Russian imperialism in the context of the war against Ukraine, 2022."

oned with, seeking Western confirmation thereof. Finally, Russia as a global power wants to have a buffer zone with nemesis NATO. This zone – or sphere of influence – includes Belarus, Ukraine and Georgia.[38] Russia challenges Western states not by advocating authoritarian regimes but by undermining the, in their view, Western feeble, hypocritical liberal democracies they despise.[39] Disseminated alternative truths generate strategic confrontation and confusion.[40] The intent of digitalised Active Measures is that Western audiences start to doubt Western truisms.

3.2 The prelude to the Russia-Ukraine war

After the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet Union, Russia slowly increased its influence in its Eastern and Southern buffer zones, initially via military means. However, after the mishap in the 1st Chechen war and Putin's rise, the policy was expanded to include diplomatic (involving like-minded local leaders),[41] informational and cyber-means.

To keep Ukraine within its sphere of influence, instead of leaning towards the EU, Russia attempted to interfere in Ukraine's 2014 presidential elections. Using state and proxy agents, it subsequently annexed Crimea, occupied parts of the Donbas area, and conducted destructive cyberattacks resulting in energy outages in 2015 and 2016 and worldwide devastating financial losses and logistical stagnation resulting from the use of NotPetya against one of Ukraine's fiscal IT services in 2017.[42]

Given the Russian exploration and experiences of 'warfare' in the information environment and cyberspace, it was expected that future conflicts or wars would have a substantial cyber component;[43] if not an all-out cyberwar. *Prima facie* however, the Russia-Ukraine war did not meet that expectation. Was the impact of cyberwarfare misjudged or did it not yet come to fruition?

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[38] Flockhart and Korosteleva, "War in Ukraine: Putin and the multi-order world," 472-475.

[39] Hansel, "Great Power narratives on the challenges of cyber norm building," 190.

[40] Black, "Russia's war in Ukraine : Examining the success of Ukrainian cyber defences," 10; Pijpers, "Influence operations in cyberspace: On the applicability of public international law during influence operations in a situation below the threshold of the use of force," 49.

[41] Galeotti, *Putin's Wars: From Chechnya to Ukraine.*

[42] Polyakova and Boyer, "The future of political warfare: Russia, the West, and the coming age of global digital competition the new geopolitics," 14.

[43] Schulze and Kerttunen, "Cyber operations in Russia's war against Ukraine," 3-4.

4. How Russia-Ukraine cyberwarfare evolved

Often only the most severe cyberattacks are registered and analysed.[44] In the Russia-Ukraine war few cyberattacks hit the headlines. It appears that aside from the eye-catching Viasat-attack very little happens in cyberspace.[45] The reality is to the contrary.

Operations in and through cyberspace entail a variety of 'cyberattacks' including hard cyber operations and digital influencing operations or soft-cyber operations. Complemented by EW, these cyber operations aim to have a strategic effect, to support operational (military) campaigns or to cause mere hindrance of tactical/local effects. Based upon this conceptual frame, we assess the observed cyber activities in the Russia-Ukraine war, considering the numbers and impact of the cyber operations and their evolution over time from February 2022 to June 2023.

4.1 Ukraine's preparations and defences

In anticipation of predictable Russian cyberattacks,[46] prior to the actual invasion, Ukraine increased its resilience in cooperation with the US and the UK (initially on-site and later remotely)[47] and a variety of commercial high-tech companies (e.g. Microsoft, Mandiant, ESET, Amazon Cloud Services).[48] Thus, active incident response and information sharing between Ukraine, IT-security firms, and the allied network defenders severely disrupted Russia's destructive cyberattacks.[49]

4.2 Russian hard cyber operations

In the immediate run-up to the February 2022 invasion, pro-Russian hackers executed rather straightforward denial-of-service attacks to impede the access of the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense, the armed forces, internet service providers and two national banks.[50] In that period, hackers also defaced the websites of dozens of

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[44] Smeets, *No Shortcuts: Why States Struggle to Develop a Military Cyber-Force*.

[45] Mironova, "Russia's invasion of Ukraine is also being fought in cyberspace."

[46] Weymouth, "Volodymyr Zelensky: 'Everyone will lose' if Russia invades Ukraine"; Sonne, Ryan, and Hudson, "Russia planning potential sabotage operations in Ukraine, U. S. Says."

[47] Martin, "US military hackers conducting offensive operations in support of Ukraine, says Head of Cyber Command."

[48] Bateman, "Russia's wartime cyber operations in Ukraine: Military impacts, influences, and implications," 14.

[49] Microsoft Threat Intelligence Centre, "A year of Russian hybrid warfare in Ukraine," March 15, 2023, 5.

[50] Ukrainian Centre for Strategic Communication, 15 February 2022.

Ukrainian government organisations with manipulated political imagery and provocative propaganda messages.[51] Spear-phishing mails targeted Ukrainian entities to divulge sensitive data. Although annoying, these many hundreds of cyberattacks had only modest impact.[52]

Mid-January 2022, Microsoft revealed the existence of a malware operation targeting multiple organisations in Ukraine.[53] This 'wiperware' (dubbed *Whispergate*) masqueraded as 'ransomware' but had no intention of locking data for a ransom. Instead, this malware basically erased (wiped or overwrote) data on the victims' computers and subsequently destroyed the computers' start-up mechanism intending to render these machines useless.

One day prior to the invasion, cybersecurity firms revealed the detection of more 'disk-wiping' malware, targeting hundreds of machines in Ukraine in the financial, defence, aviation, and IT-services sectors.[54] To date, at least nine different destructive wiper-families and two types of ransomware targeted the Ukrainian government, critical infrastructure, media, and the commercial sector.[55] It is striking that these wipers coincided with the immediate lead-up to the invasion and the few months thereafter. It is possible that these cyberattacks were conducted largely in concert with the kinetic military operations.[56] This is fully in line with the importance that Russia attaches to decisive impact during the first weeks of a war.[57]

An event with far-reaching consequences and coinciding with the complementary cyberattacks against Ukrainian internet service providers and telecommunication services, concerned a cyberattack with yet another kind of wiperware (*AcidRain*) on Viasat, a major satellite internet communications provider for, among others, Ukraine and other parts of Europe. On the eve of the invasion, hackers erased the hard drives of Viasat's associated satellite internet homebased modems rendering these unserviceable. This resulted in the loss of battlefield communications particularly in the region close to the then seriously threatened Kyiv, making Ukrainian forces virtually blind to Russian troop positions and movements.[58]

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[51] Security Service of Ukraine, "Cyber attacks on government websites."

[52] Kostyuk and Brantly, "War in the borderland through cyberspace: Limits of defending Ukraine through interstate cooperation," 498.

[53] Microsoft Threat Intelligence Centre (MSTIC), "Destructive malware targeting Ukrainian organizations."

[54] Symantec Threat Hunter Team, "Ukraine: Disk-wiping attacks precede Russian invasion."

[55] MSTIC, "A year of Russian hybrid warfare in Ukraine."

[56] Smith, "Defending Ukraine : Early lessons from the Cyber War," 3.

[57] US Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), Russian military strategy: Core tenets and operational concepts, 3; See also: Lin, "Russian cyber operations in the invasion of Ukraine."

[58] Blessing, "American Enterprise Institute, revisiting the Russian Viasat hack: Four lessons about cyber on the battlefield."

The cyberattack on Viasat is a good example of how cyberattacks can be targeted and timed in operational support of military operations by disrupting and destroying the technology used by enemy forces.[59] Thanks to the personal relationship between Ukraine's minister for Digital Transformation Mykhailo Fedorov and Elon Musk,[60] the latter's Starlink satellite system quickly filled the incurred gap and restored Ukraine's internet communications.[61]

In spring 2022, Russia withdrew the forces advancing toward Kyiv and redirected these to focus on other regions. Simultaneously, a shift in pro-Russian cyberattacks to the logistics and transportation sector inside Ukraine was observed.[62] At that time, Ukraine's railways and transportation systems transferred weapon systems and military supplies eastward. Refugees used these means to flee in the opposite direction. Russian forces launched both missile-strikes and destructive wiper-attacks on the transportation infrastructure, suggesting a common goal.

In April, hackers targeted the Industrial Control Systems of a critical infrastructure: the Ukrainian power grid. The attacker had modified the previously used (2016) *Industroyer* malware to attack the power grid and cause power outages. Although similar to its predecessor, this version contained more targeted functionality. In addition, it was accompanied by yet other sets of destructive wiper malware.[63] Late 2022, following Ukraine's military successes in regaining control over southern and north-eastern territory, Russia started kinetically attacking civil critical energy infrastructure. Given the diversity of the target infrastructure and the required access positions necessary for cyber activities, it is suggested that the generic capabilities and quick reaction times favoured kinetic action over tailored cyber actions. With the winter in sight, power and heat infrastructure were hit by numerous missile strikes. Concurrently, and possibly in support of these kinetic operations, wiper malware attacks targeted civilian power and water infrastructure.[64]

In contrast to kinetic military operations, cyber operations can be executed covertly and, hence, are more suitable to be conducted in areas outside Ukraine. Pro-Russian actors used (*Prestige*) ransomware to attack the transportation sector in Ukraine and Poland, a NATO-member and a logistical hub for supplies.[65]

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[59] O'Neill, "MIT Technology Review, Russia hacked an American satellite company one hour before the Ukraine invasion."

[60] Musk, "Starlink service is now active in Ukraine," *Twitter*, 2022.

[61] Jin, "Musk says Starlink active in Ukraine as Russian invasion disrupts internet."

[62] Microsoft Threat Intelligence, "A year of Russian hybrid warfare in Ukraine, What we have learned about nation state tactics so far and what may be on the horizon."

[63] ESET Research, Industroyer2: Industroyer reloaded, 12 Apr 2022.

[64] Watts, "Preparing for a Russian cyber offensive against Ukraine this winter."

[65] Microsoft Threat Intelligence Centre (MSTIC).

In the course of 2022, the deployment and intermittent introduction of new wiper variants took place in waves. This suggests that the attackers were forced to react (and improvise), rather than draw prepared cyber weapons from a stock. Over time, the technical level of the wipers declined.[66]

4.3 Russian electronic warfare

Prior to the invasion, some Western analysts had expressed admiration for Russia's military EW capabilities. However, certain events cast doubt on their actual strength and readiness.[67] Initially, Russia's EW complex has proved partially successful in suppressing Ukrainian air defence assets, which cleared the way for an air assault operation on Hostomel airfield near Kyiv.[68] However, this success was not sustained in the weeks thereafter.

Ukrainian Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS), like the Bayraktar TB-2, freely roamed and targeted Russian convoys north and east of Kyiv without significant interference by Russian EW-systems.[69] Arguably, this was attributed to a lack of planning for the invasion that resulted in ineffective deployment of EW systems.[70] Following the failed attempt to capture Kyiv, frontlines stabilised more or less in the south and the east. That paved the way for more effective Russian EW-operations from static positions, specifically in the execution of target acquisition in tandem with UAVs.[71] Likely due to denser Russian electronic defences, Ukraine's initial success with the UAS Bayraktar was not continued. Nonetheless, cheaper commercial and expendable drones continued to provide Ukrainian forces with critical battlefield awareness for targeting purposes.[72]

Russian attempts to block Ukrainian communications, similarly, largely failed. Not least due to the large-scale delivery of the Starlink satellite communications architecture. This allowed Ukraine to maintain dependable connections throughout tactical formations, with limited to no interference from Russian electronic warfare assets.[73]

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[66] https://cip.gov.ua/ua/news/chotiri-misyaci-viini-statistika-kiberatak.

[67] McDermott, "Russia's electronic warfare capabilities to 2025," 2.; Withington, "Russian EW: Underused or a Potemkin capability?"

[68] "The Russian air war and Ukrainian requirements for air defence," 7.

[69] Idem.

[70] Watling and Reynolds, "Ukraine at war: Paving the road from survival to victory," 10.

[71] Idem.

[72] Army, "6. Explosives delivered by drone."

[73] Colom-Piella, "The bear in the labyrinth," 77.

4.4 Russian digital influence (soft-cyber) operations

Next to the aforementioned EW and hard cyberattacks, pro-Russian state and non-state actors conducted cyber-enabled operations – disruptive propaganda, and disinformation campaigns (both mainstream and social media) – to influence target audiences.[74] False narratives were distributed via government-managed and influenced websites (e.g., RT and Sputnik), amplifying aligned framed messages,[75] propaganda and disinformation spreading through exploited social media services.[76]

The main purpose of Russian influence operations is to demoralise the Ukrainian population, and to drive a wedge between Ukraine and its Western allies. The integrity of Western states was undermined by a report on bioweapons made in Ukraine, alluding to the hypocrisy and decadence of the West.[77] Influence operations are also used to target domestic Russian audiences, Russian diaspora. Narratives used are Western Russo-phobia, a sensitive topic to Russian diaspora or ethnic Russians living in Ukraine, the 'denazification and demilitarization' of Ukraine or the endemic corruption within the Ukrainian government.[78]

4.5 Ukrainian digital influence (soft-cyber) operations

Ukraine too exploits the social media. From the invasion on, President Zelensky addresses his population online and keeps up the morale of his troops,[79] affecting the cognitive dimension of both friend and foe. The story of a Ukrainian fighter pilot, 'the Ghost of Kyiv,' went viral online. The pilot allegedly shot down six Russian aircrafts on the first day of the invasion. While the Ukrainian Air Force Command admitted that the Ghost of Kyiv did not exist, the virtual myth lives on. Another occurrence concerned the bold response of Ukrainian troops defending Snake Island after Russia's Black Sea Fleet flagship 'The Moskva' demanded their surrender. The explicit refusal 'Russian warship, go home'[80] became a popular

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[74] Kleisner and Garmey, "Tactical TikTok for Great Power competition – Applying the lessons of Ukraine's IO campaign to future large-scale conventional operations," 12-14.

[75] See inter alia: the website donbasstragedy.info (created 26 Nov 2021) and pushing posts containing "Kyiv has begun to create a "human shield" of the civilians of Donbass" on 24 Feb 2022.

[76] Microsoft, "Defending Ukraine: Early lessons from the Cyber War," June 22, 2022, 4.

[77] Ling, "How U.S. bioweapons in Ukraine became Russia's new big lie"; EU vs Disinformation, "Weapons of mass delusion."

[78] Lichtenstein et al., "Framing the Ukraine crisis: A comparison between talk show debates in Russian and German television," 66–88.

[79] "We are here to defend our independence" Zelensky, 25 February 2022, https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=WkNiYYzHeDs

[80] The actual phrase was (translated into English) "go f**k yourself," see The Guardian.

phrase online and was frequently used in internet memes. A stamp was subsequently introduced to honour the heroes. The Moskva's sinking created the theme for another postage stamp and new online memes, as did the attack on the Kerch Bridge (Ill. 12.1).

Illustration 12.1: Meme stamp of the Kerch Bridge

Of strategic importance is the fervent on-line strategic communication by Zelensky to foreign parliaments that result(ed) in diplomatic support and, moreover, in the supply of funds, military systems and ammunition.

Further, the online presence of Ukrainian state institutions, units of the armed forces, and volunteer organisations is ubiquitous. It is noteworthy that social media publication policies are part of a strategic communication engagement, guided from Kyiv, ensuring that messaging revolving around bravery, resilience, and defiance is consistent and aligned with overarching goals.[81] Within these guidelines, content creators hardly face restrictions.[82]

Humorous content and interaction with animals, particularly cats and dogs, are recurring themes in videos of Ukrainian units on social media.[83] Additionally, blatant failures and alleged crimes of Russian armed forces are frequently emphasised.[84] Other topics, such as the heroism of military personnel, martyrs (although

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[81] Interview with Ukrainian Lt. Col. The transcript is accessible via the authors.

[82] BBC news, "How Ukraine is winning the social media war."

[83] News Week, "Ukrainian soldier's "cat checkpoint" delights internet."

[84] Hogue, "Civilian surveillance in the war in Ukraine: Mobilizing the agency of the observers of war," 109.

there is no publication of overall casualty numbers), and a promotion of home-grown (drone) technology, are also commonly featured.[85]

In this way, and as of the first day of this war, social media has helped Zelensky to internationalise Ukraine's cause and to persuade (Western) democratic countries to support his country.

5. Assessing cyber activities: Failed offensive or successful defence

The role of cyber operations in the Russia-Ukraine war differs from what was expected. Apart from the invasion related attack on Viasat and the coinciding (wiperware) attacks on ISPs and telecommunication providers (TelCo) providers, hard cyber operations (digitally undermining cyberspace) that effectively supported military campaigns were unexpectedly sparse. The majority of the activities related to hindrance such as DDoS and spear-phishing attacks.

5.1 Strategic value?

Quite interesting are the wipers that have been used. In the first year of the war, nine variants of wiperware have been deployed against mainly civilian objects of the Ukrainian government, critical infrastructure (information technology, communication, energy, transport, healthcare), the commercial businesses and the media. A small percentage was directed against the armed forces.[86]
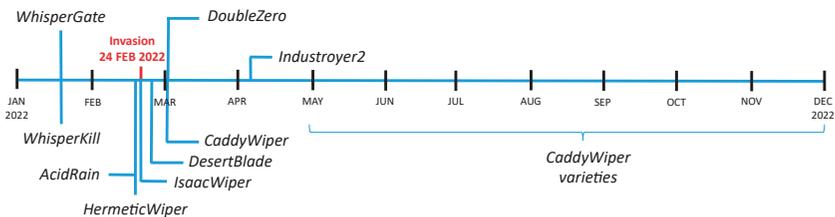
Figure 12.4 (Discovery of) Nine wiperware-families deployed around the Russion invasion

It is striking that these wipers were mainly deployed in the run-up to the invasion and the few weeks thereafter (figure 12.4). It stands to reason that the use of wipers

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[85] Alshamy et al., "Polycentric defense, Ukraine style: Explaining Ukrainian resilience against invasion," 18.

[86] Microsoft Threat Intelligence Centre, *A Year of Russian Hybrid Warfare in Ukraine*.

served as operational support to the military campaign in shaping the battlefield – a counter force asset to blind Ukraine's defences. It can even be argued that when targeted at critical infrastructures, wipers strike the vital interests of Ukraine. Following the categorisation by Smeets,[87] during the Russia-Ukraine war, these wipers could have had a potential strategic impact, but based on the data at hand, we cannot convincingly conclude that they actually had.
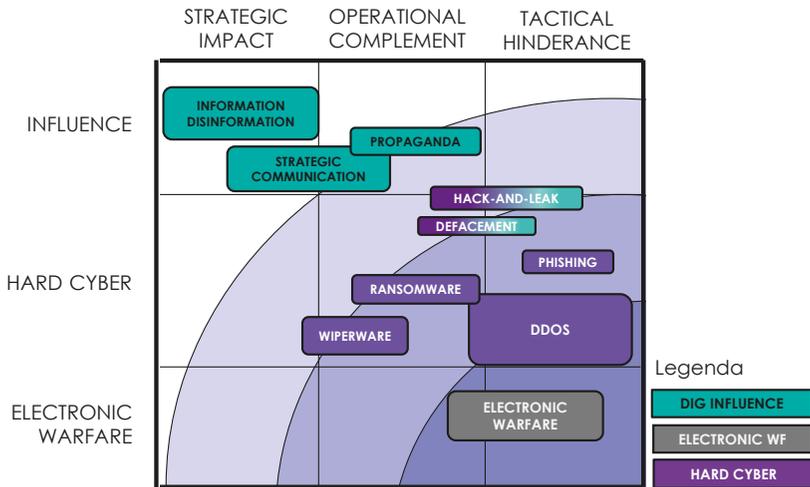
Figure 12.5 Cyber & electomagnetic attacks in the Russia-Ukraine war

Digital influence (soft cyber) operations, especially the mobilisation of support, were initially categorised as a minor hindrance. However, during the current war (manipulative) digital influence operations from both Ukrainian and Russian state entities proved to have generated (and strived for) strategic effects (Figure 12.5) as international support developed into the centre of gravity for both.[88] For Ukraine it resembles the lifeline to stay afoot. All Russia has to do is to weaken this Achilles' heel.

The Russian cyber operations in January and February 2022 should be regarded as a success. Through the hacks against satellite internet communications provider Viasat, telecom and internet service providers, and e-services, Russian operators or their affiliates, were able to create a digital blackout. One symptom of this blackout was Fedorov's tweet to Elon Musk, requesting Starlink to enable communications.

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[87] Smeets, "The strategic promise of offensive cyber operations," 95.

[88] See also: Beskow, Hawthorne, and Daniel, "How to win with data: The US SOF-cyber partnership supporting Ukraine."

Nevertheless, although cyber activities had a strategic impact in the first days of the war, and a vast number of cyber activities were recorded,[89] thus far Russia's war-related cyber campaign appears ineffective to most observers. This raises the question: Is Ukraine's defence formidable or is Russia's cyber force failing?

5.2 Ukraine's defence

It is realistic to acknowledge that information on Russia and Ukraine is limited or biased. Ukraine might withhold information about successful Russian attacks for reasons of operational security or to uphold the morale of its population and forces. Apart from that, Ukraine's cyber defence is well organised,[90] and attacks were intercepted.[91] Over the years,[92] Ukrainian cyber infrastructure including the telecommunications sector has been hardened by domestic, international (US, UK)[93] and commercial (such as Microsoft) support cushioning the impact of an attack. Ongoing cyberattacks since the annexation of Crimea have, unintentionally transferring knowledge,[94] given away Russia's *modus operandi* in advance.

Furthermore, preparation for the war by Ukraine's telecommunications sector paid off. Anticipating the invasion, mobile telecom provider Kyivstar disabled incoming roaming devices from Russia and Belarus.[95] This prevented Russia's military leadership using mobile devices as alternates for their flawed command and control setup during the chaotic first weeks of the invasion. Instead, Russian officers had to resort to confiscated Ukrainian phones, exposing themselves to surveillance and subsequent targeting.[96] Ukrainian providers placed priority on repairing damaged telecom infrastructure, which enabled C2 redundancy for the Ukrainian military. This enhanced the population's resilience, still able to contact their relatives in these chaotic times.[97] The vast majority of Ukraine's population owns a mobile phone.[98] Consequently, the state was able to continue communication

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[89] Cyber Peace Institute, "Cyber dimensions of the armed conflict in Ukraine."

[90] Cerulus, "Kyiv 's hackers seize their wartime moment"; Black, "Russia's war in Ukraine : Examining the success of Ukrainian cyber defences," 12-15.

[91] Based on threat intelligence advances, supported by artificial intelligence, and internet-connected end-point protection. See: Smith, "Defending Ukraine: Early lessons from the Cyber War," 2.

[92] Beecroft, "Evaluating the international support to Ukrainian cyber defense."

[93] Fleming, "The Head of GCHQ Says Vladimir Putin Is losing the information war in Ukraine."

[94] Smeets, *No Shortcuts: Why States Struggle to Develop a Military Cyber-Force.*

[95] "The mobile network battlefield in Ukraine – Part 1."

[96] Dalsjö, Jonsson, and Norberg, "A brutal examination," 13.

[97] "The mobile network battlefield in Ukraine – Part 1."

[98] "Mobile cellular subscriptions (per 100 People) – Ukraine | Data."

with its citizens through the e-government app '*Diia.*'[99] Furthermore, the state provided an air raid alarm system through mobile phones and an *'eVorog'* (enemy reporting) app, which helped to improve security and facilitated the crowdsourcing of intelligence.[100]

In areas where connectivity was no longer available due to destruction of internet and telecom infrastructure, or Russian denial of the electromagnetic spectrum (EMS), innovative technologies guaranteed continued command and control capabilities of Ukraine's military. Commercial US company Starlink emerged as the backbone of the Ukrainian reconnaissance fire complex (designed for the coordinated employment of fires), comprising UAS and indirect fire assets.[101] Using Starlink's satellite internet communications for connectivity, military personnel orchestrated and executed precision strikes on enemy targets. Furthermore, Starlink facilitated streaming of imagery from the frontlines. This real-time reporting allowed the Ukrainian armed services to broadcast their messages and rally internal audiences to support their objectives.[102] It also hampered Russian propaganda relying on fabrication and manipulation.

5.3 Russia's cyber activities

Extrapolating previous Russian wars, including the 2008 war in Georgia, it cannot be ignored that Russia had planned a short and successful invasion of Ukraine. The cyber operations were likely meant to shape the battlefield and create the conditions for a successful military intervention. During the invasion itself, and unlike the Crimean conquest,[103] conventional kinetic means are the preferred tools of warfare. While cyberattacks can be conducive to subversion – as during the prelude to the invasion – Russia realised that cyberattacks have less strategic utility than kinetic attacks, especially in a war-like scenario.[104]

After the stalled invasion, the dedicated state-actors involved in cyber activities apparently had to restart their planning. But gathering actionable intelligence about an actual target, designing and developing cyber weapons that create

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[99] Казаченко and Пако, "Digital communication tools in a public sector: Ukraine case-study of national security providing."

[100] "How a chatbot has turned Ukrainian civilians into digital resistance fighters."

[101] Alshamy et al., "Polycentric defense, Ukraine style: Explaining Ukrainian resilience against invasion, " 25.

[102] Ewing, "Integrating nonstate intelligence: Ukraine shows how it might work, " 3.

[103] Bouwmeester, *Krym Nash: An Analysis of Modern Russian Deception Warfare.*

[104] Maschmeyer, "The subversive trilemma: Why cyber operations fall short of expectations"; Wilde, "Assess Russia's cyber performance without repeating its past mistakes"; Wilde, "Cyber operations in Ukraine: Russia's unmet expectations," 2.

surgical effects is an endeavour that requires months or even years to prepare. Though some ill-prepared efforts were made targeting energy (Ukrainian power grid attack),[105] finance, or commodities these operations had an ad-hoc character and appear not to be synchronised with other instruments of power. Or, an alternative explanation, cyber preparations, if any, were simply overrun by strategic imperatives that could be answered in time physically by air and naval forces and without time-consuming digital intelligence and preparations, tailored virtual access positions and exploits.

There could be other reasons why Russia's cyber campaign seems ineffective. Russia may be reticent to execute hard-cyber operations against Ukraine as these would reveal their information position, capacities, *modus operandi,* and waste scarce 'zero-day vulnerabilities and exploits.'[106] Furthermore, destroying Ukrainian ICT infrastructure that is useful after the war, would be illogical.[107]

Though Russia has a fair amount of cyber-related agencies within the intelligence services of the state and armed forces,[108] or liaised to the state,[109] their capacity is not infinite. Apart from Ukraine, Russian cyber operators have to cover three more audiences: domestic, (other) former Soviet republics; and NATO (and EU) and its member states.[110]

5.4 Preparation and perception: A failed Russian cyber offense?

The Russian cyber operations appear to be unsuccessful. However, the effectiveness of offensive activities – in cyberspace or any other domain – largely depends on the opponent's capability to defend. Given their experiences from the past and with the support from Western allies and commercial companies, Ukraine appeared and proved well-prepared for a cyberwar. Their entire internet communication and telecom sector was considerably hardened with the result that Russian cyberattacks were noticed early and created only limited effects.

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[105] Greenberg, "Russia's Sandworm hackers attempted a third blackout in Ukraine."

[106] A 'zero-day' software vulnerability is a vulnerability that is not yet known (hence, 'zero-days' known) to the creator of that software, or for which no adequate patch has yet been developed.

[107] Vynck, Zakrzewski, and Zakrzewski, "How Ukraine's internet still works despite Russian bombs, cyberattacks"; Martin, "Cyber realism in a time of war."

[108] Key Russian cyber actors include the Federal Security Service ('FSB'), the Foreign Intelligence Service ('SVR'), military cyber capabilities within Russia's General Staff (the Main Intelligence Directorate 'GRU' and the 8th Directorate). Soldatov and Borogan, "Russian cyberwarfare: Unpacking the Kremlin's capabilities," 4-5.

[109] Including private entities, both legitimate and criminal. See: Soldatov and Borogan, "Russian cyberwarfare: Unpacking the Kremlin's capabilities," 4-5.

[110] Lin, "Russian cyber operations in the invasion of Ukraine," 36-38.

Moreover, Russian cyberattacks were planned and concentrated around the invasion, probably assuming that the operation would only take days and perhaps realising that during an all-out war, cyber weapons would be of less value than kinetic weapons. Based on an analysis of cyber activities in the on-going conflict, we can argue that cyber activities, especially wipers could have had a strategic impact. However, apart from the invasion related Viasat hack and the coinciding attacks on ISPs and Telcos, the cyber operations – including wiper-attacks – largely had an ad-hoc character and were often poorly executed and most likely not synchronised with other instruments of power.

Russian cyber activities did not prevail due to prepared Ukrainian defence combined with Russian mishap. This does not mean that Russian cyber capacities may be played down.

6. Effects and consequences

In the current war in Ukraine, cyber operations gained less public attention as they were concealed by the detrimental physical war. However, once put into the spotlight, cyber operations can be seen.

While most cyber activities during the Russia-Ukraine war are mere tedious hindrances, some activities have – or could have had – an operational or even strategic impact. On the one hand, Russia's initial attacks, including on Viasat, did create a digital vacuum hampering the Ukrainian defences. Destructive wiper-attacks, such as targeted against Viasat, can have a strategic impact when they undermine the vital infrastructures of a state. The use of wipers did not come to fruition during the war so far, but their risk is still lurking.

On the other hand, soft-cyber or digital influence operations can have strategic value. While mobilising support via a single tweet may be seen a nuisance, the collective and synchronised effect of digital influence operations is of strategic importance for both sides. Pro-Russia narratives seek to demoralise Ukrainians, sow division between Ukraine and its allies and bolster perceptions of Russia. While for Ukraine, international support is both its lifeline and its Achilles' heel and thus the centre of gravity. The analysis underscores Smeets & Harknett's assessment that cyber operations can have strategic impact.[111] This not only relates to hard-cyber operations, in the Russia-Ukraine war the digital influence (soft-cyber) operations are the ones with strategic value.

The effectiveness of cyber operations still suffers from its comparison to kinetic military 'dogs of war.' Instead of using the war-peace dichotomy, cyber operations

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[111] Harknett and Smeets, "Cyber campaigns and strategic outcomes," 90.

ought to be assessed on whether they have strategic, operational or tactical usage and effects away from the context in which and by whom they are used. Not least since techniques and knowledge – which comes at low costs – will proliferate to and can be used by all state and non-state actors worldwide.

The war will stop one day, but the strategic competition in cyberspace will probably prevail and NATO and EU member states are quite likely to become the next targets. Hostile and malign activities in cyberspace are not confined to a state of war and we have to realise that the cyber dogs were unleashed ages ago.

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The Space Domain and the Russia-Ukraine War

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Abstract

This chapter focuses on space as an operational military domain. How is space technology used in the Russia-Ukraine war? After a brief historical overview of the military use of space, four specific capabilities are analysed: space force enhancement through satellite communication (SATCOM); intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR); position, navigation, and timing (PNT); and space control through offensive and defensive counter-space capabilities. This analysis underlines that space technology is increasingly important for military operations. In the Russia-Ukraine war, it has enabled unprecedented transparency, supported logistics, increased precision in targeting, and has played a key role in exposing enemy locations, potential war crimes, humanitarian crises, and environmental damage. Interestingly, many capabilities are provided by commercial actors, such as Maxar and SpaceX. The way in which space technology is used, however, also tends to blur the military-civilian lines. That raises challenges related to an increased civilian risk and growing power of commercial players.

Keywords: Space technology, Warfare, Space force enhancement, Counter-space

1. Introduction

The Gulf War of 1991 is often called the first 'space war,' as it was the first conflict in which space technology played a critical role. Since then, the use of space technology in military operations has become increasingly important and widespread. The importance of space technology also means that counter space capabilities, i.e. means and methods to disrupt, degrade or destroy space systems, are proliferating, as these help to protect one's own capabilities and can be used to counter the strategic advantage of adversaries. Given the increasing militarisation and weaponisation of space, political analysts and academics have raised alarms on the growing likelihood of 'space warfare'; space turning into a battlefield.

The Ukraine conflict allows us to see where we stand today. What is the role of the space domain in the Russia-Ukraine war? What lessons can be drawn from that use of space technology in warfare? In this chapter, we will briefly show how the

militarisation and weaponisation of space has evolved and distinguish various (counter) space capabilities. Against that backdrop, we will analyse how space technology is used in this armed conflict. It will become clear that, although space warfare in the sense of exploding satellites does not take place, space technology continues to be a crucial enabler for military operations, but far more prominent and extensive than three decades ago. Based on that overview, we will draw attention to challenges that arise from this use of space, and which relate to civilian risk and the power of commercial players. By the end of this chapter, we aim to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role of space technology in modern warfare and how it is shaping the conduct of military operations in the Ukraine conflict and beyond.

2. Militarisation and weaponisation of space

Since the dawn of human space exploration, the militarisation of space has been an undeniable reality. The launch of Sputnik 1 in 1957 marked the onset of the first Space Age. Two contrasting perspectives emerged simultaneously: one in which space is a sanctuary for the betterment of humanity, to be used for peaceful purposes only, and another in which space is a crucial security environment necessitating control and dominance. During the first Space Age, space capabilities primarily served military intelligence and reconnaissance purposes, the support of ground-based weapons, and for ballistic missiles and missile defense systems. The two superpowers were also the sole space powers, and Russia and the USA conducted various experiments to weaponise space.[1]

The American invasion of Iraq, known as Operation Desert Storm, and the subsequent expulsion of Saddam Hussein's forces from Kuwait would not have been possible without satellite observation, communication, and navigation.[2] The movement, positioning, and communication in the desert as well as the preparation for ground manoeuvres relied on secure and stable satellite communication. Satellite information played a significant role in identifying targets during the 42-day-long pre-ground war air offensive. The precise positioning and synchronisation of military units depended on the Position, Navigation, and Timing (PNT) signals provided by the military Global Positioning System (GPS) through satellites orbiting approximately 20,000 km above the earth's surface. This marked the first time in history that armed forces relied heavily on space technology to support ground-based warfare.[3]

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[1] Caldicott and Eisendrath, *War in Heaven: The Arms Race in Outer Space*, 11.

[2] Anson and Cummings, "The first space war: The contribution of satellites to the gulf war," 45-53.

[3] Steer and Stephens, *War and Peace in Outer Space*, 25.

Since then, we have entered a period often referred to as the second Space Age. Space technology has become an integral part of everyday life on Earth, as it is a key technology that enables e.g. the Internet, telephone communication, weather forecasts, traffic and aviation, and the banking system. Besides the two former superpowers, numerous other states and commercial actors have entered the arena, increasing the number of satellites exponentially.[4] Because space infrastructure is a critical enabler for both critical civilian infrastructure and military operations on Earth, an increasing number of states aim to protect free access to space capabilities, including by military means. The perspective in which space is a sanctuary for humanity appears to have taken a backseat. Space is now becoming increasingly militarised, with many states fully integrating the space domain into their doctrines and military strategies. NATO has formulated an overarching space policy, officially recognising space as an operational military domain.[5] Multiple states have established dedicated branches within armed forces and are strengthening their own capabilities.

That goes hand in hand with the proliferation of means and methods to 'deceive, disrupt, deny, degrade, or destroy space systems.'[6] Such counter-space capabilities can be used defensively to counter threats and offensively to counter the strategic advantage of adversaries. A notable example is the Russian DA-ASAT Nudol system.[7] Russia demonstrated its kinetic ASAT capability by testing this missile a few months before the invasion of Ukraine.[8] The increasing operational significance of counter-space capabilities is illustrated by the recent activation of the 75th Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance Squadron in the US: the first unit within the Space Force tasked with not only target analysis (providing intelligence on enemy (counter) space capabilities) but also target engagement; the actual targeting of enemy satellites, ground stations and/or communication links between them.[9]

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[4] Navigation systems, air traffic control, train operations, traffic management systems adapting to congestion, internet and cellphone services, banking and stock exchange operations, energy providers and stations, weather forecasting, climate research, and pollution detection all heavily rely on the utilisation of space and its satellite infrastructure.

[5] The five military domains according to NATO doctrine are: Sea, Land, Air, Cyberspace (also called Information domain) and Space.

[6] Weeden and Samson, *SWF: Global Counterspace Capabilities: An Open Source Assessment.*

[7] Weeden and Samson, *SWF: Global Counterspace Capabilities. An Open Source Assessment*; Bingen, Johnson, and Young, *CSIS: Space Threat Assessment 2023*.

[8] Whilst the test was arguably in violation of international law (Zwanenburg, Peperkamp, Siemensma, 2021), the critique did not invoke the Outer Space Treaty or any other international regulations. Since then, however, Kamala Harris declared that the US would not conduct destructive ASAT tests (anymore) and since then an increasing number of states signed the same declaration, including the Netherlands.

[9] Friend, "Space Force's first targeting squadron brought to life"; Tingley, "US Space Force creates 1st unit dedicated to targeting adversary satellites."

As is clear, armed forces use space technology in various ways. These contemporary capabilities can be divided into various mission areas: 1) space situational awareness (SSA) that provides information on space infrastructure, potential threats, and space weather; 2) space force enhancement to increase the effectiveness of military operations through satellite communication (SATCOM), detection and shared early warning (SEW), intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR), observation of weather conditions (METOC), and position, navigation and timing (PNT); 3) space support which enables the launch, maintenance and use of space systems; 4) space control through defensive or offensive counter-space capabilities; and 5) space force application where space based weapons could be used to engage targets on earth.[10] These developments and capabilities indicate that space technology does no longer serve solely as a critical enabler of warfare on earth, but that space is emerging as a warfighting domain. Indeed, many experts recently came to see space as a potential battleground, as states prepared for warfare from, through, or even in space.[11] Moreover, it seems that we have now entered the third Space Age, which is characterised by commercial-military cooperation.[12] As will be clear in the analysis of the Russia-Ukraine war, this comes with its own peculiarities, advantages and vulnerabilities.

Against the backdrop of these advancements in the realm of space, we now turn our attention to the ongoing armed conflict, which started with the invasion of Ukraine by Russia on February 24th, 2022. How is space technology utilised? And do these capabilities provide strategic advantages? In the following sections, we will use the distinctions highlighted here to delve into three types of space force enhancement that hold significant relevance – ISR, SATCOM and PNT – and space control through counter-space capabilities.

3. Intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR)

In the days before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the whole world witnessed the buildup of troops, a new field hospital, and a pontoon bridge close to the Ukraine border – despite Russian withdrawal claims. Space-enabled ISR made this possible; high-resolution images were provided by US-based company Maxar, known for its involvement in building electro-optical satellites (remote sensing) since 1993. Commercial satellite imagery also showed the tactical errors and strategic blunders resulting from Russia's initial incorrect assessment of Ukrainian resistance.

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[10] Dutch Air and Space Doctrine and Defense Space Agenda.

[11] Steer and Stephens, *War and Peace in Outer Space*, 25.

[12] Shaw, "Welcome to the Third Space Age."

It revealed a line of stationary military vehicles northeast of Kyiv on their way to occupy the Ukrainian capital. It stretched to a length of over 60 km.

Other commercial actors played a similar role by providing electro-optical imagery to the media.[13] US company Planet, for example, enabled assessments of the environmental damage, including in areas that were not freely accessible. It showed the damaged oil depot in Lviv, the Irpin River Dam and forests in the Kharkiv region.[14] Also, satellite imagery was used after the destruction of the Nova Kakhova dam and hydropower plant to track flooded houses and their inhabitants and to assess environmental damage and changes to the Dnipro waterways. Moreover, such imagery can contribute significantly to war crimes investigations and truth-finding. It showed for example how the bodies found in Irpin and Bucha along the roadside were there since the Russian occupation, and not after, as Russian disinformation tried to make us believe. Extensive reporting in the New York Times on April 4th, 2022 highlighted this.[15]

Aside from electro-optical satellites, valuable information is provided by radar satellites. One of those, a used Finnish Iceye satellite, was acquired last year by the Ukrainian government through a crowdfunding campaign. The radar of this 'people's satellite'[16] is able to penetrate clouds and can contribute to situational awareness even during the night or when it is cloudy. These images helped to identify Russian military equipment, weapons and combatants.[17] Additionally, information was provided by commercial actors: 'Radio-frequency data providers like HawkEye 360 and Spire Global used satellites to track Russian GPS jammers.'[18] Nearly half of the available satellite imagery came from such commercial actors.[19] Aside from strategic advantages of ISR for Ukraine, the availability of information has had significant wider benefits for the general public. Because of the public disclosure of information, these companies significantly contributed to 'promoting global transparency and combatting the spread of disinformation' – an essential factor shaping the war's narrative.[20]

[13] Erwin and Werner, "Dark clouds, silver linings: Five ways war in Ukraine is transforming the space domain."

[14] Ovsyaniy, "Satellite images reveal how Russia's Invasion has devastated the environment in Ukraine."

[15] Browne, Botti, and Willis, "Satellite images show bodies lay in Bucha for weeks, despite Russian claims."

[16] Watkins, "Finnish company to provide Ukrainian army with satellite imaging."

[17] Ukrinform, "'People's satellite' helps spot thousands of units of Russian equipment."

[18] Erwin and Werner, "Dark clouds, silver linings: Five ways war in Ukraine is transforming the space domain."

[19] Bingen, Johnson, and Young, *CSIS: Space Threat Assessment 2023*.

[20] Erwin and Werner, "Dark clouds, silver linings: Five ways war in Ukraine is transforming the space domain."

But collaboration with commercial space actors for ISR purposes is not limited to Ukraine or its allies alone. Chinese based satellite manufacturer Changsha Tianyi Space Science and Technology Research Institute Co. LTD (Spacety China) appears to have enabled Wagner's combat operations by delivering radar satellite imagery of locations in Ukraine to Terra Tech; a Russian technology firm that supplies commercially acquired space imagery.[21] Furthermore, the US government reported that the Russian space company Joint Stock Company Research and Production Concern BARL (AO BARL) supports Russia's military operations by sharing foreign high-resolution satellite imagery.[22]

Space enabled imagery is only one source of information; valuable military data is collected through for example surveillance UAVs and human intelligence. All that data needs to be fused and analysed so as to form valuable military intelligence, such as specific targeting information. The conflict in Ukraine demonstrates that open-source intelligence (OSINT), mainly based on commercial satellite imagery and social media like Telegram and YouTube, is increasingly relevant as a complement to traditional military intelligence. Ukraine has benefitted greatly not only from both foreign governmental agencies' intelligence products but also from open sources, leading Russia to declare those commercial satellites to be legitimate targets.[23]

4. Satellite communication (SATCOM)

Russia degraded and partly destroyed the Ukrainian military communications network early in the war. As Ukraine needed a secure communication system to conduct effective defense (e.g. for communication between commanders and frontline troops), Ukraine requested Elon Musk to 'provide Ukraine with Starlink stations.'[24] Starlink, launched by SpaceX in 2019, is a private sector-run, low earth orbit satellite constellation with literally thousands of satellites that provides global high-speed, low-latency broadband internet access. The first Starlink ground terminals arrived within the first week of the conflict and formed a much-needed lifeline. The use of Starlink as a replacement for the Ukrainian command and control system was essential: it allowed the Ukrainian high command to stay on top of developments on the various frontlines.[25] It furthermore enabled connectivity and

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[21] U.S. Department of the Treasury, "Treasury Sanctions Russian Proxy Wagner Group as a Transnational Criminal Organization."

[22] U.S. Department of the Treasury, "Treasury Sanctions Russian Proxy Wagner Group as a Transnational Criminal Organization."

[23] Bingen, Johnson, and Smith, "Russia Threatens to Target Commercial Satellites."

[24] Sabbagh, "Fury in Ukraine as Elon Musk's SpaceX limits Starlink use for drones."

[25] Economist, "How Elon Musk's satellites have saved Ukraine and changed warfare."

communication with the outside world, e.g. for civilians and combatants trapped in Mariupol, as well as the global distribution of frontline videos and photos via social media. It also allowed President Zelensky to remain in contact with world leaders and the population of Ukraine – all contributing to the mitigation of the Russian (dis)information campaign.[26]

In addition, the Starlink network was used by Ukraine for controlling surveillance UAVs and combat UAVs, such as the Turkish Bayraktar TB2 drone. This became more difficult early this year, when SpaceX tried to prevent such system use. Whilst this offensive use was clear already quite early in the war, Gwynne Shotwell, SpaceX's chief operating officer, declared in February that Starlink was never meant to be weaponised by Ukraine, and that Ukrainians had leveraged it in ways that were not part of any agreement.[27] Even more impactful was the story revealed in Elon Musk's biography. Although the facts are still somewhat unclear, it seems that the Starlink enabled communication was crucial for a planned Ukrainian attack mission with maritime drones. Either Elon Musk (himself) refused to switch on necessary communication covering Sebastopol's harbour to enable the strike on Russian ships responsible for launching missiles into Ukraine, or he switched the crucial communication off. This demonstrates the importance of such systems and the role of commercial actors.

5. Position, navigation, and timing (PNT)

PNT satellites provide positioning data and are used for surveillance, navigation and targeting. Military satellites such as the GPS system are used in Ukraine, as in Iraq in 1991, to aid troops in their routes to supply frontline units and for precise location of targets. Precision weapons are either guided by radio signals, inertial navigation, designated laser or GPS. The latter does not require boots on the ground in the vicinity of the target or continuous observation of the target with e.g. a laser designator to guide ammunitions direct on target whilst minimising collateral damage risk. With the proper codes installed, the accuracy of GPS-guided munitions can be bettered to around one metre. As GPS-guided bombs are 'fire and forget,' the use of it enables the pilot (as most GPS guided bombs are aircraft delivered) to make evasive manoeuvres to disrupt the potential lock-on of anti-aircraft munitions. Artillery (155 mm and High Mobility Artillery Rocket System munitions (HIMARS)-type rocket artillery) are often GPS-guided as well to provide for greater accuracy.

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[26] Miller, Scott, and Bender, "UkraineX: How Elon Musk's space satellites changed the war on the ground."

[27] Sabbagh, "Fury in Ukraine as Elon Musk's SpaceX limits Starlink use for drones."

Greater accuracy means that less munition is needed to hit targets as opposed to non-guided artillery and a reduction of collateral damage.

Furthermore, Ukraine receives targeting information from satellites via the United Kingdom and the United States. Undoubtedly, Russia will also generate targeting information from space. However, the number of satellites available to Russia is significantly lower compared to Ukraine and its allies. While Russia has its own space capabilities, such as the Glonass system as a counterpart to GPS, questions remain about its level of precision compared to GPS. The precision of US precision weapons suggests that the combination of Russian comparable weapons and the Glonass signal may not match that of the US. In general, Russia appears to focus more on disrupting Ukrainian space capabilities than deploying its own satellite capacity. Let us turn to those counter space operations now.

6. Space control

The overview above underlines the importance of space technology in this armed conflict and indicates significant strategic advantages. As expected, adversaries have used counter-space capabilities in an attempt to mitigate these advantages. In this section, we first distinguish four types of counter-space capabilities, and then assess which and how these are used in the Russia-Ukraine war.

Presently, various states possess counter-space capabilities, including 1) direct ascent kinetic ASAT missiles (DA-ASAT) and co-orbital interceptors that can physically destroy a satellite; 2) non-kinetic weapons such as lasers to blind or dazzle sensors on satellites, high-powered microwave weapons and electromagnetic pulse (EMP) that can fry its electronics, or nuclear weapons; 3) electronic weapons to jam or spoof the data stream between satellites and their ground stations uplink or downlink;[28] and 4) cyberattacks on space systems and their data.[29] Not only can these attacks take place outside of Earth's atmosphere, but interference with space related infrastructure on Earth is imaginable and probably much easier to conduct.

Although the increasing militarisation and weaponisation raised alarms as to the likelihood of space warfare, no kinetic (irreversible) ASAT weapons have been used so far. Neither DA-ASAT missiles, like the one tested by Russia a few months before the war, nor co-orbital interceptors capable of destroying satellites. There

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[28] Electronic weapons disrupt or deny GPS or satellite communication by targeting the electromagnetic spectrum and jamming the data stream or by adding false information to the data stream and so spoofing the signal (e.g. GPS or Satellite phones).

[29] See further Weeden and Samson, *SWF: Global Counterspace Capabilities. An Open Source Assessment*; Bingen, Johnson, and Young, *CSIS: Space Threat Assessment 2023*.

were co-orbital rendezvous operations, such as Russian inspector satellite Luch, that manoeuvred towards various other satellites to conduct a close proximity operation. However, these satellites were not used as co-orbital ASAT weapons but probably for intelligence gathering.[30] Additionally, there is no reported use of non-kinetic lasers, microwave weapons, or EMP, or nuclear weapons. Despite Russian statements on using Zadira, a powerful laser weapon, its use was neither seen nor confirmed, nor any other directed-energy weapons, such as the Peresvet. But while space control has not taken the form of these two types of counter space capabilities, the other two types are frequent.

A large part of Russian counter space operations consists of electronic attacks. Ukraine also likely deploys such tactics, but there is no mention of this in the regular media. Jamming and spoofing targets the data link between the satellite and the ground station, either disrupting the signal or feeding it with false information. Already before the war, regular GPS jamming hindering UAVs was observed. Right before the invasion, for example, it appeared that an operator temporarily lost control over a Bayraktar drone due to GPS interference, reported to be caused by the Russian electronic weapon Krasukha-4.[31] Russia also attempted to jam the (ground terminals of the) Starlink system and the GPS signal to hinder Finnair's commercial airplanes flying near the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad.[32] Ukraine has also jammed Russian communication, e.g. by consumer radios used for communication between Russian units and their commanders.[33]

Where at the start of the conflict, Russia hampered its own forces almost as much as the opponent's, lessons have been learned.[34] Russia seems to be increasingly successful in the field of electronic warfare.[35] In recent months, leaked Pentagon documents revealed frequent attempts to disrupt the GPS signal for the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System munitions (HIMARS) and that locating and destroying Russian jammers was a high priority for Ukrainian forces.[36] Jamming has also interfered with other smart weapons used by Ukraine, like the Joint Direct

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[30] Bingen, Johnson, and Young, *CSIS: Space Threat Assessment 2023*, 19.

[31] Bingen, Johnson, and Young, **CSIS: Space Threat Assessment 2023**, 18; OSCE, "Spot Report 6/2021: SMM long-range UAV unable to take off due to dual GPS signal interference"; Bipindra, "STAR WARS! Russia-Ukraine conflict is world's 1st commercial space war as Moscow's EW tries to cripple Ukraine."

[32] Bingen, Johnson, and Young, *CSIS: Space Threat Assessment 2023*, 17.

[33] Höyhtyä and Uusipaavalniemi, "The space domain and the Russo-Ukrainian war: Actors, tools, and impact."

[34] Bronk, "The mysterious case of the missing Russian air force" RUSI, 28 februari 2023

[35] Withington, "Jamming JDAM: The threat to US munitions from Russian electronic warfare."

[36] Marquardt, Bertrand, and Cohen, "Russia's jamming of US-provided rocket systems complicates Ukraine's war effort."

Attack Munitions (JDAMs), negatively impacting their accuracy and causing them to miss targets.[37] A recent RUSI report states that Russian electronic warfare systems, like the Shipovnik-Aero, are increasingly effective and substantially contribute to the large number of destroyed Ukrainian UAVs.[38]

Nonetheless, whilst electronic weapons such as the Krasukha-4 and Shipovnik-Aero pose serious threats, there is no reported use of other sophisticated electronic weapons in Russia's arsenal, such as Synthetic Aperture Radar jamming systems against ISR satellites providing imagery of e.g. Russian troop movements.[39] That is surprising, since these ISR satellites have provided Ukraine with a distinct advantage regarding data and intelligence, as described above.[40] Either the Russian armed forces never quite appreciated their value, were unaware of their location, or lacked the means to act against them.

Other frequently reported counter space operations take the form of cyber-attacks.[41] Right at the start of the war, Russia launched cyberattacks on the ground stations of a space communication system, severely disrupting the communication network of Viasat, a US-founded satellite communications firm. It used 'wiper malware that crashed terrestrial modems via the satellite downlink.'[42] The attack disabled communications of the Ukrainian armed forces, but also wind turbines and internet users across Europe.[43] This seems to have been the most successful cyberattack in the ongoing conflict, and it was one of the reasons why Ukraine needed the Starlink system. Whilst Starlink was under attack from hackers too, it has not been degraded in any significant way. There are indications, however, that Russia might step up its cyber operations, which could raise the threat for space capabilities.[44] And of course, not only Russian hackers are active in this area. Little is known, but Russian satellites, including the national GLONASS system, seem to have been targeted by cyberattacks, either by Ukrainian hackers or those sympathetic to them.[45] Additionally, a Russian military satellite communications

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[37] Seligman, "Russia jamming U.S. smart bombs in Ukraine, leaked docs say."

[38] Watling and Reynolds, *RUSI: Meatgrinder: Russian Tactics in the Second Year of Its Invasion of Ukraine*.

[39] The authors of the CSIS report discuss various potential reasons for this: either these counter space capabilities are in fact deployed but that information is not public, not all the reported Russian capabilities are available or/and as effective as was expected, or they are kept in reserve.

[40] Bipindra, "STAR WARS! Russia-Ukraine conflict is world's 1st commercial space war as Moscow's EW tries to cripple Ukraine"; Bingen, Johnson, and Young, *CSIS: Space Threat Assessment 2023*, 19.

[41] Furthermore, two weeks before the invasion, cyberattacks targeting Ukrainian government systems were observed.

[42] Bingen, Johnson, and Young, *CSIS: Space Threat Assessment 2023*, 18.

[43] Weeden and Samson, *SWF: Global Counterspace Capabilities. An Open Source Assessment*.

[44] Sakellariadis and Miller, "Ukraine gears up for new phase of cyber war with Russia."

[45] Odessa Journal, "Ukrainian hackers hacked the Russian Glonass system."

network was subject to a cyberattack and disabled for approximately 24 hours at the end of June 2023. It seems that either a hacking group or even a Wagner affiliated organisation was responsible, as it occurred shortly after the Wagner revolt of June 24.[46] For now at least, space force application in this armed conflict takes the form of electronic and cyberattacks. Whilst analysts assume that Russia has other sophisticated space weapons at its disposal, these have not been used so far. As a result, counter-space operations have disrupted military operations, but not as severe as one might have expected, and it has not turned space into a battleground.

7. Commercial space support

Clearly, space capabilities are no longer exclusively in the hands of armed forces. While the US also used commercial communication services in the First Gulf War, the availability of space capabilities and their level of sophistication have increased tremendously. Companies like SpaceX offer amazingly effective and reliable services. As these networks consist of large constellations of small satellites in low orbit, the system itself is resilient and thus not vulnerable to attacks on single satellites. Computer codes and software are updated easily and quickly, increasing resilience.[47] Furthermore, whilst SpaceX is the most prominent commercial actor, many other companies offer effective military space support. ISR is provided by companies such as Maxar; a capability that was previously reserved for a few armed forces and states. And whilst these are not part of any Ukrainian space program, they are said to be so successful that: 'their combined capability may surpass that of the Russian military.'[48] Clearly, the strategic benefits of space technology are no longer reserved for a few powerful countries with costly military space programs; even smaller countries like Ukraine can now profit from these advantages. This is a clear demonstration that owning assets and capabilities is not required (especially in the space domain) as long as access to their services is provided.

Nonetheless, the involvement of commercial actors and civilians blurs the line between military and non-military actors, leading to two distinct challenges. First, commercial actors can be seen as military targets when they provide military support. Dmitry Rogozin, former director of the Russian Space Agency, suggested that Starlink would not be considered purely civilian anymore, and Dmitry Medvedev,

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[46] Menn, "Cyberattack knocks out satellite communications for Russian military."

[47] Miller, Scott, and Bender, "UkraineX: How Elon Musk's space satellites changed the war on the ground."

[48] Hilborne, "What could be the consequences of the Ukraine war in space."

the Deputy Chairman of the Russian Security Council, assumed Starlink satellites to be military objectives and ordered those that were used to guide the attack on the Moskva to be destroyed.[49] Given Russia's ASAT capabilities, it was a serious threat, even more so because many ground stations were provided to Ukrainian civilians. Moreover, civilians increasingly contribute to the war effort. Home built applications, accessible through cellphones and connected through the Starlink network, essentially 'militarised' civilians by allowing them to provide timely intelligence on Russian troops, gathering stations and logistical complexes. It is essential that states are aware of these risks, inform their citizens, and assess whether and how to protect civilians, commercial actors and their systems.

A second challenge to be taken into account is the power and influence of companies supplying critical technology. While initially it appeared that SpaceX helped the Ukrainians by providing the Starlink service at little cost, Musk requested that the Ukrainian government would pay for its use when the network had proven essential, although in the end the US DoD decided to pay the bill.[50] On June 1st this year, the Pentagon disclosed that they had signed a contract purchasing an unknown amount of Starlink terminals from SpaceX. More concerning, this sort of power not only means that companies such as SpaceX can secure lucrative deals, but can also influence geopolitical processes and military operations.[51] The prime example is Elon Musk, who got involved in the politics by proposing peace terms on Twitter and high-level meetings with political and business leaders.[52] Also, the use of commercial space services can be unreliable when the supplier restricts their extended use. SpaceX declared that they did not allow the use of Starlink for offensive purposes, whilst it was being used extensively for communication and targeting. Services were cut back to prevent it from being weaponised and used for guiding combat UAVs.[53]

[49] Ranjan, "Russia announces space war on Elon Musk's Starlink satellites, accepts Moskva was attacked"; DW, "Ukraine updates: US warns Russia over satellites threats."

[50] Belfer Center, "Starlink and the Russia-Ukraine War: A case of commercial technology and public purpose?"; Marquardt, "Exclusive: Musk's SpaceX says it can no longer pay for critical satellite services in Ukraine, asks Pentagon to pick up the tab."

[51] The Belfer Center refers to the risk 'when private companies acting in their own capacity do not acknowledge the larger ecosystem of procurement and crisis response. This allows for efficient deployment, but the politics and perception of wartime support are fraught and there are reasons why countries take time to consider what technology and training they can provide.' Belfer Center, "Starlink and the Russia-Ukraine War: A case of commercial technology and public purpose?"

[52] Metz, Satariano, and Che, "How Elon Musk became a geopolitical chaos agent."

[53] Roulette, "SpaceX curbed Ukraine's use of Starlink internet for drones -company president."

8. Conclusion

The armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine demonstrates the importance of space technology for contemporary warfare. It has enabled unprecedented transparency, supported logistics, increased precision in targeting, and has played a key role in exposing enemy locations, potential war crimes, humanitarian crises, and environmental damage. In that way, it has helped Ukraine to effectively defend itself, aided the process of truth-finding and justice, and has contributed to countering Russian censure, propaganda and information operations. Space technology continues to fulfill its role as a critical enabler of modern military operations. However, where the First Gulf War might have been the first 'space war,' this conflict would be the first 'commercial space war.'[54] While Ukraine did not have military satellites before the war, the capabilities provided by other states and commercial actors gave them a significant military advantage.[55]

That also highlights the need for and importance of international cooperation, including with commercial actors. Hybrid space networks can enhance the capability output without having to double existing capabilities or increase budgets for space capabilities, for example by optimising interoperability (also in the field of Space Situational Awareness, where a global network of sensors is necessary), improving data sharing on existing capabilities and threats, and strengthening resilience through a combination of multiple systems. Moreover, the commercialisation of the space domain means that we need to think about the role of the space industry, and how to mitigate challenges related to the risk of companies and civilians getting involved in armed conflicts. The type and degree of responsibility that states have for the safety of those commercial actors and civilians are still unclear at this moment – something that must be addressed as this involvement will only increase in the face of these technological developments. Furthermore, civil-military cooperation requires clear agreements between participating sides as to what is delivered, who is in control, how the costing is arranged, and how the agreed service level can be maintained.

Space did not turn into a 'bloody' battlefield, as some feared. There was no use of kinetic ASAT weapons, laser weapons, and certain advanced electronic weapons – capabilities that Russia was believed to have. Nonetheless, Russian counter space

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[54] Bingen, Johnson, and Young, *CSIS: Space Threat Assessment 2023*.

[55] Of the five mission areas generally recognised, in this conflict we mainly see Space Force Enhancement (in SATCOM, ISR and PNT) and Space Control (in counter space activities). Space Situational Awareness (SSA), Space Force Application (SFA) and Space Support have been less in demand as Ukraine is not (yet) a space faring nation limiting the means to conduct operations in these mission areas.

operations continue to pose a serious threat. In the past year, they have been used to 'disrupt command, control, communications, and intelligence gathering and to degrade the effectiveness of UAVs and precision munitions.'[56] Recent developments suggest that they are increasingly successful particularly in electronic warfare.[57] Moreover, the importance of space technology in this conflict will incentivise other states to gear up their counter space capabilities. Given recent developments, a shift in the character of counter space capabilities can be expected. The use of kinetic ASAT weapons is possible but increasingly unlikely: they are relatively expensive, produce space debris,[58] and are ineffective for targeting large constellations. Moreover, the debris itself will likely hamper the perpetrator's use of space as well, which is a great deterrent for conducting such attacks. Other types of counter-space capabilities might thus be more attractive, e.g. more advanced cyber and electronic weapons, kinetic attacks on ground stations, or high-altitude nuclear detonations (HANDS).[59] The use of counter-space capabilities in this armed conflict allows states to draw lessons for space control, and indicates that the focus needs to shift from (countering) kinetic ASAT weapons to (countering) increasingly sophisticated 'soft kill' weapons.

While we need to be careful when drawing lessons from this ongoing and evolving armed conflict, this analysis indicates that space technology is crucially important in modern day warfare, that it continues to be a critical enabler, is essential in multi-domain operations, and that space capabilities have become far more advanced and comprehensive. At the same time, the Russia-Ukraine war makes clear that this goes hand in hand with certain challenges. Most notably, the blurring of the military-civilian lines requires us to rethink the responsibility of states for companies and civilians that contribute to the war effort, pay more attention to effective and balanced public-private partnerships, and prepare for new (and old) threats to space systems.

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[56] Bingen, Johnson, and Young, *CSIS: Space Threat Assessment 2023*.

[57] Robinson, "Ukraine conflict points to a future of space-enabled war."

[58] There is a similarity with nuclear deterrence dynamics: The(first) use of a destructive attack will lead to mutual degradation of capabilities and extreme levels of disruption, to the point where entire orbits will be rendered useless.

[59] See further: Bingen, Johnson, and Young, *CSIS: Space Threat Assessment 2023*.

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International Involvement

Does the Russia Sanctions Revolution Bring About Change?

Esmée de Bruin, Joop Voetelink, & Jeroen Klomp

Abstract

The further 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine prompted the deployment of unprecedented sanctions and other measures targeting Russia, Belarus, and Iran. The sanctions imposed on Russia are designed to seriously weaken its economic base and limit its ability to continue to wage war against Ukraine. Despite Russia's current status as the most sanctioned country in the world, the effectiveness of the sanctions remains uncertain due to Russia's prior preparations for this contingency following its annexation of Crimea in 2014, as well as the non-universal applicability of the sanctions. While it remains premature to ascertain the extent to which the sanctions have achieved their goals, some lessons can be identified.

Keywords: Effectiveness, Economic sanctions, Russia, Ukraine

1. Introduction

In reaction to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the UK, the US, and other Group of Seven (G7) members,[1] alongside the EU and several like-minded states imposed unprecedented individual and economic sanctions against the Russian Federation (Russia). The swift international response, high level of coordination and the scope of the packages have even resulted in the term 'sanctions revolution.'[2] With these measures, this group of countries and the EU aims to discourage a continuation of the war by obstructing the Russian economy, weakening the Russian military capabilities and targeting the people and entities in charge.

Although Russia is currently the most sanctioned country in the world,[3] this does not necessarily mean that the sanctions are effective in reaching their goal.

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[1] The G7 is an informal forum where leaders of some of the key states of the international economic system (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK, and the US) meet to discuss current world-issues.

[2] European Parliament, "EU sanctions on Russia: Overview, impact, challenges."

[3] Castellum, "Russia sanctions dashboard."

In response to the sanctions imposed on Russia after the annexation of Crimea and the destabilisation of Eastern Ukraine, Russia adopted a strategy referred to as 'Fortress Russia' to counter international sanctions by building reserves and reducing foreign debt reliance and imports.[4] In addition, in the literature, it is often found that only a minority of sanctions are effective. For example, Hufbauer, Schott and Elliott find that most, although not all, sanctions between 1915 and 2000 have failed to discourage military adventures.[5] Biersteker, Eckert, Tourinho and Hudáková find UN targeted sanctions to be effective in 22% of the cases.[6] Nevertheless, first evidence points in a different direction for sanctions in the case of Russia. Portela and Kluge (2022) have evaluated the impact of the EU sanctions in terms of economic and political effects during the first months after the invasion. They find a negative economic impact that is unevenly distributed among the Russian population. Further, they do not observe political effects.[7] The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has estimated that Russia's GDP has fallen by 2.1% in the first year after the invasion.[8] To date, however, few academic studies have examined the success of these sanctions during a longer period by looking at different levels of effectiveness.

The aim of this chapter is to evaluate the effectiveness of the EU sanctions imposed on Russia during the first one-and-a-half years of the war. First, this chapter introduces sanctions by giving a brief overview of the different types of sanctions that are in place against Russia as a response to its aggression in Ukraine. In addition, this paragraph addresses the aim of the sanctions. Second, the chapter sets out the three-level framework to evaluate the effectiveness of sanctions. Third, it evaluates the sanctions against Russia on these three levels. The final paragraph is used to conclude.

2. Sanctions

2.1 Sanctions in general

Throughout history, states have used sanctions as a robust foreign policy and national security tool.[9] Following WW I, sanctions also became a valuable instru-

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[4] Demertzis, Hilgenstock, McWilliams, Ribakova, and Simone Tagliapietra, "How have sanctions impacted Russia?"

[5] Hufbauer, Schott, Elliott, and Oegg, *Economic Sanctions Reconsidered: History and Current Policy,* 70.

[6] Biersteker, Eckert, Tourinho, and Hudáková, "UN targeted sanctions datasets (1991-2013)," 408.

[7] Portela and Kluge, "Evaluating EU sanctions against Russia after the invasion of Ukraine," 6.

[8] International Monetary Fund, "Russian Federation."

[9] Today, the reasons for imposing sanctions range widely and include support for terrorism, narcotics trafficking, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and human rights abuses.

ment in the collective security system of the League of Nations and, later, the UN. Still, there is no generally accepted, authoritative definition of the term.[10] For the purpose of this chapter, we will use the following generic description. Sanctions, or 'restrictive measures' as they are commonly referred to in the EU, are measures not involving the use of armed force, which a state or international governmental organisation can impose on a state, entity, or individual to exert pressure and induce a change in policy or behaviour.

Sanctions have developed significantly over the past decades. Initially, they were typically broad in scope, generally targeting the economy of a single state. As such, these comprehensive sanctions proved to be blunt and deadly tools because of their unintended but disastrous humanitarian impact on the targeted state.[11] Consequently, in the late 1990s, more focused, targeted sanctions were introduced, intended to minimise the negative consequences for the civilian population by focusing on individuals, entities, and businesses. These targeted sanctions generally take the form of arms embargoes and trade restrictions; financial measures such as asset freezes; and travel bans.[12]

Until recently, these sanctions were primarily country-specific, addressing issues in relation to a particular state. Today, the use of thematic (or: horizontal) sanctions has gained much traction. Unlike country-specific sanctions, they focus on certain topics, such as human rights violations, cyber activities, chemical weapons, or acts of terrorism, without geographical limitations[13] allowing the listing of individuals regardless of their location or citizenship.

Sanctions imposed by the Security Council of the UN (UNSC) through a Security Council resolution have a clear legal basis and the broadest possible scope of application as the authority to impose sanctions derives from the UN Charter. It gives the UNSC the power to act when it has determined the existence of a threat to international peace and security,[14] whilst member states are obliged to carry out these sanctions resolutions.[15]

States and international organisations such as the EU can adopt sanctions legislation to implement the UN sanctions. Moreover, they can supplement these sanctions or impose sanctions in situations where no UN sanctions apply. Although

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[10] E.g. UN Doc A/HRC/48/59, 8 July 2021, Unilateral coercive measures: notion, types, and qualifications. Report of the Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights, Alena Douhan, para 19.

[11] Voetelink, "International Export Control Law – Mapping the field," 69-94.

[12] The Genocide Network, "Prosecution of sanctions (restrictive measures) violations in national jurisdictions: a comparative analysis, Expert Report," 8.

[13] Portela, "EU horizontal sanctions and the courts: Questions of interface," 32.

[14] Articles 39 and 41 of the UN Charter.

[15] Article 25 of the UN Charter.

some question the legality of these autonomous or unilateral sanctions,[16] they are common practice nowadays. Since Russia, as a permanent UNSC member, can veto any UNSC resolution, the UNSC is rendered powerless in the present conflict in Ukraine. As a result, the international community had to rely on autonomous sanctions to take action against Russia following its recognition of the self-proclaimed Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk and the armed attack on Ukraine.

2.2 Russia sanctions

Consequently, the EU, the G7 members, and like-minded states,[17] subjected Russia to an unprecedented and coordinated 'rolling program of intensifying sanctions.'[18] Partially building on the sanctions imposed on Russia since 2014,[19] they hit Russia with every possible sanction in the sanctions playbook, making it the most sanctioned state in the world today.[20]

According to the EU, UK, and the US, the ultimate target of the sanctions is Russia's war machine.[21] Therefore, they are designed to seriously weaken Russia's economic and financial base and limit its ability to continue to wage war against Ukraine.[22] Furthermore, the sanctions aim to impose economic and political costs on Russia's political elite responsible for the invasion.[23] Consequently, the sanction measures include the freeze of assets and travel bans, arms embargoes and other trade restrictions, and sanctions on specific sectors of the economy, including defence, energy, transport, and finance. The effect of the sanctions is strengthened as businesses are voluntarily exiting the Russian market.

The 15,000-plus sanctions (as of October 2023)[24] are shored up by a wide range of other measures. For example, the US has amended its export control laws, further

[16] As analysed in UN Doc A/HCR/48/59, July 8, 2021, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights, Alena Douhan, Unilateral coercive measures: notion, types, and qualification, para 68.

[17] *Inter alia*, Australia, Iceland, New Zealand, Norway, Singapore, South Korea, Switzerland, and Taiwan.

[18] Mills, "Sanctions against Russia," 15.

[19] Sanctions were imposed in response to the annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol and the ongoing destabilisation of eastern Ukraine.

[20] In March 2023, Russia was targeted by around 13,000 sanctions; Bergmann, Toygür, and Svendsen, "A continent forged in crisis: Assessing Europe one year into the war."

[21] EU-US-UK: Joint Statement on global food security and Russia sanctions by the High Representative of the European Union Josep Borrell, US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, and UK Foreign Secretary James Cleverly

[22] E.g. Mills, "EU sanctions against Russia explained," 53.

[23] Idem.

[24] Castellum, "Russia sanctions dashboard."

restricting the transfer of commodities, technology, and software to Russia. Moreover, several states have revoked, or are in the process of doing so, Russia's Most Favored Nation (MFN) status under the World Trade Organization (WTO) agreements,[25] which allows them to increase or impose new tariffs on Russian imports.[26]

As the success of autonomous sanctions depends not only on close coordination between allies but on enforcement as well, additional actions have been taken to coordinate and improve the implementation and enforcement of the Russia sanctions. In February 2022, the G7, the EU and Australia set up a transatlantic task force: the Russian Elites Proxies and Oligarchs (REPO) Task Force, to ensure the effective implementation of sanctions.[27] REPO operates closely with the Freeze and Seize Task Force established by the EU to coordinate the European sanctions.[28] Also, the European Commission has drafted a proposal to make a violation of an EU sanction an EU crime[29] in order to improve the uniform implementation and enforcement of EU sanctions across the EU.[30]

3. Effectiveness

The effectiveness of sanctions is usually defined as the extent to which the goals of the sanctions are achieved. Most authors consider sanctions to be 'successful' when they lead to a policy change, or at least a behavioural change in the target country.[31] In the 2000s there was a debate on the effectiveness of sanctions. Baldwin and Drezner described the 'sanctions paradox,' which entailed that scholars agreed that most sanctions were not bringing about the desired behavioural change, while at the same time, sanctions were often used by politicians.[32] Further, there was also disagreement about the term effectiveness itself. Some authors thought that sanctions were only successful if the target country adjusted its behavior in accordance with

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[25] The MFN status under the World Trade Organization agreements implies that states cannot discriminate between their trading partner and any favour granted to one country has to apply to all WTO-members.

[26] Mills, "EU sanctions against Russia explained," 26, 43, 56, 70, and 73.

[27] UK Government ministerial joint statement "Russian Elites, Proxies, and Oligarchs Task Force."

[28] European Commission, "Sanctions against Russian and Belarussian oligarchs."

[29] Under article 83(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU.

[30] EU Doc COM (2022) 684 final, 2022/0398 (COD), 2 December 2022, Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the definition of criminal offences and penalties for the violation of Union restrictive measures.

[31] Peksen, "When do imposed economic sanctions work? A critical review of the sanctions effectiveness literature," 636.

[32] Baldwin, "The sanctions debate and the logic of choice," 1-24.

all demands of the sending country.[33] Others also considered a settlement between the two parties, or some form of adjustment in the desired direction a success.[34]

Biersteker and Van Bergeijk state that the assessment of sanctions should not focus on behavioural change on the side of the target only. They explain that sanctions often have several goals. Hence, the effectiveness should be assessed based on these different goals.[35] Barber sets out three types of policy goals associated with sanctions. The primary objective of a sanction is to change the behaviour of a target country. The secondary objective has to do with the status and reputation of the country that is imposing the sanctions. A sanction has a signaling function toward other countries. For instance, imposing sanctions could give the impression that the sending country is a responsible member of the international community or could deter other countries from similar behaviour as the target country.[36] As a tertiary objective, a sanction could affect the functioning of the international system.[37]

In addition, Brzoska argues that measuring the success of a sanction solely by looking at its ability to cause policy change would give an incomplete representation.[38] Brzoska has proposed different levels of effectiveness to evaluate arms embargoes, sanctions, and counterterrorist financing measures.[39] First, he looks at a change in trade patterns, and then he evaluates whether a policy change is observed because of the embargo.[40] Secrieru also analysed the effect of the EU sanctions after the annexation of Crimea in 2014 on three levels: the impact of the sanctions on Russia's strategic objectives, operational goals, and tactical means.[41]
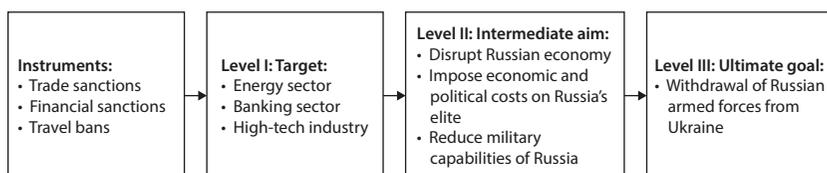
Figure 14.1: Effectiveness of arms embargoes

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[33] Pape, "Why economic sanctions do not work," 97.

[34] Hufbauer, Schott, Elliott, and Barbara Oegg, *Economic Sanctions Reconsidered: History and Current Policy,* 49-50.

[35] Biersteker and Bergeijk, "How and when do sanctions work? The evidence," 18.

[36] The Targeted Sanctions Initiative also evaluates sanctions by their ability to signal.

[37] Barber, "Economic sanctions as a policy instrument," 369-372.

[38] Brzoska, "The power and consequences of international sanctions," 2.

[39] Brzoska, "Measuring the effectiveness of arms embargoes," 2-3; Brzoska, "Consequences of assessments of effectiveness for counterterrorist financing policy," 913-914; Brzoska, "Research on the effectiveness of international sanctions," 143-160.

[40] Brzoska, "Measuring the effectiveness of arms embargoes," 2-3.

[41] Secrieru, "Have EU sanctions changed Russia's behavior in Ukraine?," 39.

In the next section, we follow these lines of thought and evaluate the effectiveness of the sanctions on three levels.[42] First, we evaluate whether the sanctions have an impact on the targeted sectors and have influenced trade patterns and international capital flows (Level I). Second, we discuss whether there is evidence that the Russian economy and military capabilities are affected (Level II). Sometimes it is unlikely that the target country will change its policy. In that case, it can be a goal to hinder the activities of that country by raising the costs of continuation.[43] An effect on the Russian economy and military capability means Russia is enduring higher costs.[44] The EU has stated that it wants to obstruct the Russian economy with sanctions to induce different behaviour on the Russian side.[45] Most sanctions try to change behaviour by inflicting economic pain on the target country.[46] Therefore, finally, we assess whether the sanctions can achieve the ultimate goal of coercing Russia to cease its actions in Ukraine (Level III).

4. Analysis of the effectiveness of the Russian sanctions

4.1 Level-I assessment

The economic sanctions imposed are primarily aimed at three important business sectors: the energy, banking, and high-tech industries.

4.1.1. Energy sector

The Russian economy is highly dependent on the revenues from oil and gas exports. In the years before the invasion, it comprised about 60% of the total exports and almost half of the government budget. At the time of the invasion, Moscow supplied nearly 40% of the gas consumed by the EU and nearly one-third of crude oil. This gave Russia significant leverage over large importing countries such as the Netherlands, Germany, and Hungary, but it also created a major dependency for the country itself.[47]

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[42] The levels used in this paper are slightly different from the ones used by Brzoska. Brzoska defines Level III-effectiveness as initiator satisfaction, while in our chapter the effect on the economy and military capabilities plays a larger role.

[43] Biersteker and Van Bergeijk, "How and when do sanctions work? The evidence," 18-19.

[44] The Targeted Sanctions Initiative also evaluates sanctions by their ability to constrain resources.

[45] European Council, "EU sanctions against Russia explained."

[46] Lektzian and Souva, "An institutional theory of sanctions onset and success," 850.

[47] Hosoi and Johnson, "How to implement an EU embargo on Russian oil," 116.

In March 2022, the U.S. started to ban the import of Russian crude oil, liquified natural gas, and coal, and restricted U.S. investments in most Russian energy companies. The EU, particularly Germany, was at that stage against import restrictions to secure the energy supply. In December of that year, the G7 allies agreed to a cap that aims to limit the price of Russian crude oil to $60 per barrel or less. The EU went even beyond the cap by imposing a complete oil embargo.[48]

Despite their severity, the energy sanctions adopted so far have not significantly reduced Russia's revenues accruing from gas and oil exports. Instead, the EU alone has paid almost €100 billion for Russian fossil fuels since the start of the invasion.[49] The core problem is that sanctions were discussed for a long time, but actual restrictions on energy imports from Russia came very late. In most of 2022, therefore, less than 10% of the export value of Russian energy was under sanctions. The ongoing sanctions discussion against the world's most important gas exporter and second most important oil exporter has also driven up world market prices. Thus, although export volumes of Russian fossil fuels have decreased overall by about 20% compared to one year before, revenues have remained stable due to high world market prices.[50]

Meanwhile, the situation forced Russia to find new customers to fill the export gap left by the sanction-supporting countries. Especially China and India were eager to take their place. As a result of the increased Russian energy exports, the value of total exports to China increased in the first half of 2022 by nearly 50% and by approximately 228% to India.

Despite its Fortress Russia strategy, Russia has not succeeded completely in anticipating the financial sanctions by an international coalition of countries. The drastic measures targeting assets held abroad were unprecedented. They immobilised about $300 billion worth of assets – or almost half of the pre-war total of $643 billion – of the Central Bank of the Russian Federation, limiting the central bank's ability to aid the war effort and mitigate the impact of the sanctions.[51]

Immediately following the seizure of the international reserves, the ruble dropped by about 50% in value. However, this market reaction was very short-lived. By April 2022, the exchange rate returned gradually, almost to pre-invasion levels. While true that the ruble has strengthened, it is only because Moscow has made it difficult for Russian businesses and individuals to withdraw money and convert

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[48] Idem.

[49] Rácz, Spillner, and Wolff, "Why sanctions against Russia work," 52-55.

[50] Myllyvirta, Thieriot, Lietava, Uusivuori, Borgmästars, Tattari, Ulvan, Mykhailenko, and Ilas, "Financing Putin's War: Fossil fuel exports from Russia in the first six months of the invasion of Ukraine."

[51] Demertzis, Hilgenstock, McWilliams, Ribakova, and Tagliapietra. "How have sanctions impacted Russia?"

it to foreign currency. The contemporary strength of the ruble is predicated upon strict currency controls and a sharp plunge in imports, which has subsequently hurt several Russian industries.[52]

However, after an initial surge in demand for liquidity – driving deposit withdrawals and a short-lived collapse in the ruble – the Central Bank of Russia was able to stabilise the situation by hiking interest rates and imposing capital controls, while at the same time supplying banks with ample ruble liquidity. As a result of this intervention, a systemic crisis did not occur, and banks' ability to provide credit to the private sector remained intact. Thus, Russia was able to avoid spillovers into the real economy. In addition, the central bank required exporters to convert the majority of their revenues into rubles, as concerns over ruble weakness and foreign exchange liquidity subsided. Thus, the current ruble exchange rate is not merely a reflection of the value of the Russian economy's fundamentals. Rather, it is a testament to the fact that financial sanctions are isolating the ruble internationally.

4.1.2. Banking sector

As far as commercial banks are concerned, the several waves of financial sanctions on Russia's largest financial institutions have impacted about 80% of Russian banking sector assets.[53] These restrictions include: i) a full ban on transactions and the freezing of assets; ii) limitations on access to capital and financial markets; iii) restrictions on debt and equity; and iv) disconnection from the SWIFT financial messaging system.[54] Although the restrictions are fairly comprehensive overall, they do leave some important loopholes for cross-border transactions by these institutions. Specifically, restrictions are not implemented consistently across the most important financial markets and jurisdictions. For instance, the Gazprom bank, the third-largest bank in asset terms, was initially exempted from full-blocking sanctions because of its critical role in energy trade.

Being shut out of the SWIFT financial transfer system hurts trade. Although Moscow has developed Russian-backed rival technologies which operate independently of Western ones, these alternative payment systems are not popular enough to augment the loss of Russia's expulsion.

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[52] Idem. Rácz, Spillner, and Wolff, "Why sanctions against Russia work," 52-55.

[53] Demertzis, Hilgenstock, McWilliams, Ribakova, and Tagliapietra. "How have sanctions impacted Russia?"

[54] Nell, Hilgenstock, Dodonov, Pavytska, Shapoval, Vlasyuk, Pokryshka, Bilousova, and Ivanchuk, "One year of war: Sanctions impact assessment and action plan for 2023."

4.1.3. Tech industry

The international sanctions curb the exports of high-tech products, such as aircraft equipment or semiconductors, to Russia to curtail its military capabilities. For instance, Russia's military aviation program no longer benefits from the revenue and resupply of aviation trade.[55]

Various sanction packages are specifically designed to target the Russian high-tech industry; these measures include: (1) The sanctions list of companies operating within the defence sector of Russia, as well as individuals involved in military production, has been expanded. (2) The list of dual-use goods prohibited for export to Russia has been extended. (3) Existing trade licenses for exporting dual-use goods to Russia have been suspended.[56]

As a response to overcome the impacts on its military supply chain and to illicitly procure foreign technology, Russia is attempting to evade sanctions and export controls using a range of techniques, including front companies and fraudulent end-user licenses and exploring the options of alternative supplier countries such as China, Iran, Türkiye, Kazakhstan, and even North Korea to supply critical technologies such as drones.

4.2 Level-II assessment

4.2.1. Economic impact

From a macroeconomic perspective, Putin's war has resulted in a contraction of the Russian economy. However, during the early days of the war, the expectation was that this economic contraction would be sharp – by as much as 15%. Since then, those numbers have been heavily revised downwards by institutions such as the IMF, World Bank, and OECD, as the latest forecasts show a contraction of as little as 2 to 5% in 2022. Thus, sanctions have inflicted some pain on Russia's economy but have not caused widespread economic collapse in the short run.[57]

The explanation behind the moderate contraction is that Russia has spent years bracing itself for this situation. First, effective Russian economic policy prevented the economy from freefalling. The government provided support equivalent to 3% of GDP in the form of social benefits, tax breaks, subsidies for loans, and increasing

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[55] Rácz, Spillner, and Wolff, "Why sanctions against Russia work," 52-55.

[56] Nell, Hilgenstock, Dodonov, Pavytska, Shapoval, Vlasyuk, Pokryshka, Bilousova, and Ivanchuk, "One year of war: Sanctions impact assessment and action plan for 2023."

[57] Demertzis, Hilgenstock, McWilliams, Ribakova, and Tagliapietra. "How have sanctions impacted Russia?"

the minimum wage. Government consumption was also increased to compensate for the big drop in investment and private consumption. Second, the current account has improved dramatically in the first year of the sanction imposition because of shrinking imports and high prices for the main export goods. The balance-of-payments dynamics suggest that Russia might be able to rebuild reserves quite quickly, undermining the effectiveness of sanctions. Finally, a very swift and sizeable intervention by the Russian Central Bank stabilised the exchange rate and provided liquidity to the banking system. This prevented the economic crisis from turning into a financial crisis that would have put the economy into a self-fulling negative spiral.[58]

Nevertheless, in the medium to long term, potential growth is expected to be very low, as Russia has shifted spending from investment to its military, lost access to key technologies, and diminished its human capital due to brain drain, while multinational corporations have fled Putin's Russia. According to estimates, over 1,000 global companies have curtailed or suspended operations in Russia. These companies represent with their revenues about 40% of the Russian GDP and around one million jobs. A brain drain accompanies the company exodus. More than 500,000 Russians have already left the country, about 50% of whom have a high level of education or worked as skilled workers in the tech industry.[59] Moreover, in the coming years, the Russian deficit will widen sharply due to the rising costs of the war and missing oil and gas revenues, driving increased borrowing and withdrawals of the National Wealth Fund and causing more visible adverse effects on Russia's balance of payments.

4.2.2. Impact on military capabilities

The international sanctions have significant and long-lasting consequences on Russia's defence industrial base, which relies extensively on foreign-sourced items. Russia's defence industry is reliant on imported microelectronics. However, since the imposition of allied restrictions, Russia has had no access to imports from many global sources, and Russia has only been able to rely on Western-made parts and components that it stockpiled in advance, but these stocks are limited or depleted. Import substitutes cannot fully replace pre-2022 shipments of Western high-tech products. Russian defence companies are using various strategies to evade sanctions and ensure the flow of technological components needed for its military industry.[60]

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[58] Portela and Kluge, "Evaluating EU sanctions against Russia after the invasion of Ukraine."

[59] Rácz, Spillner, and Wolff, "Why sanctions against Russia work," 52-55.

[60] Demertzis, Hilgenstock, McWilliams, Ribakova, and Tagliapietra. "How have sanctions impacted Russia?"

By restricting Russia's access to advanced goods, technology, and services, the coalition of Western countries has degraded the Russian defence industry's ability to replace weapons destroyed in the war. The Russian military is reportedly cannibalising chips from dishwashers and refrigerators to fix their military hardware because they have run out of semiconductors. The Russian military-industrial complex is not able to replace foreign high-tech components in Russian armaments in the near term.[61] Major supply shortages for Russian forces in Ukraine, partly because of sanctions and export controls, force Russia to turn to less technologically advanced countries.

4.2.3. Alternative suppliers

A large part of the world does not condemn Russia for its aggression against Ukraine. According to Demertzis et al. (2022), most of the world's total population is either neutral or endorses Russian aggression.[62] This is of great significance because it indicates that many countries are not necessarily willing to isolate Russia by helping to enforce sanctions and stop economic ties with Russia. Some of Russia's neighbours have acted as middlemen, importing Western goods and then sending them on to Russia. Moscow has additionally pursued alternative trade supply routes from places like China, India, Turkey, and Kazakhstan.

The crucial question for Russia is whether it will be able to substitute for the lack of imports from the sanctioning countries in the medium term. Apart from China and India, all other countries in the top ten largest economies subscribed to the sanctions. China and India are thus the natural trading partners for Russia. Doubts persist about whether rising Chinese and Indian imports can substantially replace critical technologies from sanctioning countries. Thus, the sanctions are impactful by weakening Russia's economic base and, in particular, preventing access to critical technologies. The concrete industrial consequences of the sanctions and their consequences for Russia's war-fighting capability can be observed particularly well in the vehicle and weapons industries.

4.3 Level III-assessment

So far, the economic sanctions have failed to stop Russia's aggression in Ukraine, which is the ultimate goal of the sanctions. It may create the perception that sanctions have not been effective in doing economic harm to Russia or undermining its capacity to continue the war in Ukraine. The confusion around the effectiveness of sanctions

[61] Idem.

[62] Idem.

ultimately stems from a lack of clarity about their subordinate goals. Sanctions supporters argue that the punishments are not only designed to crush Russia's economy or force Putin out of Ukraine. They stress the signaling function of sanctions that sends the message that violating international norms and invading a democratic neighbour will be met with a strong coalition response. Other proponents argue that the effectiveness of the penalties should be measured over years rather than months.

Besides, the sanctions imposed after the Russian invasion of Ukraine could still deter other countries like China from undermining the sanctions. The sanctions may also deter China from carrying out its own aggressive acts against Taiwan. As for effectiveness, the sanctions have proven among the most powerful in modern history, mainly because so many countries have gone along with them.[63]

5. Conclusion

The answer to the question of whether the sanctions against Russia have reached their ultimate goal is somewhat inconclusive. The effects we currently observe might be different from the effects in the long run. Further, it is not fully clear if the sanctions only have one goal (military withdrawal of Russia from Ukraine, hindering the Russian funding of the conflict) or have multiple (i.e., signaling international norms or deterring any future actions of adversary states). If multiple goals exist next to each other, the relationship between the different goals is not obvious.

Nevertheless, we can draw some important lessons from the current sanction episode. First, based on existing academic and policy literature, it is expected that sanctions are most effective when they are unexpected and unanticipated. However, since Russia had already prepared itself for possible sanctions after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the current sanctions might impede on their short run effectiveness. However, the current expectation is that the Russian economy will by now start to feel the harm of the sanctions. This will also be reflected in the military capabilities in the near future of the Russian armed forces. This sanction revolution might therefore shift the paradigm in the literature by not only focusing on the short run effect, but also the long run implications. Second, it is often argued that countries only support sanctions that do not harm themselves or only a little. However, in this case, many EU countries had to deal with extraordinary energy prices and inflation due to the war and the subsequent sanctions because of the connectedness of the economies due to the trade in oil and gas. Finally, the current political debate centres on whether the scope of the sanctions should be widened to also cover countries that help Russia evade the primary sanctions. This step

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[63] Hufbauer and Hogan, "How effective are sanctions against Russia?"

would be a real sanction revolution as these kinds of sanctions are not taken often. Meanwhile, one should not forget that the sanctions currently imposed on Russia lack a universal character (such as is the case with UN sanctions). Hence, there are many countries that did not feel obliged to impose sanctions on Russia or that are in fact increasing trade with Russia. So, the question of whether the sanctions are effective can perhaps only be answered with more certainty in the coming years.

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NATO Members' Burden Sharing Behaviour in the Aftermath of Russia's Annexation of Crimea, 2014-2021

Marion Bogers & Robert Beeres

Abstract

In 2014, NATO condemned Russia's primary acts of aggression against Ukraine in the Crimea region, whilst firmly supporting Ukrainian sovereignty. NATO took several steps in response to the changed security environment. By July 2014, economic sanctions were in place and, by 2016, battlegroups to enhance its forward presence were employed in Eastern Europe. In February 2022, these actions did not prevent Russia from invading Ukraine. To learn about mutual threat perceptions and ideas on counter-threat, this chapter examines and compares NATO member states' individual contributions to counter Russian threats. We aim to provide insights into how NATO members shared the burden of actions against Russian threats upon the annexation of the Crimea from 2014 until 2021. Our analysis includes NATO members' defence spending, including contributions to Enhanced Forward Presence, the Baltic Air Policing mission and endeavours to reduce dependency on Russian gas and oil. Our findings show NATO members responded heterogeneously to the changed security environment. For instance, whereas some decreased their Russian gas imports, other members did the opposite. Although most member states did increase their defence spending, the levels varied.

Keywords: NATO, Burden sharing, Military expenditure, Enhanced Forward Presence, Baltic Air Policing, Russian energy, Responsibility sharing

1. Introduction

Since the establishment of NATO, in 1949, the burden sharing question has been central to allied political discussions.[1] Most burden sharing debates revolve around defence spending, the United States accusing Europe of spending too little on defence. Usually, it is a combination of burden sharing determinants that

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[1] Bogers, Beeres, and Bollen,"NATO burden sharing research," 534; Haesebrouck, "NATO burden sharing after the Wales summit," 637.

explains the contributions of NATO member states. A low threat perception often goes hand in hand with less domestic support for higher defence spending. In times of conflict, governments tend to raise defence spending.[2] In times of peace, when national security does not play an important role on voter choice, governments tend to invest less money in defence.

In 2014, NATO's members collectively condemned Russia's primary acts of aggression against Ukraine in the Crimea region, and firmly supported Ukraine's sovereignty. NATO took several steps in response to the changed security environment. At the Wales summit in 2014, NATO members agreed to move their defence spending towards 2 per cent of their gross domestic product (GDP) within a decade. Facing Russian threat, NATO states also collaborated on additional dimensions. By July 2014, economic sanctions were in place and, by 2016, NATO deployed battlegroups to enhance its forward presence in the Eastern European region. Ultimately, in February 2022, these actions proved unable to prevent Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Did some NATO members fail in the follow up to Russia's annexation of the Crimea? Would the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 have been prevented if NATO Europe invested more in the military instead of doing business with Russia? These questions are difficult to answer, as it is difficult to predict the Russian response to other policies. However, we can examine and compare NATO member states' individual actions after Russia's annexation of Crimea and learn more about their burden sharing behaviour, threat perception and ideas on counter-threat.

However, to construct a meaningful narrative on burden sharing, one needs to understand that states do not always have the same threat perception, nor do they agree on any one scenario pursuing shared strategies.[3] After Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 each NATO member made its own tradeoff between 'guns and butter.' Some members substantially increased their defence spending, other members' defence spending only increased to a limited extent. And, although Germany expressed concerns about Russia's annexation of Crimea and took part in the European sanctions against Russia, Germany decided to continue the Baltic Sea gas pipeline deal. German politicians justified these actions referring to a policy known as *Wandel durch Handel* (i.e., Change through Trade) arguing that economic exchange would help Russia to become less authoritarian and more democratic. After Russia invaded Ukraine the President of the Federal Republic of Germany Frank-Walter Steinmeier stated that Germany was wrong about this policy.[4]

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[2] George and Sandler, "NATO defense demand, free riding, and the Russo-Ukrainian war in 2022," 795-800; Kim, and Sandler, "NATO at 70," 406-411.

[3] Bogers, Beeres, and Bollen, "Burden-sharing for global cooperation on safety and security," 31.

[4] Deutsche Welle, "German President Steinmeier admits mistakes over Russia."

This chapter aims to provide insight into how NATO members shared both military and non-military burdens regarding actions against Russian threats upon the annexation of the Crimea from 2014 until 2021. To this end, we examine each member states' defence spending during this period. As using an indicator focused solely on expenditure provides no insight into the deployability and efficiency of member states' defence systems, we apply output measures as well. To this end, we incorporate member states' troop contributions to Enhanced Forward Presence and the Baltic Air Policing mission. Finally, we find, studying NATO member states' burden sharing behaviour solely in military terms does not account for political and societal complexities at the core of security. Therefore, in our research, we measure how far member states have been able to reduce their import and export dependencies on energy trade with the Russian Federation.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. The next section draws on burden sharing theory. We elaborate on selected measures to express burden sharing behaviour amongst NATO members over the relevant period. In the third section we present our research methodology. Section four presents and discusses NATO's burden sharing behaviour. Finally, section five concludes our chapter.

2. Operational burden sharing

Cimbala and Forster define burden sharing as the distribution of costs and risks among members of a group in the process of accomplishing a common goal.[5] Dependent on the common goal, burden sharing can be operationalised differently in diverse contexts. Given the research goal, it is possible to narrow the focus of the burden down to, for instance, military expenditures within a military alliance.[6] Of course, while investigating national contributions to international safety and security, the focus can be broadened, for example, to encompass foreign aid, combatting terrorist finance, carbon dioxide reduction and refugee protection, amongst others.[7]

In this chapter, we focus on the common goal: the deterrence by NATO members of Russian aggression regarding annexation of Crimea, from 2014 until 2021. Given this perspective we find three dimensions relevant to analyse the allies' burden sharing behaviour in response to the changed security environment upon the annexation of Crimea. First, the increase in military expenditures over the period 2014-2021. At the Wales Summit 2014, all NATO members pledged to increase

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[5] Cimbala and Forster. *Multinational Military Intervention*, 320

[6] Becker and Malesky, "The continent or the "grand large"?," 164.

[7] Bogers, Beeres, and Bollen, "Burden-sharing for global cooperation on safety and security,"28.

their defence spending to at least 2 per cent over the next decade; second, the contributions towards the Enhanced Forward Presence and Baltic Air Policing missions and, finally, the decrease in use of Russian energy from 2014. At the time, Secretary General Rasmussen, in the context of the Crimean annexation, urged NATO members to turn energy diversification into a strategic transatlantic priority to reduce Europe's dependency on Russian gas and oil.[8]

3. Research methods

In this section we provide an overview of the parameters used for measuring the three dimensions introduced in the previous section. These parameters are selected based on:
1)   literature regarding burden sharing[9]
2)   availability of reliable data underlying the parameters[10]

Table 15.1 summarises the parameters to express the burden sharing behavior of NATO members. Furthermore, Table 15.1 extends an overview concerning the period of data collection, data sources, and the tables that hold the results.

Parameters	Period	Source	Table
Defense expenditures as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP)	2014-2021	NATO (2023a); SIPRI (2023)	2
Contributions to Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP)	2017-2022	IISS (2023); NATO (2023b)	3
Contributions to Air Policing mission	2014-2021	IISS (2022); Janes (2021); NATO (2019a,b,c; 2020a,b,c,d,e; 2021a,b, c); The Baltic Times (2021); Werkman (2023)	4
Imports of Natural Gas from Russia	2014-2021	Eurostat (2023a); EIA (2023a),	5
Import of oil and petroleum from Russia	2014-2021	Eurostat (2023b); EIA (2023b); Canada Energy Regulator (2023)	6

Table 15.1: Summary of parameters

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[8]   NATO. "NATO's energy security agenda."

[9]   Bogers, Beeres, and Bollen, "NATO burden sharing research along three paradigms," 4-6,

[10]   Bogers, Beeres, and Bollen, "Burden-sharing for global cooperation on safety and security,"34-38; Chalmers, *Sharing Security*; Zyla, "Who is free-riding in NATO's peace operations in the 1990s?," 416-441.

4. Results

In this section an analysis of empirical findings aims to provide insight into the burden sharing behaviour displayed by 31 NATO members and 2 NON-NATO (Finland and Sweden) member states regarding their actions after the annexation of Crimea by Russia. We will do so according to each dimension and corresponding measure presented in Table 15.1.

4.1 Defense expenditures

Table 15.2 presents an overview of the defence expenditures of the NATO allies. In 2014, Greece, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US) spent more than 2 per cent of their GDP on defence. Several states (Croatia, Estonia, France, Poland) came very close to the 2 per cent goal. Belgium, Czechia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain spent less than 1 per cent of their GDP on defence in 2014. Seven years later nine states spent more than 2 per cent on defence. In 2021, Luxembourg is the only NATO member to spend less than 1 per cent of its GDP on defence.

Table 15.2 also reveals that all states, except the US, have increased their defence spending as a percentage of national income after the annexation of Crimea. The last two columns show to what extent a state has increased its spending. East European states Latvia (128.8 per cent), Lithuania (130.8 per cent), Hungary (96.6 per cent), Slovakia (75.5 per cent) and Southern European state Greece (61.7 per cent) have increased their spending the most. Portugal (1.6 per cent), Albania (4.4 per cent) and the UK (5.6 per cent) show the lowest increase, and in the case of the US (-4.0 per cent) there is a decline.

In 2021, there are states that still spend less than 1.5 per cent of their GDP on defence. Until Russia's invasion in Ukraine in 2022 those states seemed not to be in a hurry to meet the 2 per cent goal. Since Russia's invasion in Ukraine many member states have committed to invest more in defence at a faster pace. The Netherlands expects to reach the 2 per cent goal in 2024-2025,[11] Germany in 2025,[12] Denmark in 2023,[13] and Czechia in 2024.[14] There are also states that expect not to meet the NATO goal in 2024. Italy expects to reach it in 2028,[15] Spain in 2029.[16] Finally, Portugal does not expect to reach the goal in this decade.[17]

[11] Rijksoverheid, "Voldoen aan de NAVO-norm van 2%."

[12] The Defence Post, "Germany says will reach NATO spending target by 2025."

[13] Reuters, "Denmark to boost defence spending and phase out Russian gas."

[14] Reuters, "Czech Senate backs setting NATO spending target of 2% of GDP as law."

[15] Reuters, "Denmark to boost defence spending and phase out Russian gas."

[16] AP News, "Spain boosts military spending to close gap with NATO goal."

[17] Governo da República Portuguesa, "NATO Summit 'started off in the best manner.'"

Country	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Change 2014-21 (%)	Rank
Albania	1.35	1.16	1.10	1.11	1.16	1.28	1.32	1.41	4.4	29
Belgium	0.97	0.91	0.89	0.88	0.89	0.89	1.02	1.07	10.2	25
Bulgaria	1.31	1.25	1.24	1.22	1.45	3.13	1.60	1.62	23.3	17
Canada	1.01	1.20	1.16	1.44	1.30	1.30	1.44	1.36	34.7	12
Croatia	1.82	1.76	1.60	1.64	1.55	1.61	1.71	2.16	18.5	19
Czechia	0.94	1.02	0.95	1.03	1.10	1.18	1.30	1.40	48.9	6
Denmark	1.15	1.11	1.15	1.14	1.28	1.28	1.38	1.40	21.8	18
Estonia	1.93	2.03	2.07	2.01	2.02	2.05	2.35	2.16	11.7	23
Finland	1.45	1.45	1.42	1.35	1.36	1.35	1.53	2.03	39.8	10
France	1.82	1.78	1.79	1.78	1.81	1.82	2.00	1.93	6.0	27
Germany	1.19	1.19	1.20	1.23	1.25	1.35	1.53	1.49	25.2	15
Greece	2.22	2.31	2.40	2.38	2.54	2.45	2.91	3.59	61.7	5
Hungary	0.86	0.90	1.00	1.19	1.01	1.34	1.78	1.69	96.6	3
Iceland	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Italy	1.14	1.07	1.18	1.20	1.23	1.17	1.60	1.54	35.1	11
Latvia	0.94	1.03	1.44	1.59	2.06	2.02	2.20	2.16	128.8	2
Lithuania	0.88	1.14	1.48	1.71	1.97	2.00	2.08	2.03	130.8	1
Luxembourg	0.37	0.42	0.38	0.50	0.50	0.54	0.58	0.54	46.0	7
Montenegro	1.50	1.40	1.42	1.34	1.37	1.33	1.73	1.63	8.7	26
Netherlands	1.15	1.13	1.16	1.15	1.22	1.32	1.41	1.45	26.1	13
North Macedonia	1.09	1.05	0.97	0.89	0.94	1.16	1.25	1.54	41.0	9
Norway	1.55	1.59	1.74	1.72	1.73	1.86	2.00	1.74	12.3	21
Poland	1.86	2.22	1.99	1.89	2.02	1.98	2.24	2.34	25.8	14
Portugal	1.31	1.33	1.27	1.24	1.34	1.37	1.43	1.43	1.6	30
Romania	1.35	1.45	1.41	1.72	1.81	1.84	2.03	1.95	45.2	8
Slovakia	0.99	1.11	1.12	1.11	1.23	1.71	1.95	1.73	75.5	4
Slovenia	0.97	0.93	1.00	0.98	1.01	1.06	1.06	1.22	25.1	16
Spain	0.92	0.93	0.81	0.91	0.93	0.91	1.00	1.03	12.0	22
Sweden	1.13	1.07	1.05	1.02	1.03	1.09	1.16	1.28	13.4	20
Turkey	1.45	1.38	1.45	1.51	1.82	1.85	1.86	1.60	10.3	24
UK	2.13	2.01	2.06	2.06	2.08	2.06	2.30	2.25	5.6	28
US	3.72	3.52	3.52	3.31	3.29	3.52	3.72	3.57	- 4.0	31

Sources: NATO (2023a); SIPRI (2023)

Table 15.2: Defence expenditure (as a percentage of GDP)

4.2 Contributions to the Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP)

During the Warsaw summit in 2016, NATO members decided to respond to Russian threat to security in the Baltic region. NATO enhanced its presence in 2017 in the eastern part of Europe with four multinational battle groups, led by the UK (stationed in Estonia), the US (stationed in Poland), Germany (stationed in Lithuania) and Canada (stationed in Latvia). Other states contributed to the four battle groups. After Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, NATO members agreed to establish four more multinational battlegroups in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia. These four battlegroups are led by Italy, Hungary, France, and Czechia. According to NATO the eight battlegroups demonstrate the alliance's solidarity, determination, and ability to respond to any Russian aggression.[18]

Country	AVG 2017-21 (troops)	REL 2017-21** (%)	Rank	ABS 2022 (troops)	REL 2022** (%)	Rank
Albania	20	0.69	12	51	2.17	10
Belgium	106	1.08	8	249	2.93	3
Bulgaria*	0	0.00	21	803	4.72	2
Canada	481	2.09	1	639	2.84	4
Croatia	147	1.35	3	64	0.58	18
Czechia	95	0.74	11	349	2.37	7
Denmark	83	1.09	7	217	2.71	5
Estonia*	0	0.00	21	0	0.00	23
Finland	0	0.00	21	0	0.00	23
France	236	0.21	18	769	0.67	17
Germany	560	0.90	9	1315	2.09	11
Greece	0	0.00	21	0	0.00	23
Hungary*	0	0.00	21	710	6.79	1
Iceland***	2			3		
Italy	176	0.18	19	250	0.27	20
Latvia*	0	0.00	21	0	0.00	23
Lithuania*	0	0.00	21	0	0.00	23
Luxembourg	6	0.85	10	6	1.46	13
Montenegro	5	0.41	15	11	0.86	15
Netherlands	257	1.47	2	395	2.57	6

[18] NATO. "Italian Air force deploys Eurofighter in support of enhanced air policing."

Country	AVG 2017-21 (troops)	REL 2017-21** (%)	Rank	ABS 2022 (troops)	REL 2022** (%)	Rank
North Macedonia	0	0.00	21	9	0.11	22
Norway	111	1.32	4	188	2.27	8
Poland*	176	0.28	17	407	0.70	16
Portugal	0	0.00	21	0	0.00	23
Romania*	120	0.34	16	120	0.34	19
Slovakia*	81	1.15	5	152	1.48	12
Slovenia	46	0.65	13	143	2.23	9
Spain	322	0.46	14	504	0.70	16
Sweden	0	0.00	21	0	0.00	23
Turkey	0	0.00	21	0	0.00	23
UK	936	1.11	6	1122	1.34	14
US	809	0.17	20	1165	0.25	21

Sources: IISS (2023); NATO (2023)

*Notes: AVG is Average; REL is relative; ABS is absolute; *the multinational battlegroups are stationed in Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia; ** the relative troop contribution is calculated by dividing the EFP contribution by the number of active army forces of the relevant country; *** Iceland has no army.*

Table 15.3: Contributions to Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP) 2017-2022

Table 15.3 shows states contributions to EFP for the period 2017-2021 and year 2022. During the period 2017-2021 battlegroup leaders Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States contributed most troops to EFP in absolute terms. In relative terms Canada, the Netherlands, and Croatia carried most of the burden. NATO members Greece, North Macedonia, Portugal, and Turkey contributed no troops during this period. The 'o' contributions of eastern Europe states can be explained by the fact that they share a border with Russia. After Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022 most countries raised their contributions to EFP. In absolute terms Bulgaria, Germany, the UK and the US contributed most troops. In relative terms Hungary, Bulgaria and Belgium contributed the most. Over the period 2017-2022 NATO members Greece, Portugal and Turkey have not contributed to EFP.

4.3 Contributions to the Baltic Air Policing mission

When the Baltic States joined NATO in 2004 a NATO Air Policing capability was established in Lithuania at Šiauliai Air Base with the intent to defend NATO territory and in particular the Baltic airspace against intruders. The Baltic states do not possess the necessary air policing capability, so other NATO members cover their airspace on a rotating basis. After Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, a second Air Policing capability was established at Ämari Air Base, Estonia. NATO states also deployed additional aircrafts to Poland, and augmented the capabilities of the Romanian and Bulgarian air forces.[19] NATO states contribute voluntarily to the Baltic Air Policing mission. The mission is a collective task and involves the continuous presence of fighter aircraft and crew, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.[20]

Country	Number of rotations per year								Total	Rank	Capability 2021
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021			
Albania	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	0
Belgium	0	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	8	1	53
Bulgaria	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	14
Canada	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	7	110
Croatia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	8
Czechia	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	7	14
Denmark	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	4	5	52
Estonia*	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	0
Finland	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	62
France	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	4	5	208
Germany	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	7	2	138
Greece	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	231
Hungary	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	6	14
Iceland	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	0
Italy	0	2	0	0	1	0	1	3	7	2	148
Latvia*	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	0
Lithuania*	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	0

[19] NATO, "Germany to fly NATO Air Policing sorties out of Estonia."

[20] NATO, "NATO Air Policing: securing Allied airspace."

Country	Number of rotations per year								Total	Rank	Capability 2021
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021			
Luxembourg	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	0
Montenegro	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	0
Netherlands	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	6	82
North Macedonia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	0
Norway	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	7	66
Poland	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	6	3	94
Portugal	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	4	5	30
Romania	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	39
Slovakia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	11
Slovenia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	0
Spain	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	7	2	172
Sweden (NON-NATO)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	96
Turkey	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	7	306
UK	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	5	4	167
US	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	6	1316

Sources: IISS (2022); Janes (2021); NATO (2019a,b,c; 2020a,b,c,d,e; 2021a,b,c); The Baltic Times (2021); Werkman (2023).
*Notes: *the air forces of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania contribute to the Baltic Air Policing mission with host nation support.*

Table 15.4: Contributions to the Baltic Air Policing Mission 2014-2021

Table 15.4 presents NATO members' contributions to the Baltic Air Policing mission. It provides an overview of the number of rotations per state during the period 2014-2021. The last column gives an indication of states' capability to contribute, showing the number of fighter and fighter ground attack aircraft by country. The last column reveals that nine states do not have the capability to contribute to the Air Policing mission. Of the states that possess the required capabilities, Belgium, Germany, Italy and Spain show the most active behaviour by doing seven or eight rotations during the period 2014-2021. Canada, Greece and Turkey have the required capacity to contribute, but with respectively zero and one rotation they dangle at the bottom. Greece takes responsibility with Italy to cover Western Balkans airspace, as

both states keep fighter jets ready 24/7 for this NATO air policing mission. Slovenia's airspace is permanently covered by Hungary and Italy.[21]

4.4 Energy imports from Russia

In 2021, Russia was the world's leading exporter of gas, exporting 201.7 billion cubic metres of gas via pipelines and 39.6 billion cubic meters of liquefied natural gas.[22] Russia is also the third largest producer of oil behind the US and Saudi Arabia.[23] The Russian oil and gas industry accounted for around 17 per cent of Russia's GDP in 2021. In 2014, NATO Secretary General Rasmussen stated, 'We must make energy diversification a strategic transatlantic priority and reduce Europe's dependency on Russian energy.'[24] With this statement he declared that energy security was a strategic issue, which could have implications for NATO security. After this statement European states could have opted for more diversification of suppliers to become less dependent on Russia. We consider actions to become less dependent on Russian gas a burden for European states. In this section we analyse to what extent NATO member states responded to the Rasmussen call and managed to reduce their gas imports from Russia.

Country	Import in million cubic metres				Import as a percentage of total gas import		Change 2014-2021	
	AVG 2014-18	2019	2020	2021	2021 (%)	Rank		
Albania	0	0	0	0	0%	1	-	-
Belgium	767	3903	3020	2546	12%	5	*	↑
Bulgaria	3033	2342	2201	2627	80%	18	-2%	↓
Canada	0	0	0	0	0%	1	-	-
Croatia	0	0	0	0	0%	1	-	-
Czechia	7783	9508	7590	8719	100%	19	33%	↑
Denmark	0	0	0	0	0%	1	-	-
Estonia	509	481	207	58	11%	4	-89%	↓
Finland	2634	2517	1730	1922	75%	16	-37%	↓
France	7639	10542	7635	9923	22%	7	66%	↑

[21] NATO, "NATO Air Policing: securing Allied airspace."

[22] Statista, "Leading gas exporting countries in 2021, by export type (in billion cubic meters)."

[23] IEA [International Energy Agency], "Frequently asked questions on energy security."

[24] NATO, "NATO's energy security agenda."

Country	Import in million cubic metres				Import as a percentage of total gas import		Change 2014-2021	
	AVG 2014-18	2019	2020	2021	2021 (%)	Rank		
Germany	48937	46250	52464	55443	65%	14	49%	↑
Greece	2484	1686	2305	2604	41%	11	52%	↑
Hungary	7765	11086	7539	7105	95%	19	-16%	↓
Iceland	0	0	0	0	0%	1	-	-
Italy	28895	33449	28716	29171	40%	10	21%	↑
Latvia	1208	1354	1115	1187	100%		25%	↑
Lithuania	1630	1191	1196	887	37%	9	-64%	↓
Luxembourg	219	212	140	86	11%	4	-65%	↓
Montenegro	0	0	0	0	0%	1	-	-
Netherlands	10028	15832	15166	10731	35%	8	68%	↑
North Macedonia	200	292	334	423	100%	20	216%	↑
Norway	0	0	10	128	80%	18	*	↑
Poland	9734	9603	9558	10468	57%	13	17%	↑
Portugal	0	97	670	780	14%	6	*	↑
Romania	932	990	960	2766	78%	17	431%	↑
Slovakia	4466	6707	3675	3536	69%	15	-26%	↓
Slovenia	261	106	78	129	14%	6	-54%	↓
Spain	174	3168	3387	3220	9%	3	*	↑
Sweden	0	0	184	33	2%	2	*	↑
Turkey	26126	15196	16178	26342	45%	12	-2%	↓
UK	326	3180	NA	NA	NA	-	NA	-
US	0	0	0	0	0%	1	0%	-

Sources: Eurostat (2023a), EIA (2023a).
*Notes: *Belgium, Portugal, Spain, Norway and Sweden have been purchasing gas from Russia since respectively 2017, 2019, 2018 and 2020. Notes: AVG is average.*

Table 15.5: Import of Natural Gas from Russia by NATO members (million cubic metres)

Table 15.5 shows the absolute import of Russian gas by NATO members during the period 2014-2021 and the import of Russian gas as a percentage of a state's total gas import. The figures show that Germany, Italy and Turkey imported in absolute

terms most gas from Russia. For Czechia, Latvia and North Macedonia, Russia was the only gas supplier in 2021. Also, for Bulgaria (80 per cent), Finland (75 per cent), Hungary (95 per cent), Norway (80 per cent) and Romania (78 per cent) there was little import diversification, and the import of Russian gas supply was above 75 per cent. We also compared states' absolute import figures in 2014 with states' absolute import figures in 2021. These figures show that nine states were able to decrease their gas imports from Russia during the period 2014-2021 and fifteen states increased their gas imports. Except for Latvia, Poland and Romania, all Eastern European states were able to decrease their gas imports. Large consumers of Russian gas, Germany and Italy, increased their gas imports with respectively 49 per cent and 21 per cent. Other Western European states, Belgium, France, and the Netherlands also increased their imports. Turkey was able to decrease its gas import at 2 per cent.

Country	Absolute contribution				Import from Russia as a percentage of total import		Change 2014-2021	
	AVG 2014-18	2019	2020	2021	2021	Rank		
Albania	13	52	87	74	7%	5	*	
Belgium	17058	14062	11708	11770	20%	13	-30%	↓
Bulgaria	5389	5037	572	662	10%	8	-89%	↓
Canada	21	1320	376	493	1%	2	380%	↑
Croatia	777	365	393	266	6%	4	-75%	↓
Czechia	3963	3843	3027	3429	31%	17	-18%	↓
Denmark	3110	1261	1736	1696	17%	12	-31%	↓
Estonia	469	534	715	803	39%	19	180%	↑
Finland	12213	13246	11243	8651	64%	22	-24%	↓
France	13030	12087	10156	11510	15%	11	-15%	↓
Germany	39302	33795	34902	34592	29%	16	-5%	↓
Greece	7563	6665	8244	6647	20%	13	-22%	↓
Hungary	5200	5381	4293	4060	41%	20	-34%	↓
Iceland	6	5	0	NA	NA			
Italy	11157	11712	8184	8374	12%	10	37%	↑
Latvia	530	433	402	448	24%	15	29%	↑
Lithuania	7453	8018	6155	7025	76%	23	0%	

Country	Absolute contribution				Import from Russia as a percentage of total import		Change 2014-2021	
	AVG 2014-18	2019	2020	2021	2021	Rank		
Luxembourg	0	0	0	0	0%	1	0%	
Montenegro	0	1	3	4	1%	2	*	
Netherlands	43397	33510	27246	32850	23%	14	-9%	↓
North Macedonia	17	33	26	5	0%	1	-58%	↓
Norway	967	1178	961	988	12%	10	100%	↑
Poland	24074	22647	22223	20432	60%	21	-13%	↓
Portugal	2594	1710	571	800	6%	4	-39%	↓
Romania	4176	4656	3558	3745	33%	18	17%	↑
Slovakia	5621	5183	5712	5477	77%	24	3%	↑
Slovenia	209	745	520	110	3%	3	-57%	↓
Spain	6024	4113	4096	6764	9%	7	-28%	↓
Sweden	9649	6635	3475	2663	11%	9	-72%	↓
Turkey	8607	16661	9080	10961	22%	13	102%	↑
United Kingdom	8494	10484	NA	NA	NA		NA	
United States of America	15933	21727	22635	28124	8%	6	104%	↑

Sources: Eurostat (2023b), EIA (2023b), Canada Energy Regulator (2023)
*Notes: *Albania and Montenegro did not import oil and petroleum from Russia in 2014.*
Notes: AVG is average.

Table 15.6: Import of oil and petroleum from Russia by NATO members (thousand tonnes)

Table 15.6 shows the absolute import of oil and petroleum from Russia by NATO members during the period 2014-2021. It also shows the import of Russian oil and petroleum as a percentage of states' total import. The figures show that Germany, the Netherlands, the US and Poland imported in absolute terms most oil and petroleum from Russia. Finland (64 per cent), Lithuania (76 per cent), Slovakia (77 per cent) and Poland (60 per cent) show the highest import rates in 2021. Luxembourg (0 per cent), North-Macedonia (0 per cent), Canada (1 per cent) and Slovenia (3 per cent) have the lowest import rates. We also compared states' absolute import figures in 2014 with states' absolute import figures in 2021. These figures show that seventeen

states were able to decrease their imports and nine states increased their imports. Bulgaria (-89 per cent), Croatia (-75 per cent) and Sweden (-72 per cent) show the largest reductions and the figures of Canada (380 per cent), Estonia (180 per cent) and the US (104 per cent) show the most significant increase. Although Canada has not imported any Russian crude oil since 2019, its import of petroleum increased. Due to the low amount of petroleum purchased from Russia, this increase had less impact on the Russian treasury. Germany, the Netherlands and Poland, states with high absolute import figures, were only able to decrease their oil imports to a limited extent, respectively -5 per cent, -9 per cent and -13 per cent. The US doubled its import in the period 2014-2021.

4.5 Analysis

In this section we discuss the main findings of our research per European region. The US and Canada are not included in this analysis. Therefore, we only discuss NATO European members' reaction after the annexation of Crimea. Figure 15.1 synthesises the results of Tables 15.2-15.6 by using a map.
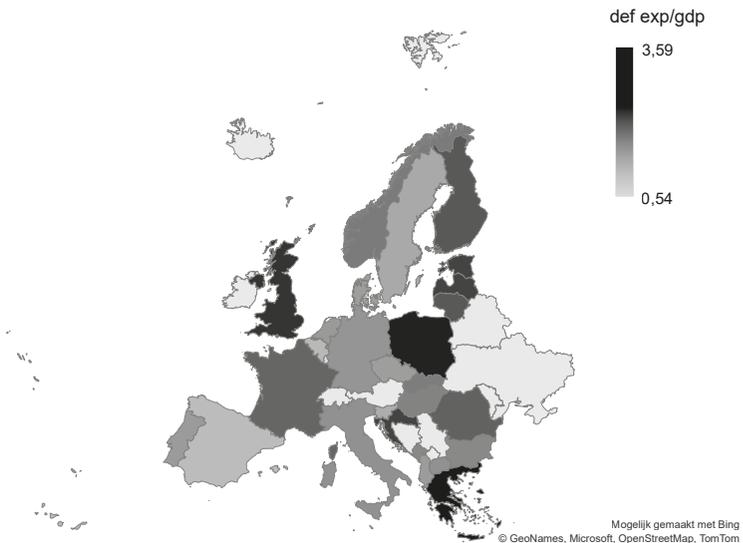
Figure 15.1a: Defence Expenditures as a percentage of GDP (%) 2021
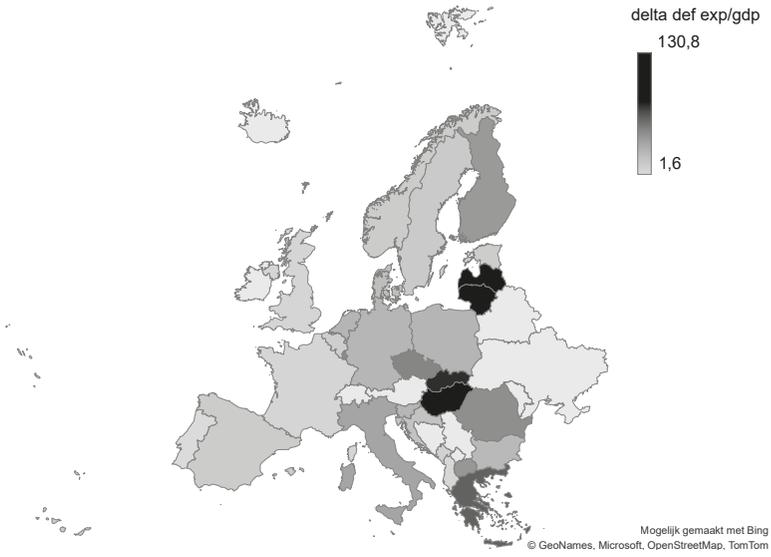
Figure 15.1b: Delta Defence Expenditures as a percentage of GDP 2014-2021 (%)
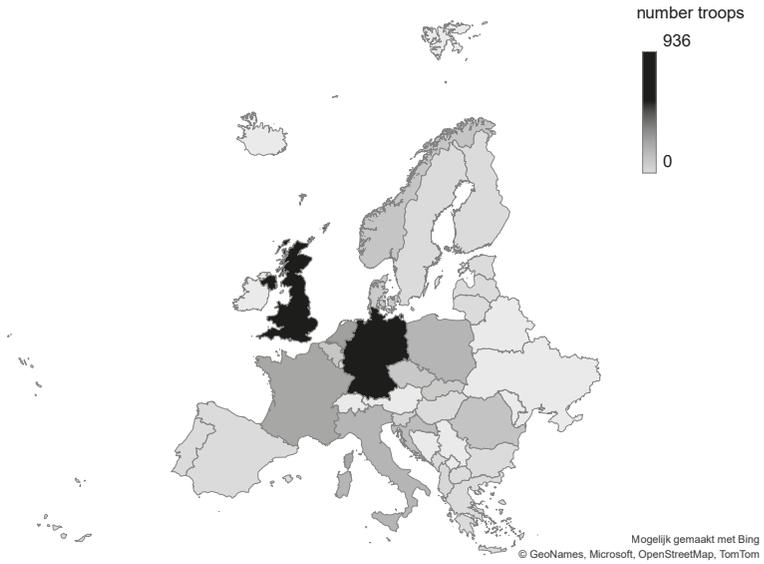
Figure 15.1c: Average contribution EFP 2017-2021
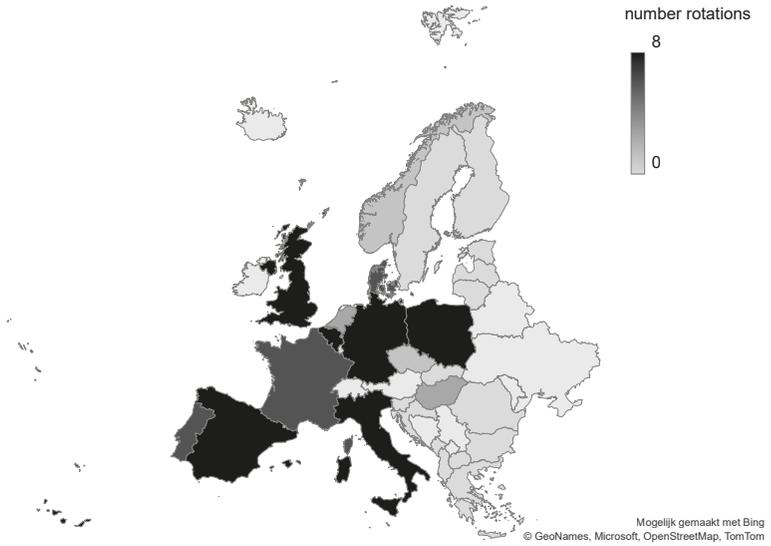
Figure 15.1d: Total contribution to Baltic Air Policing 2014-2021
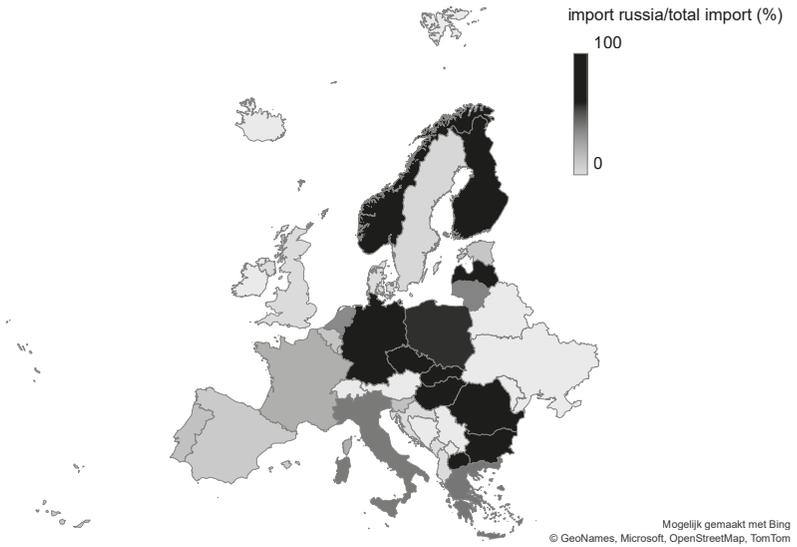
Figure 15.1e: Import gas from Russia as a percentage of total gas import 2021 (%)
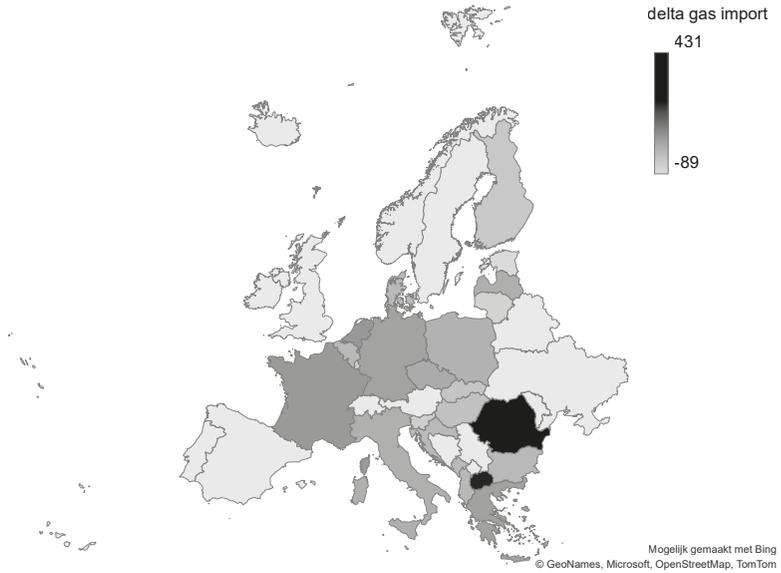
Figure 15.1f: Delta gas import from Russia 2014-2021
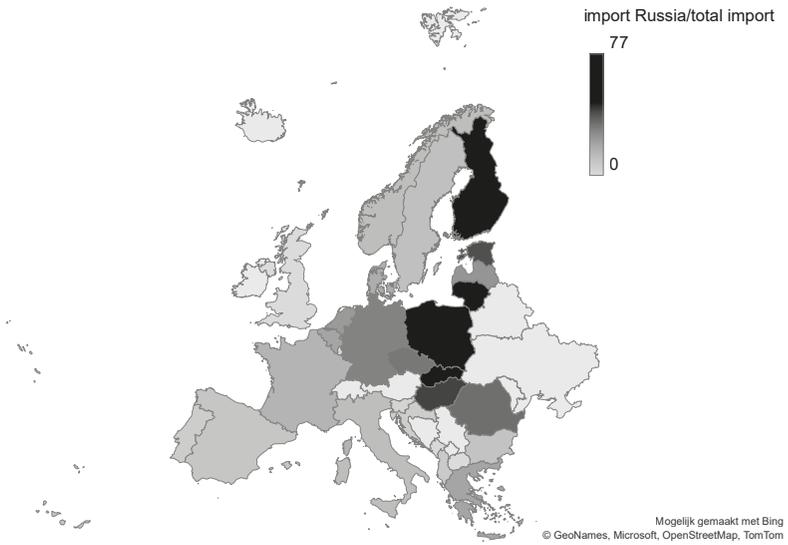
Figure 15.1g: Import oil from Russia as a percentage of total oil import 2021 (%)
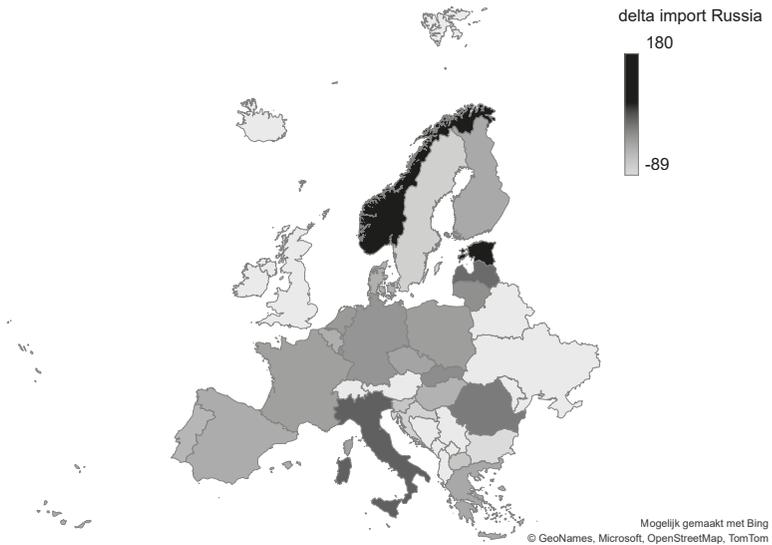
Figure 15.1h: Delta oil import from Russia 2014-2021 (%)

4.5.1 Eastern European contributions

Eastern European states (Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia) contributed 2 per cent of their GDP on defence in 2021 or increased their defence spending by more than 25 per cent after the annexation of Crimea. Five states decreased the import of natural gas from Russia and two states increased the gas import. Hungary and Latvia seem to be most dependent on Russian gas, as over 95 per cent of their import in 2021 still comes from Russia. The three Baltic states increased their oil import from Russia, and Poland, the largest importer of Russian oil, managed to slightly reduce its oil imports. In sum, after the annexation of Crimea, Eastern European states responded by spending considerably more on defence. Several states responded to the call of NATO Secretary General Rasmussen to reduce their imports of Russian energy, but not all states. We argue that Eastern European states' behaviour can be largely explained by their threat perception. They are probably more willing to invest in defence than other European states because of their proximity to Russia. The higher contributions of these states do not add much to NATO military strength but show each states' commitment to NATO in the hope that the US will protect them if necessary.

4.5.2 Western European contributions

Western European states (Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and the UK) also increased their defence spending although to a lesser extent. Only the UK already meets the 2 per cent NATO goal in 2021. Even though Western European states spend more money on defence after the annexation of Crimea it was not until Russia's invasion in 2022 that states pledged to substantially increase their defence spending towards the 2 per cent NATO goal. Spending less of their national income on defence does not imply that Western European states are not willing and able to contribute to the EFP and Baltic Air Policing mission. Most of the states are among the highest absolute contributors to both missions. After the call of NATO Secretary General Rasmussen to reduce dependency on Russian energy, most states increased the import of Russian gas and decreased the import of Russian oil. For Western European states it is easier to become less dependent on Russian oil than gas. Due to their geographical location and wealth, Western European states have enough possibilities to import oil from other oil producing states. Becoming less dependent on Russian gas seemed to be more challenging and expensive for some Western European states.

4.5.3 Southern European contributions

Southern European states (Portugal, Spain, and Italy) spend 1.50 per cent or less of their national income on defence. After the annexation of Crimea until 2021 Italy raised its defense spending by 35.1 per cent. Spain and Portugal increased their defence spending to a lesser extent. All three Southern European states do not expect to reach the 2 per cent NATO goal in 2024. Likewise, what goes for the Western European states also goes for the Southern European states. The contributions of Spain and Italy to both missions are above average, Portugal contributes no troops to Enhanced Forward Presence and performs in the middle of the rankings for the Baltic Air Policing mission showing less commitment and solidarity. All states increased their gas imports from Russia after the annexation of Crimea and Italy also increased its oil import.

4.5.4 Northern European contributions

Of all Northern European states (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden) only Finland spends 2 per cent of its GDP on defence, increasing its defence spending after the annexation of Crimea by over 25 per cent. In 2021, Sweden and Denmark spent less than 1.5 per cent of their GDP on defence. From 2014 until 2021 non-NATO states Finland and Sweden did not participate in EFP and the Baltic Air

Policing mission, while they have contributed to other NATO missions. Denmark and Norway have made an average contribution. Norway and Sweden increased their gas imports in the period 2014-2021 but are no major consumers of Russian gas. Finland imported most of its gas from Russia in 2021 but was able to decrease its import. Except for Norway all Northern European states decreased their oil imports. Norway has sufficient oil and gas fields of its own and is not dependent on Russian energy. After Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 Norway became Europe's new energy supplier.

4.5.5 South-Eastern European contributions

Of all South-Eastern European states (Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Greece, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania and Turkey) only Croatia and Greece spend 2 per cent or more of their national income on defence. Czechia, Greece, North Macedonia, and Romania were able to increase their relative defence spending with more than 25 per cent. Of all South-Eastern European states, Croatia contributed most troops to EFP during the period 2017-2021. The rest of the South-Eastern European states contributed less than average to the EFP mission. This changed after Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022; Czechia and Hungary became the front leaders of two of the eight battlegroups. Even though several states have the capacity to contribute to the Baltic Air Policing mission, Czechia is the only country contributing fighters. Three states did not import gas from Russia. The figures of Czechia, Greece, North Macedonia and Romania show a sharp increase in their gas imports and Czechia and North Macedonia got all their gas import from Russia in 2021. Except for Romania and Turkey all South-Eastern European states managed to decrease their oil imports from Russia.

5. Conclusion

Our chapter has provided insight into how NATO members shared the burden of actions against Russian threats upon the annexation of the Crimea from 2014-2021. We used several parameters to measure member states' contributions. The findings show that NATO members responded heterogeneously to the changed security environment after the annexation of Crimea by Russia.

Although most states increased their defence spending, the rate of increase differs per region. Eastern European states show a rapid growth of defence spending after the annexation of Crimea, while other European states stayed behind. This rapid growth in defence expenditure can be explained by Eastern European states' proximity to Russia. It shows their commitment to NATO in the hope that other

members will protect them if necessary. Southern European NATO members Italy, Spain and Portugal are not expected to reach the NATO 2 per cent goal in 2024. Perhaps the perception of distance between Russia and these southern states plays a role in their more frugal defence expenditure. The impact on the economy by spending at least 2 per cent on defence is also likely to influence their behaviour.

Defence economic literature has shown that low rankings on the input dimension do not necessarily lead to low rankings on the output dimension, i.e. troops.[25] The same applies to this topic. Western European states spend less of national income on defence but are among the highest absolute contributors to both missions Enhanced Forward Presence and Baltic Air Policing as these countries have the capacity and willingness to contribute. The highest score of Greece (3.59 per cent) on the input parameter 'defense expenditure as a percentage of GDP' is not a good predictor for the output parameters 'contributions to Enhanced Forward Presence and Baltic Air Policing.' Greece lacks contribution to both missions. Greece's minimal contribution to the protection of the Eastern flank of Europe does not mean that Greece is a free rider when it comes to the protection of NATO territory. Greece plays a substantial role in the reception of refugees on the Southern European borders. For a complete picture of NATO members burden sharing behaviour, it is suggested to add up states' contributions to the protection of several threats on NATO territory. This goes beyond the aim of this research.

Despite NATO Secretary General Rasmussen's request to reduce dependency on Russian energy in 2014, a significant number of states increased their gas imports from Russia. Except for Luxembourg, all Western and Southern European states increased their gas imports. Three South-Eastern states did not import gas from Russia, but the gas imports of Czechia, Greece, North Macedonia and Romania show a sharp increase. In 2021, Czechia and North Macedonia imported all their gas from the Russian Federation. Also, the more vulnerable Eastern European states Latvia, Poland and Romania increased their gas imports. The import of oil and petroleum figures presents a somewhat different picture. Except for Norway, the Baltic States, Slovakia, Italy, Romania and Turkey, all European states decreased their oil and petroleum imports from Russia. Moreover, from this study, it became apparent that after the annexation of Crimea in 2014 until Russia's invasion in 2022 there was no uniform strategy in Europe on how to deal with energy imports from Russia. Contrary to the 2 per cent guideline for defence spending, no concrete agreements have been made by NATO members to reduce their energy dependence on Russia.

The lack of a uniform NATO strategy or guideline does not mean states cannot fulfill their responsibility individually. In our view the term 'responsibility sharing' is more appropriate than burden sharing, as NATO states hold an individual

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[25] Beeres, and Bogers, "Ranking the performance," 14.

responsibility to react on Russia's aggression. The term 'responsibility' can be viewed as a bundle of obligations associated with a function.[26] Responsibility also includes *moral obligation*, an obligation arising out of considerations of what is 'right and wrong.'[27] One may question: Can it be considered responsible to continue the purchase of (more) Russian gas and oil after the annexation of Crimea? The governments of NATO members hold differing thoughts on this matter. Moreover, as a noun, 'responsibility' can be regarded to be made up of both 'response' and 'ability.' In other words, the extent to which NATO member states had the ability to respond in a constructive manner to Russian aggression. Being responsive means being able and willing to distinguish and differentiate between priorities of national and collective interest and take constructive action. For example, did governments have sufficient domestic support to lower their energy imports from Russia and to substantially raise defence expenditures? Despite the lack of substantiating figures, we claim, based on government statements, states were willing to take more far-reaching measures after Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, than after the annexation of Crimea. Also, due to their geographical location and/or wealth, some states may have experienced fewer complications to decrease their dependency on Russian energy than others.

Based on the above, the results of our research do not lead to a concrete indication of under- and over contributors or less or more responsible states. We consider this inappropriate as each NATO member's reaction to Russia's aggression will always be influenced by its own geographical, political, economic and security rationales. Instead, we argue at this point there is a need for common research to delve deeper into these (national and supra-national) rationales to explain states' behaviour. In this way we expect both common learning processes and mutual understanding amongst NATO members will be furthered, which in turn will improve the alliance's sustainability in the future.

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[26] Bivins, "Responsibility and accountability," 20.
[27] Bivins, "Responsibility and accountability," 20.

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CHAPTER 16

Contraband of War at Sea: Interference of Arms Support to the Enemy

Martin Fink

Abstract

A number of States support Ukraine in sustaining its warfighting capabilities through delivery of military equipment, training and financial support. Seen from a Russian perspective, however, the question is how to counter this support. In the maritime dimension of armed conflict, economic warfare has been a longstanding strategy to sever the enemy from its trade. Economic warfare aims to affect the State's capabilities to continue its warfighting efforts. At sea, interfering with vessels supplying the enemy via the sea is regulated by the law of naval warfare. In particular, the law of contraband regulates how neutral vessels can be stopped, searched and seized for carrying contraband: goods that may be susceptible for use in armed conflict. This chapter discusses the Russian challenges for using the instrument of the law of contraband in the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Keywords: Contraband, Laws of naval warfare, Economic warfare

1. Introduction

The outcome of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, as is often opined, depends heavily on the amount and type of military equipment that both parties are able to bring onto the battlefield. Depriving the opponent State of material to sustain its warfighting capabilities, therefore, seems of significant importance. Since the outbreak of renewed hostilities in February 2022, a number of States, including the US, the UK and several EU member-states, have undertaken measures to support Ukraine in its war against Russia. Firstly, through severing economic ties with the Russian Federation by imposing economic sanctions. And secondly, by supporting Ukraine in sustaining its warfighting capabilities through the delivery of military equipment, training[1] and financial[2] support. Other States, such as Iran,[3] are said to

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[1] Kruyt, "Operatie Interflex," 131-135.

[2] *USAID Press release*, "The United States contributes $4.5 billion to support the government of Ukraine."

[3] *The Moscow Times*, "Iran delivered ammunition to Russia on Caspian Sea cargo ships – report."

support Russia in a similar manner. From a Russian perspective, the support given to Ukraine would call for an economic warfare strategy at sea supplementing its military warfighting strategy.

From a legal point of view, providing weapons, training and other support to belligerent parties can be viewed from two main perspectives of international law. The first is from the perspective of *ius ad bellum*, in which the question would be whether the support given by States is a use of force.[4] The second view is from a *ius in bello* perspective, from which two sub-questions derive: whether the provision of weapons and training by neutral States would be a breach of the law of neutrality,[5] and what legal possibilities exist for belligerents to counter support to opposing Parties. With regard to the latter question, the maritime dimension of the law of armed conflict (LOAC), the law of naval warfare, contains rules regulating economic warfare. Naval Strategist Julian Corbett, in his *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy* (1911), summarised the legal part of economic warfare at sea ('commerce prevention' in his terms) as follows: 'It is obvious that if the object and end of naval warfare is the control of communications, it must carry with it the right to forbid, if we can, the passage of both public and private property upon the sea. Such capture and destruction is the penalty which we impose upon our enemy for attempting to use communications of which he does not hold control.'[6]

In other words, control of lines of communications enables preventing the opponent upholding aspects of its trade and economic support and thereby its ability to sustain war. As long as economic warfare (which I will define as weakening the enemy through the deprivation of the opponent's means to sustain war by hampering its trade with neutral States) is an accepted method of naval warfare, rules should also exist to regulate these activities. Not in the least because of its impact on neutrals. In this regard, the law of naval warfare seeks balance and regulation between the rights and aims of both belligerents and neutrals, but also accepts certain loss of neutral rights in circumstances of international armed conflict. In particular, goods susceptible for use in armed conflict – known as contraband – on board neutral vessels can be captured by belligerent States.[7]

When the Black Sea Grain Initiative was still in place, Russia did not resort to the instrument of counter-contraband operations against the possible influx of weapons. But after the collapse of the grain deal on 17 July 2023, in its decision not to extend its participation in the deal, Russia hinted at the direction of using this instrument. In its

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[4] Green, "The provision of weapons and logistical support to Ukraine and the jus ad bellum," 3-16.

[5] Boddens Hosang, "Militaire steun aan Oekraïne," 1-24.

[6] Corbett, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*, 95.

[7] The term 'neutral merchant vessel' is a legal term of art, meaning a vessel that is non-governmental in character. A cruise ship or a passenger liner, therefore, is also considered a merchant vessel.

statement Russia mentions that: 'all vessels sailing in the waters of the Black Sea to Ukrainian ports will be regarded as potential carriers of military cargo.'[8] Apart from the *Sukru Okan* incident that took place on August 13th, 2022, where a Palau-flagged merchant vessel was boarded and inspected by the Russian warship *Vasily Bykov* when it sailed out of the Strait of Bosporus into the Black Sea, no further actions occurred indicating an operational translation of that political statement.[9]

If stopping arms from flowing to the opponent is of such strategic importance to the outcome of the conflict, why then is the instrument of counter contraband operations left unused? What challenges exist for Russia to be reticent in commencing counter-contraband operations? This chapter will touch upon this question, predominantly from a legal perspective. It will first briefly discuss the rules of the law of contraband and then touch upon political, operational and legal challenges of counter-contraband operations in relation to the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

2. The law of contraband

Although States can prohibit their subjects from trading with belligerent States, international law does not, in general, prohibit neutral States from trading with States that are parties to an armed conflict. The existence of an international armed conflict (as is the case in the Russia-Ukraine conflict), to which LOAC applies, does however provide belligerent States with means to interfere with such trade in as far as this trade is supporting the opponent in its war fighting efforts. With regard to the maritime dimension, the law of naval warfare provides belligerents rights to legally interfere with such trade. These rules on economic warfare centralise around the method of blockade and seizing contraband. The first focuses on closing *an enemy port or coast* from all inward and outward shipping. The second focuses on *the cargo on board* vessels at sea that may be considered as contraband bound for the enemy.

Contraband are goods susceptible to use in armed conflict. The law of contraband only applies during international armed conflict. With the exception of two rules codified in the *Paris Declaration* of 1856[10] and the *Hague Convention (XI) relative to certain Restrictions with regard to the Exercise of the Right of Capture in Naval War* of 1907 (excluding postal correspondence and small coastal fishing

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[8] Statement of the Russian Defence Ministry, 19 July 2023.

[9] As of 2 December 2023.

[10] These rules are:

    [2]. The neutral flag covers enemy goods, with the exception of contraband of war;

    [3]. Neutral goods, with the exception of contraband of war, are not liable to capture under enemy flag.

vessels from capture), most of the rules on the law of contraband are based on international customary law. Although the *London Declaration* of 1909 contains detailed provisions on regulating contraband,[11] this treaty has never entered into force. The *San Remo Manual on International Law Applicable to Armed Conflicts at Sea* (hereinafter: San Remo Manual) is often referenced as a generally accepted compilation of rules regarding the law of naval warfare, including contraband rules. Because it is not the purpose of this chapter to extensively deal with all the intricacies of the law of contraband, a number of key points are mentioned that are helpful in understanding the scope and limits of seizing contraband.

First, the law of contraband applies to *neutral* merchant vessels.[12] It does not apply to neutral State vessels, such as warships and auxiliary fleets, that enjoy immunity. State vessels that perform non-commercial service are immune. Whether the belligerent right of visit and search is also excluded with regard to commercial vessels that are chartered by a State and performing non-commercial service is less clear. It is accepted, however, that these merchant vessels enjoy jurisdictional immunity for acts while on governmental duty.[13] While the *San Remo Manual* is silent on the matter and only mentions that neutral merchant vessels are subject to visit and search, the US views quite clearly that 'Neutral vessels engaged in government non-commercial service are also exempt from capture as prize and may not be subject to visit and search.'[14]

Second, it also matters whether contraband goods on board are private or public goods. Merchant neutral vessels carrying private contraband goods do not jeopardise the State's neutrality, whereas public goods might have an effect on the neutrality position and diplomatic relations between the shipping (or chartering) State and the belligerent. In this context, Article 6 of the *Hague Convention XIII concerning the rights and duties of Neutral Powers in naval war* (1907) explicitly forbids a neutral power to supply, directly or indirectly, warships, ammunition or war material of any kind. Apart from the question whether this provision is considered customary or only applies between the Parties to the treaty,[15] it appears that this provision in the case of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in light of the current

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[11] See Articles 22 to 44 *London Declaration* 1909.

[12] As opposed to enemy merchant vessels, that can be captured.

[13] See for a Dutch case Hoge Raad (Supreme Court of the Netherlands) ECLI:NL:HR:1999: AA3368. This case deals with the damage that occurred in the Eemshaven by an American merchant vessel while on governmental duty.

[14] *The Commander's Handbook*, para. 9.8.

[15] See also Article 28 *Hague Convention XIII*.

interpretation of neutrality as qualified neutrality has become moot.[16] As it stands now, States allow themselves to ship public goods in support of one of the belligerents.

Third, the belligerent rights based on the law of contraband can be exercised anywhere at sea where belligerent operations are allowed. This excludes neutral territorial and internal waters of neutral States.[17] Although there is, in principle, no limitation as to where on the oceans this belligerent right of seizing contraband is exercised, proportionality considerations may limit use to the operational theatre, depending on the specific circumstances of the conflict.

Fourth, the law of contraband has two dimensions. A 'wet' operational dimension, in which belligerent warships can stop, search and seize goods on neutral merchant vessels, or divert these vessels for further inspection in port.[18] Next to these policing rights at sea, there is a 'dry' judicial dimension where prize courts must adjudicate the seized property at sea. This dry dimension, based on the principle of *toute prise doit être jugée,*[19] implies that implementing contraband measures involves not only the military, but also other, in this case judicial, State organs. While the relevance of prize courts is sometimes questioned,[20] the fact is that currently prize courts are still in use in the situation regarding the Gaza blockade.[21]

2.1 Requirements

In order for belligerent warships to exercise its rights under the law of contraband, there are at least two, and perhaps three requirements that need to be fulfilled:
1) The cargo must be considered as contraband.
2) the vessel is ultimately bound for an enemy destination, and (perhaps)
3) contraband lists should be published.

2.1.1 Character of the goods

One part of the definition of contraband is that they are goods that may be susceptible to use in armed conflict.[22] Which goods can be regarded as such has always been a matter of controversy, and has raised many disputes between States in the past. Whereas arms and ammunition or other typical military materiel are

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[16] Heintschel von Heinegg, "Neutrality in the war against Ukraine."

[17] Section 15 SRM.

[18] Section 121 SRM.

[19] Fink, "Toute prise doit être jugée," 211-219.

[20] Haines and Martin, "Prize Courts: their continuing relevance," 267-282.

[21] Katzir and Fikhman, "Prize law and the unique nature of the law of naval warfare," 197-218.

[22] Section 148 SRM.

obvious contraband, it becomes more difficult with dual use goods or, for instance, raw materials that can be used to construct either weapons or anything else that supports the warfighting effort. Even more difficult are items such as foodstuffs and medical goods. Are these goods serving the opponents' armed forces or meant for the population?

The traditional 'Grotian' law of contraband differentiates between absolute and conditional contraband. Absolute contraband are war materials that can be captured if destined for enemy controlled territory. Conditional contraband are basically dual use goods, which can be captured when destined for enemy controlled territory *and* of which it can be sufficiently proved that they will be used for warlike purposes.[23] The London Declaration also created a third category of free or exempt goods, which under no circumstances are subject to capture. With regard to exempt goods, the *San Remo Manual* lists religious objects, articles exclusively intended for the treatment of wounded and sick, items destined for prisoners of war and clothing and essential foodstuffs meant for the civilian population provided that there is no serious reason to believe that such goods will be diverted to other (military) purposes.[24] The Declaration also attached a difference between the types of contraband regarding the application of the doctrine of continuous voyage (see below). Since the First World War, however, differentiating between absolute and conditional has vanished in practice and in judgements in prize courts. The terms, however, are currently still in use.

2.1.2 Contraband lists

The London Declaration produced lists of absolute and conditional contraband, to which goods could be added to by declaration.[25] These lists had the purpose of clarifying what is considered contraband *without* giving any notice to neutral States if war would break out.[26] As this system did not come into effect, the idea of necessity remained that belligerent Parties should publish contraband lists. Practice also exists. But whether publishing contraband lists is a legal requirement to exercise a right to capture contraband seems somewhat unsettled. The *San Remo Manual* clearly states that belligerents must have published contraband lists in order to exercise their right of capture of contraband.[27] This view is, for instance,

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[23] Smith, *The Law and Custom of the Sea*, 118.

[24] Section 150 SRM.

[25] Article 22-25 London Declaration 1909.

[26] Bentwich, *The Declaration of London,* 60.

[27] Section 149 SRM.

followed by the UK,[28] Denmark[29] and the Netherlands.[30] Other States, in their Manuals, such as France, state no position. The US takes the following (different) approach: 'Though there has been no conflict of similar scale and magnitude since World War II, post-World War II practice indicates, to the extent, international law may continue to require publication of contraband lists, the requirement may be satisfied by a listing of exempt goods.'[31]

This approach seems to follow the view that if a list must be published, neither absolute nor conditional contraband goods need to appear on the list but the requirement is satisfied by (only) listing exempt goods.[32] Although from an operational standpoint this would give States and warships maximum flexibility to apply the law of contraband at sea, it firstly, diminishes clarity on what goods are considered contraband. And secondly, in a reciprocal sense, a State would also have to accept that its trade can be restricted based on the same terms. Also Germany appears to be less strict in the publishing of contraband lists as their Manual states that: 'The Parties to a conflict *may* notify the neutral States of lists of goods which they deem to be essential to the war.'[33]

Even if lists are published, issues will remain. Firstly, because it can still be doubted whether certain items may actually appear on the list. And secondly, because the items on the list may not be described precisely enough so that it continues to be unclear whether certain items would fall under the list.[34] In practical terms, there is likely to be tension between the need for flexibility and the need to be as clear as possible. For that reason the *San Remo Manual* states that 'contraband lists shall be reasonably specific.'[35]

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[28] Paragraph 13.110 *The Manual of the Law of Armed Conflict*.

[29] *Danish Military Manual*, 604.

[30] The Dutch instruction on the application of the law of naval warfare, originating from the 1960s and, in fact, unclear as to whether this instruction is still applicable, mentions that goods that are susceptible to use in armed conflict will be published on a list by the Government.

[31] *The Commander's Handbook*, para. 7.4.1.

[32] The commentary of the *San Remo Manual* mentions that a view was put forward that munitions can be captured even without having published a list.

[33] *German Law of Armed Conflict Manual*, para. 1239.

[34] This challenge is also encountered in the context of UN mandated maritime embargo operation, in which the mandate for instance only notes that arms and arms related material can be stopped from entering the State under embargo.

[35] Section 149 SRM.

2.1.3 Enemy destination: continuous voyage

The other part of the requirement of contraband is that contraband must ultimately be destined for territory under the control of the enemy. This requirement contains both a limiting and an expanding factor. The limiting factor is that only goods bound 'for' an enemy destination can be captured, but not goods that exit enemy territory. Also, vessels that have actually managed to deliver their contraband cargo and are outbound or stopped on a later voyage, cannot be captured based on their earlier delivery of contraband.

The expanding factor relates to 'ultimate' destination, which ties in with applying the doctrine of continuous voyage to the law of contraband.[36] In this doctrine, contraband goods can also be captured when it is clear that goods will be delivered at a port that is not under control of the enemy and it is furthermore established that these goods will then be transported further to enemy territory. This doctrine, therefore, is a significant expansion to the geographical area of application of contraband law. Under this doctrine, contraband goods that arrive, for example, in the port of Rotterdam and are then shipped to Ukraine over land, could be captured at sea. A more detailed discussion exists on the level of whether the doctrine applies to both absolute and conditional contraband. Because practice has stopped making any distinction between absolute and conditional contraband, this discussion seems to have lost its significance.

3. The Russia-Ukraine conflict

Soon after Russia started hostilities in February 2022, the battle to gain command of the sea commenced with tactical manoeuvring of naval assets (for an elaborate sequence of events, I refer to the contribution of Captain Warnar elsewhere in this volume). Days later, Turkey closed the Turkish Straits, which is the main gate to the Black Sea. Turkey's position has since been that the Straits are closed to all military vessels from all States. This leaves the entry from the Danube river and the entry from the river that connects the Sea of Azov with the Caspian Sea as only possible entries into the Black Sea. The fact that the river entries are either completely controlled by Russia, or not completely navigable for warships and pass through States with different allegiance, makes them unsuitable for external support to Ukraine. Furthermore, the ports in the Sea of Azov are under occupational control of Russia. From the outset, Russia suspended navigation in the north-western part of the

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[36] It must be noted here that the application of the doctrine to contraband law is separate to the discussion on whether this doctrine is also applied to blockade law.

Black Sea and in the Sea of Azov. Whether or not Russia legally established a naval blockade, remains subject to debate.[37] In any event, the sinking of the Russian warship *Moskwa* and battle over Snake Island challenged Russia's sea control. During the summer-period of 2022, through UN mediation, the grain crisis was dealt with and resulted in creating a maritime humanitarian corridor, through which under strict coordination and control, vessels can pass into and out of Ukrainian ports, to deliver grain in other places in the world. This Black Sea Grain Initiative lasted until 17 July 2023, when it collapsed after Russia decided to withdraw from the Initiative.

The situation at sea has made it unlikely that external arms support (or: contraband from Russia's perspective) by States will directly arrive in Ukrainian ports by means of the sea. Support is likely to arrive over land. As a matter of security, there is hardly any public information available to retrace how military equipment actually arrives in Ukraine. But it can be said that the sea is sometimes part of the route. In March 2022, one source mentioned that: 'Materiel that Ukraine needs is stored at U.S. bases throughout Europe. Once the weapons and equipment are pulled from these U.S. stocks, they'll be transported by air, truck or rail...'[38] Some months later, military equipment was also shipped to Europe by cargo vessels.[39] One media outlet mentions that 'the Pentagon has expanded its use of maritime shipping to deliver weapons for the war in Ukraine, U.S. defense officials said, after relying heavily on aircraft early in Russia's invasion to get arms to Kyiv as quickly as possible. While aircraft can reach Europe from the United States much more quickly, ships can haul vast quantities of cargo that could allow Ukraine to build up a larger arsenal for future campaigns in the war.'[40]

The same media-outlet mentions: 'U.S. military officials declined to detail specific routes used to get weapons to Ukraine but said that some of the weapons coming from the continental United States find their way directly to the battlefield, while others are being used to replenish American stocks elsewhere in Europe from which U.S. military officials withdrew supplies to arm Ukraine.'

In January 2023, the Dutch port of Vlissingen received US military material. These shipments were said to be heightening the stocks of the US military forces in Europe.[41] Other sources mention that also European States use vessels to transport arms support to Ukraine. Spain, for instance, used its naval vessels to ship arms material for Ukraine to Poland. Presumably, from there, it will be transported into Ukraine.

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[37] Fink, "Naval blockade and the Russia-Ukraine conflict," 411-437.

[38] Castillo, "Logistics case study: How do weapons get to Ukraine?"

[39] Reuters, "Cargo vessel set to ship U.S. medical, defence supplies towards Ukraine."

[40] Lamothe, "Pentagon expands use of seas to send weapons to Ukraine."

[41] Netherlands Ministry of Defence,"Permanent structured Cooperation (PESCO)."

4. Why not?

Apart from the action against the *Sukru Okan*, Russia appears not to have taken any further actions to commence counter-contraband operations. A number of reasons can be mentioned why Russia has not resorted to the use of such measures.

4.1 Politics: the political-strategic narrative and balancing neutrality

From a political perspective, two points can be underlined. First, the instrument does not fit Russia's political-strategic narrative. As mentioned, belligerent rights based on the law of contraband can only be used during an international armed conflict. Accepting this, for instance by publishing contraband lists or stopping neutral merchant vessels at sea, is not in line with the Russian narrative of conducting a 'special military operation.' In any case, and similar to the questions related to the Russian (de facto) blockade, Russia would not openly State it is using belligerent rights. While Russia probably had legal grounds to board the *Sukru Okan* and the incident received much indignation condemning it as a violation of international law, Russia did not defend itself by referring to its belligerent rights.

Second, while Russia disagrees with the qualified neutrality position allowing States to support Ukraine without breaching the law of neutrality, seizing neutral merchant vessels from supporting States or vessels that carry such support would increase tensions between non-belligerents States and Russia. Whereas merchant vessels that carry contraband do not automatically involve their flag States in the conflict in terms of losing neutrality; in this situation, we must keep in mind that the goods are public goods shipped by States themselves. Stopping public goods on merchant vessels chartered by a State would create direct State-to-State confrontation, as opposed to a case of merchant vessels shipping contraband that are not public goods. Commencing counter contraband operations in order to stop State support of military material would raise tensions between Russia and non-belligerent States to a perhaps uncomfortably high level.

4.2 Operational: capabilities and inspection regimes

Several operational considerations can be mentioned. First, generally effectively implementing economic warfare through counter-contraband operations implies the need for sufficient naval assets to exercise such strategy. These assets would also need some sea control or at least an area without risk in order to conduct counter contraband operations. It also requires intelligence to find possible contraband transiting the oceans. Otherwise, it might be a needle-in-a-haystack exercise if the operation is not information driven. Within the Black Sea this could arguably be

set-up, although Ukraine has shown that it can successfully attack Russian war-ships and naval bases. Within the Black Sea, the grain deal set up a system where vessels under strict inspection regime of the parties involved were allowed to sail into a number of Ukrainian ports and return with grain shipments. The regime also functioned as a door to keep possible contraband from sailing into Ukraine. During the period of a functioning grain deal, there was no need for an inspection regime in the Black Sea. In the wider maritime dimension, considering – while the doctrine of continuous voyage would allow for it – that goods are not sailed directly into Ukraine but use other foreign ports after which the goods get shipped over land, it would arguably be a bigger challenge of setting up a system with sufficient naval capabilities to effectively conduct counter contraband operations. Apart from the fact that the conflict increases in global dimensions, in this context and more practically it is often argued that it has become impossible to exercise the law of contraband at sea, considering the enormous size of today's container shipping. Depending on which maritime routes Russia would decide to search for contraband, it would probably have to rely on diversion ports for inspection. In other words, apart from possible ad hoc inspections based on individual suspicions at sea, setting up an effective system of counter-contraband operations in the wider maritime dimension beyond the Black Sea is cumbersome to the extent that it may not be efficient.

4.3 Law: immunity, prize law and new approaches to old law

Last, some legal complexities can be pointed out. First, one question relates to the status of the vessels that deliver the material. As mentioned above, Spain for instance, used its navy to transport arms material. Warships are immune to belligerent visit and search.[42] The US has chartered merchant vessels. Whereas State vessels are not subject to belligerent visit and search, the discussion lies on the issue of vessels that are taken up from trade in order to transport governmental arms. Would they be considered as ships on non-commercial duty and therefore be immune to the belligerent right of visit and search? If that is indeed the case, trans-porting vessels are from a legal position quite easily protected against interference. Economic warfare through counter-contraband operations, seems therefore more opportune in terms of stopping dual use (conditional) goods that will more likely be private goods, rather than absolute contraband that, in the current case, are most likely public goods.[43]

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[42] Militarnyi, "The Spanish Navy ship will transport military equipment to Ukraine"

[43] Interestingly, this position is somewhat difficult to align with the concept of convoy, where neutral warships can convoy neutral vessels, which will protect them, in principle, from visit and

Second, the OCSE report on 'violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law, war crimes and crimes against humanity' regarding this conflict mentions that the OCSE mission did not receive any information that Russia has published contraband lists.[44] Assuming that this indeed has not happened, the question arises whether this would legally bar Russian naval forces from exercising belligerent rights to seize contraband. As stated earlier, the answer seems to be somewhat unsettled. Russia's view regarding the publication of contraband lists is unfortunately unknown.

Third, when adhered to in its fullest sense, the process of contraband law must also contain a 'legal finish' where prize courts adjudicate seizures at sea based on prize law regulations. It is unclear whether Russia has either set-up or already has a system of prize courts. In any case, with regard to the capture of the two Ukrainian flagged merchant vessels, *Princes Nicole* and *Afina,* or the *Apache,* no mention is made that they were brought before a prize court for adjudication.

And finally, which is interesting to note in terms of possible evolution of the law of contraband, Professor Andrew Clapham opined that: 'a belligerent State should no longer be able to claim that international law authorizes it to capture and permanently confiscate through a prize court the neutral ships and aircraft found to have been carrying contraband or engaging in unneutral service,'[45] He argues that granting belligerent rights should be seen differently in today's collective security construct. Aggressor States should not obtain them. He therefore connects the use belligerent rights to a sufficient legal basis to resort to armed force.[46] His view is a logical conclusion from the perspective that the UN Charter has codified the principle that interstate use of force is prohibited. 'It makes no sense to say that you cannot resort to armed conflict against another State and yet, if you do, you can keep the old Belligerent Rights that belonged to those that went to War.'[47] If one would follow Clapham's view, it would mean that Russia, as the aggressor with no sufficient legal basis for the attack on Ukraine, lacks a legal basis to exercise belligerent rights, such as the right to exercise counter contraband operations, against Ukraine and neutral States.

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search. But even in cases of convoy, this is not absolute. A vessel can still be searched if the convoy commander is unwilling or unable to satisfy the intercepting warship.

[44] OCSE, *Report on Violations*, 44.

[45] Clapham, "Booty, bounty, blockade, and prize," 1262.

[46] Furthermore, he considers that neutral merchant vessels by way of acting – by clearly resisting visit and search – should not be regarded as military objectives. Instead, such actions should fall within the paradigm of law enforcement activities.

[47] Clapham, "Booty, bounty, blockade, and prize," 1268.

5. Conclusion

Certain elements in Russian actions with regard to the hostilities at sea – suspending navigation, occupying enemy ports, gaining sea control over the Sea of Azov and the North-Western part of the Black Sea, and (albeit ended) participation in the Black Sea Grain Initiative – indicate a geographically limited economic warfare within the Black Sea. A strategy at sea that includes actively seizing of arms and arms related material does not seem to be part of Russian strategy at sea at this stage of the conflict. While the Black Sea Grain Initiative was in place, Russia could fall back on the inspection regime which at least minimised the entry of possible contraband to Ukraine through the Black Sea. It has however not undertaken any action to counter goods that reach Ukraine in a more indirect manner. What can be concluded from this short chapter, is that although counter-contraband measures at sea may seem a useful instrument for a belligerent to control trade with the enemy, it has political, operational and legal challenges which makes its use less opportune than one might think. Especially in the current situation where neutrality has taken a different turn than envisioned by traditional neutrality law, counter contraband operations would lead to direct confrontation between Russia and non-belligerent States.

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Between Multilateralism and Great Power Competition: The Future of European Indivisible and Comprehensive Security

Sabine Mengelberg & Floribert Baudet

Abstract

Even before the Russian war against Ukraine, strategists and academics in the West argued and even pleaded for a return to Great Power Competition. This interest reflected a growing conviction that the era of internationalist multilateralism was over and that the world is divided in two rival blocs, i.e., the Europeans and Americans on the one hand, and Russia and China on the other. In this view, Ukraine is the first battleground between these blocs. However, multilateralism and multi-polarity are alive and kicking. Not only that, international organisations such as the UN, NATO, the Council of Europe, the OCSE and CSTO, are indispensable. This is especially so when relations between member states have become tense. They provide norms, facilitate the exchange of ideas and as such help diffuse tensions that may have risen among their members. To substantiate our claim, we will discuss the establishment of the European security architecture and show how ideas that underlay it, are still meaningful, if only because Russia, especially in defeat, is still a force to be reckoned with.

Keywords: Democracy, The rule of law, Cooperative security, Confidence and security building measures, European security architecture

1. Introduction

It is often said that this is an age of Great Power Competition, exemplified by Russian aggression against Ukraine (2004, 2014 and 2022) and Georgia (2008), China's Belt Road Initiative and its assertive posture against what it considers its breakaway province of Taiwan, and American unilateralism. Great Power Competition is not only a descriptive term, it has normative traits as well; even before the Russian war against Ukraine, several western strategists and academics advocated a return to Great Power Competition, and away from internationalist multilateralism. They held that there were clear analogies with the situation during the late 19th century, when Russia and Britain were engaged in the so-called Great Game, and Germany made what was seen as a bid to achieve world hegemony. Multilateralism was

deemed to be passé. Instead, the world is divided into two rival blocs, i.e., the Europeans and Americans on the one hand, and Russia and China on the other. In this view, Ukraine is the first battleground between these blocs, and Taiwan may soon be next.

This contribution, however, will challenge the central premise of this alleged renewed Great Power Competition. Rather than dead and buried, multilateralism and multi-polarity are alive and kicking. Not only that, international organisations such as the United Nations, NATO, the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Cooperation and Security in Europe (OSCE) and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), are indispensable. This is especially so when relations between member states have become tense. They provide norms and facilitate the exchange of ideas and as such help diffuse tensions that may have risen among their members. To substantiate our claim, we will discuss the establishment of the European security architecture. We will show how ideas that underlay it, i.e., that security is indivisible and comprehensive, are still meaningful, if only because Russia is still a force to be reckoned with. Perhaps paradoxically, this is even more so if Ukraine manages to defeat it. First, we will discuss the theoretical state of research on the concepts of great power competition versus multilateralism, together with the presumed agency of international organisations. Additionally, we will dwell on the development of the European security architecture, inspired by Roosevelt's 'One World' concept but born and raised during the Cold War. Lastly, we will discuss its relevance against the background of the war in Ukraine.

2. Great power competition versus multilateralism: Agency of international organisations in a world of great power politics

The war in Ukraine stoked up the long-running battle of ideas between the liberal and realist schools of thought in the field of international relations. One of the sharpest debates between them centred around the question of whether or not international institutions really mattered. Duffield, among others, claimed the importance of international institutions,[1] whereas Mearsheimer and others questioned their authority, autonomy and relevance.[2] The latter argued that the international political arena is in a state of anarchy. It is characterised by competition in search of survival, and power and conflict rather than stability and rules enforced by international organisations, dominate international politics. In this view organisations are wholly and existentially dependent upon the will of

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[1] Duffield, "What are international institutions?" 1–22.

[2] Mearsheimer, "The false promise of international institutions," 5–49.

states. According to realism states are not influenced or ruled by any structural, coercive power other than themselves. International organisations are no more than empty shells or impersonal policy machinery manipulated by state actors. As there is no overarching central authority, realist literature treats cooperation in the security and defence domain as purely intergovernmental or even ad-hoc cooperation that occurs solely for the purposes of forwarding the self-interest of the state.[3] According to realism international security and defence cooperation, often labelled as 'high politics,' lies at the heart of the state, where state sovereignty rules. With regard to the organisations of the European security architecture, they point at the requirement that within the OSCE, NATO and the EU Common Security and Defence Policy decision making on missions, operations, and enlargement, is unanimous, which they maintain, is a clear expression of national sovereignty.

In sharp contrast, Duffield and others maintain that states do not operate in an anarchical system. They cooperate. They are linked and connected with each other through for instance agriculture or transport policy.[4] While these scholars acknowledge that decision-making in crucial fields is unanimous, notable liberalism school adherents argue that sovereignty itself has never been a fixed concept. It varies in degree and form.[5] Ever since the end of the Cold War international cooperation has increased and has taken various forms between states and organisations, a phenomenon that Howorth labelled 'intergovernmental-supranationalism.' Strikingly, in the security and defence domain this has resulted in a shift away from the traditional concept of sovereignty.[6] Sovereign equality, a key characteristic of states, is not absolute, and hasn't been for some time. For instance, article 8 of the Council's Statute, adopted in 1949, gives the Council of Europe organisation the right to suspend members and this article was invoked to expel the Russian Federation after its aggression against Ukraine.[7] Furthermore, EU and NATO member states increasingly engage in bi- and multilateral security and defence cooperation, witness the supranational Dutch/Belgian air force

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[3] Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 1-2.

[4] See: Krasner, ed., *International Regimes*; Keohane, "International institutions: Two approaches," 379–96; Rittberger, ed., *Regime Theory and International Relations. The American Journal of International Law*.

[5] For an elaboration on differentiated cooperation, see: Haftendorn, Keohane, and Wallender, *Imperfect Unions*, 7; Schimmelfennig, Leuffen, and Rittberger, "The European Union as a system of differentiated integration: Interdependence, politicization and differentiation," 764–82; Bergmann and Müller, "Failing forward in the EU's common security and defense policy: The integration of EU crisis management," 1–19; Fiott, "In every crisis an opportunity? European Union integration in defence and the war on Ukraine," 447–62.

[6] Howorth, "Decision-making in security and defence policy: Towards supranational intergovernmentalism?"

[7] See: Council of Europe, "European Treaty Series -No. 1."

cooperation that has been in place since 1947. Finally, the recent integration of the Dutch land force component in a joint German/Dutch Corps that can be deployed by both NATO and EU is the most far-reaching defence cooperation between European states to date.

Especially after the end of the Cold War, this cooperation increased beyond ad-hoc bilateral cooperation into multilateral interaction involving policy coordination and sometimes institutionalisation.[8] According to liberalism, states influence one another and formalise their relationships in agreements and treaties. And some of these agreements and treaties serve as administrations above states – supranational organisations – with regard to certain policy areas of national governments. States accept rules of an international organisation because they reduce insecurity, transaction costs as well as unpredictability.[9] After all, the alternative, anarchy, is not attractive. Some of the rules like those inherent in the EU, are thus self-imposed; others are imposed by international organisations, by treaty, on member states, such as Article 5 of the North Atlantic treaty that created NATO. And in some cases, rules are applicable between international organisations, like the 2003 Berlin Plus agreement between NATO and EU's Common Security and Defence Policy.

In addition, some scholars argue that organisations have become independent actors themselves, because of the political or legal authority they possess or when state actors are not supported to act. Within the European security architecture, states have been willing to accept involvement from an international organisation like the UN and the OSCE[10] that are regarded as more independent and inclusive, over involvement by individual states, such as the United States or Russia, or by organisations such as the EU and NATO. This is exemplified by the former presence of the OSCE in Transnistria (Moldova), Georgia and Nagorno Karabakh (Azerbaijan), where it engaged in either fact-finding or monitoring missions. Think also of the activities of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) in the Baltic states after they regained independence. International organisations are asked to act because of specific technical expertise, mandates, or knowledge, as, for instance, Frontex, that was tasked with defending the EU's borders and the fight against cross-border crime. Another example is the EU's central role in combatting Covid-19.

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[8] The concept of multilateralism has become commonly used, though the academic debate on multilateralism has been fragmented. For an elaboration on the development of the concept, see: Koops, *The European Union as an Integrative Power: Assessing the EU's "Effective Multilateralism" with NATO and the United Nations*, 66-78; Morse and Keohane, "Contested multilateralism," 385–412.

[9] Hasenclever, Mayer, and Rittberger, *Theories of International Regimes*, 37.

[10] The Cold War era Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe was institutionalised into the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) at the Budapest Summit, December 1994.

While overall cooperation between states in the security and defence domain remains mostly intergovernmental, traditional paradigms are shifting and it can be argued that organisations are more than just the sum of interstate cooperation. As a result of their mandate, expertise and capacities international organisations set the agenda in their policy domain and can compel states to comply: 'At times, international organizations may actually shape the policy preferences of states by changing what states want. It matters who initiates policy and why.'[11] Sometimes officials of such organisations are 'called in' as facilitators when stakes are high and solidarity between states is tense. These officials in turn give their organisation a face and a voice that carries beyond their formal roles. Examples of this include the high profiles of the head of the EU Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, and of NATO secretary general Jens Stoltenberg since the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24th February 2022.[12] Accordingly, the partnership and enlargement programs of EU and NATO changed from engagement instead of enlargement, to a new willingness to enlarge. This is accompanied by debates about majority decision making and an increase of the EU budget in the defence domain, which had been unthinkable for years.[13]

Another area in which the two camps of theorists have clashed is over the causation of the war and how it should end. This is not just some bickering. According to scholars of realism the 'taproot of the current crisis is NATO expansion' and the only way out of the current war is a negotiated peace with Russia which involves Ukraine's recognition of the Russian annexation of parts of its territory in order to end the invasion.[14] Their reasoning is that since Russia is a great power, the West should recognise and accommodate its security interests. Such an approach would help avoid the risk of Russia using nuclear weapons because as a great power, Russia cannot afford to lose.

According to liberalism, however, Russia's invasion in Ukraine is a profound violation of the UN Charter, which eliminates any chance of a diplomatic compromise. In this reasoning, diplomatic negotiations would not only reward Putin's war of aggression in Ukraine, it would also undermine the international rules-based order built on the territorial integrity and political independence of all UN states.[15]

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[11] Barnett and Finnemore, *Rules for the World: International Organizations in Global Politics*, 10.

[12] Vanhoonacker and Pomorska, "The institutional framework," 67–90.

[13] For example: In June 2022, the EU granted candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova. In May 2023 a 'group of friends,' nine EU member states including Germany and France, promoted a gradual shift from unanimity to qualified majorty voting even within the foreign policy domain. The date of 2030 is foreseen to start with the first enlargement round with countries such as North Macedonia.

[14] Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine crisis is the West's fault: The liberal delusions that provoked Putin," 77–89.

[15] Fukuyama, "Why Ukraine will win."

3. The genesis of the European security architecture, 1945-1992

The problem of how to deal with a humiliated great power is not new though. In fact, it lay at the root of attempts during the 20th century to create what we now call the European security architecture. A closer look at those past attempts might perhaps point to a way forward to a constellation in which both Russia's status as a great power can be confirmed, and Ukraine's existence as a sovereign state that is free to make its own foreign policy choices can be secured.

After the First World War, a war that resulted from late 19th century Great Power Competition, the victors put into place collective League of Nations security arrangements to restore order and stability in Europe. A recurrence of this competition, and the German desire to avenge the humiliating Versailles Treaty in particular, lay at the root of the Second World War. The victors in that war were united in their insistence that Germany would not be able to start a new war to redraw Europe's borders and power arrangements, but their inability to find a model that would suit their interests led to the creation of two German states and a division of the continent in two opposing blocs. This was effectively the death knell for the 'One World' concept that had been espoused by President Roosevelt and was embodied by the United Nations Organisation, which was crucially weakened as a consequence.

The division of Europe was problematic and unstable as it was based on two competing views of society and of security. Western Europe joined the American 'Empire-by-invitation' for protection,[16] while the Eastern part of the continent was subjected to the Soviet Union's visions of progress, peace and security. While Western Europe reached levels of prosperity never seen before and opportunities for individual expression, the Soviet Union's sphere saw a bloody counterinsurgency in the areas annexed in 1939-1940 and again, in 1944-1945, consecutive waves of terror, persecution and repression, and ill-fated struggles for liberation.[17] Under the leadership of Washington and Moscow the two blocs fought each other ideologically, politically, diplomatically and economically. In addition they fought a number

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[16] Lundestad, *The United States and Western Europe since 1945 from "Empire" by Invitation to Transatlantic Drift*.

[17] See for instance: Snyder, *Bloodlands*; Ostermann, *Uprising in East Germany, 1953: The Cold War, the German Question, and the First Major Upheaval behind the Iron Curtain*; Sebestyen, *Twelve Days: The Story of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution*; Malashenko, *Soviet Military Intervention in Hungary, 1956*; Lendvai, *One Day That Shook the Communist World: The 1956 Hungarian Uprising and Its Legacy*; Machcewicz, *Rebellious Satellite*; Heinemann and Wiggershaus, *Das Internationale Krisenjahr 1956*; Gilbert, *Cold War Europe: The Politics of a Contested Continent*; Jankowiak, Rafał, and Reczek, *28 June 1956 in Poznań: One of the First Months of Polish Freedom*.

of proxy wars. While today the Cold War is remembered with some nostalgia for its apparent stability, in fact the risk of nuclear escalation was never far off.

One of the fruits of the era of détente that was ushered in after the 1962 Cuba Crisis, however, was the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (1973-1975), the predecessor of today's OSCE. Originally, Moscow had intended to deny the USA and Canada a say in European security and force the conference to politically and legally sanction its hold over Eastern Europe, perhaps even including its right to militarily intervene wherever it saw fit.[18] When the Helsinki Final Act was signed in August 1975, however, it reaffirmed existing international law by adopting ten guiding principles:

1. sovereign equality and respect for the rights inherent in sovereignty,
2. refraining from the threat or use of force
3. inviolability of frontiers
4. territorial integrity of states
5. peaceful settlement of disputes
6. non-intervention in internal affairs
7. respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief
8. equal rights and self-determination of peoples
9. cooperation among states
10. fulfilment in good faith of obligations under international law.[19]

In addition, the so-called Third Basket of the Accord contained obligations to improve what was termed 'the free flow of individuals, ideas and information' between societies and by implication, across the Iron Curtain. All in all, Moscow's state-centric view of security had been rejected in favour of the West-European premise that there could be no state security without human security, an idea that had been pioneered by the Council of Europe in the early 1950s.[20] Worse still, as CSCE developed into a 'process,' access to Western technology and investment became dependent on improvements in human rights behind the Iron Curtain. This, in turn, bolstered dissidence and oppositional activity in the Soviet sphere of

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[18] Wenger, Mastny, and Nuenlist, *Origins of the European Security System*.

[19] OSCE, "Helsinki Final Act | OSCE," 5-10.

[20] A child of the Cold War, the Council of Europe was conceived as a union of anti-totalitarian states built on the rule of law and human rights and fundamental freedoms. Its member states had the right to file complaints about other signatories' treatment of their citizens. In addition, through the adoption, in the early 1950s, of the First Additional Protocol, individual citizens could – simply put – sue their states before the European Court. Cf. Baudet, "'A statement against the totalitarian countries of Europe': Human rights and the early Cold War," 125–40.

influence. Furthermore, while Moscow had obtained acceptance that state borders were inviolable (which was hardly a major concession), the Final Act stipulated that they could be changed by mutual consent. Lastly, the principle of self-determination implied that peoples or citizens could choose their own political system. Gradually, in fact very gradually, CSCE developed into a set of shared norms.[21] It did not cement the post-war order, as Moscow had intended. Instead, CSCE laid the framework to overcome it – in a peaceful way.[22]

4. 'A Europe whole and free': The liberal school's heyday and its downfall

After the end of the Cold War the idea of a pan-European security order was launched. This order should be based on 'interlocking and mutually reinforcing organizations' as the phrase ran, and the idea of a division of labour between them. The Europe-wide CSCE/OSCE, the western organisations of NATO, Council of Europe and EU and the post-Soviet Commonwealth of Independent States and its security organisation CSTO, each had their own roles to perform.[23] Captured by US President G.H.W. Bush as 'a Europe whole and free,' the whole of Europe would be governed by the concepts of the liberal world order and multilateralism, which should promote peace, stability and prosperity throughout the continent.[24] In November 1990, CSCE's Paris Charter outlined this inclusive pan-European framework based on a

[21] This is illustrated best by the fact that in early 1989 the 'human dimension mechanism' was put into place, according to which *all* signatory states accepted the other signatories' right to express concern but also convene for consultations over human rights violations. Effectively it meant that the communist states had accepted the western concept of human security.

[22] To be sure, there is much discussion about CSCE's role in ending the Cold War. Realist explanations attribute the end of communist rule in Eastern Europe to the *approchement* of the two hegemons and arms limitation talks, whereas more structuralist explanations point at the role played by transnational networks, norms and the like. Recent literature includes: Morgan, *Final Act: The Helsinki Accords and the Transformation of the Cold War*; Westad and Villaume, *Perforating the Iron Curtain: European Deténte, Transatlantic Relations, and the Cold War, 1965-1985*; Badalassi and Snyder, *The CSCE and the End of the Cold War*; Wenger, Vojtech Mastny, and Christian Nuenlist, *Origins of the European Security System*; Bange and Niedhart, *Helsinki 1975 and the Transformation of Europe*; Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect International Norms, Human Rights, and the Demise of Communism*; For a (small) state-centred approach, see: Baudet, "'It was Cold War and we wanted to win': Human rights, 'Détente,' and the CSCE," 183-198.

[23] The Collective Security Treaty has its origins in the Soviet armed forces: these were replaced in 1992 by the United Armed Forces of the Commonwealth of Independent States. The arrangements involved developed into the CSTO.

[24] U.S. Diplomatic Mission to Germany, "President Bush. A Europe whole and free. Mainz. May 1989." The idea was further developed in NATO's 1991 strategic concept. "The Alliance's New Strategic Concept (1991)." NATO, 1991.

comprehensive and *indivisible* concept of security, shared values, and commitment to activate cooperation between its members. The CSCE transformed into OSCE. It is based upon the idea of peaceful settlement of disputes without the use of violence, as first outlined in the Helsinki Final Act's 5th Principle in 1975. *Indivisible security* then implies that security of one state cannot be won at the expense of another. *Comprehensive security* implies that security is not solely defined in military terms, but also includes economic, ecological and social factors.[25] It reflected a shift in security and defence thinking away from deterrence and defence toward confidence and security building measures, arms control, multilateral cooperation and, generally, a broader perspective on security centred around transparency with regard to each other's military capabilities.[26] This approach was built on mutual security reassurances through the establishment of mutual gains, consensus, political and military transparency, institutions, and rules.[27] OSCE is basically a system of cooperative security, and it does not oblige states to act against any aggressor.

As the 'primary instrument for early warning, conflict prevention and crisis management,' OSCE was mandated as the overall organisation for peacekeeping operations in the entire area from Anchorage to Vladivostok, as the phrase ran. The operations themselves could be executed by NATO, the Western Union and the then post-Soviet CIS.[28] To strengthen this security framework, Russia and NATO drew closer together, culminating in the NATO-Russia Founding Act of 1997. In the same period EU and NATO also engaged in formal relations.

From its inception, however, the new European security order was challenged by crises and conflict. Moscow accepted German reunification but had to grudgingly concede that Germany remained a NATO member. This grudge inspired an informal assurance on the part of the alliance that NATO forces and infrastructure would not move to the East,[29] an assurance that has guided US-Russia relations from the end of the Cold War until 2022; even with the establishment of eFP after 2014, NATO's presence in its eastern member states remained modest. In the 1990s, NATO also gave a 'no-first-use guarantee'[30] and both Russia and NATO committed verbally to strengthening the OSCE for a new balance in Europe.

A number of wars and crises, starting with the collapse of Yugoslavia in 1991, saw NATO/the US and Russia on opposite sides which frustrated this development. Russia's participation in NATO-led I/SFOR in Bosnia from 1995 was professional

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[25] OCSE, "The challenges of change."

[26] Carter, Perry, and Steinbruner, *A New Concept of Cooperative Security*.

[27] Zagorski, "The OSCE and cooperative security," 58–63.

[28] OCSE, "CSCE towards a genuine partnership in a new era."

[29] Sarotte, *1989: The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe*.

[30] NATO, "The Alliance's New Strategic Concept (1991)."

though tense, and relations plummeted during NATO's war against Serbia (1999) and the dispute over Kosovo's legal status that followed it. Likewise, the unlawful American invasion of Iraq (2003) further alienated the Russians, and so did American plans for deployment of an anti-missile defense in Poland and the Czech Republic as they conflicted with Moscow's interpretation of the agreements made at the beginning of the nineties. For the West, trust in Russia was undermined by its handling of the first Chechen war (1995) and its counterinsurgency/counterterrorist campaign there.[31] Its heavy-handed interference in Georgia and Ukraine did little to abate this distrust. While the international institutions continued to function, a closer look reveals that cooperation and coordination (the 'interlocking' concept) between them was mainly through staff-to-staff cooperation.[32] It was ad-hoc and built on specific expertise, as these organisations more often than not operated in the same areas. Genuine institutionalisation was largely absent. EU-OSCE cooperation, for instance, though partly institutionalised, was mostly on a staff-to-staff ad-hoc basis as the EU preferred the UN for crisis management and strove to increase its own profile as a conflict prevention and stability actor. This did little to bridge the developing gap between Russia and the US.[33] In fact, the European security architecture itself increasingly became 'interblocking' through overlap in tasks and membership, and competition arose. Consensus on how tasks would be coordinated between the OSCE, the EU, the Council of Europe, the CSTO and NATO in areas such as crisis management, conflict prevention, counter-terrorism or non-proliferation was increasingly difficult to achieve.[34] For Russia, interest in a pan-European security architecture was mainly driven by positioning the OSCE as a counterbalance to NATO. In contrast, the West's interest in a security architecture, apart from democracy and human rights, lay in the stabilisation of the wider Europe and settlement of European ideas of democracy and multilateralism. As a result, the European security architecture descended into a web of formal but mostly informal cooperation schemes that gave free rein to rivalries between state and organisational actors and OSCE gradually lost its relevance.

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[31] Terrorist attacks from separatists and ethnic-based groups in Russia's North Caucasus and outside the North Caucasus increased between 2007-2010, exemplified by the bombing of the Moscow subway system in March 2010, resulting in over 40 deaths and many injuries.

[32] Ojanen, "Analysing inter-organisational relations."

[33] Consultations between the OSCE Troika, including the OSCE Secretary General, and the EU at both the ministerial and ambassadorial/Political Security Committee levels. Contacts between the Secretary General and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and other high-level EU officials. Annual staff-level talks on topical issues that are on each organisation's agenda. See: OCSE, "The European Union."

[34] Duke, "The EU, NATO and the Lisbon Treaty: Still divided within a common city," 22.

5. Towards a revived comprehensive European security architecture

Two years into the war and the overall prospects for a pan-European security order appear bleak. Increasingly, policy makers and analysts argue that the geopolitical environment is moving away from the multilateral world that the EU foresaw in its strategy of 2003. Russia is no longer a member of the Council of Europe; most OSCE missions have closed, both EU and NATO are preparing their security and defence structures for deterrence combined with a revived partner and enlargement program. Communication and liaison between EU or NATO and Russia is frozen. New borders are drawn, and blocs are built across Europe.[35] If and when the fighting stops, there will therefore be no return to the liberal European security order as it was foreseen at the beginning of the nineties. At least not in the short run. As Karsten Jung argues, 'given the apparent failure of prevailing liberal norms and institutions to prevent Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine, such a reform of the European order will likely lead to a more pragmatic, realist approach to continental security.'[36]

When so much is still in the balance, it is hard to conceive a post-war security architecture for Europe. At present NATO and the EU are firmly behind Ukraine, which in itself gives Putin an excellent opportunity to argue that Russia is really at war with the West. Such an argument strikes a chord with anti-Western states around the globe. Remarks by Western government and NATO officials to the effect that 'Ukraine is fighting our war' undermine the West's narrative that it is not involved and instead strengthen Putin's claim. Should the West fail in its efforts to sustain Ukraine, vastly more is likely to be lost than a number of provinces in Eastern and Southern Ukraine, however ghastly this prospect might already look to Kyiv. Should, on the other hand, Ukraine prevail, this could well have dire consequences for the Russian Federation, with political instability and regime change as possible first results. A third option, a stalemate resulting in yet another frozen conflict, will continue to drain resources. For various reasons, this scenario is perhaps even less attractive, but it might materialise when during a cold winter the as yet unbroken solidarity of the West with Ukraine will be severely tested. An argument can therefore be made that the war should be brought to an end before that date.

In 1814 the victors of the Sixth Coalition against Napoleon convened in Vienna to decide on the future of Europe, and by a touch of wisdom and political courage, decided to accept defeated, post-Napoleonic France into the ranks of participants. The arrangements laid down in the Vienna Final Act of 1815 created a system that lasted

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[35] Biscop, "War for Ukraine and the rediscovery of geopolitics: Must the EU draw new battlelines or keep an open door?"; Kribbe, Lumet, and Middelaar, "Bringing the greater European family together: New perspectives on the European political community."

[36] Jung, "A new concert for Europe: Security and order after the war," 25.

about a century. Major warfare between Great Powers did not occur for about forty years, and the system was robust enough to weather the upheavals of 1848 and 1859-1861 and in fact lasted until 1914. Today, there is another organisation based at Vienna, that although it is hibernating now, could perform a similar function; the OSCE.

We hold that there are a number of reasons to reactivate that organisation. As during the Cold War, today most OSCE member states[37] belong to a security alliance; as during the Cold War, there is a divide between democratic governments on the one hand and authoritarian ones on the other. The guiding rules of the original CSCE however, stressed the sovereign equality of each participating state; it was not a conference between alliances or hegemons and subject states, it was one between sovereign states. Furthermore, the OSCE is a regional organisation under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter, but never founded on a treaty which gives states more flexibility and freedom of movement. This also paved the way for the participation of a number of neutral and non-aligned states. The guidelines for good inter-state conduct it adopted in 1975 are still very much relevant today, in that they call for cooperative security and build upon the indivisibility of security, i.e., requiring states to adhere to human rights and fundamental freedoms. By defining human rights as 'individual rights' vis-à-vis the state, the concept contributed to international security in that it reaffirmed state sovereignty while at the same time limiting its powers.[38] They allow for territorial changes, on the condition that these are 'mutually agreed upon.'

In addition, the OSCE is the only organisation apart from the UN in which Russia and the United States are member states; it also offers a level playing field between Russia and Ukraine, who each will participate as a sovereign state, and who cannot be expelled as the Council of Europe rules allow. In addition, each member state and not just the United Nations Security Council's P5, has a veto.[39] The OSCE developed a system of confidence and security building measures and also offers a number of mechanisms and functionaries such as the High Commissioner on National Minorities that have proved their worth. Reviving OSCE does not need to conflict with NATO and EU enlargement. Ever since the end of the Cold War two collective defence organisations, NATO and CSTO, have existed under the OSCE umbrella.[40] While centred around states, it has accommodated petitions and heeded calls from various interest and minority groups and civil society and could do so again in, say, the Caucasus, Eastern Ukraine – or Northern Ireland for that matter.

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[37] Formally the states are called participating states within the OSCE organisation instead of member states.

[38] See for instance Mazower, "The strange triumph of human rights, 1933–1950," 379–98, 381.

[39] Though as a result of the growing number of participating states together with the conflicts in the OSCE area a consensus-minus-one rule was adopted at the beginning of the 1990s.

[40] Jung, "A new concert for Europe: Security and order after the war," 25, 39.

We acknowledge that the OSCE's present condition is far from ideal as a starting point. But a case could be made that the benign neglect that befell the organisation after about 2000 contributed to where we are today. A revitalised OSCE may be a long way in coming, but we feel it should be attempted. After all, the alternatives of prolonged low-intensity conflict or nuclear escalation are hardly attractive.

Peace-making, to be sure, will require painful realisations and painful concessions; the winning side, should there be one, will have to be able to sell the result as a victory. The losing side will have to accept defeat. If and when an agreement is reached, it is obvious that upholding and sustaining it will not only require the continued commitment of Ukraine and Russia. It requires the umbrella of a multilateral coalition aiming for some kind of stability and peace arrangement under a newly created or already existing organisational framework. The OSCE obviously has much to its credit: after all, it managed to bridge the even wider gap between the victors and losers of World War Two, and overcome the divide between two mutually exclusive opposing political and ideological systems. The most important challenge for peace to return to the continent however begins after the ink of a ceasefire agreement has dried. To quote the preamble of the constitution of UNESCO: 'Since wars begin in the minds of men and women, it is in the minds of men and women that the defenses of peace will have to be constructed.' Inconceivable as it may seem today, multilateralism thus has an important role to play, especially in an age of Great Power Competition.

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The Russia-Ukraine War and the Changing Character of the World Order

Theo Brinkel & Carel Sellmeijer

Abstract

New actors such as China, the Global South and Russia have put their mark on the character of the international order that up until now was dominated by liberal values and the hegemony of the United States. This development already has an impact on the power of the United Nations and the possibilities of peace operations. This chapter focuses on the way this transformation affects the role of the United Nations to restore and maintain peace and security in the case of Ukraine. Although the Security Council is unable to end the war in Ukraine and the Russian invasion is a blatant violation of international law, western countries cannot afford to leave thinking about ending the war to others. If there is any chance of UN-involvement in a negotiated peace between Ukraine and Russia, it will most certainly not take the form of a multidimensional peacebuilding mission to protect civilians and promote security sector reform and might be a return to the minimal role of the UN with traditional peacekeeping. The way peace will be established will not only determine the future of Ukraine, but the character of the international order as well.

Keywords: Peacekeeping, United Nations, Ukraine, Transformation, World order

'We are now at an inflection point. The post-cold war period is over. A transition is under way to a new global order.' This observation was recently made by António Guterres, the Secretary General of the United Nations.[1] It is inevitable that he came to this conclusion after realising that the power of the UN to restore international peace and security in Ukraine is extremely limited. As the promotion of peace and security is the main purpose of the UN, this is remarkable. The invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation on 24th February 2022 was a gross violation of international law and more specifically the United Nations Charter. This should have prompted a reaction of the UN Security Council, but it didn't.

An important obstacle to a more effective role of the UN is the battle between fundamentally different visions of the global order that is taking place in the background. On the one hand there is the supposedly western view of a liberal

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[1] United Nations, *A New Agenda for Peace; Our Common Agenda Policy Brief no. 9*, 3.

international order that is characterised by the rule of law, democracy, and respect for human rights within the framework of the United Nations. On the other hand, countries such as Russia and China dismiss this view as US-dominated and in need of replacement by the principle that the international community should not interfere in the internal affairs of states.[2]

Thinking about solving the conflict in Ukraine may seem highly utopian at this stage. At the time of writing this chapter, neither side was officially interested in peace initiatives under the heading of the United Nations. The war aims of Russia and Ukraine are totally incompatible. Russia wants to incorporate the territories it has conquered in the Russian Federation. Furthermore, the Ukraine rump state should then be neutral and subservient to Russian interests. All independent countries that formerly belonged to the Soviet Union should in the Russian view be demilitarised, which would imply an infringement of the independence of the Baltic republics, which are members of NATO and the EU. Ukraine, for its part, wants restoration of its pre-2014 borders, reparations of war damages and criminal prosecution of those suspected of war crimes.

Although the prospects for peace are dim, this doesn't mean the UN has been inactive. Nor can the United Nations be dismissed as irrelevant, if only because any solution of the war will have consequences for the United Nations in the future. There have been several initiatives, but they originated in non-western countries which incline to serve Russian and Chinese views of the future of the world order. It is not in the interests of the West (to be more specific: NATO, the EU, and sympathising countries) to leave the future of the world order in those hands. The West itself should also think about the role of ways to peace and the position of the United Nations within it. The outcome of the Russia-Ukraine war will not only be crucial to the people of Ukraine, but it will also affect the future of the UN, the future of peace operations, and the future of the international legal order. It is therefore important to consider the role of the United Nations as the guarantor of peace and security.

That is why this chapter will deal with the following question: how does the transition of the global world order affect the role of the United Nations to restore and maintain peace and security in the case of Ukraine? This question will first be tackled by looking at the debate on the future in the liberal world order. In the second section, the role of the United Nations and its most relevant institutions in the maintenance and promotion of peace and security in the world will be presented. In the third section we will take a closer look at the role of UN peacekeeping as an instrument of the maintenance and promotion of peace and security. The fourth

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[2] A claim that turned out to be not without hypocrisy when Russia interfered in the domestic affairs of Ukraine and initiated a large-scale military intervention in February 2022.

part of this contribution will then consider how this role and this instrument can be applied to the case of the current war in Ukraine. This will enable us in the conclusion to assess the potential role of the United Nations in the Russia-Ukraine War against the background of the debate on the future of the world order.

1. International order in transition

Both politically and militarily, the war confronted the UN-system with tendencies that had already emerged before 2022. In the 1990s and the early 2000s the dominant view of the international order preferred multilateral and rules-based patterns of cooperation within a broader framework of a market economy, free trade, democracy, and respect for human rights. However, in 2018 Ikenberry argued that this liberal international order was in crisis. He discerned various causes: Donald Trump, as US President, questioned its relevance. Britain left the EU and damaged the international order in Europe. Liberal democracy was in retreat. Populist, authoritarian, and nationalist politics was on the rise. American hegemony was in decline and the 'non-West,' e.g., China, India, the Global South, was on the rise.[3] The liberal order seems to be giving way to a more pluralistic system with a leading role for powers such as China. The war in Ukraine acted as an accelerator of these changes, as Geis and Schröder argue.[4]

Less than a month before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Russia and China presented a joint declaration on the future of international relations. Indirectly criticising the United States, they stated that 'certain States' attempts to impose their own "democratic standards" on other countries [...] prove to be nothing but flouting of democracy and go against the spirit and true values of democracy.'[5] Countries such as China, Brazil, India, and South Africa, are looking for an alternative to the western dominated international order and for that reason try to coordinate their international policies. New international groupings emerge, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) and the BRICS development bank. Other countries prefer the involvement of the Wagner Group for their internal security (Mali, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic) above peacekeeping missions with a Western military presence. Putin's Russia happily benefits from these developments and purports to be on their side. A significant group of countries, from the Global South, either

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[3] Ikenberry, *The End of the Liberal International Order?*

[4] Geis and Schröder, *Global Consequences of the War in Ukraine*, 297, 300.

[5] *Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on the International Relations Entering a New Era and the Global Sustainable Development*, 4 February 2022.

vote in favour of Russia, or abstain in resolutions in the UN General Assembly that condemn the illegal invasion of Ukraine.

One may add that Western countries have often overstepped the limits of international law themselves, such as the intervention in Kosovo in 1999 that lacked a Security Council mandate, the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 with a questionable mandate of the Security Council, or the intervention in Libya in 2011 that went way beyond the intention of the relevant Security Council resolution. More recently, western governments strongly supported Israel after the Hamas attacks of 7th October 2023 and in doing so alienated themselves from many other countries in the world that tended to focus on the plight of the Palestinian population. However, the argument that the liberal global order is tainted by mistakes and inconsistencies of western countries does not justify others doing the same thing. It is a typical argument of authoritarian regimes, which apparently is not shared by their victims who still tend to seek asylum in western countries and not in Russia or China.

Some of the criticism may be understandable, but the UN as an institution and as an expression of the international legal order is not a western invention. It was deliberately meant to be universal in nature and to stand at the service of all nations. All member states have willingly signed the UN Charter. Even the acceptance of the principle of responsibility to protect, the most far-reaching product of liberal thinking, can be considered universal. This principle argues that states are primarily responsible for the protection of their own citizens against crimes against humanity. But if a state government is not able to do so, the responsibility to protect the vulnerable population is transferred to the international community. The UN World Summit of heads of state and governments of 2006 unanimously adopted the principle of responsibility to protect, which was affirmed by the Security Council in the same year. Almost two thirds of the founding member-states were from what is now called the Global South. Also, of the 141 countries that voted in the General Assembly on the condemnation of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, over 90 countries belong to the same category.[6]

In a recent policy brief, UN Secretary General Guterres stressed universality as one of the guiding principles. In it, he advocates a new multilateral system that recognises that the world order is shifting and is adjusting to a more fragmented geopolitical landscape.[7] Still, he argues, the United Nations is in essence a norms-based organisation. Guterres: 'It owes its birth to an international treaty, the Charter, signed and ratified by States. It faces a potentially existential dilemma when the different interpretations by Member States of these universal normative

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[6] Hout, *The War in Ukraine; Is This the End of the Liberal International Order?*

[7] United Nations, *A New Agenda for Peace: Our Common Agenda Policy Brief no. 9.*

frameworks become so entrenched as to prevent adequate implementation.'[8] Of course the aggressor in the Russia-Ukraine war is the Russian Federation, which, as permanent member of the Security Council, can block any UN action. However, more fundamentally, these different interpretations of the universal frameworks prevent the United Nations from taking a more decisive role in ending the war in Ukraine. What the UN can do, theoretically, is shown in the next paragraph.

2. The powers of the UN

Although debate on the transformation of the international order has intensified, currently the UN has to make do with its original founding treaties. The United Nations was founded on 24th October 1945 in San Francisco, shortly after the end of the Second World War. According to Article 1 of the Charter of the United Nations, its main purpose is to maintain international peace and security, to develop friendly relations among nations, to achieve international cooperation in solving international problems and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion, and to harmonise actions of nations in the attainment of these common ends.[9]

Article 1 formulates the general purpose of the United Nations. Article 2 deals with the obligations of the member-states. They are to settle their international disputes by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security and justice are not endangered; they shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations (Article 2, sections 3 and 4 of the Charter). The UN Security Council was established to maintain international peace and security. It consists of fifteen members. There are five permanent members. To wit: China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. These member states have a right of veto on decisions by the Security Council.

The founders of the United Nations had to find a proper balance between the ideal of a world government that would guarantee global peace and the reality of great powers that did not want to have their hands tied. To keep the great powers within the system, the smaller powers had to accept the right of veto. But even if such a right were not to exist, what could stop a great power from acting the way it wants, especially when dealing with a nuclear power such as Russia. The

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[8] *A New Agenda for Peace; Our Common Agenda Policy Brief no. 9*, 7.

[9] These and the following citations from the Charter of the United Nations were found at *Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice*, San Francisco 24 October 1945.

effectiveness of the Security Council ultimately depends on trust between the superpowers.

The Security Council has far-reaching powers if it can reach a decision. It can authorise compulsory sanctions and military action when it concludes that international peace and security is threatened. There is a military staff committee that can advise on military operations. However, there is a long list of breaches of the international peace and security where the Security Council has not been able to act because of the vetoes of its five permanent members. During the Cold War it was mostly the Soviet Union that exerted its veto power. China usually vetoes resolutions that interfere with what it considers the internal affairs of states. The United States mostly vetoes resolutions that criticise Israel.

Apart from the Security Council there is the General Assembly, where all member-states are represented by one seat and one vote. It has no binding authority, but by expressing opinions in the form of resolutions it is, in the words of Paul Kennedy, a 'barometer of world opinion.'[10] In this role, it has contributed to the emergence of global opinions on apartheid, the climate, the position of women, or the fate of the people of the Palestine Territories.

The third central institution of the UN is the General Secretary. He is nominated by the Security Council and appointed by the General Assembly. His task is to run the day-to-day affairs of the UN. He can bring subjects to the attention of the Security Council, to start studies and reports and he can speak out on topics that concern world peace. Dag Hammerskjöld played an active role in the Congo Crisis in the sixties and Kurt Waldheim mediated in 1977 in the release of hostages by Polisario, the independence movement of the Western Sahara. The General Secretary is supported by several specialised departments. One is the Department of Peace Operations (DPO), formerly the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. It is responsible for the preparation and direction of UN peacekeeping operations. The DPO currently has no operations in Ukraine. The Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) of the United Nations is established to prevent and resolve conflicts in the world. The DPPA focuses on international peace and security through analysis, conflict prevention, and conflict management.

The United Nations does more than just maintain international peace and security. The UN Development Program, for instance, is responsible for social-economic development. For the provision of emergency aid to countries in need there is the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Care for refugees in the world is the responsibility of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, whereas human rights are the work of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the UN Commission for Human Rights. The International Court

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[10] Kennedy, *Parliament of Man*, 210.

of Justice settles disputes between states based on international law. It also gives advice on international legal matters. The International Criminal Court takes care of judging people suspected of crimes against humanity, war crimes, genocide, or ethnic cleansing. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is an autonomous international organisation within the wider UN system, and it reports to the General Assembly and the Security Council. The IAEA deals with the peaceful use of nuclear energy and the prevention of military use of nuclear power.

The international order that was established with the founding of the UN consists of a whole complex of rules and institutions within the framework of the Organisation of the United Nations. This system was designed to regulate relations between states in general and particularly between the superpowers to prevent a third world war. It has been able to accompany international relations with varying accomplishments during the changes that have taken place from the period shortly after the Second World War, the bipolar system of the Cold War, the process of decolonisation, the turbulent period after the demise of communism, the rise of international terrorism until the emergence of authoritarianism in recent years. According to Kennedy it worked best when there was a basis of mutual trust between the most powerful actors and more specifically the permanent members of the Security Council.[11]

There are many ideas and proposals that aim at improving the effectiveness of the UN system. However, all changes in the UN Charter need the approval of a two thirds majority in the General Assembly and the absence of a veto by any of the permanent members of the Security Council. Until now, no changes have been made. However, on 26th April 2022 the General Assembly adopted a resolution stating that the General Assembly could formally convene within ten working days of the casting of a veto by one or more permanent members of the Security Council. The Assembly can then have a debate on the situation as to which the veto was cast, if it does not meet in an emergency special session on the same situation. In such a session member-states can comment on that veto and on the arguments used.[12] This meant that the Russian Federation had to explain its veto in the Security Council meeting on the war in Ukraine.

During the Cold War the tensions between the superpowers prevented these rules and institutions from functioning properly. Peace operations had only a limited role in maintaining order between sovereign states or in the ambition to promote or enforce peace by political, social, institutional, and economic reforms within states. The flaws and shortcomings of the international order were basically

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[11] Kennedy, *Parliament of Man*, 75.

[12] *Standing Mandate for a General Assembly Debate When a Veto Is Cast in the Security Council*, General Assembly Resolution 76/262.

caused by fundamental differences of opinion on the international order and the question of whether the sovereignty of states is respected absolutely, or if it is possible or even desirable that state sovereignty is subjected to universal standards such as good governance, democracy, and respect for human rights. The latter is based on the conviction that peaceful relations between states are best served in the long term by promoting democratic institutions and societies within states. According to this view, threats to international peace and security are not just limited to aggression between states but can also be caused by domestic violent conflicts, bad governance, poverty, or climatic disasters.

3. UN peacekeeping

The various forms of peacekeeping have become visible symbols of the role of the United Nations in international crisis management, with military intervention as one of the most far-reaching instruments the UN can muster.[13] The term 'peacekeeping' originated in the fifties and became one of the most important instruments in the hands of the United Nations for the management of armed conflicts.[14] Since then about two hundred peace operations have been implemented in various shapes and sizes. What they have in common is the ambition of the participants to limit the scourge of war. They usually amount to ad hoc reactions to specific problems regarding the management and solution of armed conflicts. They are first and foremost a political instrument, by the use of which the deployment of military force is intended to provide conflict parties with a certain amount of security. The instrument of peace operations inevitably conforms to continuous changes in international relations.[15] Successful peace operations can contribute to the improvement of the chances of sustainable peace in conflict ridden areas in the world. Bad performance can, however, worsen a situation that may already be dire.

Peacekeeping emerged as a by-product of the Cold War. A series of improvisations to address matters of peace and security had to be invented because the member states could not agree on the arrangements laid out in Chapter VII of the UN Charter. The mechanism of peacekeeping missions was introduced without the participation of forces of the major powers. Neither peacekeeping as such nor peacekeeping operations are mentioned in the UN Charter. The Security Council had to invent a procedure establishing under what criteria the UNSC would agree

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[13] Thakur, *The United Nations, Peace and Security*, 37.

[14] Other instruments in the international toolbox are, for instance, conflict prevention, sanctions, humanitarian intervention, or transnational legal mechanisms.

[15] Williams and Bellamy, *Understanding Peacekeeping*, 2-3.

to a mandate for an actor to act on its behalf, like in the Korea War in 1950 and the Gulf War in 1990. Traditional peacekeeping missions were characterised by so-called blue helmets in white vehicles having as their main role the assistance of peaceful resolution of conflicts between states. Common features of these types of peace missions were consent of the conflicting parties, impartiality, and limiting the use of violence to self-defense only. They operated under Chapter VI of the United Nations Charter ('Pacific Settlement of Disputes'). Troops were usually positioned in buffer zones to physically separate the warring parties. Unarmed, or lightly armed observers were deployed to monitor violations of a peace agreement and report them to the political level. What these traditional peacekeeping missions normally achieved was the freezing of a conflict.

The number of peace missions increased considerably after the end of the Cold War. They were now applied in intra-state conflicts, where many countries signed peace agreements and hosted UN peacekeeping missions. But they failed to prevent violence from reoccurring. Step by step the tasks of peace missions were broadened with, for instance, the protection of humanitarian convoys (UNPROFOR) or elections (UNTAC), but still within the same restrictive mandate of limited use of force, i.e. for self-protection only. This was called 'Wider Peacekeeping.' Gradually, peacekeeping operations evolved to peace enforcing operations (IFOR, UNTAET, UNAMSIL), mandated by Security Council resolutions based on Chapter VII of the UN Charter. In the absence of a UN army more participation of regional security organisations in peace operations (such as NATO or the African Union) was vouched for.

Since the UN mission in Sierra Leone in 2000 every Security Council resolution has included the task of protection of civilians, which aimed at helping states to restore their authority without necessarily promoting reforms of state institutions. Peacekeepers tried to mitigate the serious impact of civil war on the local population but did not solve underlying causes. After the Al-Qaida attacks on New York and Washington on September 11th, 2001, and the inability of the Security Council to condone US intervention in Iraq in 2003, Secretary General Kofi Annan examined the major threats and challenges to global peace. In 2005 he published the report 'In Larger Freedom; Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All.'

This report underlined the interdependent character of security threats, and points towards the reciprocal reinforcement of development, security, and human rights.[16] The needs of states emerging from conflict could not be addressed properly by the existing peacekeeping mechanisms at the UN. So, several reforms were initiated by the UN to coordinate post-conflict security and development strategies, priorities, and programming. Peacebuilding missions integrated military, police, and civil capacities in comprehensive international efforts to contain the conflict

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[16] *In Larger Freedom*, Report of the Secretary General.

and stabilise the post-conflict situation by focusing on economic, social, political and security conditions within states, as well as to prevent future violence and to consolidate peace. Doyle and Sambanis have labelled state building and peace-building activities of contemporary UN-operations as 'extensive intrusions into the domestic affairs of other legally sovereign states.'[17]

In the past years, the international political climate has become less favourable to the more intensive types of peace building. Several reasons have been brought forward. Among others, this was caused by diminished budgets because of the financial crisis of 2008/2009, mounting criticism of the effectiveness of the large-scale and costly multidimensional peace missions. This criticism was partly aimed at the ever-widening ambitions of peacekeeping (which Etzioni has dubbed 'long-distance social engineering').[18] Etzioni argued that priority must be given to ensure basic security, both for its own sake and for the sake of the democracy that might gradually grow out of it. Partly, it was caused by failures in cases such as Afghanistan or Mali, where years and years of peacekeeping and comprehensive approaches had achieved little. Western countries have adjusted their ambitions regarding peace operations to the realities in international relations from conflict resolution to conflict management. But in the background, again, stands the criticism of the liberal world order and the growing support for a multipolar system.

In his New Agenda for Peace Guterres also pleas for a reconsideration of peacekeeping, claiming a serious and broad-based reflection on its future is necessary. He envisages 'nimble adaptable models with appropriate forward-looking transition and exit strategies' without unrealistic mandates. Also, in his view, the Security Council needs to be more representative of the geopolitical realities of today and of the contributions that different parts of the world make to global peace.[19]

4. UN practice in the Ukraine war

When the New Agenda for Peace was published, the war in Ukraine had already lasted one and a half years. The Security Council undertook no action after Russia's invasion of Ukraine although it was a blatant violation of the UN Charter. The same can obviously be said of the annexation of Crimea in 2014. One of the bitter aspects of the current situation is the incapacity of the United Nations to play a meaningful role in this respect. Guterres said in an interview in *El Pais* on 9th May 2023, that peace negotiations are not possible. Guterres: 'There was talk of a Russian offensive

[17] Doyle and Sambanis, *Making War and Building Peace*, 22.

[18] Etzioni, *Security First*, 41.

[19] *A New Agenda for Peace; Our Common Agenda Policy Brief no. 9, 20, 30.*

in the winter and a Ukrainian one in the spring. It is clear that both parties are fully engaged in the war.'[20]

The Security Council is powerless, because the Russian Federation, as one of the five permanent members, uses its veto-power to prevent the adoption of any resolution that criticises its own violation of fundamental international law. On several occasions the General Assembly, which has no veto-power, has condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine and demanded that Russia withdraw its troops from Ukrainian territory while simultaneously reaffirming Ukraine's independence and territorial integrity.[21] Such resolutions of the General Assembly may be morally important, but they are not binding. There is no executive organ under the UN umbrella that can force member-states to comply with decisions of either the Security Council or the General Assembly, let alone if it would be feasible when dealing with a superpower that possesses nuclear weapons. During the early stages of the war Poland proposed to send an international peacekeeping force to Ukraine that would support humanitarian aid and that would be robust enough to be able to defend itself in combat. It was not followed up, because of the risk that UN peacekeepers would be confronted by Russian troops.

General Secretary Guterres was involved in making possible the evacuation of Ukrainian citizens from the town of Mariupol when it was besieged by Russian troops. Together with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey he also played a central role in the so-called Black Sea Grain Initiative. This agreement between Ukraine and Russia of 22nd July 2022 made possible the export of grain from Ukraine, which has often been described as the granary of Europe. Many countries, mostly in the developing world, are dependent on Ukrainian grain. During the first months of the war, Russia blocked Ukrainian ports in the Black Sea. Initially, the agreement was to last for 120 days, but it was extended for a few months. At the time of writing this chapter, Russia continues to block and alternative ways to export Ukrainian grain have been explored.

In April 2022 the General Assembly suspended Russian membership of the UN Human Rights Council. In a ruling on 16th March 2022 the International Court of Justice ordered the Russian Federation to immediately end its military operations in Ukraine. The International Atomic Energy Agency is active in attempts to register and stabilise the situation in and around the nuclear power plant in Zaporizhzhia. The International Criminal Court (ICC) is an international organisation that can prosecute individuals for the international crimes of genocide, crimes

[20] Guterres, "Peace negotiations are not possible at this time. Both Russia and Ukraine believe they can win."

[21] Aggression against Ukraine, ES-11/1. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 2 March 2022.

against humanity, war crimes and the crime of aggression. In March 2022 the ICC Prosecutor opened an investigation into allegations of 'war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide committed on any part of the territory of Ukraine by any person from 21st November 2013 onwards.' On 17th March 2023 arrest warrants were issued for Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation, and Maria Lvova-Belova, Commissioner for Children's Rights in the Office of the President of the Russian Federation. There were 'reasonable grounds to believe that each suspect bears responsibility for the war crime of unlawful deportation of population (children) and that of unlawful transfer of population (children) from occupied areas of Ukraine to the Russian Federation, in prejudice of Ukrainian children.'[22]

Other international initiatives have shown commitment to peace in Ukraine. In September 2014 and February 2015, the so-called Minsk Accords were drawn up by the Trilateral Contact Group on Ukraine. This group consisted of representatives from Ukraine, Russia and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), comprising 57 states, including the United States and Canada. Many traditional and broader peacekeeping tasks were included in the first protocol, such as the monitoring and verification of a ceasefire, the establishment of security zones between Ukraine and Russian-held territories, and the withdrawal of armed groups and military equipment. To support the peace process there would be an inclusive national dialogue and all hostages and illegally detained persons were to be released. The Minsk II agreement consisted of a ceasefire, withdrawal of heavy weapons from the front line, release of prisoners of war, constitutional reform in Ukraine granting self-government to certain areas of the Donbas and restoring control of the state borders to the Ukrainian government. The Minsk Accords could not prevent the Russian aggression of 2022, but they suggest that the OSCE could offer a potential acceptable framework for Russia and Ukraine to host peace negotiations. Peace, however, remains elusive.

On the level of military involvement, it seems that the United Nations must fundamentally rethink the path peacekeeping has taken since the end of the Cold War. Currently the focus in the UN and in academia is still on stabilisation missions in failed states, climate, terrorism, gender issues and human rights. This development started with traditional and small peacekeeping missions and resulted in the broad and multidimensional peacebuilding and stabilisation missions that we saw in Afghanistan and Mali. If there is any chance of UN-involvement in a negotiated peace between Ukraine and Russia, it will most certainly not take the form of third-party intervention in an intrastate conflict between transnational conflict parties in support of a failed state to protect civilians and promote security sector reform. A return to the early forms of international intervention that aimed

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[22] *Situation in Ukraine, Investigation ICC-01/22.*

to separate conflicting parties by the establishment of a buffer zone based on a ceasefire-agreement (which would preferably run along the pre-2014 state borders between Ukraine and Russia) seems to be a more probable trajectory.

If hostilities are ended in such a way, there will probably be a huge task of demining large tracts of land, both populated and agricultural, of repairing damaged infrastructure and of assistance with demobilisation, disarmament, and re-integration of former regular and irregular armed groups, return of refugees and displaced persons, and the adoption of a program for economic recovery and reconstruction. The United Nations is well equipped for organising such tasks. A total of **174,000 square kilometres** of Ukraine's territory is currently in need of survey and demining.[23] The UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS) is part of the Department of Peace Operations and is currently involved in 21 programs in conflict areas like Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, Syria, and Congo.

5. Conclusion

Western countries have rightly allied themselves with the cause of Ukrainian freedom. This war is first and foremost a matter of justice for Ukraine. But in the background, it is about the future of the international order as well. Thinking about a possible future role for the United Nations in stopping and solving the war in Ukraine must therefore not be left to those countries alone that seek an alternative international order. In this contribution we tried to show how changes in the global order affect the effectiveness of the United Nations in guaranteeing international peace and security. Up till now, the UN Security Council has not been able to act the part it should have played in the prevention or ending of violence of the Russia-Ukraine War. As we have seen, the lack of trust between the permanent member-states of the Security Council played an important role. On the other hand, on various occasions and in practically all its affiliated institutions it has expressed its condemnation of the war and of Russian aggression. On a deeper level, the UN must deal with the existence of fundamentally different views on the character of the international legal order and the right of the international community to interfere in the internal affairs of states.

The UN may have been able to address threats to peace and stability in the early nineties, but that changed following the disagreements over the Iraq war in 2003 and the civil war in Syria that has been going on since 2011. Furthermore, the use of the veto-power of the five permanent members of the Security Council has very much varied over time. It is no more and no less than a function of the relations and

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[23] The total area of the Netherlands is 41,543 square kilometres.

differences of opinion between the states with veto-power in the Security Council. This may all help to explain the difficulty for the UN to effectively respond to the violence in Ukraine.

The constantly changing global political context will always shape the performance of the United Nations in maintaining peace and security. Today, as in the past. This doesn't mean that the incapacity of the Security Council to perform in the Russia-Ukraine war is without relevance. On the contrary, the outcome of the war may be decisive not only for the people of Ukraine, but also for the future of the international legal order and the role of the UN and UN-mandated peacekeeping. The future character of the international order is at stake: Will it be dominated by authoritarian regimes and aggressive policies or by universal humanitarian values and considerations?

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The West versus the Rest? A Pluralist English School Perspective on the Ukraine War

Jörg Noll & Sonja de Laat

Abstract

This chapter shows how the pluralist thoughts within English School Theory contribute much better to our understanding of India's and Brazil's view of the Ukraine War than Realism does. Those countries refrain from choosing sides and emphasise the role of diplomacy in finding a solution. They do not think or behave along power concepts and do not bandwagon with China, Russia, nor the West. What they are striving for, is a fair share in resources, knowledge, and the economy; and – most important – in the institutions of the Cold War, like the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and indeed the UN. Only a reform of the United Nations Security Council and the veto power, the countries of the global South believe, can bring equality and a true international society, the core of English School theory. The Ukraine war triggers, once again, this reflex by the global South and in particular by India and Brazil.

Keywords: English School, Realism, Pluralism, BRICS, India, Brazil

1. Introduction

When commenting on the BRICS meeting in August 2023, Günther Maihold correctly observed: 'G7 needs to be aware that the formation of BRICS+ is more than a mere political manoeuvre to advance China's vision of international order. All the BRICS+ members and the future group of partner countries have their own agendas, and the BRICS forum is one of the various platforms on which member countries try to promote their vision of the wor(l)d, especially for their participation with better conditions in the global economy.'[1]

The former Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of the United Kingdom, David Miliband (2007-2010), elucidates the behaviour of those non-Western countries: 'Western conviction about the [Ukraine, JN and SdL] war and its importance is matched elsewhere by skepticism at best and outright disdain at worst,' holding that 'it threatens the renewal of a rules-based order that reflects

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[1] Maihold "The geopolitical moment of the BRICS+."

a new, multipolar balance of power in the world.'[2] According to him, '[m]uch of the fence-sitting [of non-Western countries, JN and SdL] is not driven by disagreements over the conflict in Ukraine but is instead a symptom of a wider syndrome: anger at perceived Western double standards and frustration at stalled reform efforts in the international system.'[3] Miliband then lists many frustrations of countries like India, Indonesia, South Africa, and Brazil that the war and Western competition with China are pushing 'urgent issues such as debt, climate change, and the effects of the pandemic,'[4] to the background.

The observations by Maihold and Miliband stand in stark contrast to those analysts leaning toward (neo-)realist explanations. Whether it is power, power play or geo-political changes, the behaviour by those non-NATO or EU states and in particular Brazil, India and South Africa, are often explained by bandwagoning with China and Russia. Bandwagoning, as neo-realist theory tells us, means that weaker states align with a great or superpower because they have (almost) no other choice within the anarchic system. Either it is actively promoted by China with the Global South Initiative (GSI),[5] or the US lost its influence and nations jumped on the bandwagon of the alternative world vision offered by China and Russia.[6] But those analysts often err.

The behaviour of non-aligned countries is much more diverse than it looks at first sight. Many of those countries outside Europe clearly reject taking sides with Russia and/or China. Instead, the countries in the global South are showing more and more protecting their national interests, while at the same time staying non-aligned.[7] Yet, this cannot be explained by reducing their motives to (neo-)realist rationalisations. The reasons for their behaviour can be much better found in past and present actions by the Western countries, in particular those countries related to G7 and OECD.

To understand the behaviour of non-Western countries, we need to turn to more rigorous theories. However, while being right in his analysis of the possible motivations of non-Western countries, Miliband only reluctantly and more implicitly touches upon possible deeper, theoretical explanations. At best, he is using the term 'Realpolitik,' almost in its original meaning. As von Rochau more than 150 years ago stated, 'successful statecraft depended on an appreciation of the historical

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[2] Miliband "The world beyond Ukraine: The survival of the West and the demands of the rest," 36.

[3] idem, 37.

[4] ibid.

[5] Lin and Blanchette "China on the offensive: How the Ukraine war has changed Beijing's strategy."

[6] Labgrima "A growing BRICS shows U.S. is losing the battle for the global South."

[7] Shidore "The return of the global South: Realism, not moralism, drives a new critique of western power."

circumstances in which the statesman operated.' Yet, even more important 'was the ability to anticipate, and adjust oneself to, the changing conditions of modernity.'[8]

When looking at non-Western states, however, their policy towards the Ukraine conflict can best be understood not with realism or with Realpolitik but from an English School perspective. In particular pluralism, one important line of thought within English School, sheds light on the reactions of non-Western countries. It advocates that states do not have to be all the same (democracies), instead embracing diversity for as long as minimal standards of coexistence – an international society – are met. This resembles the rule-based order Miliband is referring to.

Our chapter looks at two important countries in the global South, India and Brazil, to figure out what the reasons might be for not univocally sharing the Western narrative and to what extent those countries interpret the actions by the West as a confirmation of their criticism. We do not want to criticise the Western support of Ukraine but want to use the insights of English School to analyse how India and Brazil argue and what the consequences might be for future relations of the West with the rest.

To that end we first explain in short, the core of English School theory, focusing on the pluralist thought. In the second part, we are using what Buzan calls pluralist primary institutions to develop a framework for analysing selected contributions by Brazil and India.[9] What follows is the analysis and interpretation of our findings.

2. A short introduction to English School

The English School, although coming of age since its beginnings in the 1960s, is an important yet often overlooked concept within International Relations theory. Contrary to realism, with central concepts like anarchy and power, and liberalism and its strive for an international government or world society, the English School adheres much more to the concept of international society. Hedley Bull wrote that it 'comes into being "when a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions."'[10]

Order is a basic condition wherein international society resembles the national society that provides security against violence; stability of property, private or public; and observance of agreements. It is associated with Grotianism/Rationalism

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[8] Bew, *Realpolitik: A History*, 6.

[9] Buzan, *An Introduction to the English School of International Relations,* 9.

[10] Bull cited in Linklater "English School."

and 'about the institutionalization of mutual interest and identity among states and puts the creation and maintenance of shared norms, norms, rules and institutions at the center of IR theory.'[11]

There exist two competing lines of thought within English School, i.e. solidarists and pluralists. Nicholas J. Wheeler defines solidarism as 'the solidarity, or potential solidarity, of the states that make up international society, concerning the enforcement of the law.'[12] Solidarism recognises that individuals have rights and duties under international law but acknowledges that these rights for individuals can only be enforced by states. Solidarism assumes that states serve the interests and goals of people, not the other way around. Human rights and security are more important than the sovereignty of states, in other words, morality takes precedence over the principle of sovereignty.[13]

Contrary to solidarism, pluralism states that international society gains most by respecting the independence of states. It is important to respect the central role of interstate consensus in the international order, the importance of ethical diversity among states, and the fragility of normative progress.[14] Pluralism assumes that states reach an agreement with each other about certain norms and disciplines of behaviour through past interactions and experiences. This agreement ensures that order is maintained at the international level, but this process of agreement is affected by the wide diversity of ethical principles and views of governmental systems. It makes agreements fragile and difficult to push in a progressive direction.[15]

3. Primary institutions of international society

Primary institutions are institutions of international society that are durable practices that evolved and 'are constitutive of actors and their patterns of legitimate activity in relation to each other.'[16] Table 19.1 gives an overview of those primary institutions.

Some of the concepts, or masters as Buzan calls it, in Table 19.1 come close to realism and realist thought. The important difference is that English School does not consider those masters to enlarge individual countries' power, but to contribute

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[11] Buzan "An introduction," 12-13.

[12] Wheeler *Saving Strangers: Humanitarian Intervention in International Society*.

[13] Lis *Do English School 'Solidarists' Provide a Convincing Justification for Humanitarian intervention?* For an analysis of BRICS countries' and solidarism, see Tüzgen and Oguz Gök "Understanding the policies of the BRICS countries in R2P cases: An Englisch School perspective," 3–29.

[14] Williams *Pluralism, the English School and the Challenge of Normative Theory*.

[15] ibid.

[16] Buzan "The primary institutions of international society," 167.

Primary Institutions	
Master	**Derivative**
Sovereignty	Non-intervention
	International law
Territoriality	Boundaries
Diplomacy	Messengers/ diplomats
	Conferences/Congresses
	Multilateralism
	Diplomatic language
	Arbitration
Balance of Power	Anti-hegemonism
	Alliances
	Guarantees
	Neutrality
	War
	Great power management
Equality of people	Human Rights
	Humanitarian intervention
Inequality of people	Colonialism
	Dynasticism
Trade	Market
	Protectionism
	Hegemonic stability
Nationalism	Self-determination
	Popular sovereignty
	Democracy

Table 19.1: The nested hierarchy of international institutions

to a stable international society by adhering to those principals. In other words, if countries respect sovereignty and territoriality, using diplomacy to come to terms, starting to improve the equality of people – less in a liberal sense but much more as a basic condition – then a peaceful coexistence would be possible.

This is why pluralism helps to understand the reluctance of parts of the world to share and defend support of Ukraine by the West, notwithstanding the

conundrum of not rejecting or even supporting this war. The analysed countries solve this conundrum of being pluralist and not condemning the intervention at the same time, by blaming both Russia and Ukraine for being responsible for the war. Pluralism repeatedly emphasises that interventions by the West are leading to the 'West versus the Rest.' To come to an international society, states must agree on basic norms and values that are shared by all. Pluralists are afraid that any intervention of the West interferes with that principle and that this in turn leads to yet another alienation between the West and the rest of the world.

We expect that the countries under scrutiny, Brazil and India, are using arguments related to the primary institutions of international society. To show that we are basing our analysis on the derivatives of Table 19.1, we are analysing selected documents, speeches and other public utterances by officials of the countries. We also refer to publications from pundits to put the behaviour of the countries into perspective. We are using the masters from Table 19.1 and their derivatives and are skimming the texts, i.e. a first quick read of the text to find relevant passages. After that we are scanning those more relevant parts and placing them into context.[17] Given the scope and range of our research, we are not looking for other indicators that might reflect solidarism, liberalism, or realism. Our aim is solely to show how Brazil and India are arguing along pluralist thought lines.

4. India

After its independence in 1947, India balanced between the two superpowers during the Cold War. At the same time the country was always emphasising its independence and its right to choose its own way. This is expressed, among others, by its founding initiative of the Non-Aligned Movement, named in 1950 during Nehru's reign, and its role within the Group of 77 in the UN.

Nowadays, the country has the largest population in the world and its economy accounted for 7.2% of the global economy in 2022.[18] Its top trading partners are the US, China, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and countries in the region, like Singapore, Indonesia and Australia.[19] At the same time, the country relies on Russia for its energy supplies and weapons. Although Russia's share of total Indian arms imports fell from 64% to 45% over the last years on average, the country is still the largest supplier of weapons and India is the largest arms industry market for Russia. The

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[17] Doorewaard, Kil, van der Ven *Praktijkgericht kwalitatief onderzoek. Een praktische handleiding.*

[18] Statista *India: Share of global gross domestic product (GDP) adjusted for Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) from 2018 to 2028.*

[19] Cogoport *A Showcase of India's Top 10 Trade Partners.*

second supplier of arms is France and the third the US.[20] India is depending on several sides (in)directly involved in the Ukraine War. India was a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council (UNSC) in 2021-2022.

4.1 India and the Ukraine War

When analysing the speeches during UNSC meetings and by the Indian Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, the pluralist attitude of the country becomes apparent. India demanded 'respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States,' during the first days of the Russian invasion in Ukraine.[21] Modi reiterated this during an address to the Joint Session of the US Congress on 23rd June 2023: 'With the Ukraine conflict, war has returned to Europe. It is causing great pain in the region. Since it involves major powers, the outcomes are severe. Countries of the Global South have been particularly affected. The global order is based on the respect for the principles of the UN Charter, peaceful resolution of disputes, and respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity.'[22] This quote not only reflects pluralist's masters, but directly addresses its core, global order and the principles of UN, e.g. sovereign equality, peaceful settlement of conflicts, refraining from threat, and – important in this respect – the non-intervention principle of the UN in internal affairs.[23]

The master primary institutions: diplomacy	Source	Page
[...] focusing **diplomacy** to address all issues concerning the situation	5974th meeting	6
[...] with international **law** and with agreements [...]	5974th meeting	6
[...] sustained **diplomatic dialogue** between de concerned parties.	5974th meeting	6
Dialogue is the ontly answer te settling differences [...]	8979th meeting	7
[...] return to the path of **diplomacy** and **dialogue**	8980th meeting	5
[...] return to the path of **diplomacy** and **dialogue**	8983th meeting	10
[...] call for dialogue and diplomacy.	PM speaks with President Putin	1

Table 19.2: India Diplomacy

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[20] Peri "India remains biggest arms importer between 2018-22 despite drop in overall imports."

[21] S/PV.8979, UNSC 8979th meeting; S/PV.8980, UNSC 8980th.

[22] Modi *Address to the Joint Session of the US Congress on 23 June 2023*.

[23] United Nations *Charter Chapter 1*.

From the start of the conflict, India emphasised diplomacy as being key to a solution (Table 19.2). In India's view, both sides – Russia and Ukraine – must engage in a diplomatic solution respecting other key concepts of UN and pluralism, like sovereignty and territorial integrity. Modi repeated this in a personal engagement with Putin.[24] A year into the conflict, during a special session of the General Assembly, India again abstained from every vote – either on amendments brought to the table in favour of Russia or against it.[25] During that meeting, Mrs. Kamboj, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Permanent Representative, declared, again: 'India remains steadfastly committed to multilateralism and upholds the principles of the United Nations Charter. We will always call for dialogue and diplomacy as the only viable way out. While we take note of the stated objectives of today's resolution, given its inherent limitations in reaching our desired goal of securing lasting peace, we were constrained to abstain in the voting on it.'[26]

India is reluctant to choose sides or even interfere in the conflict. There are different reasons for that. The country is not willing to give up its economic and military relations with Russia, given the rising tensions with China. This, however, does not exclude critical talks with Putin.[27] India fears that the conflict leads to an increase in prizes and the country seeks to keep trading with Russia, while it aims at the same time for diversification in its arms imports.[28] And, given its still unsettled issues of trade currency, it is trying to enlarge its own exports to Russia. Since the Western sanctions, it is difficult for Russia to trade in dollars. This is why India is trying to have all trade paid in Indian rupees. The biggest obstacle is the large imbalance in trade. While the country is exporting $2.8 billion in the last fiscal year to Russia, it imported $41.56 billion from the country, mainly crudes and weapons.[29] The country needs and wants to enlarge its exports to Russia with for example electronic items.[30] India, although trading with Russia and China, is relying on the US for security, too.[31]

In the end, it is unlikely that India will ditch Russia. It is critical, but also dependent. It 'refuses to form exclusive alliances with any great power';[32] and the country is making clear that it demands a fair share of the UNSC and a reform,

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24   Pasricha "India remains steadfast in partnership with Russia."

25   A/ES-11/PV.19, General Assembly, Eleventh Emergency Special session, 19th plenary meeting.

26   A/ES-11/PV.19: 10/12

27   Pasricha "India remains steadfast."

28   Menon "The fantasy of the free world: Are democracies really united against Russia?"

29   Sharma "Trade in Indian rupee with Russia shows hiccups in 'de-dollarisation' concept."

30   Reuters "India hopeful of rupee trade with Russia after imports surge."

31   Menon "The fantasy of the free world: Are democracies really united against Russia?"

32   Lalwani and Jacob "Will India ditch Russia? Debating the future of an old friendship."

'pitching for a permanent seat in the expanded membership of the UNSC, arguing that the existing body does not truly reflect the contemporary world realities.'[33]

5. Brazil

The largest country on the South American continent, Brazil, is one of the five original BRICS countries. 'As part of this group of emerging powers Brazil has played an increasingly vocal and central role in the evolution of major international institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and adopted an important position as provider of economic, political, and physical security in the Americas.'[34] Until today, Brazil is playing an important role in expressing the global South's thoughts about the Ukraine War and the frustrations with the West.

Being one of the largest countries in the world, it should come as no surprise that only 39.2% of its GDP accounts for foreign trade. Its largest trading partner – by far – is China which accounts for 26.8% of exports and 23.2% of imports. In comparison, to the US as the second most important trade partner Brazil is exporting 11.4% and importing 18.6%. Brazil's main export products are iron ores, soya beans and petroleum oils.[35] Like almost all countries in the world, Brazil had to cope with a significant inflation up to 16% in 2021.[36]

As will be seen, Brazil's argumentation resembles that of India. There exists, however, one important political difference. Prior to 1st January 2023, Jair Messias Bolsonaro was president of the country, since that date, it is Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. Brazil was a non-permanent member of the UNSC in 2022-2023.

5.1 Brazil and the Ukraine War

From the beginning, Brazil aimed at a diplomatic solution: 'Negotiations must also [...] take into account the security concerns of all parties to the conflict and [...] aim to create adequate conditions for an inclusive political dialogue that must reflect the diversity of and include representation from all the peoples of the region. Brazil does not underestimate the complexity of the current situation, but we insist on dialogue as key to achieving a lasting settlement to this conflict. Too much is at

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[33] Singh "'Another wasted opportunity': India criticises delay in UNSC reforms: India, Brazil, South Africa, Germany and Japan are strong contenders for permanent membership of the UNSC.

[34] Burges *Brazilian Foreign Policy After the Cold War*, 1.

[35] Santander *Brazilian Foreign Trade in Figures.*

[36] OECD *Economic Outlook.*

stake here, above all the lives of many civilians. We owe them all our efforts to bring this crisis to a peaceful solution.'[37]

Many of the pluralist masters can be found in this quote, like diplomacy, balance of power, and human security. In Table 19.3 we see that this has not changed during the conflict.

The master primary institutions: diplomacy	Source	Page
'We believe that the Security Council should strive to show a united resolve in pursuing **diplomatic** solutions to all threats to international peace and security'	8979th meeting	6
'we need to create the conditions for **dialogue** among all parties involved'	8979th meeting	6
'Brazil attempted to seek such a **balance** and to maintain a space for **dialogue**'	8979th meeting	6
'there does not appear to be willingness on either side for a **ceasefire** in the near future'	9245th meeting	15
'Brazil understands that initiatives such as the temporary ceasefire … pave the way for the resumption of **dialogue**'	9243th meeting	11

Table 19.3: Brazil Diplomacy

What has changed, is Brazil's voting behaviour. In the beginning of the conflict the country voted reluctantly against Russia[38] – for which it felt it did not get the credit by the West it deserved[39] – yet it quickly abstained under both presidents.[40] Shortly before the invasion, President Bolsonaro visited Putin and said he was 'in solidarity with Russia,' without elaborating. He later told reporters Putin had peaceful intentions.'[41] Lula himself does not choose sides, but championed himself as mediator to end the conflict, infused by his frustrations with the West. 'The Brazilian peace initiative reflects a profound sense of frustration and fatigue in the developing world with a protracted confrontation that is generating massive humanitarian suffering, material costs and diplomatic uncertainty. Accordingly, Russia bears sole responsibility for initiating the war in Ukraine, but by now, the United States and Europe's response has become equally blamable for sponsoring

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[37] S/PV.8974, UNSC 8974th meeting.

[38] Paraguassu "Despite Bolsonaro reluctance, Brazil votes against Russia on U.N. resolution."

[39] Hirst and Tokatlian "How Brazil wants to end the war in Ukraine."

[40] S/PV.8979, UNSC 8979th meeting; S/PV.8980, 8980th meeting; A/ES-11/PV.19, 19th plenary meeting. Thursday, 23 February 2023, 3 p.m., New York.

[41] Paraguassu "Despite Bolsonaros reluctance."

a sine die proxy war.'[42] According to Hirst and Tokatlian this reflects the stances of other Latin-American countries and Lula's frustration is for a large part grounded in the unrests, invasions and wars after the Cold War, while Lula proclaims 'the world requires tranquility.'

The post-Cold War world also made clear that the Cold War order is outdated. Both, Lula[43] and Bolsenaro,[44] are using the conflict to address UNSC reforms. Brazil has been doing it for years and is using the conflict to emphasise its unease with the current UNSC and the veto power of the permanent members. Outright frustrated, the permanent representative said a few days after the invasion 'No country, elected or non-elected, with or without veto power, should be able to use force against the territorial integrity of another State with no Council reaction. The Council's paralysis when world peace is at stake could lead to its irrelevance when we need it most. It is our collective responsibility not to allow that to happen.'[45] Lula reiterated this during his closing remarks of the G20 summit 2023 in India.[46]

6. Implications: Pluralism versus realism

At first sight, it seems a bit odd using English School theory and pluralism to analyse the Ukraine war. From its beginnings, it is central to English School to structure the debate of interventionist vs. non-interventionists to protect human rights. Above all, it seems that Russia's aggression can only be supported by proponents of realist thought, either for defending its own sovereignty or by defending its historical claims for Ukraine being part of larger Russia. Yet, as we show, English School and in particular pluralism can much better explain non-alignment and autonomic behaviour of a state than a system centric theory can, navigating between or distracting themselves from archaic power concepts in international relations.

As can be seen in Figure 19.1, to some extent the pluralist debate within English School indeed bears parallels with realist's thinking, since its philosophical, legal, and theoretical foundations come close to realist thinking. 'Although realism and pluralism start from different ontologies (system versus society), they share a similar vulnerability to pessimism.'[47] On the other hand, there must be some via-media between what Carr called utopianism – not having a relation with reality – and the

[42] Hirst and Tokatlian "How Brazil wants to end the war."

[43] Paraguassu "Brazil's Lula says 'neither Putin nor Zelenskiy ready for peace.UNSC.'"

[44] General Assembly, Seventy-seventh session, 4th plenary meeting, Tuesday, 20 September 2022, A/77/PV.4,

[45] UNSC S/PV.8979, 10/17.

[46] Lula da Silva "Speech by President Lula at the closing of the G20 Summit."

[47] Buzan, *An Introduction to the English School of International Relations*, 93.

fatalistic realism.[48] Pluralism is this possible via-media, since it sees coexistence as the maximum that can be reached within international society. This coexistence is supported by what is called the primary institutions of international society.
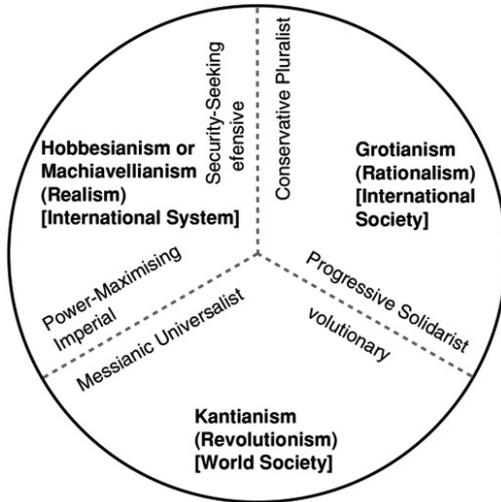
Figure 19.1: The classical 'Three Traditions' model of English school. (Buzan. An Introduction to the English School of International Relations*)*

7. Conclusion

Since the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and possibly even before, American and British troops have trained and supported the Ukrainian armed forces in their reform efforts. With the invasion of 24th February 2022, this support accelerated, and the Western world almost unanimously sent weapons to Ukraine, trained its soldiers on (advanced) weapon systems and is already making plans for the reconstruction of the country. While this support surprised many politicians, pundits, and Putin, the reactions in the rest of the world appear to be diverse. While only five countries supported Russia during a meeting of the UN general assembly shortly

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[48] idem, 7-8; Noll and Rothman "Power denied? E.H. Carr and the conduct of the post Cold War interventions."

after the invasion in 2022 and more than 140 condemned the invasion, 40 countries[49] did not choose sides and abstained. One of the leading countries in abstention and navigating between the West and Russia is India. The other one is Brazil that in the first place voted against the Russian invasion but abstained after that.

This chapter has shown why the countries are not choosing univocally the side of the West and Ukraine. The main reasons are frustration about Western behaviour after the Cold War, i.e. selective invasions, wars, and selfishness by the West that made the global South suffer. That became not in the least place obvious during the Covid pandemic. Contrary to what certain pundits may expect, Brazil and India did not choose the side of China either. Once again, (neo-) Realism fell and falls short in explaining the consequences for international relations and security in the future.

As shown, English School and Pluralism are much better suited for understanding India's and Brazil's concerns the more those countries do not think or behave along power concepts. What they are striving for, is a fair share in resources, knowledge, and the economy; and – most important – in the institutions of the Cold War, like the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and indeed the UN. Only a reform of the UNSC and the veto power, the countries of the global South believe, can bring equality and a true international society. The Ukraine war triggers, once again, this reflex by the global South and in particular India and Brazil.

As a consequence, it is not multipolarity as some pundits want us to believe, but much more a networked world we are heading towards. As Shivshankar Menon pointedly mentioned '… dynamic of multiple affiliations and partnerships is the norm in Asia.'[50] And Sabine Mengelberg recently added, it is the EU that must get used to flexible cooperation and global connections.[51] In that sense, India and Brazil might teach the EU a lot.

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[49] Algeria, Angola, Armenia, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Burundi, Central African Republic, China, Congo, Cuba, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, India, Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Madagascar, Mali, Mongolia, Mozambique, Namibia, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Senegal, South Africa, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Uganda, Vietnam, Zimbabwe.

[50] Menon "The fantasy of the free world: Are democracies really united against Russia?"

[51] Mengelberg "Wennen aan een à la carte wereldorde."

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Rules and Norms

Fighting Justly: The Russia-Ukraine War and the Usefulness of Morality

Peter Olsthoorn

Abstract

War is almost always conducted with various restrictions in the form of rules, rituals, and taboos. Many of the norms that regulate warfare can be found in the tradition of just war. This tradition seeks to provide a middle ground between an unrealistic (at least for politicians) pacifism that does not even allow war in self-defence and a too realistic realism that claims there is no place for ethics in war. The tradition of just war does not have the force of law; it provides, above all, a vocabulary to discuss war in moral terms. At the same time, the tradition does have an impact: it forms the basis of humanitarian law and the Geneva Conventions. Just like with laws, it is recognised here that imperfect adherence to these principles does not necessarily diminish their validity. Most proponents of the tradition believe that the principles of just war, even though some date back centuries, are sufficiently general to be applicable to contemporary conflicts, such as the Russia-Ukraine war. If we apply the norms of the just war tradition to the current situation in Ukraine, we see that Russia is waging an unjust war in an unjust manner.

Keywords: Just war, Michael Walzer, Proportionality, Discrimination, Due care

1. Introduction

Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* describes how Athens extended its empire to the alarm of competing power Sparta, leading to a war between Athens and a Spartan-led coalition that lasted from 431 to 404 BC.[1] In 416 BC, Athens told the island state of Melos to submit to Athenian rule and break ties with Sparta – or alternatively face an invasion by the much stronger Athens. Melos warned Athens that such an unprovoked invasion would cause other states to get worried about becoming the next victim of Athenian aggression and could thus increase hostility towards Athens. Athens conversely argued that it would appear weak if it left Melos siding with the Spartans unpunished. For Athens, justice was not part of

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[1] Kagan, *Peloponnesian War*.

the equation. As the Athenian envoys famously put it: 'For ourselves, we shall not trouble you with specious pretences [...] since you know as well as we do that right, as the world goes, is only in question between equals in power, while the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must.'[2] They believed this to be a law of nature: 'Of the gods we believe, and of men we know, that by a necessary law of their nature they rule wherever they can [...] you and everybody else, having the same power as we have, would do the same as we do.'[3] The Melians refused to yield but ultimately had to surrender after the ensuing Athenian siege, ending with the slaying of the men and the enslavement of the women and children. Athens ultimately lost the war with Sparta, partly because it overreached with its expedition to Sicily, and Thucydides warns that an overly amoral foreign policy will in the end backfire. For Melos, Athens' defeat came too late, but Ukraine can still hope for a better outcome.

As for justice and war: almost everyone will agree that the Athenians committed an injustice when they imposed their will on Melos by force. Thucydides appeared to have thought so, and also in Athens the justice of the invasion of Melos was a subject of debate. That suggests that it is possible to have a meaningful conversation about the morality of a war – just as we can have a meaningful discussion about the strategy or logistics of that war. We do not have to leave that conversation to those working in or for the military: philosophers and lawyers (and ultimately we ourselves) should engage in that exchange. Doing so contributes to what is commonly called the just war tradition. That tradition has no force of law, but offers a vocabulary for thinking and speaking about war in moral terms. At the same time, the tradition does have actual impact: it is, for example, the basis of humanitarian law and the Geneva Conventions. Most advocates of the tradition believe that its principles, even though some date back centuries (the term just war tradition is more accurate than the more widespread term just war theory), are sufficiently general to apply to contemporary conflicts such as in Ukraine. As with laws, the imperfect adherence to these principles does not diminish their validity.

The next section describes how the just war tradition distances itself from realism and relativism, essentially the beliefs the Athenian envoys subscribed to: ethics has no place in war because morality is relative in the first place. The section after that briefly describes the most important just war principles, which are in the subsequent section applied to the Russia-Ukraine war. To end things off, the final section debates the usefulness of morality in war.

[2] Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War*, 89.
[3] Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War*, book V, 105.

2. Realisms and relativism

If one were to read Ukraine for Melos and Russia for Athens in the above, there are some discouraging parallels (Thucydides wanted his book to be 'a possession for all time').[4] The Athenian belief that there is no place for justice and morality in times of war, for instance, still rings true to many people today. This popular view has turned up in various forms throughout history, from Cicero's statement that the law is silent when weapons speak to Hobbes' assumption that in a state of nature – where states still find themselves in relation to each other – man is a wolf to his fellow man.[5] This understanding of war has been rather influential in the study of international relations where it goes under the name of realism. Realism suggests that in relations between states, the possibility (and will) to act morally is non-existent. National self-interest and necessity reign supreme, as states that show weakness will be subjugated. Speaking in moral terms about war and peace is hollow as it has no actual influence on actions.[6] Prescriptive realism, which argues that states 'should' act amorally, adds that mixing war and morality ultimately leads to more casualties because a party that believes it occupies the moral high ground will fight even more ruthlessly.[7]

Realism is a way of thinking about war and peace that appeals to common sense – at first glance it contains an important truth that is summed up in General Sherman's dictum that war is hell, but also in Clausewitz's intuitively appealing claim that wars tend to 'absoluteness' and that the limitations law and morality impose are in essence alien to it.[8] However, as many authors have pointed out, war is almost always fought with the observance of various rules, rituals and taboos.[9] A familiar example is the taboo on shooting a lone soldier who forms too easy a target. This is the 'naked soldier' from Robert Graves' war memoirs.[10] The most important of these rules is that war is best left to a certain group in society: knights, mercenaries, nobles, samurai or, as is the case today, (professional) military personnel.[11] Such restrictions are not alien to what war is, but rather form an essential part of it. War

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[4] Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War,* book I, 22.

[5] Cicero, *Pro Milone*; Hobbes, *De Cive*, dedication.

[6] Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, 3, 10

[7] Orend, *War and International Justice.*

[8] Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, 22, 32-3.

[9] See for instance Chiu, *Conspiring with the Enemy*; Keegan, *History of Warfare*; Lynn, *Battle*; Shaw, *Utilitarianism and War*.

[10] Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, 139

[11] Hence that many just war theorists are critical about the use of private military companies (such as the Wagner Group is or was) and volunteer battalions (such as those fighting for Ukraine). See for instance Pattison "Just war and privatization."

is often a surprisingly regulated practice. We find many of these norms that aim to limit the damage that war causes to at least some extent in the just war tradition. This tradition tries to offer a middle ground between an unrealistic (for politicians at least) pacifism that does not allow war for self-defence, and a too-realistic realism that asserts that in war states cannot but follow their self-interest. Precisely because it has a semblance of truth, realism, with its assumption that states want to increase their power and that other possible motives are mere talk, is a more formidable opponent of the just war tradition than pacifism is.

One of the reasons for the outward plausibility of realism lies in its assumption that morality is relative, and that there can be no universally accepted judgments about right and wrong in war. 'One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter,' as the platitude goes. Clearly, such relativism reduces ethical judgments to matters of opinion. It builds on the empirical claim that there is widespread moral disagreement, and the metaethical claim that the truth of moral judgments is 'relative to the moral standard of some person or group of persons.'[12] Walzer refers to Melos: we all see that the rights of the Melians have been trampled on, just as we all see that kicking babies for fun is wrong.

3. Fighting just wars justly

The principles of the just war tradition address both when one may choose to go to war (the *jus ad bellum*) and how soldiers should fight that war (*jus in bello*). As for *jus ad bellum*, the three most important criteria are that a war must serve a just cause, must be proportional to that just cause, and must be the last resort. Of those criteria, just cause is the most essential, and there are really only two of those: a country may defend itself and, in exceptional circumstances, intervene to stop severe human rights abuses in another country. No politician will start a war without trying to convince the population and its armed forces that there is indeed a just reason for fighting – although this does not necessarily mean that politicians themselves believe that justification, of course. Politicians 'work hard to satisfy their subjects of the justice of their wars; they "render reasons," though not always honest ones.'[13]

The two main principles of *jus in bello* are the principle of discrimination and the principle of proportionality. Discrimination – distinguishing between

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[12] It is on such grounds that the just war tradition explicitly distances itself from moral relativism. In the end, we can all subscribe to a number of basic principles that minimise the suffering caused by war. Michael Walzer has most influentially expressed that view in his *Just and Unjust Wars*.<fn>Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars.*

[13] Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, 39.

combatants and non-combatants – concerns the immunity of innocent civilians and states that they should never be the target of an attack. Proportionality means that unintended civilian casualties (intended civilian casualties are never justified) are only justified if their number is proportionate to the military objective: the (expected) number of civilian casualties resulting from a legitimate attack on a military target must be proportionate to the (expected) military gains. Both principles thus place the protection of civilians at the centre. War is a destructive activity, and the application of the principles of discrimination and proportionality aim to limit the damage done. Discrimination and proportionality together set limits on what can and cannot be done to civilians.

This principle of discrimination is fairly straightforward: attacks should be limited to military targets. Proportionality is more a matter of weighing, and inherently subjective: military planners tend to exaggerate the importance of their target, while underestimating the risk of civilian casualties. Moreover, the requirement that the number of unintended civilian casualties should be proportionate does not by itself require political and military decision-makers to minimise the number of civilian casualties as much as possible. It is because of the elasticity of the principle of proportionality that Walzer proposes an additional 'due care' principle: military planners must actively try to avoid unintended civilian casualties.[14] They can, for example, warn civilians in a timely manner of an impending attack on a nearby military target, use precision weapons, or opt for ground troops instead of airplanes.

4. Fighting an unjust war unjustly

Regarding the *jus ad bellum*, the rhetoric from the Kremlin about the war in Ukraine clearly testifies to the fact that political leaders deem it a necessity to at least give the impression of waging a war on just grounds.[15] President Putin (who prefers to call the war a special military operation) invokes the necessity of self-defence, but also the duty to end genocide by Ukraine (the Genocide Convention of 1948 states

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[14] Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, 155-6. As Walzer puts it elsewhere, the doctrine of double effect 'makes things too easy for the attackers; all they have to do is "not intend" to harm the civilians, even though they know they will cause injury or death. Instead, there must be a second intention to match the second, collateral effect. First, the soldiers carrying out the attack must intend to hit the target; and second, they must not intend to kill civilians. It is this second intention that must be manifest in the planning and conduct of the attack; the attacking force is morally required to take positive measures to avoid or minimise injury to civilians in the target area.' Walzer, "Responsibility and proportionality," 49.

[15] According to Walzer 'no political leader can send soldiers into battle, asking them to risk their lives and to kill other people, without assuring that their cause is just – and that of their enemies unjust.' Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, xi-ii.

that there is an obligation to prevent and punish genocide) and of an humanitarian intervention to protect innocent civilians. By using such terms and motives, he attempts to justify the invasion, most likely mainly for the Russian domestic audience, Russian soldiers and governments that have not yet taken a position. Putin does not espouse the view of the Athenian envoys that might makes right, cloaking himself in arguments from the just war tradition instead. Although this is of course an abuse of that tradition, it has the collateral benefit that it makes Putin vulnerable to criticism from that same tradition. Also in the realm of morality, arguments can be false. The justifications Putin offers have been extensively and repeatedly debunked: Ukraine and NATO do not pose a threat to Russia, and Ukraine is not committing genocide against Russian-speaking Ukrainians.[16]

This brings us to the jus in bello principles of discrimination and proportionality. Both can be applied to the current war: both Russian and Ukrainian attacks must be limited to military targets, and the number of unintended civilian casualties must be proportional to those targets. But especially the Russian attacks we have seen so far also target civilian objects and infrastructure, such as hospitals and schools, clearly violating the norms of the laws of war and the just war tradition regarding how a war should be fought. Such attacks constitute a flagrant violation of the principle of discrimination that is there to protect civilians. Undoubtedly, there will always be situations where the distinction between military and civilian objects is difficult to make, but the real problem is that the Russian military is not too concerned about making that distinction in the first place. Many attacks seem to be aimed at undermining the morale of civilians and their trust in their own government. To the extent that civilian casualties in Ukrainian cities are unintended, we can at least establish that the Russian military does not comply with the 'due care' principle by using unguided rockets and bombs from the cold war era.

Nevertheless, Russia also tries to maintain the appearance of justice here, for instance by the half-hearted establishment of humanitarian corridors. Russia also alleges that images of war crimes have been staged. The most important tribute Russia brings to the jus in bello is the claim that it does not attack civilian objects and that targeted buildings were used by the Ukrainian military, suggesting that the Ukrainian military uses civilians as human shields. Nowhere does Russia state that Ukrainian civilians are an appropriate target because there is no place for ethics in war. Of course, this lip service to the principles of just warfare is far from convincing, but here too it gives us at least a ground to criticise the Russian military for breaching jus in bello principles. If Putin knew (or should have known)

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[16] 'The Russian war is an unprovoked attack on a neighbor, an independent and sovereign state. It is clearly illegal. It is also, and this is more important, unjust—it is a crime not only legally but morally, too.' Walzer, "Our Ukraine."

of these breaches, he, as commander-in-chief of the Russian military, is also subject to criticism on this point. Biden's calling his colleague Putin a war criminal, already in the early weeks of the war, did not go down well in the Kremlin.[17]

In short: the just war tradition stipulates that a state must have a very good reason for war – self-defence – and Russia does not have this good reason. In war, intentional attacks on civilians are prohibited, and military personnel must make efforts to avoid unintended civilian casualties. Russia does not adhere to these principles. The Russian way of operating evidently leads to many unintended civilian casualties, but it is becoming increasingly clear that a significant number of civilians have been executed by Russian occupiers. Many journalists and politicians now accuse Russia of practices reminiscent of the Middle Ages, when soldiers terrorised innocent civilians to avoid direct confrontation.[18] This mediaeval way of operating shows at least some similarities in terms of practice and purpose with the attacks on civilian targets (such as hospitals and apartment buildings) by the Russian military and the executions of civilians by Russian soldiers. Russian normlessness with regard to attacks on civilian objects appears to be a deliberate choice that serves a clear purpose – just like it was in the Middle Ages. The question is to what extent the execution of civilians is a policy that stems from the Kremlin; but the fact that Putin decorated the Russian soldiers who fought in Bucha (where more than 400 civilians were murdered in March 2022) is an indication that this might very well be the case.

That brings us to a final consideration. If we can blame Putin for the unjust way this war is fought, the jus in bello, can we then also blame Russian soldiers for the unjustness of the war itself, the jus ad bellum? Walzer, articulating the prevailing view, sees these two domains as strictly separate: politicians may decide to wage an unjust war, but the question of whether soldiers fight it justly is another matter. In this view, soldiers are responsible for how they fight, not for what they fight for.[19] The fact that Russia is waging an unjust war does, in this view, not change a thing for Russian soldiers in Ukraine: they have the same rights and duties as soldiers fighting a just war. Russian soldiers are responsible for how they fight, in this case often unjustly, but cannot be held responsible for the unjustness of the war itself. However, an increasing number of theorists disagree. These revisionists point out that the view that soldiers fighting an unjust (for instance genocidal) war have the same rights as soldiers fighting for a just cause (for instance stopping a genocidal war) leads to untenable conclusions.[20] The most blatant one in the case of the

[17] Parker, "Biden calls Putin a 'war criminal.'"

[18] See Lynn *Battle*; Slim, *Killing Civilians*.

[19] Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*; for a different view, see McMahan, *Killing in War*.

[20] 'Suppose that unjust combatants are engaged in a continuing atrocity, such as a massacre of civilians. Just combatants arrive and attack them as a means of stopping the slaughter. According

Russia-Ukraine war: in the traditional Walzerian interpretation Russian soldiers who kill Ukrainian soldiers defending their country are acting morally permissible when they do so. Revisionists acknowledge that there are excusing conditions for these Russian soldiers – state propaganda, lack of independent media – but insist that the killing of an Ukrainian soldier by a Russian soldier can never be 'just.'[21] Others go a step further, and do think that Russian military personnel should know better and should hence be prosecuted for waging a war of aggression.[22] This, of course, goes especially for those higher up in the military hierarchy, or personnel of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation, better known as the FSB, who busied themselves with planning the war. As it stands, international law leaves little room for prosecuting soldiers for their participation in an unjust war of aggression, while the idea itself is hugely unpopular among those working for the military.[23]

5. Discussion: The usefulness of morality

Some years ago, Walzer wrote an essay titled 'The Triumph of Just War Theory' – a title that may be overstating the case a bit.[24] Nonetheless, the idea that all is fair in love and war holds less and less true for war, at least according to Walzer. Although restrictions on what soldiers can do are as old as war itself, at present law, politics, media and public opinion, both at home and abroad, set limits on what troops may do that are stricter than ever before. Today, especially Western military personnel feel duty-bound to exercise self-control when deployed, and violations of norms on a mediaeval scale have largely been eradicated. If Western soldiers deliberately kill civilians, as has happened in Iraq and Afghanistan, this is not a policy but a reason for investigation and prosecution.[25]

to the Theory, even though the unjust combatants are acting impermissibly in killing the civilians, they nevertheless act permissibly if they kill those who are trying to rescue the civilians. It is hard to believe that morality could permit *that*.' McMahan, "Rethinking the Just War." Thomas Nagel already wrote about the Vietnam War that 'if the participation of the United States in the Indo-Chinese war is entirely wrong to begin with, then that engagement is incapable of providing a justification for any measures, taken in its pursuit – not only for the measures which are atrocities in every war, however just its aims.' Nagel, "War and massacre."

[21] McMahan, "Moral liability for the Russian invasion."

[22] Clapham, "Ukraine can change prosecuting crimes of aggression."

[23] See for that latter point also Peperkamp and Braun, "Contemporary Just war thinking."

[24] Walzer, "Triumph."

[25] See for example the investigation by the Inspector-General of the Australian Defence Force. Inspector-General of the Australian Defence Force, *Afghanistan Inquiry Report*.

The reasons behind this self-restraint are partly functional: in many contemporary conflicts, winning the hearts and minds of the local population is crucial, and sparing innocent civilians achieves this most effectively. This modus operandi is thought to yield better information and more cooperation from the local population, and thus, in the end, furthers the accomplishment of mission goals and increases security for the troops. Those who wish to convince soldiers of the importance of ethical behaviour often do so by demonstrating that it ultimately serves their own interests – as the Melians did when they warned the Athenian envoys that raiding Melos would only weaken Athens.[26] In part due to these functional arguments, Western military personnel generally leave civilians alone. That there is a self-serving element here does not take anything away from the fact that nowadays most wars are probably fought somewhat more ethically than in older times, testifying to the idea that military ethics does not necessarily amount to a contradiction in terms.

Walzer thinks that for the United States Vietnam was the turning point. During that war, the US military bombed Laos and Cambodia without regard for civilian casualties, but afterwards the sparing of civilians was increasingly seen as a 'military necessity.' Walzer: 'it was a war that we lost, and the brutality with which we fought the war almost certainly contributed to our defeat. In a war for "hearts and minds," rather than for land and resources, justice turns out to be a key to victory. So just war theory looked once again like the worldly doctrine that it is.'[27] What we see today is that success in conflict not only requires winning hearts and minds in the conflict area, but increasingly also in one's own country and the rest of the world. Walzer argues that 'modern warfare requires the support of different civilian populations, extending beyond the population immediately at risk.' This broader support can only be obtained by sparing civilians in the war zone: 'a moral regard for civilians at risk is critically important in winning wider support for the war … for any modern war. I will call this the usefulness of morality. Its wide

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[26] We see this two-sidedness also in US General Petraeus' letter from 10th May 2007 to his troops in Iraq: our values and the laws governing warfare teach us to respect human dignity, maintain our integrity, and do what is right. Adherence to our values distinguishes us from our enemy. This fight depends on securing the population, which must understand that we – not our enemies – occupy the moral high ground. This strategy has shown results in recent months. Petraeus, "Letter to personnel in Iraq." Interestingly, also some outside the military have a tendency to convince militaries of the importance of ethical conduct with arguments that are mainly based on expediency: Human Rights Watch reported that civilian fatalities in Afghanistan increased support for the Taliban, and that taking 'tactical measures to reduce civilian deaths' was essential for maintaining the support of the local population that the mission in Afghanistan depended on. Human Rights Watch, *Troops in Contact*, 5.

[27] Walzer, *Triumph*, 9.

acknowledgement is something radically new in military history.'[28] An optimist might say that waging war without regard for human life is becoming increasingly ineffective.

At the same time, however, the mixed motives behind this restraint admittedly form somewhat of a surrendering to the rationale behind realism. Most of us would like to see a more moral motivation in both military personnel and political leaders, if only because the pitfall of functional arguments for ethical behaviour is that they lose their power when it seems more effective to act unethically. History is replete with examples of military action that was anything but ethical but was nevertheless effective. Russia's actions in Chechnya and Syria are two recent examples. Russia thinks, or thought, that also in Ukraine it is more effective to ignore moral considerations. Whether such amorality actually brings the Russian goals closer depends on how costly for the Kremlin the rest of the world can make that normlessness. On a very hopeful note: if the Kremlin's unscrupulousness becomes costly enough, Ukraine might prove a turning point for Russia, forcing it to acknowledge the usefulness of morality.

Although it is uncertain how and when the Russia-Ukraine war will end, Russia's position (militarily and economically) seems weakened in any case. While Putin by and large controls public opinion in his own country, he has alienated much of the rest of the world (although particularly in the West). This is at least partially because Russia is waging an unjust war in an unjust manner. Athens found out a long time ago that the most likely result is a small tactical gain at the cost of a momentous strategic loss.

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[28] Idem 10.

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CHAPTER 21

The 'Technology War' and International Law: A Legal Perspective on New Technologies Used in the Ukraine Conflict

Steven van de Put & Marten Zwanenburg

Abstract

This chapter will examine how the law deals with new technologies employed on the battlefield, using examples from the conflict in Ukraine. It is submitted that from a legal perspective, new technologies can fit into one of three distinct categories. The first category consists of technologies that represent a gradual advancement and therefore fit the existing legal obligations. The second concerns technologies that international law is able to accommodate through the use of interpretative methods. Lastly, some technologies might require the adoption of new legal obligations. Rather than focus specifically on one particular technology, this chapter will examine how international law can 'catch up' with technological developments on the battlefield. In this way, it offers insight into how international law can incorporate new technological developments, providing relevant considerations for future conflicts. As armed conflict seems to, unfortunately, always be a great driver for innovations, it will remain relevant for states to consider how these technologies should be approached from a legal perspective.

Keywords: New technologies, International law, Armed conflict

1. Introduction

One of the striking features of the fighting that has been taking place in Ukraine since February 2022 has been the large-scale employment of technology on the battlefield. New or at least recent technology has been used by both sides, in some cases to great effect. Examples include the use of hypersonic missiles, the large-scale use of satellite technology, cyber operations and Artificial Intelligence (AI). Ukraine's Minister of Digital Transformation has gone so far as calling the conflict a 'technology war.'[1]

The fact that new and emerging technologies and methods for employing them are tested in an armed conflict is not new. States have always been keen to trial new

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[1] Arhirova, "Minister: Ukraine will beat Russia in war of technologies."

means and methods of warfare in an actual combat environment. Earlier examples are the Vietnam War and the conflict in Syria.[2] It has been suggested however that the scale on which technology is used in the conflict in Ukraine is unique.[3]

The use of new and emerging technology during an armed conflict raises many questions. Some of these are legal in nature. Such technology may raise questions concerning the application and interpretation of existing law in relation to such technology. It may not be clear how to 'translate' existing rules to a certain technology (means) or how that technology is used (method). Questions may also arise concerning whether new rules are needed to prohibit or regulate new technology. Such questions may come into sharper focus when the use and effects of a particular technology are witnessed in an actual conflict.[4]

Lack of clarity concerning the application of the law to particular technologies is problematic for states for several reasons. First, it makes it more difficult for them to ensure that they respect the obligations under international law which they have entered into. If it is unclear what these require of the state, that state may unintentionally breach those obligations and thereby incur international responsibility. Lack of clarity concerning the applicable law also leads to instability in the sense that states are less clear about what they may expect from others, including their opponents and their allies. This increases the risk of misunderstandings and misinterpretations, and complicates holding states and other actors accountable.

This chapter examines how states can deal with legal questions arising from the use of new and emerging technology, drawing on the conflict in Ukraine. It will be argued that three main categories of technology can be identified in this context. First, there are technologies that can be regulated by existing law without problems. Second, there are technologies that raise questions concerning the applicable law, but those questions can be answered satisfactorily by interpreting the law. Third and finally, a particular technology may require the adoption of new rules. It will be argued that these three categories provide a useful analytical framework when considering how to deal with the legal regulation of new technologies used in armed conflict. However, they are not watertight compartments. In some cases there may be reasonable arguments for placing a technology in more than one category, and in any event over time the majority view in the international community

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[2] Beecher, "All sides test their arms in Vietnam."; Sharkov, "Russia is using Syria to test its next generation of weapons."

[3] See Arhirova, "Minister: Ukraine will beat Russia in war of technologies."

[4] Crootof identifies four ways in which new technology can be legally disruptive. In addition to the two mentioned here and which are the focus of this chapter, these are a) technology that significantly changes the way that law is created or used and b) technology that highlights existing ambiguities in existing law. Crootof, "Regulating new weapons technology."

concerning a particular technology may change concerning in which category such technology belongs.

The main purpose of the chapter is to provide an analytical framework for considering the interaction between the use of new technologies in armed conflict and international law. The chapter does not aim to provide an in-depth analysis of the regulation under international law of specific technologies used in armed conflict. It also is not geared toward providing recommendations on how states should deal with particular technologies from a legal perspective, although the analytical framework provided may help states in formulating their views on this. The chapter also does not aim to provide an exhaustive overview of the use of new technology in the conflict in Ukraine. The conflict is rather used to illustrate the broader issues described above.

2. Applying existing law – applying old law to new technology

Questions concerning how the law should deal with technology are not new. This includes the situation in which such technology is used in the military domain. Many publications on this topic begin by referring to attempts to outlaw the use of the crossbow in the Medieval Age.[5] It has been pointed out however that nowadays, technological change takes place much faster and that more technologies have a great impact, acting as a 'game changer.'[6]

When a new means or method of warfare is developed, the first question to be asked from a legal perspective is whether it challenges the existing legal framework. This section of the article will discuss how existing law can deal with new technology, drawing on examples from the Ukraine conflict. After briefly describing the starting point for applying international law to new technology, it will identify three categories of technologies. First, there are technologies that can be regulated by existing law without problems. Second, there are technologies that raise questions concerning the applicable law, but those questions can be answered satisfactorily by interpreting the law. Third and finally, a particular technology may require the adoption of new rules.

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[5] See E.G. Shereshevsky, "International humanitarian law-making and new military technologies."

[6] McLaughlin and Nasu, "Introduction: Conundrum of new technologies in the law of armed conflict."

2.1 Existing legal obligations

Within international law, the starting point that existing law applies to new means and methods of warfare is broadly accepted. Most famously, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) took this approach in the *Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons Advisory Opinion.* In the arguments that some states made before the court, they advanced the viewpoint that the court would be engaging in law-making if it considered the legality of nuclear weapons. The court rejected this view, by stating that 'the contention that the giving of an answer to the question posed would require the Court to legislate is based on a supposition that the present corpus juris is devoid of relevant rules in this matter.'[7]

The court also held that the existing rules of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) apply to 'all forms of warfare and to all kinds of weapons, those of the past, those of the present and those of the future.'[8]

2.2 Applying existing law without the need for further interpretation

As was set out above, the starting point when new technologies are introduced on the battlefield is that existing legal obligations regulate those technologies. The question then arises whether those obligations can be applied without difficulty.

It is not the case that all new technologies provide an ill fit with the existing legal framework. Some developments might, for all intents and purposes, actually match with the existing legal framework. Whereas the conflict in Ukraine has, in many cases, provided some legal challenges, this is not the case for all of the technological developments we have seen used in this conflict.

When applying this approach to specific technologies employed in Ukraine, several examples can be given. Firstly, we have seen the use of hypersonic missiles. It has been reported that Russia has employed its Kinzhal missile, a modified version of the Iskander short-range ballistic missile that is launched from an airplane.[9] These are missiles that are able to travel at more than five times the speed of sound, providing operational benefits for the state employing them.[10] Their speed leads to them being difficult to detect on radar systems and makes it near impossible to effectively intercept these weapons.[11]

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[7] Legality of the threat or use of nuclear weapons, par 18

[8] idem, par 86.

[9] Ismay, Mpoke Bigg, and Kramer, "Questions surround Russia's use of hypersonic missiles in its latest attack."

[10] Brockman and Schiller, "A matter of speed? Understanding hypersonic missile systems."

[11] Al Jazeera, "What are the hypersonic missiles Russia is using in Ukraine?"

When considering these weapons from a legal perspective, it however becomes clear that they do not pose any fundamental challenge to the application of the existing legal framework. Whereas some adaption or gradual changes might be necessary, they do not require a fundamental new obligation or new interpretation. An example here can be seen in the considerations under the *ius ad bellum*, where the use of hypersonic weapons may have a significant impact on how the law is applied. Under the *ius ad bellum*, the right of self-defence is one of the exceptions to the prohibition on the use of inter-state force. One of the requirements for a state to be able to invoke that right is that there is an armed attack. There is broad, albeit not general, support for the view that an 'imminent' armed attack also triggers the right to self-defence. As Gill states, the speed of hypersonic weapons 'would conceivably push the moment in which it would be perceived to be necessary to conduct a pre-emptive strike forward – well beyond what is currently thought of interceptive or anticipatory self-defence – into the realm of a preventive strike.'[12]

This is because the speed of the weapon could impact gauging when a defensive response is necessary.[13] This will affect the application of the law but not necessarily the law itself or even its interpretation. Under the *ius in bello* or IHL, it has been generally accepted that the principles of targeting would still govern the use of these weapons. As these weapons do not introduce any fundamental new characteristics, the existing legal framework would still apply and govern their use.[14]

A second example concerns the use of naval drones by Ukraine. In April 2023, Ukraine used unmanned maritime systems, also referred to as 'naval drones,' to attack the Russian Black Sea Fleet in the Crimean port of Sevastopol. Russia claimed it repelled the attack.[15] Navies have a long tradition of using so-called fire ships to attack enemy fleets. A famous historical example of this would be the British use of such ships in sinking the Spanish Armada in 1588.[16] Naval drones can be seen as a successor of these fire ships. As a general rule, states have simply recognised these as weapons and have not yet gone as far as recognising this as a specific category of vessels. This entails that these do not necessarily need navigational rights.[17] Instead, as states interpret these as a form of weapon within the existing regime, they would still be governed by the existing rules regarding naval targeting, and these have so far been interpreted according to the prevalent legal obligations.[18]

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[12] Gill, "The Ius ad Bellum Anno 2040: An essay on possible trends and challenges."

[13] Gill, "The Ius ad Bellum Anno 2040," 35.

[14] Dinstein, "Air and missile warfare under International Humanitarian Law."

[15] Reuters, "Russia says it repels naval drone attack on Sevastopol."

[16] Royal Museums Greenwich, "Launch of fireships against the Spanish Armada, 7 August 1588."

[17] Tuckett, "What's in a name? Getting it right for the naval "drone" attack on Sevastopol."

[18] International Institute of Humanitarian Law. *San Remo Manual on International Law Applicable to Armed Conflicts at Sea,* par 38-45.

A third example concerns the use of biometrics. Although there are no provisions in IHL expressly regulating this technology, IHL applies to its use during armed conflict.[19] A broad range of uses of this technology, both in peacetime and during armed conflict, most notably concerning the gathering and storing of biometric data of civilians, would also be governed by human rights law. In this case, it is especially relevant to consider the practice of Russia in so-called 'filtration camps.' These are camps set up by Russia where 'filtration' of Ukrainian citizens in regions under Russian occupation takes place, often before transferring those persons to Russia. Filtration is a form of compulsory security screening, typically involving the collection of biometric data of the civilians concerned.[20]

So far, it has been reported that Russia has gathered a substantial amount of biometric data on civilians within the territories which it has occupied.[21] An argument could be made that this would be a violation of IHL, for example, because this does not respect their persons or because it constitutes obtaining information through coercion.[22] It might be more relevant however to consider the more comprehensive legal obligations under human rights law in this context. Within the context of these filtration camps, it could be established that Russia has human rights obligations vis-à-vis the persons in those camps, leading to the relevance of such considerations.[23] This article will not address the issue of the interaction between IHL and human rights, other than noting that the starting point of such interaction is that the two fields of law complement each other.[24]

Analysing the use of such technologies from a human rights perspective offers some insight into how international law governs their use. Both Ukraine and Russia were parties to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), although Russia ceased to be bound on 16th September 2022 following Russia's exclusion from the Council of Europe. Both states continue to be parties to the International Covenant

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[19] Graf, "Between accuracy and dignity: Legal implications of facial recognition for dead combatants."

[20] Human Rights Watch, "We had no choice: 'Filtration' and the crime of forcibly transferring Ukrainian civilians to Russia." For a legal analysis of the camps, see Kalandarishvili-Mueller, "Civilians are protected under GC IV 1949: The illegality of Russian filtration camps under IHL."

[21] Kalandarishvili-Mueller, "Civilians are protected under GC IV 1949: The illegality of Russian filtration camps under IHL."

[22] Geneva Convention (IV) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, art 27, 31.

[23] It has been accepted that human rights jurisdiction can also be outside of a state's territory. This would be conditional on established effective control over an area or through state agent control, and within the context of the filtration camp Russia arguably has both.

[24] For further analysis see inter alia e.g. Gill, "Some thoughts on the relationship between International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law: A plea for mutual respect and a common-sense approach."; Droege, "The interplay between International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law in situations of armed conflict."

on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).[25] Most relevant here would be Article 8 of the ECHR and Article 17 of the ICCPR, guaranteeing the right to privacy. Under these articles, any gathering of biometric data would have to be both proportional and have a lawful basis, preventing the arbitrary deployment of such technologies.[26] Human Rights Watch has concluded that the Russian data collection practices in the context of the filtration process raise serious concerns around respect to privacy, as well as data protection.[27]

In this way, some technologies might simply represent operational advancements or new uses of concepts, means and methods, to which existing international law can be applied without particular problems. Yet, this is not the case for all new (uses of) technology within the current conflict. In some cases, it might be necessary for states to further define existing obligations to ensure that they remain relevant. The following paragraph will offer some considerations in this context.

2.3 Interpreting existing legal obligations

A second category concerns new (uses of) technologies that introduce fundamental new characteristics, yet these characteristics are still able to be accommodated by the existing legal obligations. In these situations, it is often not the case that the use of these new technologies can be accommodated in a straightforward manner. Applying existing law may not be a good fit with the new technology, or with a particular use of that technology. That does not necessarily mean that the existing law cannot be applied, however. Rather, states may come to new interpretations of the law in order to 'translate' legal obligations to adequately regulate new technologies.

This is nothing new. Indeed, interpretation of the law is central to the application of international law. International law itself provides tools for such an exercise, notably in the form of broadly accepted rules of treaty interpretation which have been laid down in the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties. The central rule is that a treaty shall be interpreted in good faith in accordance with the ordinary meaning to be given to the terms of the treaty in their context and in the light of its object and purpose.[28] One of the things to be taken into account is the subsequent practice in the application of the treaty by the parties.[29] Particular

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[25] See, for some of the effects of Russia leaving; Emtseva "The withdrawal mystery solved: How the European Court of Human Rights decided to move forward with the cases against Russia."

[26] Zwanenburg and van de Put "The use of biometrics in military operations abroad and the right to private life."

[27] Human Rights Watch, "We had no choice: 'Filtration' and the crime of forcibly transferring Ukrainian civilians to Russia."

[28] Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, Article 31 (1).

[29] Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, Article 31 (3) (b).

treaties or even subdisciplines of law also include rules that are particular to that treaty or subdiscipline that may play an important role in interpretation. For example, several IHL treaties include a version of the so-called 'Martens clause.' This clause is included, with minor variations in wording, in several IHL treaties. This includes Article 1 of the first Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions, which reads: 'In cases not covered by this Protocol or by other international agreements, civilians and combatants remain under the protection and authority of the principles of international law derived from established custom, from the principles of humanity and from the dictates of public conscience.'[30]

The ICJ has considered that this clause 'has proved to be an effective means of addressing the rapid evolution of military technology.'[31] Although the precise meaning and role of the Martens clause is the subject of controversy, one way in which it has been understood is in informing the interpretation of rules the application of which is unclear.[32] As stated in the judgment of the ICTY Trial Chamber in the Kupreskić case: 'this Clause enjoins, as a minimum, reference to those principles and dictates any time a rule of international humanitarian law is not sufficiently rigorous or precise: in those instances the scope and purport of the rule must be defined with reference to those principles and dictates.'[33]

At the same time, 'translating' existing law to make it compatible with a new (use of) technology has its challenges. For example, a particular interpretation may raise problems when that interpretation is used in another context. There may be cases where the interpretation of the law is so far-reaching that the law is stretched to breaking point. And different states may not agree on a particular interpretation of the law, so that there is not one 'authoritative' interpretation. These are some of the reasons why such an exercise has been referred to as more art than science and requires caution.[34]

The conflict in Ukraine offers a number of examples of the above. One of them is the use of cyber operations. The use of such operations, or at least what is referred to as 'hard' cyber operations, appears to have been more limited in Ukraine than many experts had expected. This does not mean that cyber operations have not

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[30] Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), Article 1 (2).

[31] Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons, par 78.

[32] See for an analysis of the Martens Clause inter alia Meron, "The Martens Clause, principles of humanity and the dictates of public conscience."; Cassese, "The Martens Clause: Half a loaf or simply pie in the sky?"

[33] Prosecutor v. Kupreskić, par 525.

[34] Corn, "Cyber operations and the imperfect art of "translating" the law of war to new technologies."

played an important role in the conflict, however.[35] Such operations raise a variety of questions under IHL.

One of these concerns is how to conceptualise data, a vital element of cyber operations, for the purposes of IHL. When considering legal targets, IHL makes reference to the notion of military objectives. Military objectives are defined in Article 52(2) of the first Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions (AP I): 'In so far as objects are concerned, military objectives are limited to those objects which by their nature, location, purpose or use make an effective contribution to military action and whose total or partial destruction, capture or neutralization, in the circumstances ruling at the time, offers a definite military advantage.' This definition is binding on Ukraine and Russia since they are both parties to AP I, but it is also considered as reflecting customary international law, thus also binding states not parties to AP I.

Under the abovementioned definition, something can only be a legitimate military objective if it is first an 'object.' It is unclear however if digital data qualifies as such an object.[36] Traditionally, only tangible objects have been considered to be 'objects' in the sense of IHL. States could clarify whether they consider the term should also extend to immaterial objects such as digital data. Unfortunately, states appear to hold different views on this. Certain states, such as Denmark and Israel, have clarified that they do not see data as an object in the sense of IHL.[37] In contrast, other states including Germany and Norway, hold the view that at least some types of data should be considered as objects under IHL.[38] Consequently, no shared interpretation has yet been reached of the term 'object' that provides clarity on the status of data under IHL.[39]

Such clarity is necessary in evaluating whether certain cyber operations in the Ukraine conflict respect the principle of distinction. This principle provides that civilian objects may not be attacked.

In January 2023, a data wiper malware called CaddyWiper was used against a Ukrainian news agency, Ukrinform, deleting information on that organisations' systems. This cyber operation was attributed to what is allegedly a unit of the

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[35] See e.g. Ducheine, Pijpers, and Arnold, "The 'next' war should have been fought in cyberspace, right? An analysis of cyber-activities in the 2022 Russo-Ukraine War."

[36] Pomson, "'Objects'? The legal status of computer data under International Humanitarian Law."

[37] Ministry of Defence of Denmark, *Military Manual on International Law Relevant to Danish Armed Forces in International Operations,* 292; Schondorf, "Israel's perspective on key legal and practical issues concerning the application of International Law to cyber operations," 401.

[38] Federal Government of Germany, *On the Application of International Law to Cyberspace*, 7; Norway, *Manual i Krigens Folkerett*, par 9.58.

[39] NATO CCDCOE, "Qualification of Data as an Object under IHL."

Russian military intelligence organisation GRU.[40] If the Ukrinform data is considered as an object, then it could be argued that this constituted a violation of the principle of distinction.

This example also illustrates another controversy concerning the application of IHL to cyber operations. This is the question of whether cyber operations can constitute an 'attack' in the sense of IHL. A number of IHL rules, including the prohibition of attacking civilian objects, apply only to 'attacks.' The term 'attacks' is defined in Article 49 AP I as 'acts of violence against the adversary, whether in offence or in defence.' There is no international agreement on the question of whether cyber operations, in particular cyber operations that do not cause physical damage, constitute an 'attack' in this sense.[41] If they do not, then the use of Caddywiper malware to delete data would not be governed by IHL rules concerning 'attacks' and, as a consequence, could not violate these rules.

The ambiguity concerning whether data constitutes an object and when cyber operations constitute an 'attack' can be addressed by states interpreting existing law. This is why these questions are discussed here to illustrate the second category of the three described in this chapter. This is notwithstanding the fact that states have so far not come to agreement on 'which' interpretation they should adopt. If such disagreement persists, however, it is likely that calls for new rules to break the deadlock may be put forward, in which case the third category, which is discussed below in paragraph 2.4, becomes relevant.

Apart from fundamental new characteristics of new technologies, broad formulations contained within some legal obligations might also offer the potential for states to shape the use of new technologies through interpretation. Reference here can once again be made to the use of biometrics. Under Article 27 of the fourth Geneva Convention (GC IV), for example, protected persons are entitled to 'respect for their persons.' This raises the question of whether, and if so, under which circumstances, states may collect and store biometric data of such persons without this breaching the obligation to 'respect' such persons. State practice currently suggests that this does not entail a prohibition on the gathering of such data, but more clarification may be needed.[42]

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[40] Eclectiq, "Security service of Ukraine and NATO allies potentially targeted by Russian state-sponsored threat actor."

[41] See, for example Biggio, "International Humanitarian Law and the protection of the civilian population in cyberspace: Towards a human dignity-oriented interpretation of the notion of cyber attack under Article 49 of Additional Protocol I."

[42] Zwanenburg, "Know thy enemy: The use of biometrics in military operations and International Humanitarian Law," 1404-1423.

The conflict in Ukraine might speed up such developments. As the military potential of many of these new technologies is demonstrated, states would perhaps be incentivised to consider many of these interpretations and make them explicit to create clarity regarding their own legal obligations in potential future conflicts.

2.4 New rules

As noted, in some cases, new technology may lead states or other actors to consider that new rules are necessary. If they consider that reinterpreting existing rules is not adequate to regulate a particular technology, then this will likely lead to calls for new rules. In this case, the technology concerned falls into a third category of technologies that may require the adoption of new rules. As such, it is the fact that there is a call for new rules that determines whether a technology falls into this category and not an innate characteristic of the technology itself. It may be noted that states and other actors may not agree on the question of whether new rules are needed to regulate technology. Some may consider that existing rules are sufficient, whether or not interpreted in a particular way. This illustrates the point that there are no watertight separations between the different categories.

Numerous factors will influence whether or not states are receptive to a call for new rules. These include political, military, cultural, historical and even religious factors.[43] In addition, commentators have identified particular characteristics of weapons and other means of warfare that tend to make them more 'regulation-tolerant' or 'regulation-resistant.'[44] These include the effectiveness of the weapon, its novelty, its disruptiveness and its public notoriety.

Although states are still the main creators of new rules in international law, it is important to point out that non-state actors are increasingly involved in both calling for as well as developing new rules. For example, Microsoft and others have, for a number of years, been calling for a Digital Geneva Convention.[45] Such a convention would create a legally binding framework to govern states' behaviour in cyberspace in peacetime but also in armed conflict.[46]

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[43] Watts, "Regulation-tolerant weapons, regulation-resistant weapons and the law of war," 540-618.

[44] Idem. 618.

[45] Smith, "The need for a digital Geneva Convention."

[46] See for an appraisal of this proposal: Jetn, "The Digital Geneva Convention: A critical appraisal of Microsoft's proposal," 158.

To some commentators, the use of cyber operations in the conflict in Ukraine has further exposed the need for such a new treaty.[47] The call for such a convention does not seem to have gained much traction with states so far. However, there are examples where the efforts of civil society have played an important role in leading governments to negotiate and adopt new rules. This has been most notable in the development of treaties on anti-personnel landmines and cluster munitions.[48]

Once a need for new rules has been identified, an important question to be answered is at what point in time should such new rules be developed. One potential answer to this question is to take a 'wait-and-see' approach.[49] When the characteristics and potential effects of a particular technology are not yet fully clear, states may prefer to wait to regulate such a technology until there is more clarity. They may consider that more information is needed to develop adequate regulation. They may also fear that regulation may stymie the development of technology that will be, or may turn out to be, beneficial.

Another approach is based on the 'precautionary principle,' and starts from the premise that the 'wait-and-see' approach may lead to regulation that is too little too late. It may lead to irreparable damage that could or even should have been prevented. Another risk of the 'wait–and-see' approach is that if states use new technology, they are more likely to invest in its development. As a consequence, they are then less likely to risk losing that investment by agreeing to restrictive regulation.[50] It has been submitted that if the risks of a particular technology are considered great, then the precautionary principle weighs in favour of a ban.[51]

An example from the conflict in Ukraine that may illustrate different points discussed above is the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in military operations, and the use of weapons employing AI in particular. On the one hand, this technology is being used in the conflict between Ukraine and Russia, making it clear that it has enormous military potential. For example, it has been reported that a Ukrainian AI company modified its commercial AI-enabled voice transcription and translation service for it to be able to process intercepted Russian communications and automatically highlight information regarding Ukrainian forces.[52] The proven effectiveness of AI can be a reason for states to be reluctant to impose legal limitations on such use. This may explain in part why Russia has been one of the states seen as frustrating efforts to arrive at such regulation in the context of the Convention

[47] Baldassaro, "Russia-Ukraine conflict exposes need for Digital Geneva Convention."

[48] See generally Rappert, Moyes, Crowe, and Nash, "The roles of civil society in the development of standards around new weapons and other technologies of warfare," 765.

[49] Crootof "Regulating new weapons," 21.

[50] Shereshevsky "'International Humanitarian Law-making and new military technologies," 2141.

[51] Crootof "Regulating new weapons," 23.

[52] McGee-Abe, "One year on: 10 Technologies used in the war in Ukraine."

on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW). Talks on potentially regulating so-called Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems (LAWS) have been formally taking place in a Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) under the auspices of the CCW since 2017. On the other hand, the actual use of AI in a conflict may also serve to underline the risks associated with the use of such technology, as well as the fact that those risks are already here. This may lead to strengthening calls for regulation. The actual use of these technologies may also contribute to bringing more clarity on what those risks are exactly, thus undercutting the argument that more time is needed to study those risks.

A final example is the use of thermobaric weapons by Russia in the Ukraine conflict.[53] This use has led to increased attention on these weapons. It has also occasioned some calls from within civil society to ban them.[54] States do not seem to have been receptive to these calls, however. This may be because these weapons are considered to be highly militarily effective in certain situations, particularly against concealed enemy personnel.[55] It may even be that the use of the weapon in Ukraine has served to further demonstrate this effectiveness, thereby highlighting this 'regulation-intolerant' characteristic of thermobaric weapons.

In this way, the use of technologies might highlight existing lacunae within international law, putting an emphasis on states to act and actively engage with new international legislation. The Ukraine conflict and the new uses of technologies here can, therefore, also provide a catalyst for states to further engage and consider new legal rules.

Conclusion

This chapter examined how the law can react to (the use of) new technology in armed conflict. It has drawn on the large-scale conflict in Ukraine since February 2022 for examples, which has seen the use of inter alia hypersonic missiles, biometrics, cyber operations, AI, and thermobaric weapons.

It was found that from a legal perspective, these technologies can be subdivided into three main categories. First, there are technologies that can be regulated by existing law without any problems. Second, there are technologies that raise questions concerning the applicable law, but those questions can be answered

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[53] Rivas, Ruiz, and Umlauf, "Ukraine has accused Russia of using thermobaric weapons. Here's what makes them so devastating."

[54] Hanson, "What are thermobaric weapons? And why should they be banned?"

[55] For a discussion on the law applicable to these weapons see van Coller, "Detonating the air: The legality of the use of thermobaric weapons under International Humanitarian Law."

satisfactorily by interpreting the existing law based on accepted methods of interpretation in international law. Third and finally, existing law may not adequately address new technology even when interpreted, thus calling for new rules.

It is submitted that although these categories are useful from an analytical perspective, the lines between them are not very clear. In some cases, states or commentators may disagree on the category into which a specific (use of) technology belongs, and there may be reasonable arguments on both sides. The fact that some consider that new IHL rules are not required for cyber operations while others call for a 'digital Geneva Convention' is a case in point. Secondly, the fact that a new (use of a) technology can be adequately regulated by interpreting an existing rule does not necessarily mean that states agree on a specific interpretation. Several examples were provided in this chapter, relating inter alia to how IHL regulates cyber operations. Finally, it was found that the actual use of technology in a conflict can serve as a catalyst for thinking about how to address a specific (use of a) technology from a legal perspective. It remains to be seen what the results of this thinking will be in the case of the conflict in Ukraine.

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Russian Commercial Warriors
on the Battlefield

Thijs Cremers & Han Bouwmeester

Abstract

Since the war in Ukraine started in February 2022, the Wagner group has become the personification of evil. 'Mercenaries' or 'soldiers of fortune' as they have been called still leads to misunderstanding and disapproval in the Western world. But denying the existence of so-called soldiers of fortune is denying the past, present and the future of warfare. This chapter argues that the line between mercenarism and Private Military and Security Companies (PMSCs) is very thin, due to a lack or the absence of clear definitions and a lack of legal clarity. On the one hand, proponents of outsourcing certain security tasks claim that PMSCs can make a positive contribution to peace and stability in contested areas around the world when governments are unwilling or unable to provide public security. On the other, opponents point out the negative aspects of this, and with it the loss of control over the monopoly on force. Perhaps this negative connotation of PMSCs is an exaggeration of the so-called moral conscience prevailing in Western countries and based purely on excesses and failures. However, Wagner's performance in Ukraine does not meet the standards of today's Western PMSC business. This chapter is based on Western publications which are publicly available.

Keywords: PMSC, mercenary, Wagner, Redut, Ukraine, Russia-Ukraine war

1. Introduction

A book on the Russian-Ukrainian war that began in February 2022 cannot be published without explaining Private Military and Security Companies (PMSCs). After all, it was during this war that the name of the Wagner Group became well-known, and people started to realise how PMSCs' impact on the battlefield was steadily growing. For months, various mainstream and social media reported about the actions of this PMSC and its financier Yevgeny Prigozhin. The Wagner Group fought for nearly a year to capture the Ukrainian city of Bakhmut, metre by metre, and suffering many casualties.

Through this bitter struggle, the Wagner Group became the symbol for the market of force, which up to then had tried to prevent too much public attention. There are other PMSCs fighting on the Russian side during this Russia-Ukraine war.

In this chapter, in addition to the Wagner Group, the lesser-known PMSC *Redut* is also discussed. For now, the question arises: Can companies like Wagner and Redut be considered cold-blooded mercenary armies, or are they behaving in the manner of modern PMSCs? Further research on this topic may provide new and clearer insights. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to find an answer to the following research question: 'Do Wagner and Redut's combat operations in the Russia-Ukraine conflict conform to views on modern Private Military and Security Companies?'

The answer to this question will shed more light on the role of this market for force on which various PMSCs operate. The structure of this chapter is as follows. The first two sections provide a better understanding of the difference between mercenaries and PMSCs, including a consideration of the legal bases of both, followed by a section on the different types of PMSCs. The next section answers the question why PMSCs fight in armed conflicts. Subsequently, PMSC Wagner and its involvement in the Russia-Ukraine conflict is discussed, with a look at another Russian PMSC, Redut, as well. It will put both PMSCs to the test, how they fit in with the views on modern PMSCs and to find out the differences and similarities of the two Russian-oriented PMSCs. The conclusion answers the research question. The final remarks argue what these insights about PMSCs mean for the future of warfare. Although PMSCs operate in more theatres of operations around the globe, this chapter exclusively focuses on the Russia-Ukraine war.

2. Mercenaries and PMSCs explained

There is still much ambiguity about what exactly should be understood by mercenaries and PMSCs. Often the terms 'mercenaries' and 'PMSCs' are used inter-changeably, and no distinction is made between them, while on the other hand several experts believe that a difference can be made between the two. This section first discusses the international legal foundations regarding mercenaries and PMSCs. Then, the next section discusses the differences and similarities between mercenaries and PMSCs.

According to *Oxford Languages* the term mercenary means 'a professional soldier hired to serve in a foreign army.' The term originates from the Latin word *mercenarius* meaning 'hireling,' which in turn stems from the word *merces* meaning 'reward.' Although there is no unanimous academic agreement on the term mercenary, the explanation provided by the *1949 Geneva Conventions* is often followed. According to article 47, sub 2, a mercenary is any person who:

1. Is specially recruited locally or abroad in order to fight in an armed conflict;
2. Does, in fact, take a direct part in the hostilities;

3. Is motivated to take part in the hostilities essentially by the desire for private gain and, in fact, is promised, by or on behalf of a party to the conflict, material compensation substantially in excess of that promised or paid to combatants of similar ranks and functions in the armed forces of that party;

4. Is neither a national of a party to the conflict nor a resident of territory controlled by a party to the conflict;

5. Is not a member of the armed forces of a party involved in the conflict;

6. Has not been sent by a state, which is not a party to the conflict, on official duty as a member of its armed forces.[1]

Although the Geneva Conventions had already defined mercenaries and mercenarism in 1949, an official ban on the use of it was never issued until 1989, when the United Nations, through its *Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights* (OHCHR), adopted *Resolution 44/34*, which comprises the 'International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries.' Colonial powers made elaborate use of mercenaries to fight opposing forces and these forces were often treated as combatants. In the 20th century, with their struggle for independence, the emerging states in Africa developed a dislike for mercenarism as it was directly linked to colonialism, racism, and the denial of self-determination. Only in 1977, the African Union adopted a 'Unity Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa' in Libreville, the capital of Gabon.[2] This convention entered into force in 1985 and has so far been ratified by 32 out of 55 African countries.[3] After the entry into force of the 'International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries' in 2001, 37 countries ratified the convention. It is notable that the United States, United Kingdom, and the Russian Federation, who actively use PMSCs as a complement to their large standing armies, did not ratify this resolution and have not done so far.[4]

When the Angolan government in 1995 succeeded in enlisting the South African-based commercial company *Executive Outcomes* for combat services, academics struggled to categorise this company. On the one hand, *Executive Outcomes* participated in fighting activities during the Angolan Civil War to make a profit for itself, as was customary with mercenaries; on the other, *Executive Outcomes* was a legally registered company and subject to business regulations. Initially, organised mercenaries were grouped according to their business structure, legal

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[1] "Doctors without borders: The practical guide to Humanitarian Law."

[2] African Union, "Convention for the elimination of mercenarism in Africa."

[3] United Nations, "International convention against the recruitment, use, financing and training of mercenaries."

[4] Tekingunduz, "Are Private Military Contractors any different from mercenaries?"

form, clients, services, and frontline distance. Later, the term PMSC appeared with the general assumption that most of these companies work for a diverse group of clients, perform a multitude of functions, and adapt their services in response to changing client demands and business opportunities.[5] Today, the International Committee of the Red Cross, internationally recognised as a legal authority on armed conflicts, assumes that 'PMSCs' are private business entities that provide military and/or security services, regardless of how they describe themselves.'[6] Their functions include armed surveillance and protection of persons and objects, such as convoys, buildings and other places; maintenance and operation of weapons systems; detention of prisoners; and advice to or training of local armed forces and security personnel.[7]

With the continued commercialisation of the battlefield, a Swiss initiative, the *Montreux Document*, specifically pursuing PMSCs saw the light of day in 2008. It provides a blueprint for governments to effectively regulate PMSCs. The document highlights the responsibilities of three principal types of states: 1. 'Contracting states,' being nations that hire PMSCs, 2. 'Territorial states,' being nations on whose territory PMSCs operate, and 3. 'Home states,' being nations in which PMSCs are headquartered or registered.[8] The recognition of three different types of states contributes to a clearer view on who is doing what, where and with what responsibility. The convention is currently backed by more than 50 countries (governments) worldwide, including the United States and the United Kingdom.

Following the Montreux Document, another Swiss initiative started in 2013: the *International Code of Conduct Association*, known by its acronym ICoCA. This multi-stakeholder organisation serves as guardian and regulator of the 'International Code of Conduct for Private Security Service Providers,' also known as the *Code*.[9] The aim of this initiative is for affiliates to respect human rights and International Humanitarian Law during their activities. The initiative is intended as an international code of conduct for Private Security Companies (PSCs), whose focus is the protection of high-ranking individuals, infrastructure, transportation and actions of large corporations and multinationals and governments. It should be noted, however, that the dividing line between PMSCs and PSCs is sometimes blurred, as some nations have started using PSCs to allow them to perform various military tasks in addition to their protective duties. The ICoCA invests in activities ranging from capacity building,

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[5] Krahmann, '*Privatization of Warfare*.'

[6] Montreux Document Forum, "The Montreux Document on Private Military and Security Companies," 9.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Idem., section 2.

[9] ICoCA – International Code of Conduct Association, "About us," 3-6.

certification to advisory services, monitoring, and the handling of complaints, to provide affiliates, who comply with this, with a distinctive seal of approval.[10]

Currently, the ICoCA initiative counts 264 participants worldwide. Participants can be divided by membership type including PSCs who are either certified members or affiliate non-voting members, international organisations from civil society, such as *Human Rights Watch*, governments[11] and observer organisations.[12] The 'Code' is intended for PSCs and their providers, whereby PSCs are defined as 'any company whose business activities include the provision of so-called 'security services,' either on its own behalf or on behalf of another, irrespective of how such company describes itself.'[13] According to the Code, the undertakings of security services include mainly activities in the field of guarding, protection, surveillance, and training.[14] The Code does not specifically cover involvement in combat operations, which excludes many PMSCs, at least those who focus purely on participation in combat activities. It does limit the scope of the Code. Since the introduction of the document, independent research showed a strong decrease of violence against civilians during and after the end of hostilities, from which the forum concludes that the introduction of the Montreux Document has a positive impact on the reduction of violence against civilians.[15] Despite existing mercenary legislation, the previously observed blurring of boundaries between PSCs and PMSCs makes it extremely difficult to prevent violations of these rules and conventions by mercenaries, PSCs and/or PMSCs.[16]

3. PMSCs versus mercenaries

When Erik Prince, a former US Navy Seal, founded US-based *Blackwater* in the late 1990s, he could not foresee that his company would be worth billions of dollars only 10 years later.[17] With *Blackwater*, as with South-African-based *Executive Outcomes* a decade earlier, the veil of secrecy and obscurity around mercenarism was partially

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[10] ICoCA – International Code of Conduct Association, "What we do."

[11] Today, only the governments of Australia, Canada, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and the United States are committed.

[12] ICoCA – International Code of Conduct Association, "Members archive."

[13] ICoCA – International Code of Conduct Association, "The code."

[14] ICoCA – International Code of Conduct Association, "The code."

[15] 'Montreux Document Forum, "Independent Research confirms the positive impact of the Montreux Document on the reduction of PMSC's violence against civilians."

[16] For more background information on the military oath, loyalty and professionalism in relation to PMSCs see: Wagemaker and Chafekar with their chapter "A military oath for Russian military security contractors? Wagner, Putin and the death of Prigozhin" in this book.

[17] Simons, *Master of War: Blackwater USA's Erik Prince and the Business of War*, 200.

lifted and the market for force became publicly widely known. Earlier, Tim Spicer, founding father of British-based *Sandline International* had already coined the term Private Military Company (PMC) to distance himself from the tainted term of mercenary.[18] The term PMC, which was commonly used at first, was later expanded to the term PMSC.

Researchers and international organisations initially viewed PMSCs and mercenaries as similar actors. For example, in 2007, the United Nations General Assembly still considered PMSCs as 'new mercenary modalities,' noting that while PMSCs had a sound corporate organisational structure with long-term business interests, they were essentially no different from mercenaries. Later, research focused on identifying clear differences between PMSCs and mercenaries on the one hand and regular soldiers on the other, noting that 'mercenaries are combatants without close and immediate control by a legitimate authority.'[19]

Nowadays, a difference has indeed been identified in the academic debate about mercenaries and PMSCs. The crucial difference between PMSCs and ad hoc mercenaries is that PMSC contractors, because of the obvious way in which they are organised and hired by governments, often ensure that they use less force and operate in a restrained manner, subject to applicable rules and values within the international community. In contrast, ad hoc mercenaries are considered not very integrated into the security system, as they act mainly in individual form, making them less approachable and susceptible to the control of the authorities that hire them. It may make them more likely to use excessive force and to violate human rights.[20]

Another major difference is the already mentioned ban on mercenaries since UN resolution 44/34 was invoked, whereas PMSCs have not been banned. Since security companies work together with governments and their armed forces in the service of their countries' interests they are considered 'legal.'[21] These PMSCs act as an intermediary between the professional soldier and the governments that hire them; at the same time, mercenaries can be hired by anyone with sufficient funds.

Besides the differences between mercenaries and PMSC-contractors, there are similarities between mercenaries and PMSC-contractors, which blur the lines between who is who. First and foremost, both PMSC contractors and mercenaries work for money and predominantly not for idealistic or political motives. Second, more in general, a mercenary is deployed for frontline operations while

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[18] Leander, "The Market for force and public security: the destabilizing consequences of Private Military Companies."

[19] Mquirmi, *Private Military and Security Companies: A New Form of Mercenarism?* 3.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Fernández, "Mercenaries: the bloodthirsty side of the war."

PMSC-contractors can serve in multiple areas of operation: intelligence, security, logistic, transportation and in combat.[22]

4. Different types of PMSCs

Modern military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan have dramatically changed the way war is perceived. Central to this transformation has been a huge increase in the number of commercial companies contributing to military operations. These companies not only provide for logistics and transport but also for training and assistance, intelligence, security and even combat operations. While there were six times as many United States (US) soldiers as contractors in the area of operations during the Vietnam War, the ratio has dropped to 1.4:1 in Afghanistan and even 1:1 in Iraq.[23] The ratios show that the influence of contractors, and hence PMSCs, on the battlefield has increased enormously over the last 50 years. It is therefore imperative to further analyse PMSCs. Although well-known PMSC-researcher Peter W. Singer denounced the lack of a proper typology for PMSCs, he structured PMCS into three different types, based on tasks, purpose and the distance to the frontline:

1. **Type 1, Military Provider Firms**: These firms send in soldiers who participate in the actual fighting (combat-protection) or provide the client with commanders who direct the local troops, e.g., the South African-based *Executive Outcomes*, US-based *Academi,* which was formerly known as *Blackwater*, and Canadian-based *GardaWorld Corporation* (including former British-based *Aegis Defence Services*).
2. **Type 2, Military Consultant Firms**: These firms provide services to their client in the field of military advice and training, which are inherent for the execution of military operations, e.g., US-based *MPRI* (*Military Professional Resources Incorporated*), or the Netherlands-based *Triangular Group Academy*.
3. **Type 3, Military Support Firms**: This last type of PMSC provides its client with services in the field of logistics, transportation, and operational capabilities, e.g., US-based *Kellog, Brown and Root*, US-based *Supreme Group* and Spanish-based *Golden Owl*, which specialises in providing international open-source intelligence and investigation.[24]

[22] Ibid.

[23] Schwartz and Swain, *Department of Defense Contractors in Iraq and Afghanistan: Background and Analysis*, 5; Krahmann, "Privatization of warfare," 121.

[24] Singer, *Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry*, 91.

The evolution of PMSCs has not come to an end yet. As wars never stop evolving and changing their lethal character neither will militaries and actors closely affiliated to war. 'The PMSCs of today are flexible entities that respond to customer demand.'[25] As long as wars endure, there will be mercenaries, PMSCs or whatever they are termed in future... and they will wander battlefields for eternity!

5. Reasons to use military provider firms

Looking at the three different types of PMSC, it is evident that type 2 and 3 PMSCs not only carry out their activities further from the front line but are also more bound by international regulations. This is much less true for type 1 PMSCs, and yet nations make elaborate use of this type of PMSC. There are five main reasons why nations or non-state actors advocate the deployment of PMSCs for combat operations in armed conflicts, although the participation of independent, commercial parties in fighting can have far-reaching implications for the international situation. Applying these reasons on the PMSCs under survey will provide a better understanding of how these PMSCs operate.

First, and most obvious, PMSCs are flexible and can move quickly to a potential global hot spot, without the long political and bureaucratic decision-making process armed forces need to adhere to. As with the short notice to deploy troops, a possible exit or repatriation from a conflict area is also easy and can take place directly after the task is completed, there is no obligation to meet a certain end state before departure. This makes PMSCs attractive to nations or other relevant parties involved in armed conflict.[26]

Secondly, it is not always clear who is actually deploying the PMSCs. Consequently, top officials invoke plausible deniability and avoid any responsibility.[27] Authorities in a nation sometimes deliberately want to put a veil of ambiguity over a conflict. They allow one or several PMSCs to fight along regular army units or perform 'dirty' tasks on the battlefield through all sorts of fuzzy international constructions. Moreover, it is doubtful that a PMSC, in turn, would ever allow its contractors to be tried by the legal system of a weak client state, even if legal action were taken from the global community.[28] In addition, if many contractors from a PMSC are killed, a

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[25] Nimkar, "From Bosnia to Baghdad: the case for regulating Private Military and Security Companies," 7.

[26] Raman and Opre, "Private Military Companies: Empowerment of state of privates?"

[27] Pałka, *The Awakening of Private Military Companies*, 9.

[28] Singer, "Corporate warriors: the rise of the privatized military industry and its ramifications for international security," 215.

nation need not be blamed. While governments are held accountable for the deaths and injuries of their soldiers, PMSCs do not have to publicly report their casualty numbers.[29] In other words, PMSCs allow nations to shirk responsibilities and to deny any involvement in certain activities at the frontline, while making it difficult internationally to prosecute and try these PMSCs and their contractors if necessary.

Third, in general, PMSC employees are well-trained professionals. They are often recruited from the 'elite forces of the best-trained armies in the world.'[30] A 2014 study found that PMSC operators possess many military and special forces skills, can perform a variety of missions and can quickly adapt to the demands of the military mission on the ground in the deployment area.[31] PMSCs are therefore a welcome addition to combat power for many armed forces, which no longer possess these capacities themselves due to the many budget cuts in recent years. These PMSCs therefore can be used as a force multiplier in conflicts when these governments cannot tip the balance in their favour, or in conflicts where governments are, or the international community is, unable or unwilling to deploy forces, like in Angola and Sierra Leone.[32]

The fourth reason for a nation to deploy PMSCs in armed conflict has a direct link to the previous reason: it can be a low-cost solution. How much nations are willing to pay for PMSC services cannot be ascertained from public sources, but the activities of a PMSC are based on a business model. Information on the cost-effectiveness of PMSCs is also inconclusive, but it is often claimed that PMSCs are more cost-effective than standing armies. Governments that hire PMSCs do not have to take care of remittances for the purpose of pensions, health care, housing benefits, etc.[33]

The fifth and final reason why nations are willing to deploy nations for warfighting is because these nations believe that the PMSCs, whom they would like to use for those combat operations, are committed to a high professional standard with ethical and human values. In this way, PMSCs earn respect and trust even though their operators have not taken an oath, as soldiers of regular armed forces do.[34] PMSCs are not seen as individual mercenaries, but as companies in a free market environment. Proponents of PMSCs say they are respected companies with highly qualified staff, many of whom have military backgrounds. In her 2005 article, Leander explains that PMSCs must behave respectfully to survive in the

[29] Dijkman, *Soldiers of Fortune: The Wagner Group As a Tool for Russian Grand Strategy*, 34.

[30] Zadzorova, "Privat Military Companies: an efficient way of meeting the demand for security."

[31] Joachim and Schneiker, "All for one and one in all: Private military security companies as soldiers, business managers and humanitarians."

[32] Leander, "The market for force and public security."

[33] DCAF Backgrounder, "Private Military Companies," 2.

[34] For more background information on the military oath, loyalty and professionalism in relation to PMSCs see: Wagemaker and Chafekar in this book.

market of force. Therefore, a high degree of professionalism is required to show such behaviour. According to Leander, PMSCs do not behave like Machiavelli's 'whores of war' and are not traditional mercenaries.[35] PMCS that do not meet the standards of professionalism will eventually force themselves out of business.[36]

6. Wagner's role in Ukraine

The following sections focus on Russian PMSCs involved in the war in Ukraine, starting with the Wagner Group or *ChVK Vagner*[37] in Russian. The origin of the Wagner Group is not clear. According to the independent Russian website *The Bell*, the creation of the Wagner Group derives from an initiative by some senior Russian officers after they attended an impressive presentation by Eeben Barlow, founder of South African-based *Executive Outcomes*. The officers decided that the leadership would be in the hands of Yevgeny Prigozhin, Putin's 'chef.' Wagner Group's main training camp is at the *Molkino* base in Russia's Krasnador region, which is also home to the 10 *Spetsnaz* Brigade, belonging to the GRu,[38] Russia's military intelligence service.[39] This assumes an intimate relationship between the Wagner Group and the GRu, although it has never been openly confirmed by Russian authorities. On top of this, Wagner is equipped by the Russian government and uses Russian armed forces logistics to be able to execute military operations.[40] This raises the question of whether the Wagner Group can be considered a PMSC operating on the bases of a so called free market for force instead of being an extension of Moscow's political power. The Wagner Group, however, likes to remain shrouded in mystery, with little or no traceability.

After its founding, the Wagner Group soon became active during the annexation of Crimea, and later during the armed conflict in the Donbas region.[41] Wagner's mission, often done at the invitation of the authorities, involves protecting high-ranking individuals, maintaining order, supporting groups involved in internal conflicts, but in Africa they also provide protection for gold and diamond

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[35] Leander, "The market for force and public security."

[36] Mquirmi, *Private Military and Security Companies: A New Form of Mercenarism?*

[37] *ChVK* in *ChVK Vagner* stands for *Chastnyye Voyennyye Kompanii*, which means Private Military Company (the old terminology).

[38] *GRu* stands for *Glavnoje upravlenije General'nogo shtaba Vooruzhonnykh sil Rossiyskoy Federatsii* (Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation), Russia's military security service.

[39] Fainberg, *Russian spetsnaz, Contractors and Volunteers in the Syrian Conflict*, 18.

[40] The Economic Times, "Nepali Gurkhas are joining Wagner: The lure of the Private Military Companies."

[41] Wouters, *Putin's Private Army: How the Wagner Group Supports Russian Strategy*, 3-4.

mining.[42] The Wagner Group therefore seems not only to be a type 1 PMSC, as appears in Ukraine and Syria, but in Africa and elsewhere it is also a type 2 PMSC. From its creation, it was noticeable that the Wagner Group did not comply with international regulations. Assumed incidents of Wagner operators or Wagner-affiliates, such as looting, plunder and rape in the town of Bucha at the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine conflict or the execution of Wagner-deserters, show that Wagner has not adhered to human rights and international law.[43]

In the summer of 2022, a hugely bitter fight between Wagner and Ukrainian forces unfolded over Bakhmut, while experts disputed its strategic value. Bakhmut became an object of prestige for both the Russian Federation and Ukraine. On the one hand, President Putin wanted to capture the city of Bakhmut at all costs because the Russian front had stalled after a few months, and the seizure of Bakhmut was still the only success on the Russian side.[44] On the other, President Zelensky and the Ukrainian military authorities saw the defence of Bakhmut as an opportunity to considerably weaken the Russian forces.[45]

During the first half of 2023, the Wagner Group became completely exhausted after months of fierce fighting. Prigozhin proclaimed several times that Bakhmut was completely in Wagner's hands, but each time Ukrainian defenders managed to regain small parts of the city.[46] In late May, President Zelensky hinted at its final fall.[47] Whether the Wagner Group adhered to professional standards, as mentioned as the fifth reason for the use of type 1 PMSCs, is doubtful, as they fought brutally for months in and around the city of Bakhmut. Should the Russian authorities have found this objectionable at all, it was overshadowed by the fact that during the autumn of 2022, and the first half of 2023, the Wagner Group was the only unit still making slow progress on the Russian front.

During the battle for Bakhmut, it was Prigozhin's army who was able to fill up the ranks faster with replacements than the Russian armed forces could do with a centralised mobilisation system. This flexibility, being the first reason to use military provider firms, came at a high price. As it was not until Wagner's forces were exhausted that they were finally replaced by regular Russian forces at the end of May 2023.[48] Although the quality and the training of these replacements can be questioned it shows the flexibility of this auxiliary force.

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[42] Clarke, Parens, Faulkner, and Wolf, "Is Wagner pivoting back to Africa?"

[43] McFate, "Opinion | The mercenaries behind the Bucha Massacre"; Faulconbridge, "Video shows sledgehammer execution of Russian mercenary."

[44] Engelbrecht, "What does Russia's success in Bakhmut mean for the war in Ukraine?"

[45] Dettmer and Melkozerova, "Zelensky digs in against calls to quit Bakhmut."

[46] d'Istria, "Wagner and Putin claim the capture of Bakhmut, a city reduced to rubble."

[47] Viser, Pager and Hee Lee, "Zelensky says destroyed Bakhmut now lives 'only in our hearts.'"

[48] Stepanenko, Bailey, Mappes, Wolkov, and Kagan, "Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 28, 2023."

The loss of lives of Wagner's troops in the conflict has been estimated at over 20,000, according to Telegram's 'Wagner Loading' channel around July 20th 2023.[49] These numbers, however, cannot be confirmed and are in contrast with the numbers given by the Russian authorities. This applies not only to the losses of the Wagner Group but also for the Russian armed forces as it is believed that Russian authorities 'routinely undercount its war dead and injured.'[50] To avoid public unrest, war victims are buried without notifying relatives or family by using anonymous mass graves.[51] The losses of these private companies do not count in the official Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) reports of how many servicemen have died or been injured.[52] Just as the involvement of the Wagner Group during the annexation of Crimea in 2014, it shows that the Russian government is laying a veil of obscurity on the use of PMSCs, in order not to be kept responsible for the actions of the PMSCs, thus playing the card of murdered innocence.

In its early years, the Wagner Group was known for recruiting former elite soldiers from the special forces and VDV (Russia's airborne troopers), but during the war in Ukraine, many Wagner fighters were killed, and the recruitment of new fighters declined rapidly. Prigozhin and other Wagner officials frequently tried to recruit new personnel in Russian correction facilities which, according to the United Nations' High Commissioner for Human Rights, sometimes involved threats and intimidation. Other prisoners were promised better salaries and offered pardons for criminal sentences in exchange for fighting in Ukraine.[53] So, in the case of the Wagner Group, the reasons for using type 1 PMSCs, respectively 'well-trained contractors' and 'high professional standards,' were shifting quite negatively during their participation in Russian combat operations. Yet, despite this, Russian authorities continued to deploy the Wagner Group as success with regular Russian units failed to materialise.

Meanwhile, Prigozhin made it clear that he disagreed with the way the war was being conducted, criticising Russian Defense Minister, Sergei Shoigu, and Russia's Chief of the General Staff, General Valery Gerasimov. Prigozhin, owner of a large business empire, made skillful use of his media channels to openly express, along with other critical military bloggers, his dissatisfaction with the direction of the war.[54] He also openly complained about the lack of sufficient logistical support from

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[49] Camut, "Over 20,000 Wagner troops killed, 40,000 wounded in Ukraine: Prigozhin-Linked Channel."

[50] Cooper, Gibbons-Neff, Schmitt, and Barnes, "Troop deaths and injuries in Ukraine War near 500,000, U.S. Officials say."

[51] Het Nieuwsblad, "Zeven massagraven met Wagner-strijders gevonden in Rusland."

[52] Rácz, "Band of brothers: The Wagner Group and the Russian State."

[53] "Russian Federation: UN experts alarmed by recruitment of prisoners by 'Wagner Group.'"

[54] Lister, Sciutto, and Ilyushina, "Exclusive: Putin's chef, the man behind the troll factory."

Russian forces while the Wagner Group was battling for Bakhmut and suffered huge losses.[55]

During Friday, 23rd June 2023, tempers ran so high that Prigozhin declared an 'all-out war' on the Russian authorities and led his Wagner Group to march toward Moscow. The mutiny, which embarrassed President Putin, took Russian forces completely by surprise. It developed at lightning speed and ended in great confusion and chaos. The Wagner Group moved from the Donbas region to Rostov-on-Don in Russia, where they seized control of the headquarters of the Southern Military District, and then advanced toward Moscow.[56]

Late in the evening of 24th June 2023, Prigozhin announced the end of the action, following a deal with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko.[57] After an initial period of silence, Putin eventually reacted furiously to the coup, labelling it treasonous and 'a stab in the back of our country and our people.'[58] The Wagner Group would withdraw to Belarus and it was unclear what was going to happen to Wagner operations in Africa and Syria. Putin himself continued to vehemently deny that the Russian Federation had officially deployed the Wagner Group. Even after Wagner's rebellion in June 2023, Putin insisted in an interview with the Russian daily newspaper *Kommersant* that the Wagner Group never existed because, Putin indicated, PMSCs are formally banned following Russian law.[59] This fits in perfectly with the already mentioned reason of plausible deniability.

Nearly two months later, on Wednesday 23rd August 2023, a business jet crashed on its way from Moscow to Saint Petersburg. According to Russian aviation authorities among the ten figures were key officials of the Wagner Group, including Yevgeny Prigozhin.[60] Despite all suspicions, the Russian authorities have denied any involvement in the accident.[61] The chain of events leading to the presumed death of Prigozhin seems to fit in perfectly with the already mentioned reason of plausible deniability by the Russian president and the Russian authorities.

Conclusively what's interesting to mention is the fact that the Wagner group seemingly does not meet the requirements of a 'free' market company as PMSCs do. The fact that they use governmental training grounds and were equipped by the Russian armed forces show a huge involvement of the authorities and may influence the way Wagner operates. It is remarkable that the Wagner uprising even

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[55] Taube, "Who's who in the Prigozhin-Kremlin conflict?"

[56] Blazakis, Clarke, Fink, and Steinberg, "Wagner Group: The evolution of a private army," 5.

[57] Stognei, Fedor and Evans, "Wagner troops withdraw as Russian uprising leaves Vladimir Putin weakened."

[58] Sauer and Roth, "Putin accuses Wagner chief of treason and vows to 'neutralize' uprising."

[59] Hodge, "Wagner 'does not exist': why Putin claims a rift in the mercenary group."

[60] Smith, "Jet crash victim who died alongside Prigozhin."

[61] Dixon and Ebel, "Prigozhin confidant says fatal plane crash shows no one is safe."

existed! The argument Prigozhin used, the lack of logistical support for Wagner troops in the form of ammunition supply and military equipment would lead in a free market to cancellation of the contract. Instead Prigozhin started a revolt and a march towards Moscow. He might have used his strong influence to gain leverage over Putin, as he felt that his powers were daunting. In his internal feud with Defense minister Sergei Shoigu, Prigozhin needed a deal to get out as long as he could. For Putin it would cost too much, in terms of people, materiel and public support to fight Wagner troops than to bargain and give in to Prigozhin. According to William Partlett of the University of Melbourne this uprising shows how intra-elite disputes are 'resolved' in modern Russia, resembling the prerogative state of Nazi Germany.[62] It makes the interconnectedness between Prigozhin, his Wagner group, and Putin painfully clear. As András Rácz stated in his article that instead of using the Russian narrative, according to which Wagner is a private military company, Wagner should be viewed as a classic proxy organisation and handled accordingly.[63]

7. The lesser-known PMSC Redut

Besides the Wagner Group, Redut also appears to have played a significant role in this war. PMSC Redut, acting as a type 1 PMSC during the Russia-Ukraine war, was founded in 2008, and initially belonged to the family of anti-terrorist PMSCs. The initial Redut organisation was largely composed of Russian ex-military personnel, drawn from the 45th Special Forces Regiment of the Russian Airborne Forces. Redut reportedly has particularly close ties to the Russian Ministry of Defense.[64] This makes plausible deniability as a reason to hire a PMSC difficult if not impossible. However, Russian authorities made no further announcements about Redut's actions during the Russia-Ukraine war, trying to downplay their responsibility for Redut's activities or even denying any governmental involvement. Although Russia strongly denies any involvement in Redut, the markers clearly show a different story, making the reason for plausible deniability at least questionable.

According to insiders, Redut did not comply with international regulations, such as the Montreux Document and the ICoCa Code, just like the Wagner Group did not. Another similarity with the Wagner Group is that it immediately became clear that they acted brutally during combat operations in Syria. This behaviour does question the reason for maintaining a high professional standard (ethics). Redut is now completely

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[62] Partlett, "Why Prigozhin's march on Moscow was not a coup."

[63] Rácz, "Band of brothers."

[64] Østensen, and Bukkvoll, "Russian use of private military and security companies – the implications for European and Norwegian Security," 24-25.

under the control of the GRu, which is also known as the least sophisticated Russian security service with often a rougher approach. Redut asserts complete loyalty to Russia's state institutions, since they also depend on it for ammunition, equipment, and logistics. Nevertheless, the group still enjoys a certain degree of autonomy, but not comparable to the latitude Prigozhin claimed for the Wagner Group.[65]

The Russian General Staff intended that Redut would become an apprehensive competitor to the Wagner Group, as the Wagner Group came less and less under control. On 24th February 2022, Redut was to play a significant role in the attack on Kyiv and the planned killing of the Zelensky government.[66] The deputy head of the GRu, Lieutenant General Vladimir Alexeyev, had made plans for this part of the Russian attack on Ukraine. Redut recruited many former Wagner and Special Forces members in the period leading up to the Russia-Ukraine, totalling several thousand by January 2022, which infuriated Wagner chief Prigozhin. Like the Wagner Group, Redut is a rapidly deployable intervention force for the Russian government. When units are needed immediately to protect Russian interests, the Russian government can call on companies like Redut. Their flexibility is a strength and, as already mentioned, one of the reasons for governments to hire PMSCs. Redut suffered heavy losses of up to 90% of their strength during the advance to Kyiv in the first weeks of the war. Due to the weakening of Redut, Prigozhin's Wagner Group became the leading PMSC during this war.[67]

It is notable that Redut initially had many well-trained operators in its ranks, drawn from the Wagner Group but also from Russian Special Forces, as the third reason for using type 1 PMSCs specifies. However, the question remains as to whether Redut was also able to recruit suitable personnel after the early stages of the Russia-Ukraine war to complement the huge losses it suffered at the beginning of the war. After all, the Russian armed forces and the Wagner Group were desperate for qualified personnel. As with the Wagner Group, it is doubtful whether Redut pursued high professional standards, as the fifth reason for using type 1 PMSCs indicates. During the Russian attack on the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv, which incidentally failed, the operators of Redut fought doggedly and suffered many losses, making it plausible that ethical and humane values were not always considered.

In early 2023, Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin authorised *Gazprom Neft*, a subsidiary of Russian energy giant Gazprom, to establish its own PMSC. The

[65] Chkhaidze, "PMC Redut: The Wagner Group's potential replacement."

[66] For more background information on the planned killing of the Zelensky administration see: Han Bouwmeester with his chapter 'Putin's miscalculation: the effectiveness of Russia's new-type warfare in Ukraine' in this book.

[67] Oliphant, "Inside ambitious mercenary outfit Redut, the Wagner rival linked to the Russian spy service."

new PMSC started under the name *Gazprom Neft Security*. It was led by former high-ranking members of Russia's Federal Security Service (FSS) and the Ministry of Internal Affairs.[68] Later that year, in April 2023, the Russian Ministry of Defense forced several members of Gazprom Neft Security to sign contracts for Redut to fight under their leadership in the Russia-Ukraine war.[69] Gazprom never admitted its involvement in the formation of PMSCs. Instead, in the past, the company sought to project a traditional Western corporate image to trading partners in Europe by making environmental, social and governance commitments. Moreover, Gazprom sponsored the UEFA Champions League for several years.[70]

8. Conclusion

This chapter concentrated on the question: 'Do Wagner and Redut's combat operations in the Russia-Ukraine conflict conform to views on modern Private Military and Security Companies?' Answering this question, however, is not simple. Mercenaries meet the views on PMSCs in the twilight, and circumstances decide whether they are considered as white or black knights. They often lack direct supervision by legitimate authorities. This means that they are more likely to derail than contractors belonging to a PMSC that respect international esteemed values, as indicated in the ICoCa Code and the Montreux Document. Many PMSCs focus on being type 2 and 3 companies. They are often well organised and already affiliated to ICoCa. Moreover, they also pursue a certain professional standard for themselves to be hired. PMSCs that concentrate only on type 1 tasks are no affiliates of ICoCa, and, as a result, do not comply with the Code. It is therefore often questionable how and whether they will behave on the battlefield.

With regard to the fourth reason for hiring a PMSC (a PMSC is a low cost solution), this question could not be answered properly in this chapter and is therefore marked with a question mark. The information on the costs of hiring a PMSC was at best questionable and incomplete. According to a RAND study, Putin stated that Wagner had been paid an amount of 86.26 billion rubles ($1 billion) between May 2022 and May 2023 to cover wages,[71] however it is difficult to make a cost estimate of a comparable Russian armed forces unit.

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[68] Sukhankin, "The 'Privatization of Force' presses on in Russia, Part one."

[69] "It's not just Wagner, at least three Gazprom-linked private military companies now have fighters in Ukraine."

[70] Ivanova, Miller and Seddon, "'Stream' and 'Torch': the Gazprom-backed militias fighting in Ukraine."

[71] Dunigan, "Where will all the Wagner group mercenaries go now that Russia has exiled their leader?"

Reasons to hire PMSCs for combat operations	PMSCs used by Russian authorities	
	Wagner	Redut
Flexibility	✓	✓
Plausible deniability	✓	✓✗ (questionable because of its obvious ties to the Russian authorities)
Professionalism (high level of expertise-training)	✓ → ✗ (changed over the course of the conflict due to personnel shortages and losses)	✓ → ✗ (changed over the course of the conflict due to personnel shortages and losses)
Low cost solution	Further research needed	Further research needed
High professional standard (ethics: moral code)	✗	✗

Table 22.1: The reasons to use PMSCs for combat operations applied to Wagner and Redut

The Wagner Group and Redut did not conform to the views of modern PMSCs and ignored the ICoCa Code and Montreux Document. Contractors of both companies can be considered Russian commercial warriors on the battlefield. The two PMSCs were involved in brutal combat operations during the Russia-Ukraine war and initially had experienced personnel. The high number of casualties made it almost impossible to recruit new well-qualified personnel, especially as the Russian armed forces sought to include conscripts in their ranks. Moreover, it is questionable whether both PMSCs were able to uphold a professional standard consisting of humane values during the intensive combat actions in which many contractors were killed. Finally, both PMSCs operated in a twilight zone, because of which the Russian authorities denied any involvement in the deployment of PMSCs during the Russia-Ukraine war and were thus able to avoid responsibility for the violent activities of both PMSCs. In addition to these similarities, there was a major difference between the two PMSCs: while the Wagner Group started to operate more and more independently, Redut remained under full control of Russian authorities. Indeed, Redut was put forward by the Russian authorities to compete with the Wagner Group in an attempt to diminish the influence of the Wagner Group in which Prigozhin was increasingly distancing his PMSC from the Russian armed forces, during this Russia-Ukraine war.

9. Final remarks

This chapter provides a description of PMSCs in general, and of Russian-oriented PMSCs during the Russia-Ukraine War in particular. Now it may seem to many as if only the Wagner Group was active as a PMSC during this war, but nothing could be further from the truth. PMSCs were active on both sides, Russian and Ukrainian. Only the linkage of events was most notable with the Wagner Group, from the protracted and bloody fighting around Bakhmut, to utterances of Yevgeny Prigozhin, the rebellion of the Wagner Group, and the presumed death of Prigozhin. Nevertheless, it is necessary to make two observations.

First, the Wagner Group, and to a lesser extent Redut, created a very negative image of PMSCs, but it would be unfair to consider all PMSCs in this way. After all, Wagner Group is a PMSC that fell into the first type, the so-called Military Provider Firm, and it acted ruthlessly, not obeying any rule regarding human rights and International Humanitarian Law. And although for a long time they were the only unit on the Russian front still making some progress with fierce fighting, the Russian authorities were having increasing troubles to keep a grip on the Wagner Group. Russia's Defense Minister, Sergey Shoigu, had already benefitted from other Russian PMSCs that could compete with the Wagner Group in the run-up to the Russian-Ukrainian war. Globally, there are several PMSCs that are in stark contrast to the Wagner Group; many of these PMSCs do not have a fighting role but rather provide advisory and support services which means that, unlike the Wagner Group, they are not found close to the front. Moreover, several PMSCs have committed themselves to the ICoCa and several nations are striving to respect the Montreux Document.

Second, during the writing of this chapter, in the period September – October 2023, it became apparent that all sorts of elements of the Wagner Group were reappearing at the front. According to a recent update of the British intelligence service large elements of The Wagner Group have likely been reassigned to serve in the Russian National Guard – the *Rosgvardiya*[72] – and the mercenary group has 'resumed active recruitment.' It also mentioned the fact that Pavel, the son of, Prigozhin is likely to be leading one of these units. Other Wagner-groups have likely joined Redut.[73] It shows that the Wagner Group's story is not over yet. The performance of the Wagner Group and of the other PMSCs during this war requires additional and extensive academic research. Indeed, the deployment of PMSCs on

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[72] *Rosgvardiya* is the special Russian National Guard, placed directly under the authority of the Russian President

[73] Taylor, "British Intelligence: Wagner Group mercenaries have likely been folded into Russian National Guard."

the battlefield has become indispensable in contemporary warfare. PMSCs will play an increasingly prominent role in future conflicts and contribute to further commercialisation of the battlefield.

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CHAPTER 23

A Military Oath for Russian Private Military Security Contractors? Wagner, Putin and the Death of Prigozhin

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Abstract

This chapter focuses on the concepts of loyalty and military professionalism of Russian Private Military Companies (PMSCs) related to military oaths of office. It aims to explore whether such an oath, recently exploited by the Russian leadership, will keep Putin safe from attempted mutinies like Wagner chief Yevgeny Prigozhin's coup attempt in late June 2023. The chapter explores and discusses military professionalism in relation to concepts of loyalty as well as the military oath as a speech act. Subsequently, the question of what loyalty is for PMSCs is explored. Against this theoretical backdrop, the role and functionality of (horizontal and vertical) loyalty of private military companies in Russia and Prigozhin's attempted military coup is analysed and discussed.

Keywords: Loyalty, Russian armed forces, Wagner, Prigozhin, PMSC, Private military companies, Russia, Oath, Coup attempt, Speech act

> *I (surname, first name patronymic) solemnly swear allegiance to the Russian Federation, undertake to sacredly observe the Constitution of the Russian Federation, to strictly carry out the orders of commanders and superiors, conscientiously fulfil the duties assigned to me. I swear to be loyal to the Russian Federation, to courageously defend its independence and constitutional order.*[1]

1. Introduction

Mercenaries once enlisted in the Wagner Group have all been put on the spot by President Putin's decree on 25th August 2023: they 'shall be sworn in'[2] by taking this oath. Before Dmitry Utkin and Yevgeny Prigozhin chose Richard Wagner's name for their company, they may have wanted to stay up for the last part of Wagner's most

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* This contribution reflects our personal observations.

[1] Translation by DeepL: http://actual.pravo.gov.ru/text.html#pnum=0001202308250004

[2] Based on a translation by DeepL: http://actual.pravo.gov.ru/text.html#pnum=0001202308250004

famous work *Der Ring Des Nibelungen*. The ending of *Götterdämmerung* concerns the burning and destruction of Walhalla – a specific heaven for warriors who died in battle and home of chief God Wotan, guardian of oaths and laws. Its finale represents the end of everything caused by deception in oath taking. Gunther, King of the Gibichungs,[3] lured Siegfried into swearing a blood oath in brotherhood. In the meantime, however, Gunther filled Siegfried's drink with a potion to cause amnesia for his own personal gain, which consequently led to the destruction of Gods and humanity.

Mercenaries who had signed a contract with the Wagner Group were expected to be solely committed to their employers, not necessarily to Russia let alone Putin when they were hired to support the Russian armed forces. The charismatic Prigozhin was clearly in charge of the Wagner Group. He considered his men not just to be committed to the Group but, particularly, to him. Unlike Siegfried, Prigozhin declined to take an oath to the Russian armed forces – which essentially meant an oath to Putin – and ordered his men to advance to Moscow on 23rd June 2023, which became a test of their commitment and loyalties.

Prigozhin was dissatisfied with the Russian political and military leadership.[4] He described them as incompetent. His mercenaries were not supported with decent materiel and enough ammunition to handle the 'special military operation' in Ukraine.[5] After only one day on 24th June, however, he decided to withdraw and ordered his men to end the 'March for Justice.'[6] Prigozhin stated he wanted to stop Russian bloodshed, but he also realised that he could not mobilise a considerable force against Putin.[7] Exactly two months after this attempted military coup, Prigozhin and Utkin were killed in a plane crash. The Wagner Group de facto ceased to exist without its leaders; moreover, Putin made this certain as he ordered the organisation to be dismantled.

On 25th August 2023, the autocratic Russian leader Vladimir Putin signed a decree, which demanded that all mercenary groups swear an oath of loyalty to the Russian state.[8] The objective of the Russian oath of loyalty is to build 'the spiritual and moral foundations for the defense of the Russian Federation' while in this regard likewise

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[3] A people named after King Gibich in the epic music dramas composed by Richard Wagner: Der Ring des Nibelungen (1857). The works are based loosely on characters from Germanic heroic legend, namely Norse legendary sagas and the Nibelungenlied.

[4] Foreign Affairs, "Prigozhin's rebellion, Putin's fate, and Russia's future: A conversation with Stephen Kotkin."

[5] YouTube, "Wagner boss Prigozhin slams Russian officials from a field of corpses."

[6] BBC, "Wagner chief vows to topple Russian military leaders."

[7] The Guardian, "Wagner rebel chief halts tank advance on Moscow 'to stop bloodshed.'"

[8] Decree of the President of the Russian Federation dated August 25, 2023 No. 639, 'On swearing in certain categories of persons.'

safeguarding his own position. The oath is also aimed at those who participate in 'a special military operation,'[9] namely Ukraine.[10] However, forming those foundations is easier said than done: much more is needed than solely swearing the oath. Moreover, mercenary groups tend to have a different view on service and office than regular armies. This research implies that values like loyalty and professionalism should first be rooted in an organisation as well as in its personnel before oaths become effective. Oaths are not magic formulas that work with a little pixie dust. Moreover, it is rather questionable whether an oath for volunteer forces that are unfamiliar with certain norms and values and objectives can live up to expectations. In short, oaths need to be rooted and maintained in the organisation and in its members.

This chapter will focus on the concepts of loyalty and military professionalism of Russian PMSCs related to military oaths of office. Because of that focus, we will not analyse the Russian political system or question the legitimacy of private contractors. This contribution aims to answer the question 'Will an oath of loyalty to the Russian state be effective for private military security contractors?' In other words, this chapter wants to explore if such an oath will keep Putin safe from other attempted mutinies. In order to address the research question, this chapter will proceed in nine parts. We will first address how oaths are socio-normative speech acts;[11] subsequently, military professionalism shall be addressed with a focus on the concept of loyalty. Consequently, we will address what loyalty is for PMSCs prior to explaining what the military oath is as a speech act. Against this general theoretical backdrop, we will apply this analysis to private military companies in Russia and Prigozhin's attempted military coup. This chapter will end with a discussion and a conclusion.

2. Oaths as speech acts

Speech acts mark a change in our social reality: by saying the words, something is done.[12] They have roughly three levels: the locutionary act, which is the actual use of the words by the speaker; the illocutionary act, which concerns the intention *in* the use of the words; finally, the perlocutionary act, which completes the speech act in a certain context by creating a certain effect on the hearer.

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[9] The Moscow Times, "Putin signs decree forcing paramilitary fighters to swear oath."

[10] Reuters, "Putin orders Wagner fighters to sign oath of allegiance."

[11] Although there is a difference between oaths and promises (unlike promises oaths carry more gravity as a commitment is made), we consider them interchangeable in this chapter and will only mention oaths. See further: Sulmassy, 'What is an oath and why should a physician swear one?' 329-346.

[12] A simple example of a speech act are wedding vows. By saying the words 'I do,' the marriage is not true or false, registered or described; certain legal, fiscal and ethical obligations to one another come into being as well as a new reality for the couple and society. See further: Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*.

Oaths belong to the socio-normative approach of speech acts rather than the mentalist approach as they go beyond 'expressing' an intention.[13] In an oath, a commitment is made. In the socio-normative approach, it is argued that with intentions alone, our society would be unable to function. Commitments are crucial to connect personas (speakers and hearers) and propositional contents for activities in communities to function.[14] Making a commitment is, therefore, not about 'expressing' an intention, it is about 'having' the commitment to act. Commitments are about 'coordinating actions through action coordination.'[15]

Oaths concerning the public interest are 'oaths of office.'[16] By saying the words, an individual is 'granted the moral authority of the state to make decision (sic) affecting the lives of other citizens who are not kin, friend, or protegee.'[17] Rutgers defines the oath of office as 'a social-linguistic act that provides the highest warranty a person can give for promises regarding the acquisition of office, loyalty to the political regime, the use of public authority, and the proper execution of tasks, according to his/her moral convictions and beliefs, that is accepted as such by the social community, and that is accompanied by specific rituals, including specific gestures, and that is recorded.'[18] Oaths, therefore, go beyond contractual relations;[19] they are also concerned with vertical authority relationships.[20] Merely implementing an oath does not automatically imply the right behaviour let alone that its members as well the organisation are loyal to its leadership.[21] By taking the oath, the speaker publicly in front of society declares his loyalty and, therefore, puts his credibility at risk for his community. His future course of action is proof of his oath. Violation of the oath would likely lead to shame and damage of the trust relationship with society on various levels. The oath, or better the intention behind the oath, needs to be vertically and horizontally rooted in the organisation and in its members.

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[13] This is usually the case with promises: Searle, *Speech Acts*, 62; Grice, "Meaning," 383-384; Ambroise, "Promises," 505.

[14] Geurts, "Communication as commitment sharing: Speech acts, implicatures, common ground," 1-30; De Brabanter and Dendale, "Commitment: The term and the notions," 2; Kissine, *From Utterances to Speech Acts*, 148-165.

[15] Geurts, "Communication as commitment sharing," 3-6.

[16] Office is derived from Latin 'officium,' which means 'service' or 'official duty.'

[17] Rutgers, "The oath of office as public value guardian," 434-435.

[18] Rutgers, "Will the phoenix fly again?," 249-276.

[19] Steen and Rutgers, "The double-edged sword," 343-361.

[20] Rutgers, "Oath of office," 435.

[21] The banker's oath in the Netherlands, for example, has shown that the working culture must first be on par with what is desired from the profession before the effect of an oath pays off. See further: Loonen and Rutgers, "Swearing to be a good banker: Perceptions of the obligatory banker's oath in the Netherlands," 28-47.

3. Military professionalism

Putin wants private military contractors who work for commercial organisations to enter the professional Russian armed forces. Civilian control of the military lies at the core of military professionalism, which is monopolised by the state, rather than regulated as is the case with some civilian professions.[22] The concept of professionalism[23] comes down to four elements. First, professionals are defined by expert knowledge and skill obtained through academic education. Secondly, professionals operate in a social context and deliver a service to society. They are not so much focused on financial gain as they are on public service and good work. Thirdly, professionals are part of a professional body that distinguish themselves from other experts with intellectual skills as they carry a social responsibility. Finally, professions thrive on autonomy: they tend to self-organise and self-regulate.[24] Considering these elements, the military professionalism's product in society's productive field is its expertise, if needed, in the use of force with instruments of violence in case the existence of the state is or will be at risk. At the same time, the military is also able to threaten the polity due to the tremendous arsenal of brute force. In order to contain that, civilian control is at the core of military professionalism and, furthermore, requires a legal framework of which the military oath is a part.[25] Either way, the military requires trust from society to obtain a certain standard of autonomy to organise the military profession's field of work.[26]

4. Loyalty

Civilian control is enforced by a legal framework. Guarantees of civilian control are provided through oaths as speech acts, which are about loyalty and, thus, demand loyalty.[27] The Oxford English Dictionary defines loyalty as a 'faithful adherence to one's promise, oath, word of honour' and, furthermore, it can mean a 'faithful adherence to the sovereign or lawful government.' Loyalty of the armed forces

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[22] Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*.

[23] Professionalism is derived from the Latin *professionem* which means 'public declaration.'

[24] Flexner, "Is social work a profession?," 152-165; Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, 8-10; Freidson, *Professionalism, The Third Logic*, 180; Loth, *Private Law in Context: Enriching Legal Doctrine*, 233; Kwak, *The Legal Junction*, 17-19.

[25] Feaver, "The civil-military problematique: Huntington, Janowitz, and the question of civilian control," 149-178; Feaver, "Civil-military relations," 211-241; Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier*, 220.

[26] Snider, "Dissent and strategic leadership of the military professions," 256-277.

[27] Rutgers, *Oath of Office*, 433.

is about loyalty to the authority of the state, which means acceptance of civilian control and preventing a (violent) military junta.[28] Subsequently, civilian control is the core of military professionalism to guarantee civilian authority from 'the guys with the guns.'[29]

Loyalty and military professionalism may conflict with the subordination to civilian control.[30] On the one hand, military professionals are subjected to the state, on the other hand, they may feel responsible for national security. In their profession, the military is a public body, which contains role-bound obligations and military values while it also has to deal with personal moral codes in professional ethical dilemmas. According to Luban, these role-bearing conflicts occur when character built by performing the role conflicts with other norms within that role.[31]

Interestingly, loyalty in the military has a paradoxical element. In order to activate loyalty in the vertical authority relationship, the armed forces invest heavily in horizontal loyalty: loyalty to the group. To actually make soldiers fight and kill lies in constructing a social reality within their group by separating them from their initial social environment and ingrain a new idea of the world through loyalty and obedience.[32] It is thus about being faithful to colleagues and the organisation rather than to groups outside theirs.[33] According to Connor, loyalty 'depends upon reciprocity and the fulfilment of responsibilities to others.'[34] Reciprocity is built on the belief of mutual acknowledgement between people. Therefore, if loyalty to the state is demanded in the military oath, it cannot be a one-way street. Authority is about reciprocity.[35] Loyalty and authority are therefore mutually dependent: whereas the state ought to be able to rely on loyalty from the armed forces, the military should be able to rely on the state to responsibly deal with the authority entrusted to them.

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[28] Engelkes, Sverke and Lindholm, "Predicting loyalty: Examining the role of social identity and leadership in an extreme operational environment – a Swedish case," 1-21; Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, 1957.

[29] Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, 1957.

[30] For an interesting study on this, see: Mayer, *The Dark Side: The Inside Story of how the War on Terror Turned into a War on American Ideals*.

[31] Luban, *Lawyers and Justice: An Ethical Study*,108.

[32] Connor, "Military loyalty: A functional vice?," 282.

[33] Olsthoorn, *Military Ethics and Virtues*, 66-92.

[34] Connor, Andrews, Noack-Lundberg and Wadham, "Military loyalty as a moral emotion," 533.

[35] Vining, *The Authoritative and the Authoritarian*; Lindahl and Van Klink, "Reciprocity and the normativity of legal orders," 110.

5. PMSCs, mercenaries and loyalty

Machiavelli showed in *The Prince* and *Discorsi* the issues in loyalty of mercenaries – men that are just motivated by financial gain. In Machiavelli's days, they were the body of armies although they acted more like 'adventurers and ruffians who wanted to wealth and plunder, men who had nothing to lose had everything to gain through war.'[36] He has shown how changes in the composition of armies and military technique transformed the spirit of armies as well as the need for professionalism.[37] This notion was taken further in the seventeenth century by Maurice of Nassau, Gustavus Adolphus and Raimondo Montecuccoli.[38]

In this day and age, there is a difference between mercenaries and warriors although both could form armed groups. Whereas the mercenaries are primarily motivated by money, warriors are combatants derived from more traditional societies – for example Somalia, Chechnya, Afghanistan and Iraq. These kinds of warriors learn through their societal norms and legacies to fight in specific ways. They are typically loyal to their tribe, clan, or communal group, often with a formal or informal honour code which could be considered to have a similar function as a military oath.[39]

Today's mercenaries are called 'private contractors' who have never been 'obligated to take orders or to follow military codes of conduct, since a contractor is bound by a contract, and not an oath.'[40] In short, they are just loyal to themselves as were mercenaries in the Roman empire[41] and as Machiavelli has characterised them. Modern mercenary groups are often referred to as Private Military Security Contractors.[42] PMSCs are 'businesses that offer specialised services related to war and conflict, including combat operations, strategic planning, intelligence collection, operational and logistical support, training, procurement and maintenance.'[43] PMSCs are different from legitimate armies as they have a corporate

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[36] Gilbert, "Machiavelli," 15.

[37] Gilbert, "Machiavelli," 21-27.

[38] Rothenberg, "Maurice of Nassau, Gustavus Adolphus and Raimondo Montecuccoli and the 'Military Revolution' of the seventeenth century," 32-63.

[39] For detail, see for example: Shultz and Dew, *Insurgents, Terrorists and Militias: The Warriors of Contemporary Combat*, 17-38.

[40] Schreier and Caparini, *Privatizing Security: Law, Practice and Governance of Private Military and Security Companies*.

[41] Gueye, "La Valeur du Serment Militaire dans les Guerres Civile à Rome: l'Exemple du Conflit de 49-45 av. J.-C.,"111-129.

[42] For more background information on PMSCs see: Cremers and Bouwmeester with their chapter "Russian Commercial Warriors on the Battlefield," in this book.

[43] DCAF Backgrounder, "Private Military Companies."

structure rather than a military chain of command and they are – as are their members – motivated primarily by financial gain rather than professional service for the public good.[44] Whether states could outsource to PMSCs should depend on 'shared values, understandings and dispositions.' A PMSC should, thus, fit within a state's philosophy. Denmark, for example, appears to rather hold back on the use of PMSCs.[45] The US, on the contrary, has outsourced major parts of its logistics during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq as well as at times 'dirty jobs.'

6. The military oath as a speech act

In summary, the military oath is a public declaration of loyalty and subordination in a vertical authority relationship with the state. In the military oath of office as a speech act, the speaker transforms into a military professional, who acknowledges that the state (the civil authority) has the primate of the use of (brute) force. Because of that, the speaker also becomes subservient and thus loyal to the state. It is somewhat paradoxical that on the one hand the armed forces are created to protect the polity and awarded an immense arsenal of weapons to do that, but at the same time, they also have the means to become a threat to the same polity which has asked for their protection.[46] There is, therefore, also a more practical and pragmatic approach to authority and loyalty: if the state does not take care of its military, it might turn itself against the state. The legal framework is a tool with the function to prevent this from happening; however, it also has its limits against 'the guys with the guns.' In short, the military oath implies and demands reciprocal loyalty.

The purpose of the oath is essentially an individual subordination to the state with the goal to guarantee the primate of the use of force to the state.[47] By taking the oath, the individual makes a commitment to acknowledge civilian control in the primate of the use of force but also commitment to his profession, commitment

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[44] *Halliburton* and *Blackwater* are prime examples of a PMSC. *Halliburton* had a vital mission as the logistical backbone of the American occupation of Iraq; *Blackwater* is known for taking care of (also) dirty, disputable jobs – for instance in Iraq's Fahludja. For detail and the dilemmas that come with the use of PMSCs, see: Chatterjee, *Halliburton's Army: How a Well-Connected Texas Oil Company Revolutionized the Way America Makes War*.

[45] Van Meegdenburg, "We don't do that: A constructivist perspective on the use and non-use of private military contractors by Denmark," 26.

[46] Feaver, "The civil-military problematique: Huntington, Janowitz, and the question of civilian control," 149; Feaver, "Civil-military relations," 214; R. Atkinson, *The Limits of Military Officers' Duty to Obey Civilian Orders: A Neo-Classical Perspective*, 3.

[47] Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier*, 220; Feaver and Kohn, "Civil-military relations in the United States: What senior leaders need to know (and usually don't)," 12.

to be loyal to the Constitution as well as to the state. The purpose of a contract for PMSC-contractors works somewhat in a similar fashion. However, PMSCs have a pragmatic yet ruthless reputation to non-loyal employees. States' involvement with PMSCs will, therefore, only work if they have the guarantee that the contracted PMSC will only (successfully) do what they are contracted for.

The military oath as such, therefore, activates a future course of behaviour on various levels: it converges loyalty and professionalism. At the same time, the state (or a PMSC for that matter) is not discharged from – or better, has to take – responsibility and accountability in the vertical authority and loyalty relationship with the speaker. In other words, the commitment made in the oath is not a one-way street: it is reciprocal. The same counts for loyalty: the state and its military (or the PMSC and its contractors) need to be loyal to each other. Only then are they able to trust each other, which is essential if they come in harm's way. In speech act terms, both speaker (military) and hearer (state and society) are condemned to each other and need to be able to rely and trust each other. The state should be able to assume that the armed forces are loyal to the polity. In return, the armed forces ought to be able to rely on the civil authority to responsibly deal with the authority entrusted to them. Only then are members of the armed forces able to knowingly and willingly put their lives at risk on missions for the state. As indicated before, for PMSCs, this works in a similar way; however, contractors are primarily motivated by financial or personal gain: the more dangerous the work, the higher the gain.

7. Private military security companies in Russia

PMSCs have been around in Russia for centuries.[48] Count Vronsky in Anna Karenina, for instance, joined a volunteer force to fight the Turks and the Ottoman Empire in Serbia. Today, however, PMSCs and other armed volunteer groups are formally forbidden in Russia.[49] They exist, though, because Putin allowed them to, and there are many.[50] Russian PMSCs, like The Wagner Group, have primarily operated in Crimea, Syria, Ukraine, and in Africa. They have only worked with financial and diplomatic support of the Russian Federation and on behalf of the Russian state.[51]

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[48] Sukhankin, "The Russian State's use of irregular forces and private military groups: From Ivan the Terrible to the Soviet Period."

[49] The Wagner Group is illegal, see for instance: Le Monde, "Russia considers granting Wagner Group legal status."

[50] Marten, "Why the Wagner Group cannot be easily absorbed by the Russian Military – and what that means for the West."

[51] Ibid.

They are, therefore, not so much literally a PMSC, nor a mercenary group but could be better characterised as a 'semi-state security actor.'[52]

Russia has a love-hate relationship with PMSCs in the way Machiavelli has described in *The Prince* – trust and loyalty are the main challenges. Nevertheless, they remained part of its policy also for Putin. As so often, PMSCs were not seen as a symptom of state failure nor as the state's enemies but very useful as its proxies, carrying out (dirty) acts on the state's behalf.[53] Under Putin, the PMSCs became an integral part of the power structure which could be considered 'paramilitarised.' According to Drapac and Pritchard, the state that in fact has become a paramilitarised regime can be challenged and undermined but not completely destroyed by PMSCs and other independent military, paramilitary or criminal organisations.[54] In other words, Putin's paramilitarised regime had the ability to outsource military force but as a consequence also had to face political violence as loyalty and trust became issues.[55]

The Russian leadership increasingly had issues with The Wagner Group and, moreover, with its bombastic chief, Yevgeny Prigozhin.[56] In fact, he became the face of the threat of the PMSCs to the Kremlin.[57] Prigozhin may have had a point that the Wagner Group was insufficiently supported by the Russian state and its military apparatus. Many Russian soldiers sympathised with Prigozhin of which as a consequence, the loyalty of the regular Russian forces was increasingly undermined. He may have even aimed for a mutiny amongst the Russian armed forces against the military leadership of the Kremlin. Especially in the first half of 2023, Prigozhin exposed the power struggle as well as the inadequacy at especially the top of Russia's military leadership. By early June 2023, it had become clear that the primacy of the use of force appeared not to be with the Kremlin anymore. However, Prigozhin's March to Justice became The Wagner Group's Waterloo.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Üngör, *Paramilitarism: Mass Violence in the Shadow of the State*; Ahram, "Why states choose Paramilitarism," 65-70.

[54] Drapac and Pritchard, *Resistance and Collaboration in Hitler's Empire.*

[55] For detail, see for instance: Stuart, "Wagner had a golden rule. When its founder Dmitry Utkin broke it, lawyers pounced."

[56] See for instance: Sussex, "Putin under pressure: The military melodrama between the Wagner Group and Russia's armed forces."

[57] Foreign Affairs, "Prigozhin's rebellion, Putin's fate, and Russia's future, A conversation with Stephen Kotkin."

8. Prigozhin's 'March for Justice'

Prior to Prigozhin's 'March for Justice' to Moscow on 23rd and 24th June 2023, the Russian Defence Ministry issued an order for private military organisations to sign a contract to be loyal and subordinate to Russia's regular military.[58] This would have severely restricted Prigozhin's influence. On 23rd June, Prigozhin ordered his men to march to Moscow. A day later, however, Prigozhin withdrew his orders. After the apparent (military) coup attempt, Prigozhin initially 'fled' to Belarus but was later still 'allowed' again to be in Russia. In the meantime, Russian military commanders forced the Wagner members in Syria to sign new contracts with the Russian defence to stop the insurgency from spreading.[59] On 23rd August, Prigozhin as well as his number two, Dmitry Utkin, and eight others died in a plane crash in Russia.[60] Putin issued an executive order (decree)[61] two days later that the members of PMSCs, like the Wagner Group, had to swear an oath of allegiance to the Russian federation.[62] The oath, contained within the order, requires individuals to 'strictly follow the orders of commanders and superiors.'[63] Under Article 87 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation,[64] the President is the 'supreme commander-in-chief of the armed forces.' In short, after the failed coup attempt, Putin had to ensure loyalty of the total of his armed forces – including the insubordinate PMSCs – to Russia as well as to him.

[58] Faulconbridge, "Prigozhin says Wagner will not sign contracts with Russia Defence Minister."

[59] Al-Khalidi and Gebeily, "Syria brought Wagner fighters to heel as mutiny unfolded in Russia."

[60] Dmitry Utkin was allegedly the co-founder and (behind-the-scenes) military commander of the Wagner Group as a PMSC while Prigozhin was its owner and public face. See for instance: Roth and Sauer, "Wagner rebel chief halts tank advance on Moscow 'to stop bloodshed'"; Le Monde, "Russia considers granting Wagner Group legal status"; Bell, "In Prigozhin's shadow, the Wagner Group leader who stays out of the spotlight."

[61] The Moscow Times, "Putin signs decree forcing paramilitary fighters to swear oath."

[62] Lieven observes that, 'a key reason why Putin did not act much sooner to suppress Prighozin and end his feud with the Russian high command was precisely that for more than a year, Russian domestic propaganda had built up an image of the Wagner fighters as Russian military heroes. Their slaughter would not have gone down well with ordinary Russians.' Lieven, "The failed Wagner coup shows Vladimir Putin's regime remains stubbornly strong."

[63] "Decree of the President of the Russian Federation dated August 25, 2023 No. 639, On swearing in Certain Categories of Persons."

[64] Constitution of the Russian Federation.

8. Discussion

Prigozhin's self-proclaimed 'March for Justice' was Russia's most significant domestic political event since Putin came to power. Everyone could see that the Kremlin was paralysed with indecision as well as how Putin's much-hyped 'power vertical' had disappeared. The March was the climax of Prigozhin's dissatisfaction with the Russian leadership and damaged Russia's military leaders.

After the 'March for Justice' and moreover the deaths of many of The Wagner Group's top leadership, Putin demanded that the PMSCs (including Wagner) and volunteer forces be brought under state control. He issued that a military oath of allegiance be administered in which loyalty to the Russian Federation is sworn and, therefore, to Putin himself.[65] There was a clear message: either take the oath and keep your arms or disarm yourself – obey or go to prison. Putin must have realised he had created a monster with Wagner and other PMSCs, and, moreover, with bombastic leaders like Prigozhin who had almost escaped from Putin's control and spooked the Russian elites. The death of Prigozhin and the obligation to swear an oath on the (absolute) loyalty to Russia are widely interpreted as Putin reasserting control over the Russian military and associated PMSCs.

In line with the research of Easton and Siverson, Putin's reaction could be expected: 'Leaders who survive a coup attempt take the opportunity to purge known and potential rivals also deterring future coup conspiration.'[66] However, Putin's emphasis on loyalty in the aftermath of the failed coup attempt could also affect Russia's battlefield performance as the Wagner Group has proven effective on the battlefield and has delivered probably the most important Russian battlefield successes in Ukraine.[67] Putin is probably still struggling to have effective as well as loyal military forces. This, moreover, since it is still debatable whether there will be an effective reciprocal relationship between the Kremlin and the Russian armed forces. Despite the enormous force of the Russian armed forces, they have not been able to make a difference against a minor enemy – Ukraine. The war in Ukraine has become an increasingly frozen conflict since the end of 2022 until the time of writing (end of 2023).[68]

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[65] Putin not just demanded an oath or pledge of loyalty from the armed forces and Russian PMCSs but also from the ruling elite (also in order to maintain his own security and his grip on power), see for instance: Troianovski, "After armed rebellion, Putin tries to reinforce his defenses"; Sharp, "Russian leaders pledge loyalty to Putin."

[66] Easton and Siverson, "Leader survival and purges after a failed coup d'états," 596-608.

[67] Ber, "From Popasna to Bakhmut. The Wagner Group in the Russia-Ukraine War," 1-6.

[68] Toosi, "Ukraine could join ranks of 'frozen' conflicts"; Carpenter, "Could the Ukraine War become the mother of all frozen conflicts?"

Speech act theory provides a linguistic insight into the workings of loyalty and military professionalism in the military oath of allegiance. The wordings of the decree and the Russian military oath forge the spiritual and moral foundations of the defence of Russia as well as being sworn to strictly follow the orders of commanders and senior leaders. This forged loyalty and discipline could work in the short term; whether it would work in the long run is questionable. This is, moreover, the case since a main reason for Prigozhin's coup attempt was his frustration with the professionalism of the Russian armed forces. The lack of support he received from the Kremlin during especially vital offensives were amongst the main reasons for his dissatisfaction and proved, according to Prigozhin, the incapabilities of Russia's leadership at all (command) levels. Due to this lack of trust, he refused to sign a contract with the Russian Defence Ministry on Wagner's loyalty and subordination – and possibly also since it would undermine his influence. His so-called 'March for Justice' may have possibly referred to justice for him personally rather than justice in the broader sense of the word. However, it could also refer to the injustice of deploying Wagner soldiers without (basic) respect. Due to the lack of logistical support by the Russian regular forces, Wagner units felt like cannon fodder and treated as second-rate soldiers. The Wagner group had proven to be vital and responsible for most of the few battlefield successes in Russia's 'special military operation' in Ukraine. It could, therefore, be argued that the unwillingness to sign was a lack of trust that there would be reciprocity in loyalty in a way.

Whether an oath for PMSCs could lead to more state control over private military organisations is questionable; however, in the short term it could prevent illegal or independent rogue operations. Consequently, if done correctly, the momentum built up by it could be used to fuel a reciprocal relationship. State control could, this way, lead to loyalty to the state authority, which could enforce accountability to the Russian government. The oath could also stimulate (enforce) feelings of patriotism, which could urge uniformity, discipline and idealism within the group. This is essential for obedience to superior orders in the military line of command – including the ones coming from the president and the commander-in-chief i.e. from Putin.

The challenge is, though, that PMSC-members have a different idea of loyalty as they principally work for financial gain. This also questions their professionalism as they are first and foremost loyal to themselves rather than loyal to a greater good. To invest in loyalty with uniformed Russian soldiers in order to enforce the vertical authority relationship may prove to be quite challenging. The words in the oath alone will not accomplish that. Oath takers might express loyalty, but may likely not be committed to what the oath represents. Loyalty is connected to mutual trust which takes a long time to build. It requires a shift in philosophy for contractors as well as trust from the state authority. According to Johan Thorbecke, the Dutch

politician who played a principal role in establishing the first Constitution of the Netherlands (1848), 'Trust arrives on foot, but leaves on horseback.' It encapsulates the fragility of trust and therefore also loyalty.[69] Trust is the vital component in a relationship. It holds even greater significance in strategic alliances compared to transactional relationships.

9. Conclusion

This chapter commenced with the question: 'Will an oath of loyalty to the Russian state be effective for private military security contractors?' In this contribution, the military oath of office has been perceived as a speech act. The oath provides a personal guarantee that the primate of the use of force lies with the state, rather than the military. Derived from it is loyalty. In the military oath this is implied as reciprocal. Loyalty is a two-way street. By having the oath administered as the civil authority, a commitment to the oath taker is made in return. In short, the soldier or the military is not just loyal because they are ordered to be so. Reciprocity implies responsible, loyal behaviour on both sides.

PMSCs do not swear to abide by the Constitution. The contractors implement their expertise in instruments of violence for personal financial gain and do not necessarily serve the public good. They do not use 'force' as they are not legitimate armies but use 'violence' instead to meet the goals and targets as stated in their contracts. PMSCs have a corporate structure and their principal aim is profit. It makes them contractors for that reason. PMSCs and equivalents have always signed contracts in an equal horizontal relationship and are not subjected to a vertical hierarchy with the state.

An oath of office in general may work when norms and values are already on par with what the profession requires and desires from the professional community. However, this does not seem to be the case with military contractors. With Putin implementing fear, the Russian military oath of office demanded for contractors may, at best, have a mentalist view with an 'intention' to live up to what the oath represents. After all, they have different norms and values and have always aimed for financial gain. Whether demanding to take the oath in June 2023 would have made a difference is, therefore, highly questionable. Moreover, whether such an oath would have prevented Prigozhin's 'March for Justice' is even more debatable as the occasion for the march was the lack of commitment from the Kremlin and the distrust in the professionalism of the Russian armed forces or better the Russian

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69 Ross, Malone and Kinnear, "Understanding the role of trust in network-based responses to disaster management and climate change adaptation in the Asia-pacific region," 165.

military leadership. In short, the relationship between the state and the military was not reciprocal as Prigozhin bombastically had voiced many times. The Wagner Group saga most likely has changed how Putin considers PMSCs, what can be done with them but also that they could be a burden if not a danger to his regime.

Prigozhin was able to bring to the surface the unhappiness and distrust that had accumulated in the Russian armed forces since the invasion of Ukraine. In the end, he was unable to mobilise the dissatisfaction in his possible coup attempt on 23rd-24th June 2023. Although the Kremlin was apparently able to reclaim a monopoly on the use of force after Prigozhin's 'March for Justice,' a complete make-over of the 'fragmented' Russian security forces seems to be needed. Putin needs to invest in a true reciprocal – trustworthy and loyal – relationship between the Kremlin and the Russian armed forces, including PMSCs and volunteer groups. The obligation to just swear an oath of loyalty to Russia and Putin is certainly not enough. Regaining trust will take time and a lot of effort. It is not simply taking an oath, but true and honest changes in the political-military relationship and military professionalism that will be essential and major. Loyalty in a vertical authority relationship from someone lower in the pyramid can only work when the dominant force at the top of the pyramid provides trust and loyalty in return. Those changes will colour Russia's political trajectory for the years to come. And as Richard Wagner's *Götterdämmerung* has shown, deception in oath taking has led to the downfall of a complete community, oath taker as well as oath administrator. Putin has been warned!

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Collecting Evidence of International Crimes in Ukraine: The Role of the Royal Netherlands Marechaussee

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Abstract

This chapter outlines the various international crimes that have been committed in Ukraine, discusses the available accountability options and sketches the context in which international crimes investigations take place within and outside Ukraine. It introduces some of the most relevant actors that are involved in criminal accountability initiatives and discusses the role of the Royal Netherlands Marechaussee in collecting evidence on international crimes in Ukraine. As the investigation landscape becomes increasingly rich in its variety of actors, the role of the gendarmerie in it is one to monitor closely.

Keywords: Ukraine, International crimes, Battlefield evidence, Accountability, Royal Netherlands Marechaussee

1. Introduction

Since the full-scale invasion of Russia into Ukraine on 24th February 2022 numerous international crimes – war crimes, crimes against humanity, possibly genocide, and the crime of aggression – have allegedly been committed in Ukraine. These events were preceded by the invasion and subsequent annexation of Crimea and armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine in 2014. Immediately after the 2022 invasion, the international community called for concerted action in the investigation of these crimes as well as the prosecution of suspected perpetrators. The international crimes committed in Ukraine and the 'battlefield evidence' that needs to be collected to pursue accountability have led to unprecedented amounts and types of new investigation and prosecution initiatives. Yet, they also pose novel challenges.

Eurojust defines battlefield evidence as 'materials that originate from a conflict area, including materials collected by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs),

entities of the United Nations (UN), the International Criminal Court (ICC) and other organisations.'[1] The collection of battlefield evidence is a multidisciplinary process that increasingly adopts a modular, hybrid and multinational character. Battlefields offer a distinct context to collect evidence on a wide number of serious crimes. In recent years, a number of initiatives regarding the use of battlefield evidence have been taken, notably in relation to the investigation or prosecution of terrorist offences[2] and international crimes.

In light of these recent developments, this contribution aims to describe the process of collecting battlefield evidence and other relevant information for the purpose of international crimes prosecutions in Ukraine. We outline the types of international crimes that are committed and the available accountability options (section 2); then sketch the context in which international crimes investigations within and outside Ukraine take place by introducing some of the most relevant actors that are involved (section 3); and subsequently discuss the deployment of the Royal Netherlands Marechaussee (RNLM) in Ukraine since May 2022 and early lessons that can be drawn from these experiences for the further thought and policy development concerning the involvement of military police in battlefield international crimes investigations (section 4).

2. International crimes in the Russia-Ukraine war

War crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide, and the crime of aggression are known collectively as the core international crimes and are the four crimes that fall under the jurisdiction of the ICC. There are clear indications that the Russian armed forces have committed international crimes since 2014, and on an even much larger scale since the invasion in 2022.

At the time of writing, Ukraine's Prosecutor General's Office had registered more than 80,000 cases that may amount to international crimes.[3] For instance, in Kherson, 20 torture chambers were found and more than 1,000 survivors reported an array of abuses, including the use of electric shocks, waterboarding, being forced

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[1] Eurojust Memorandum on Battlefield Evidence, September 2020. See: Eurojust, "Eurojust memorandum on battlefield evidence."

[2] For an overview of five recent initiatives, see: Position of the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism on the use of 'battlefield' or military produced evidence in the context of investigations or trials involving terrorism offences, April 2021. See: https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/ Issues/Terrorism/SR/UNSRCT_Position.

[3] Kovalenko, "Q&A: Ukraine's Prosecutor General discusses accountability for Putin's war crimes."

to strip naked, and threats of mutilation and death.[4] Moreover, more than 60 cases of rape were documented in the Kherson region alone.[5] In areas still controlled by Russian forces, residents, including children, have been forcefully relocated to other occupied territories or to Russia.[6]

On 23rd June 2023, the Under-Secretary General of the United Nations for Political Affairs told the UN Security Council that the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has recorded 24,862 civilian casualties to date.[7] The actual figures are likely considerably higher.[8] The World Health Organisation (WHO) furthermore verified over a thousand cases of attacks on healthcare, with 101 deaths and 139 injuries. Most attacks involved the use of heavy weapons. Also, UNESCO has verified damage to 260 sites since February 2022, including 112 religious sites, 22 museums, 94 buildings of historic significance, 19 monuments, 12 libraries and one archive.[8] The safety, livelihood and dignity of a huge proportion of Ukrainian citizens have been profoundly undermined by the war. Moreover, many people living outside Ukraine have experienced the dependency on food supply lines and energy security.[9]

In accordance with the laws of armed conflict or International Humanitarian Law (IHL), not all casualties and destruction that occur in a war qualify as a crime. IHL provides rules according to which fighting parties can conduct their hostilities during an armed conflict lawfully. Not all violations of IHL are war crimes; only serious violations of a subset of IHL rules amount to individual criminal responsibility. In the international armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine, in particular the Russian armed forces violate IHL on a large scale, which, allegedly, include many instances of war crimes. The UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine concluded that the Russian authorities have committed the war crimes of attacks on civilians and energy-related infrastructure, willful killings, unlawful confinement, torture, rape and other sexual violence, and unlawful transfers and deportations of children.[10]

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[4] Freking, "Ukraine's top prosecutor speaks of 'evil' Russian atrocities."

[5] Associated Press, "WATCH: Ukraine top prosecutor says Russian forces are using rape, torture to sow terror."

[6] United Nations, "Deportation, treatment of Ukraine's children by Russian Federation take centre stage by many delegates at Security Council briefing – 24 August 2023."

[7] United Nations, "Russian-Ukraine war has weakened international security, USG DiCarlo warns – 23 June 2023."

[8] Ibid, note 9.

[9] GCSP, "Human security and reconstruction in Ukraine – June 5, 2023"; see also: Benton, et al., "The Ukraine war and threats to food and energy security"; for more information on the human impact of the war in Ukraine, see: United Nations Development Programme, "Human impact assessment Ukraine."

[10] United Nations Human Rights, "War crimes, indiscriminate attacks on infrastructure, systematic and widespread torture show disregard for civilians, says UN Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine."

In addition to war crimes, many of the crimes that are committed by the Russian armed forces also appear to qualify as crimes against humanity. Crimes against humanity are not characterised by having to be committed during an armed conflict, as is the case with war crimes, but for crimes to qualify as crimes against humanity, they need to be committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against a civilian population. There are clear indications that the requisite contextual elements for crimes against humanity are fulfilled, such as that crimes such as murder, deportation and forcible transfer, torture, rape and other forms of sexual violence, and persecution are committed against the Ukrainian civilian population through a state policy that is both widespread and systematic.

Moreover, the 'denazification' rhetoric that the war is targeted against the Ukrainian national identity may also fulfill the criteria of the special intent that is required for the crime of genocide. Killings of Ukrainians, bodily and mental harm, and, notably in this context, forcible transfer of children to Russia may amount to genocide if committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national (or ethnical, racial or religious) group because they are part of that group identity. Increasingly, commentators are noting that there are compelling signs of genocide against Ukrainians.[11]

Finally, it is widely accepted that the use of armed force by Russia against Ukraine qualifies as a crime of aggression, for which the leaders that were in a position to effectively exercise control over or direct the political or military action of Russia are responsible. While nowhere near the scale and systematicity of the Russian atrocities, there are also indications that Ukrainian forces may have committed war crimes. For example, video footage has been published which suggests that Ukrainian troops may have executed surrendering Russian officers.[12]

Yet, while many core international crimes are committed, bringing those responsible to justice for crimes committed in an international armed conflict is complicated. This is particularly the case when they enjoy impunity from their home state. Collecting evidence of the criminal responsibility of individual perpetrators, including their knowledge and intent, during an armed conflict is highly challenging. Nevertheless, in the current situation in Ukraine, there are unprecedented international and domestic initiatives to collect such information. Evidence is collected by a large number of actors, both previously existing actors that seek

[11] For example, Clint Williamson. See: Kovalenko, Oksana, and Rayevskyi, "Treat it like a marathon, not like a sprint." Lawyer Clint Williamson worked on the tribunals in Yugoslavia and Cambodia. Here's what he thinks on the trial of the Russians."

[12] Browne, Hiltner, and Williams, "Videos suggest captive Russian soldiers were killed at close range."

novel ways to collaborate and share information, as well as new actors that are established by states or private initiatives.

When it comes to international crimes, there are multiple institutions that have jurisdiction to prosecute: the Russian and Ukrainian domestic judicial systems, other states through the doctrine of universal jurisdiction,[13] and the ICC. The Office of the Prosecutor (OTP) of the ICC would typically seek prosecution of the most responsible perpetrators and is intended to 'complement,' not to replace, national criminal justice systems. This fundamental principle is known as the 'principle of complementarity.' Except for prosecuting cases at the ICC, the OTP may also play a role in encouraging and assisting in the prosecution of international crimes in domestic jurisdictions. These activities are often referred to as 'positive' or 'proactive' complementarity and may entail the use and admission of information and evidence collected by the ICC before national courts.[14] Although Ukraine is not an official state party to the ICC's founding document – the Rome Statute – it has accepted the Court's jurisdiction relating to the conflict situations in Crimea and the Donbas region since 20th February 2014. This is referred to as an 'ad hoc declaration accepting ICC jurisdiction.' The declaration to the ICC was not temporally restricted, which means that it can examine all core crimes committed since February 2014 until the present day. On 28th February 2022, the ICC Prosecutor announced he would seek authorisation to open an investigation into the situation in Ukraine. On 2nd March 2022 he announced opening an investigation on the basis of the referrals received.

Given the above, the OTP of the ICC has the jurisdiction to prosecute war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide committed in Ukraine. Prosecuting the top leaders such as President Putin for the crime of aggression is more complicated. The ICC is not able to exercise jurisdiction over the Russian aggression against Ukraine

[13] Through universal jurisdiction, other nations but Ukraine may investigate and prosecute war crimes even when the alleged actions did not occur on their own territory and neither the perpetrator nor victims are nationals. European states have increasingly been using universal jurisdiction powers in the past decade. Most countries, like the Netherlands, prosecute on the basis of 'secondary universal jurisdiction,' which means that the presence of the suspect on the nation's territory is a prerequisite to the exercise of universal jurisdiction. An exception are Germany and Sweden. They employ the prosecutorial strategy of 'structural investigations,' which means that they gather evidence on international crimes in Ukraine without yet having identified specific suspects on their territory. Investigations are not directed against specific individuals, but are employed for the purpose of investigating specific structures, within which international crimes have been allegedly committed and which are in the interest of the state (e.g. because many victims reside there). Structural investigators are meant to collect all relevant information that can be obtained in the country using, for example, open source evidence and witness testimony, before the suspects are even identified. See: Aksamitowska, *War Crime Units: Legislative, Organisational and Technical Lessons.*

[14] Donlon, "Positive complementarity in practice: ICTY Rule 11bis and the use of the tribunal's evidence in the Srebrenica Trials before the Bosnian War Crimes Chamber," 920-954.

because it has a more restricted regime for aggression than for the other crimes. Moreover, Putin cannot be prosecuted within the Ukrainian or other domestic judicial systems because he enjoys head of state immunity in foreign domestic courts. Therefore, Ukraine and supporting states are seeking for sufficient international support to establish a special tribunal to prosecute the aggression against Ukraine. As of yet no 'Aggression Tribunal' has been established. Internationally, there is no agreement on how to address the many political and legal hurdles.[15]

3. Actors involved in collecting evidence in Ukraine

The Ukrainian authorities demonstrate a strong willingness to carry out international crimes proceedings. Ukraine's Prosecutor General's Office (PGO – also referred to as OPG) directs all prosecutorial activities in Ukraine. It has a dedicated War Crimes Department which consists of a central office and nine regional units. Since the start of the war, hundreds of new people (lawyers, investigators) have been hired to work on war crimes investigations. According to the Ukrainian Criminal Procedure Code, war crimes are the exclusive responsibility of the Security Service of Ukraine (referred to as SSU or SBU).[16] But as SSU/SBU investigators cannot investigate the large number of war crimes, it is assisted by the National Police, the SBI – State Bureau of Investigation and even the National Anti-Corruption Bureau (NABU).[17] The War Crimes Department consists of four units: one dealing with the crime of aggression; one dealing with war crimes cases where civilian objects have been destroyed with civilian casualties; one dealing with violent war crimes (killings, tortures, deprivation of liberty); and a fourth unit supporting regional prosecutors in dealing with cases that involve fewer casualties or less serious destruction.[18] This was the situation as of December 2022. Given the many developments in Ukraine, it cannot be excluded that the situation has changed in the meantime.

By May 2023, Ukrainian courts had reportedly convicted 30 Russian military personnel for war crimes.[19] Trials often concern 'in absentia' cases, mostly con-

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[15] Numerous blogs and articles have been written about ways in which such a tribunal could be set up and the challenges related to this. See e.g.: Just Security, "Crime of aggression"; Geneuss and Jeßberger, "Russian aggression and the war in Ukraine: An introduction"; Wesslau, "A tribunal like no other: Prosecuting Russia's crime of aggression in Ukraine."

[16] JustTalk, "One year of war crimes investigation. Interview with Yuriy Byelousov, head of the war department at the pgo [en]."

[17] Klitina, "How the national anti-corruption bureau works during wartime."

[18] Salem, "Ukraine Series: Interview with Yuriy Belousov."

[19] Matola, "Ukraine: Prosecuting war crimes in civilian courts"; For earlier reporting, see: Justice Info, "Map of war crimes trials in Ukraine."

sidering lower level perpetrators, prosecuted/convicted for murder, robbery or indiscriminate bombing. In all cases the accused were charged under one and the same general provision of the Criminal Code of Ukraine, namely Article 438 which criminalises all violations of laws and customs of war.[20] Interestingly, it is not uncommon that a Russian Prisoner of war (POW) after conviction is rapidly transferred to Russia in exchange for Ukrainian POWs held by Russia.[21]

Notwithstanding its willingness and the very serious efforts that Ukraine itself makes to hold perpetrators of international crimes accountable, it is obvious that it will not be able to deal with all alleged crimes. This is the reason why the ICC steps in to 'complement' the efforts made by Ukraine. As for the role of the ICC, it is important to clarify that Ukraine is not a State Party to the Rome Statute. However, it has twice exercised its prerogatives to accept the Court's jurisdiction over alleged crimes under the Rome Statute occurring on its territory, pursuant to article 12(3) of the Statute. In the first 12(3) declaration, Ukraine accepted ICC jurisdiction with respect to alleged crimes committed on its territory from 21st November 2013 to 22nd February 2014. In the second declaration, the relevant time period was extended on an open-ended basis to encompass ongoing alleged crimes committed throughout the territory of Ukraine from 20th February 2014 onwards.[22]

Ever since the full-scale invasion in February 2022, the ICC has been upscaling its investigation activities in Ukraine. To facilitate its investigative activities, the ICC Registry and the government of Ukraine signed a cooperation agreement on the establishment of an ICC country office in Ukraine in March 2023.[23] That same month, the OTP of the ICC issued its first arrest warrants for the Ukraine situation for the war crimes of unlawful deportation and transfer of Ukrainian children to Russia for President Putin and Maria Lvova-Belova, Commissioner of Children's Rights in the Office of the President of Russia.[24] The OTP may expand these cases of child deportations as war crimes later to also charge them with crimes against humanity and genocide. Moreover, he may issue further arrest warrants and indictments for other crimes that it is currently investigating.

Except for the Ukrainian authorities and the ICC, numerous other international actors are actively promoting accountability for international crimes in Ukraine. For example, Eurojust – the European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation – in March 2022 facilitated the establishment of a Joint Investigation

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[20] Nuridzhanian, "Prosecuting war crimes: Are Ukrainian courts fit to do it?"

[21] Salii, "War crime in Ukraine: A Russian pilot is convicted… and exchanged."

[22] International Criminal Court, "Ukraine. Situation in Ukraine."

[23] International Criminal Court, "Ukraine and International Criminal Court sign an agreement on the establishment of a country office."

[24] International Criminal Court, "Situation in Ukraine: ICC judges issue arrest warrants against Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin and Maria Alekseyevna Lvova-Belova."

Team (JIT) aimed to promote information exchange between prosecution services of different European states on international crimes committed in Ukraine. The JIT consists of 7 countries: Ukraine, Lithuania, Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Slovakia and Romania, while the ICC's OTP acts as a 'participant.' Noteworthy is that it is the first time that the OTP has joined a JIT, and it is a novel practice that a JIT investigates alleged core international crimes in an ongoing international armed conflict.[25] Moreover, the OTP made it explicit that it will not only 'take,' but that it will also seek opportunities to 'provide information and evidence to the concerned national authorities in support of their investigations and prosecutions.'[26] In April 2023, JIT members agreed to not only investigate alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity, but also crimes of genocide. Thus far, the JIT on Ukraine has not led to any concrete prosecutions.

In the absence of an aggression tribunal, Eurojust set up the International Centre for the Prosecution of the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine (ICPA).[27] This, it is argued, should be instrumental in filling the earlier referred to 'impunity gap' related to the crime of aggression. The ICPA will be part of the existing support structure for the JIT, set within Eurojust, with a specific focus on supporting and enhancing investigations into the crime of aggression. Although the name may suggest otherwise, the ICPA is not physically a 'centre.' It is a separate unit within the already existing JIT.

The Ukrainian authorities, the ICC and the JIT also cooperate intensively with a range of other actors that collect battlefield evidence, most notably with international and Ukrainian NGOs (sometimes also referred to as Civil Society Organisations – CSO's) active in documenting and archiving atrocities. The by now rich collection of CSOs include Bellingcat, Global Rights Compliance and Redress. And more than 30 Ukrainian NGOs that document atrocities are organised under the umbrella of the 5AM coalition.[28]

In the challenging and constantly changing context described above, the RNLM has also been actively contributing to accountability in Ukraine. Between June 2022 and December 2023, RNLM dispatched four 'Trident Justice' (TJ) missions, tasked to collect forensic evidence on international crimes in Ukraine on behalf of the ICC. Moreover, RNLM hosts the Joint Initiative to support Forensic Investigations

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[25] Tan and Yang, "The Joint Investigation Team in Ukraine: An opportunity for the International Criminal Court?"

[26] International Criminal Court, "Statement by ICC Prosecutor, Karim A.A. Khan QC: Office of the Prosecutor joins national authorities in Joint Investigation Team on international crimes committed in Ukraine."

[27] See: Eurojust, "International Centre for the Prosecution of the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine."

[28] 5 AM, "Ukraine 5 AM Coalition."

on International Crimes (JIFIIC), that aims to provide a sustainable structure to these type of missions. Together with the ICC, the aim is to develop a long-term coordination modality in order to provide joint multinational and multidisciplinary forensic teams on a rotational base. These teams can – in close consultation with the Ukraine authorities – be deployed to Ukraine to collect evidence and other relevant information in line with international standards.

Like many of the novel initiatives described above, the rotational deployment of international teams of forensic experts and their enablers is nothing but unique. Never in its over 20 years existence has the ICC relied on the assistance of gendarmerie forces of a member state in collecting information and evidence on the battlefield, let alone in a country at war. In the subsequent section, we will elaborate more on the legal basis and nature of the Trident Justice missions.

4. Role of the RNLM in collecting information and evidence on international crimes in Ukraine

The deployment of Dutch personnel in support of the ICC investigation was established through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which lays down the mode of cooperation between the Netherlands and the ICC. The personnel are made available to the ICC on a temporary employment (secondment) basis, while the legal basis of the ICC to perform its investigative tasks on the territory of Ukraine is based on permission granted by Ukraine which – as mentioned above – has declared that it accepts the jurisdiction of the ICC. As temporarily designated experts of the ICC, members of Trident Justice missions are covered by the *Agreement on the Privileges and Immunities of the International Criminal Court (2002)*, to which Ukraine is a party. Article 21 of this Treaty specifies the scope of immunities and privileges of experts performing functions for the ICC, including immunity from arrest and detention. Because TJ-members have been seconded to the ICC – and, for example, are not conducting investigations in the context of Dutch criminal charges – all information gathered during the mission remains with the ICC.[29] Alternatively, based on the earlier referred to principle of 'positive complementarity,' information can also be shared with Ukraine.

During the TJ-missions, OTP of the ICC is in charge of the investigation and its investigative strategy, while the RNLM commander of the TJ-missions decides on issues related to safety, security and logistics. The TJ-missions vary in length between two and eight weeks long. Each of the four missions consists of

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[29] Fink, *Inzet van de Koninklijke Marechaussee in de opsporing van internationale misdrijven in Oekraïne.*

interdisciplinary teams of 20-50 members. They are composed of investigators, forensic experts and support personnel and do not only include RNLM staff but also experts from other defence units and the Netherlands Forensic Institute (NFI). While the first two missions were exclusively comprised of Dutch staff, in missions III and IV also experts from other countries – including Czech Republic and Belgium – participated.[30] The expertise that has been provided ranges from 3D-mapping of crime scenes, forensic pathology, extraction of information from data carriers (laptops, telephones) and post-blast and ballistics expertise. Given the ongoing investigations and the required confidentiality that is to be taken into account, it is at this stage not possible to disclose more details about the nature of the missions.

Per request by the ICC, the Netherlands Minister of Defence announced in May 2023 that the Netherlands would donate a mobile forensic laboratory to the ICC. The laboratory allows investigators to analyse evidence, on site, according to international standards. Such a laboratory can be highly useful because of the many locations where alleged war crimes have been committed and because laboratories have often been destroyed in areas where forensic evidence is being secured. The donation concerns material support only, not the deployment of personnel, which means that the ICC is to assume care and responsibility for the operation of the laboratory in Ukraine.[31] At the time of writing, logistical details on how, when and where to deploy the laboratory were subject to discussion between the Netherlands Ministries of Defence and Foreign Affairs, the ICC and the Ukrainian Attorney General.

As previously indicated, except for Dutch investigators, also experts from Czech Republic and Belgium participated in Mission III and IV. This is one of the tangible results of the RNLM's JIFIIC project team, which in close cooperation with the OTP of the ICC aims to develop a long-term coordination modality in order to provide joint (multinational) multidisciplinary forensic elements on a rotational base. A significant number of other countries has in the meantime displayed an interest to either participate in future Trident Justice missions commanded by the RNLM or to organise alternative missions. France, for example, deployed a technical and forensic mission under the auspices of the OTP in June 2023.[32] Moreover, in the course of 2023 a Danish police team as well as a Swiss police team were deployed for the purposes of JIFIIC: a truly international endeavour.

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[30] Hunder, "Dutch war crimes investigators examine Ukraine's battered infrastructure."

[31] Ollongren, *Schenking mobiel laboratorium aan het ICC*.

[32] Interfax, "France sends two teams of investigators, forensic experts to Ukraine to help investigate environmental crimes – MFA."

5. Concluding reflections

In this contribution, we described the many international crimes that have been committed in Ukraine, the various accountability options available to hold perpetrators of these crimes accountable, and a number of new initiatives that have been set up to promote accountability and facilitate the exchange of possible evidence of international crimes. Special attention was dedicated to the unique rotational deployment of international teams of forensic experts, commanded by RNLM. A precedent has been set, but it remains to be seen if and to what extent seconded gendarmerie forces will in the future, also in other situations and countries, be deployed on behalf of the ICC.

Whether the new developments discussed in this chapter will eventually lead to a significant number of convictions – and if this will include high level suspects of the likes of Putin and Lvova-Belova – also remains to be seen. International crimes prosecutions are known to be highly complex. Moreover, the outcome of the war in Ukraine and the internal political and security situation in Russia to a large extent impact whether or not international crimes suspects can be arrested. That said, international crimes prosecutors are known to be patient and to not easily give up. After the indictment, it took the prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal of former Yugoslavia (ICTY) fourteen years to arrest former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic.

Indeed, this factor should be taken into account with regard to the seconded forensic experts of the TJ missions: it may take several years before they are called to testify in a courtroom in The Hague. The collection of evidence therefore requires proper expertise, including a sound chain of custody. What is more, as the ICC may share information and evidence with other actors, including Ukraine and other JIT-members, these very same experts may have to testify in courts in Kyiv, Bucharest or Vilnius.

As the investigations landscape becomes increasingly rich in its variety of actors, the role of the gendarmerie in it is one to monitor closely. They provide important opportunities in the collection of battlefield evidence during an ongoing armed conflict, because they combine police expertise with military expertise. For the RNLM, it is relatively easier to deploy personnel to expeditionary missions abroad than it is for the National Police organisation, given the training completed by military officers that prepares them for operating in a conflict situation and given the hierarchical command that applies to the deployment of military (police or gendarmerie) officers. The lessons that can be learned from their experiences may contribute to a better understanding of how to improve the global support to the investigations conducted for trials by Ukraine, the ICC and elsewhere. Moreover, it may help to further understand the coordination needs that the various actors have.

The experiences with Trident Justice in Ukraine are also relevant for the RNLM itself. The Defence White Paper 2022 states that in the near future, the RNLM will be reinforced with a squadron specialising in military police tasks ('MP squadrons'), including investigation tasks into alleged war crimes in mission areas.[33] It is a novelty that the Netherlands Army so explicitly delegates the latter task to the RNLM. Although the future context in which these MP squadrons will be operating may be entirely different from that in Ukraine – for instance, the ICC may then not be actively involved or the mission may not be limited to the collection of forensic evidence – the experiences of the current missions are extremely valuable in reflecting on what type of expertise these MP squadrons will need and which future contexts they may operate in.

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[33] See: Ministry of Defence, "Defence White Paper 2022," 20: "The Royal Netherlands Marechaussee will be reinforced with a squadron specialising in military police tasks at the highest end of the spectrum of force, such as detention and investigation tasks into alleged war crimes in mission areas."

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Lessons and Ending

CHAPTER 25

Lessons from Ukraine: Benchmark or Significant Exception?

Martijn van der Vorm & Gijs Tuinman

Abstract

Since the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia, a deluge of articles, reports and analyses have been published that attempt to distill the lessons from this conflict. Of course, the first large scale conventional war in Europe in the 21st century will hold relevant lessons for (Western) militaries. However, these manifestations of lessons are no blueprints for change, as the lessons are context-specific and determined by the conditions of the war and the societies that wage it. This chapter is not so much about the lessons themselves but offers, instead, a novel perspective on military learning theory and practices. We argue that beyond emulating the manifestations of learning, the war in Ukraine offers an indispensable opportunity to evaluate the adaptation processes in war and consider the value of learning from others.

Keywords: Emulation, Organisational learning, Adaptation, Organisational culture, Conventional warfare

1. Introduction

For the Ukrainian armed forces, the Russian annexation of Crimea and the onset of the Donbas war in 2014 was a rude awakening. As the Ukrainian military was caught flat-footed, the conflict spurred a painful process of adaptation, resulting in an adaptation and enhancement of its fighting power between 2012 and 2022.[1] That fighting power was put to the test in 2022, and showed that Ukraine had made significant adaptations and succeeded in thwarting Russia's initial plans.

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[1] According to Tom Dyson and Yuriy Pashchuk, the learning experiences of the Ukrainian armed forces proved to be far from straightforward. Differences in cultural outlooks between generations of officers and the virtual absence of an institutional process to incorporate lessons based on experiences from combat impeded Ukraine's efforts to enact organisational change in its military from battlefield experiences. Dyson and Pashchuk, "Organisational learning during the Donbas War: The development of Ukraian Armed Forces lessons learned processes," 62-64.

While international observers followed the Donbas War with keen attention, the Russian invasion in 2022 sparked a flurry of publications on the practical lessons for Western militaries.[2] The war forced Western armed forces to reorientate towards interstate competition and conventional warfare.[3] After three decades of expeditionary stabilisation, counterinsurgency and peace support operations across the globe, Western militaries had limited recent empirical data on conventional warfare to drive organisational change.

Moreover, this type of high-intensity interstate war in Europe serves as an empirical case-study for the effectiveness of strategy, doctrinal concepts, tactics, and equipment. It can yield important insight to assist organisational change and help prepare Western militaries for future wars. For instance, classical concepts such as combined arms operations, mass and robust logistics are brought to the fore by this conflict.[4] At the same time, more novel aspects of warfare such as unmanned aerial systems (UAS) and the impact of cyber activities are under study.[5] Furthermore, attention on Russian adaptation processes is limited yet crucial, because it provides a more comprehensive view on the complexity of the war. According to Theo Farrell, using observations from foreign militaries and conflicts for military change amounts to emulation: incorporating concepts and capabilities inspired by other militaries. According to Farrell, this pathway of change can be distinguished from innovation, the development of new military capabilities, and adaptation, the adjustment of existing capabilities.[6]

But how can armed forces learn from the Ukraine war? How do militaries observe, analyse, and emulate the right lessons from the experiences of other militaries? Of course, observing foreign wars to glean lessons for one's own institution is not a new phenomenon. Meaningful analyses can be made based on such observations, yet successful implementation of lessons from beyond the own institution can be more challenging due to differences in tasks, organisational or strategic culture, doctrinal underpinnings, financial constraints, and political considerations. In other words, learning from others is less straightforward than it seems.

This chapter will examine the extent to which lessons from the current war in Ukraine can help Western militaries prepare for future conflict. To examine this query, this chapter is structured in three parts. The first section investigates the

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[2] Kofman, et al., *Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine.*

[3] Van der Vorm, *The Crucible of War: Dutch and British military Learning Processes in and Beyond Southern Afghanistan,* 17-18.

[4] Fox, *Reflections on Russia's 2022 Invasion of Ukraine: Combined Arms Warfare, the Battalion Tactical Group and Wars in a Fishbowl*; Robert Gibson, "Logistic lessons in the Russia-Ukraine War."

[5] Sherman, "Drone-on-drone combat in Ukraine marks a new era of aerial warfare"; Ducheine, Pijpers, and Arnold, "Bits- or Blitzkrieg? Cyber operations in the Russia-Ukraine War," 42-46.

[6] Farrell and Terriff, *The Source of Military Change,* 6-9.

concept of learning from foreign conflicts and the associated dynamics. The second section discusses three preliminary observations of the first one-and-a-half years of the Russian invasion. The third section analyses the value of such observations, directions of (re-)orientation of Western armed forces, lessons to be learned, and potential opportunities and pitfalls to implement these as part of organisational change.

2. Learning from others' experiences: Emulation and wartime observations

In early literature on military innovation and adaptation, a common notion was that militaries are inherently cautious to change.[7] Even when faced with operational challenges during war, militaries can be adverse to taking risks with adaptations that might impede combat effectiveness.[8] Moreover, while the pressures of war can instill a sense of urgency to enhance the military's performance, changes in operations were assessed as less dramatic due to constraints of time, resources and risk.[9] Conversely, peace time is seen as more conducive for implementing lessons learned. Still, it is important to note that in the last decades, Western armed forces have continuously been involved in demanding expeditionary missions such as Iraq and Afghanistan where the troops in the field had to adapt to operational challenges. At the same time, the larger defence institutions remained largely preoccupied with long-term planning and procurement projects.[10]

While military organisations can foster organisational change through developing new concepts, technologies or equipment and drawing from their own wartime experiences, other armed forces can also serve as a source of reference and inspiration. This form of change is designated emulation and 'involves importing new tools and ways of war through imitation of other military organizations.'[11] In previous conflicts, liaison officers seconded to allied units or headquarters collected experiences, lessons and best practices for the benefit of their own organisations. For instance, European observers were deployed during the American Civil War

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[7] See: Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars*; Rosen, *Winning the Next War: Innovation and the Modern Military*; Hasselbladh and Yden, "Why military organizations are cautious about learning," 1-20.

[8] Kuo, "Dangerous changes: When military innovation harms combat effectiveness," 48-87.

[9] Rosen, *Winning the Next War: Innovation and the Modern Military*, 253.

[10] Indeed, the various Western missions can be thought of as discrete projects with little consistent strategic thought to either the conflict or the military organisations participating in them. Further, the capabilities and concepts tested against an adversary in these warlike environments were by choice of the Western establishments and not engaged by the enemy through his analysis and selection of weaknesses in the Western military system put at play.

[11] Farrell and Terriff, *Military Change*, 6.

and the Russo-Japanese War. A more recent example of learning from others are 'hunting parties' or 'tiger teams' employed by the British Army in order to scour allied units for lessons during the war in Afghanistan.[12] Indeed, commentators advocate deploying military observers to Ukraine to observe, analyse and learn first-hand from the war in order to acquire direct access to the battlefield.[13]

Foreign developments can inspire organisational change. But how can armed forces adopt and implement new concepts, organisational structures, and technology? Two schools of thought can be distinguished: neorealism and neoinstitutionalism.[14] Neorealism contends that international competition is a main driver for military change. Based on threat perception, militaries can seek to offset any advantage by a competitor by mirroring capabilities by adversaries or partners. When a state is less secure, its incentive to emulate successful foreign military practices becomes more prominent.[15] Observations of military effectiveness in foreign conflicts can then be a potent spur for emulation.[16] In other words, according to neorealism, organisational change is driven by empirical data on new capabilities or threats. Of course, beyond emulation, states can also attempt to negate adversarial advantages through alliance formation or by an asymmetrical approach, for instance by opting for irregular warfare.[17]

Whereas neorealism suggests a rational and mechanistic approach based on the perception of the strategic context, neoinstitutionalism by contrast holds that emulation and organisational change occurs due to internal considerations; change is driven from the inside of military organisations themselves. In this school of thought, emulation does not necessarily enhance the organisation's performance. Rather, legitimacy is gained by mimicking other armed forces. This is also known as institutional isomorphism.[18] Each member state has its own strategic culture, organisational structure, and threat perception based on geographical and historical factors.[19] Some of them prefer continuity and stability and are only inclined to change if that increases prestige, resources, autonomy or survivability of the organisation.[20] For instance, the militaries of great powers can exemplify adher-

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[12] Van der Vorm, *Crucible of War*, 292.

[13] Evans, "Bind Ukraine closer to American military learning"; Griffiths, "U.S. military observers and why they are needed in Ukraine."

[14] Goldman, "The spread of western military models to Ottoman Turkey and Meji Japan," 41-68.

[15] Ibid, 42-43.

[16] Fox, "Conflict realism: A new school of thought for examining the future of armed conflict."

[17] Posen, *Military Doctrine*, 61-62.

[18] Goldman, "*Western Military Models*, 43-44.

[19] Tuinman, *A European Small State Perspective on Change within Special Operations Forces*, 11-12.

[20] Echevarria II, "Tomorrow's army: The challenge of nonlinear change," 85.

ence to international or professional norms.[21] Militaries generally strive toward effectiveness, professionalism and legitimacy in order to endure. For instance, smaller states can adopt specific capabilities to emulate a more senior ally. This can enhance the military effectiveness while concurrently raising legitimacy in the eyes of the senior partner.[22] A prime example of this dynamic can be seen within NATO where member states adopt the alliance's standards to achieve interoperability.[23]

Because of these contextual differences, learning from foreign wars is a challenge. Identification of the correct or opportune lessons in wartime is difficult, particularly so when the proposed solutions are not in line with institutional culture and norms.[24] The organisational culture also indicates whether armed forces draw inspiration for change from within the organisation or the broader environment.[25] Cultural biases can warp analysis of performance of other military organisations, which will hinder correct identification and implementation of valuable lessons of war and warfare.[26]

Military success or failure has different causes. Institutional and cultural norms can be critical for change.[27] Organisational developments are also thoroughly shaped by their routines and norms. In the literature on military innovation and adaption, organisational culture is increasingly identified as a primary shaper of change, both as a driver and as a barrier.[28]

To be sure, none of the challenges illustrated above suggest that learning from foreign wars is not worthwhile or impossible. Far from it, foreign wars provide valuable lessons, references, and inspiration for armed forces in lieu of direct participation in combat. However, to effectively learn from others, militaries must recognise these dynamics and limitations of these lessons in preparing for future operations.

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[21] Of course, these approaches are not mutually exclusive.

[22] De Wijk and Osinga, "Military innovation on a shrinking playing field: Military change in the Netherlands," 133-134.

[23] Furthermore, most allies look primarily to the United States for inspiration. This is not to suggest that the collective armed forces of NATO allies resemble smaller derivatives of the US military.

[24] Hill and Gerras, "Systems of denial: Strategic resistance to military innovation," 109-132.

[25] Adamsky, *The Culture of Military Innovation: The Impact of Cultural Factors on the Revolution in Military Affairs in Russia, the US, and Israel*, 131-133.

[26] Porter, *Military Orientalism: Eastern War Through Western Eyes*, 15-18.

[27] Sharman, *Empires of the Weak: The Real Story of European Expansion and the Creation of the New World Order*, 20-26.

[28] See for instance: Finkel, *On Flexibility: Recovery from Technological and Doctrinal Surprise on the Battlefield*; Fox, *Learning to Fight: Military innovation and Change in the British Army, 1914-1918*; Long, *The Soul of Armies: Counterinsurgency Doctrine and Military Culture in the US and UK*.

3. Preliminary observations

As of now, eighteen months into the war there exists a plethora of studies, articles, and commentaries on practical, linear and one-sided lessons that Western militaries should learn. Some of them study best practices and successful adaptions of the Ukrainian military forces. Others study the dysfunctional Russian tactics and mediocre results in the military encounters with the Ukrainian military forces so as to learn 'what not to do.' For now, scholarly attention starts to grow for the adaptation and learning processes of both belligerents (including Russia) in the war.[29] In this section, we discuss the adaptation and learning processes of both belligerents along three themes: enduring realities, technology, and command & control. These observations show why the learning processes and outcomes are different for both sides. The following insights provide direction for Western militaries, how to assess and evaluate lessons from observing war instead of being engaged in it.

3.1 Enduring realities, tanks, and trenches

The performance of the tank in the first months of the Ukrainian war reintroduced the longstanding discussion on the relevance of the tank in war. 'The tank is dead' was the lesson that many observers were taking from a flood of images depicting Russian tanks mired in the mud, their turrets blown off, ambushed and destroyed by Ukrainian forces armed with cheap anti-tank weapons, drones and mines.[30] The images of streets littered with tank carcasses went often alongside feeds from Turkish-produced drones destroying tanks, seemingly with ease, reinforcing the perception of the Second Armenian-Azerbaijan War in 2020. Russian-produced tanks destroyed by the same Bayraktar-drones seemingly supported the 'tank is dead' claim, according to a considerable part of the Western military commentators and analysts.[31] However, the Ukrainian call from President Zelensky for military support and weapons specifically mentioned Western tanks: 'We must form such a tank force, such a freedom force that after it strikes, tyranny will never again rise up.'[32] In line with Ukraine's past Soviet-style military doctrine and training, tanks

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[29] Spearheaded by the RUSI report on "Russian tactics in the second year of its invasion of Ukraine" that highlights how the Russians adapted their tactics in the Ukrainian conflict and the challenges this has created for the Ukrainian military that must be overcome. Jack Watling and Nick Reynolds, "Meatgrinder: Russian tactics in the second year of its invasion of Ukraine," RUSI, 19 May 2023.

[30] Johnson, "The tank is dead: Long live the Javelin, the Switchblade, the…?"

[31] Ibid.

[32] Gozzi, "Ukraine war: Zelensky urges speedy delivery of Western tanks."

deliver mobility and firepower, which in their view is key in an offensive war.[33] Or as the military theorist Anthony King declared: 'They need something that can actually destroy Russian tanks at distance.'[34]

Russian armour is rarely used anymore for attempts at breakthrough. The influx of shoulder-launched antitank missiles (javelin, NLAW, etc.) from Western allies at the start of the war was disastrous for Russia's tanks. After the destruction of Russian armour formations, which were not used in a combined arms configuration, flanked, and protected by air and ground forces, the Russians adapted. Now tanks supplement artillery capabilities through indirect engagements. Tanks are also used as highly accurate fire support assets able to utilise their enhanced optics to identify and knock out firing positions. Furthermore, Russians use tanks in raiding actions. Because of the continual pressure that Russian infantry place on Ukrainian defensive positions, Ukraine requires regular troop rotations. Striking troops during these rotations significantly increases the likelihood of inflicting casualties, so the Russians often conduct raids with tanks when they detect troop rotations.[35]

Besides the tank, another enduring reality of war resurfaces in Ukraine, the trench. A trench provides a very efficient way for soldiers to protect themselves against heavy direct and indirect firepower. Trench warfare, in which opposing armed forces attack, counterattack and defend relative permanent systems of trenches dug into the ground, is usually resorted to when the superior firepower of the defence compels the opposing forces to 'dig in.' This means that mobility will be sacrificed to gain protection.

As analysts suggest, the absence of air dominance on both sides and the width of the frontline (approx. 1,100 km) resulted in reduced densities of force to hold terrain. Mass fires subsequently reduced the potential to concentrate forces and manoeuvre for both belligerents. Furthermore, the proliferation of unmanned aerial systems (drones), masses of precision strike munitions and high-tech ISR capabilities provided the ability to speed up the kill chain, from sensor to shooter, effecting on concentrations of forces on both sides of the frontline. Then, it is not difficult to imagine digging yourself in.[36]

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[33] Gat, *The Future of the Tank and the Land Battlefield*, 4.

[34] Gallardo and Melkozerova, "Why Ukraine believes tanks can turn the tide of war."

[35] Watling and Reynolds, *Meatgrinder*, 14-15.

[36] The introduction of Western HIMARS rocket systems is a case in point. Russian concentrations of forces and accumulations of munitions and supplies became increasingly vulnerable. The threat of destruction deep behind the frontline led to more dispersed and fragmented battlefields with lower densities of formations, fire capabilities and depots: Much, "How HIMARS rocket launchers helped Ukraine 'get back in the fight against Russia.'"

Digging in is an adaptation that both belligerents implemented while fighting.[37] However, the rationale to dig in and reinvigorate trench warfare does not follow the same learning process. For the Ukrainians, the Russian artillery superiority and sensor density prevented Ukrainian forces from concentrating sizable units, because anything bigger than company-level would be detected and targeted preemptively. The experiences from the successful Ukrainian Kharkiv counteroffensive in May 2022 reinforced the idea that a vulnerability in the defence of the adversary needs to be detected and exploited. However, the necessary concentration of an offensive force is vulnerable to detection and kinetic strikes. Therefore, digging in was necessary for Ukrainians to detect weaknesses in the Russian defence, buy time and space to equip, and to build and train an offensive Ukrainian formation for an eventual counterattack or counteroffensive.

For the Russians, the logic towards trench warfare is slightly different. Russian defensive capabilities are rooted in an old but effective twentieth century strategy.[38] The Russian way of war is based on their idea of the reconnaissance-fire complex.[39] By using vast amounts of tubed and rocket-launched artillery in combination with active reconnaissance on all levels below division, sophisticated ISR and automated command and control, the aim is to speed up the process between detection, decision-making and destruction of the target. Where the Ukrainian military logic follows the idea that fires (deep as well as close) shape the battlefield to manoeuvre into the rear or depth, the Russian calculus prescribes manoeuvre in support of fires. Russian forces focus on the actual destruction of enemy forces, where the Ukrainians try to outmanoeuvre them.

Although both belligerents experience the realities of war, they adapt in different ways. As a result, Russia and Ukraine reacted differently regarding changes in doctrine, force structure and application of tanks and trenches. For Western militaries there are no clear take-aways on the value or proposed obsolescence of tanks and trenches in modern warfare. Understanding the intricacies and subtleties of the drivers for change on both sides is essential to draw lessons.

3.2 Technology

War often sees the introduction of new military and, application of, civilian technologies. The expectations are high, and belligerents hope that their high-tech capabilities give them a marked advantage. The Russia-Ukraine war is no

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[37] Noorman, "The Russian way of war in Ukraine: A military approach nine decades in the making."

[38] Betz, "Russian fortifications present an old problem for Ukraine."

[39] Grau and Bartles, *The Russian Reconnaissance Fire Complex Comes of Age*, 1-2.

exception. Hi-tech weapons, equipment and systems are being battle-tested on both sides. Javelins, families of drones, electronic attack systems, cyber weapons, air defence capabilities and 'mobile-phone-fire-mission' applications (the Delta app) have seen their application in combat.[40] However, to effectively implement new technologies, militaries must integrate them in their standing organisation, change their doctrine, and experiment and adapt to these new capabilities.

At the start of the war, the Ukrainian military possessed more or less the same equipment and technology as the Russian armed forces, due to their Soviet legacy. However, new equipment and predominantly Western technology started to roll into Ukraine's military when foreign support programs started delivering.[41] What helped the implementation of new equipment and tech was Ukraine's strong digital and creative industry. This included an effervescent ecosystem of digital start-ups, innovative technological institutions and universities, but also developers.[42] The driver for change in Ukraine was therefore more or less bottom up, instead of enforced through policy and strategy from the top. It made the Ukrainians quick and successful in utilising available dual-use technology from the strategic to the tactical levels through an iterative process.

The learning process started for Ukraine after the invasion of Georgia (2008) and the annexation of Crimea (2014). Being in the underdog position, they needed to focus on deterring or defeating Russia's potential revisionist ambitions. Ukraine's technology enlistment strategy followed the functional approach: What is the Russian threat and how can we smartly utilise available technologies. This requires people that are creative, who can experiment and have room to fail and learn on a highly iterative scale.

Yet, in the technology competition model Russia had the upper hand. Russia was able to build, advance and integrate the technologies to create a technological combat overmatch over their adversaries. Russia has been analysed and monitored by Western institutions and observers for decades. The focus has been on nuclear weapons and their high-tech capabilities: (military) innovations, such as hypersonic missiles, cyber communities, troll farms, drone capabilities, Armata tanks, radar and electronic warfare, and stealth capabilities. These capabilities determined

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[40] The Economist, *Ypres with AI*, 3-4.

[41] Krebetsch, "Foreign support to Ukraine: Evidence from a database of military, financial, and humanitarian aid."

[42] Ukraine was called "the emerging digital tiger of Europe: Bandura and Staguhn, "Digital will drive Ukraine's modernization." Mainly in the Kyiv and Lviv area, businesses, universities and governmental organisations work closely together on AI, bigdata, digital marketing and cloud computing. See for example: Macaulay, "Why supporting Ukraine's tech ecosystem is so important; Find out what Ukraine's founders had to say."

how the West perceived Russian strategic threat.[43] On March 2018, General Valery Gerasimov, the chief of the General Staff of the Russian armed forces, noted that the Syrian conflict represented the 'contours of future war.'[44] He called the Syrian experience 'priceless' for Russia's military. As the United States and its allies used a wide arsenal of high-tech weapons there, such as drones, satellites, and various robotic systems, the Russian military was able to learn from its potential adversary and to mimic similar tactics and technologies. The Russian defence strategy geared up, top-down, for a long-term high-tech competition with the United States and NATO.[45] Strategy however also remained determined by old-Soviet legacy systems, research institutions and the hierarchical military cultural values.

Simultaneously, the opponent's military starts adapting to the new reality from the moment it is confronted with technological innovations. As a result, the military advantage of novel dwindles after it is introduced on the battlefield and drops like a stone the moment that the technology is captured by the enemy.[46] Technology often appeals to military leadership through a promise of instantaneous advantage and success, but this can be disappointing because of the inevitable action-reaction cycle. Western analysts argue that while new technologies are very useful, they are not wonder-weapons that transcend general principles of warfare.[47] Cyber offensives can be countered by cyber defence, redundancy, and alternate non-cyber-dependent equipment; massed use of remotely piloted aircraft can be countered by new anti-aircraft weapons and new electronic warfare equipment; and while precision fire is efficient, it does not provide everything ground forces need from their fire support. Though both Russia and Ukraine might be somewhat deficient in precision fire, it has not proven a total game-changer, and older fire and manoeuvre weapons are still providing essential capabilities.[48]

The learning processes of both belligerents take off from different starting points, but also the purpose of using the latest technology is different. Russia gained experience and experimented with novel technologies in warlike theatres such as

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[43] Samuel Bendett, *The Rise of Russia's Hi-Tech Military*, 2.

[44] Zakvasin, "«Контуры войны будущего»: как российская армия готовится к конфликтам нового поколения."

[45] Bendett, *Russia's Hi-Tech Military*, 7.

[46] Trofimov, "Ukraine's new offensive is fueled by captured Russian weapons."

[47] Russia, for example, has been capturing some of the US and NATO-provided weapons and equipment left on the battlefield in Ukraine and sending them to Iran, where the US believes, Tehran will try to reverse-engineer the systems and reincorporate them in the Russian formations. For its part, Ukraine equips its units not only with Western equipment, but also with captured Russian weapons. Tanks, howitzers, and ammunition left behind by retreating Russian forces are now being used against their former owners.

[48] Hecht, *The Russo-Ukraine War: Possible Lessons for the IDF*.

Syria and Georgia. Ukraine must fall back on the combined experience from the Donbas-war (2014-2022). Equally important for the differences in learning processes are the specific cultural, economic, and societal factors. Those also determine how and to what extent dual-use technology is integrated into the military.

3.3 Command and control

There is truth in the popular quote from Napoleon: 'In war, the moral is to the physical as three is to one.' A winning military is a military with high morale, effective leadership, and distributed power among its ranks. Commentators and strategists explain the performance of belligerents in war. Ukrainian leadership is effectively boosting the morale of their troops using the Western command philosophy of mission command. Mission command goes beyond orders and requires an environment of freedom and trust between leaders and subordinates. In the chaos and uncertainty of war, troops are empowered to make their own decisions, take the initiative, and lead boldly. The Ukrainian Commander of the Armed Forces Gen. Zaluzhnyy explained the contrast between his generation with Soviet-style top-down command experience and the new generation: 'These are completely different people – not like us. These are not scapegoats, as in the Russian army, for example, but real helpers who will soon replace officers.'[49]

This distinction, however, is not that simple. Michael Kofman posits that the Ukrainian forces actually consist of two armies:[50] a Soviet legacy hierarchical system and a more modern Ukrainian military based on the idea of mission command, trained on leadership and command and control by American and British trainers. The former army is less open to innovation and experimentation and commanders tell their subordinates what to do and how to do it. Learning processes are formal and limited. Franz-Stefan Gady notes this dichotomy within the Ukrainian armed forces and states that 'it's clear that Ukraine is struggling with how to employ its forces. Once in the fight, they sometimes display poor tactics and a lack of coordination between units. All while having to cope with still deeply entrenched bureaucracy, infighting and a continued reliance on 'Soviet-style thinking.'[51] Additionally, the attrition of western trained leaders in the bloody battles at Bakhmut, Vulhedar

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[49] Quoted in: Conor, "Mission command spurring Ukrainian succes."

[50] The question is being raised for the West that it has moved too fast and too far in reducing its arsenal of tanks and statistical artillery (both guns and mortars).

[51] Quoted in: Altman, "A sobering analysis of Ukraine's counteroffensive from the front; A military analyst just returned from touring the Ukraine front and has offered his blunt take on how the counteroffensive is really going"; See also the twitter feeds of Franz-Stefan Gady and Michael Koffman from 18th July 2023 where they lay out sixteen relevant observations from their trip.

and Kherson in combination with their replacements with mobilised and volunteer forces with limited training and experience hampers Ukrainian opportunities for bottom-up learning. Recognising that mission command is culturally defined and needs a tradition of trust and liberal values is one thing, but transferring the gist of it is another.[52]

On the Russian side, distributed mission orders are rare. Analysts agree that Russia has a tendency of reinforcing failing operations until orders are changed at higher levels. The lacking initiative and problem-solving ability of junior leadership has implications for combining different arms and joint capabilities on the tactical level.[53] The early phase of the Russian invasion rapidly unravelled the myth that the Russian armed force was modern and capable of matching Western standards. However, having failed in the initial stages of the war, its commanders reverted to traditional Soviet-era warfare, top-down and hierarchical, using massive artillery bombardments coupled with echeloned attacks of expendable Wagner merce-nary-type units and high-capable VDV units. Moreover, Russia demonstrated its ability to fight and mobilise at the same time, tie down a large Ukrainian force in a grinding battle for Bakhmut and force the Ukrainians into a disadvantageous war of attrition.[54] There is also evidence of reduced impact of HIMARS missile strikes due to effective Russian countermeasures and sophisticated defensive obstacle zones, where Russians combine counter mobility efforts with effective fires that absorb offensive Ukrainian attacks, without the need of deploying their operational reserves.[55]

The Russians observed, learned, and adapted in a way that matched their strategic culture, organisational structures and traditional military norms and standards. Ukrainian forces have transformed into a recognisable Western military force with Western investments since 2014, with a radically different leadership culture, although this transformation remains far from complete.

[52] Or as a Ukrainian soldier tells a U.S. researcher at a Western training location: 'Our way of war is not Western or Russian – it is Cossack. We just happen to be fighting with a lot of donated American and NATO equipment.' In: Matisek, Reno and Rosenberg, "US-led security assistance to Ukraine is working."

[53] Zabrodskyi, Watling, Danylyuk, and Reynolds, *Preliminary Lessons in Conventional Warfighting from Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: February–July 2022*, 12-13.

[54] The Economist, *Slow Learners*, 10.

[55] Kilner, "Ukraine forced to update Himars software after Russia jams rockets"; Watling, "West must focus on preparing Ukraine's troops – or we will all pay the price."

4. Opportunities and pitfalls in learning from the Russia-Ukraine war

Against the backdrop of these preliminary observations, the question arises as to whether Western militaries can draw lessons for organisational change from Ukrainian and Russian tactics, operations, and military capabilities. Arguably, the Ukraine war validates the conscious decision of Western militaries to recalibrate towards conventional warfare. Enhancing both the collective deterrence posture of NATO and the member states' ability to fight at scale against a capable opponent is necessary after three decades of expeditionary stabilisation and counterinsurgency operations. In this regard, the war in Ukraine underscores the enduring realities of war and warfare and questions the obsolescence of tanks and trenches in modern warfare.[56] And thus, highlights the urgency of renewed investments in time, attention and resources that has dawned on Western militaries.[57] The previous section also demonstrates the rise of new technologies. Western militaries are observing the developments in employing drones in various roles and the associated countermeasures with keen interest. Furthermore, the use of the electromagnetic spectrum in both defensive and offensive roles will hold pertinent lessons for observers.

Yet, as compelling as the military developments in Ukraine are, translating the observations and related focus into specific building blocks for change and implementing those elements into existing formations and organisations is far from straightforward. While the operations in Ukraine show important developments and trends in warfare, analysts should be aware of the limitations of emulation and deep learning from these observations. What are these limitations?

First, western forces should be aware of the 'fallacy of linear projection' as described by William Fuller. He cautions against extrapolating developments in current wars towards new conflicts that can have far distinct characteristics.[58] The return of great power competition does not equate to a resurgence of conventional

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[56] For instance, the presumed demise of the main battle tank's relevance in modern warfare proved to be premature. Furthermore, the impact, ammunition consumption and attrition rates of tubed artillery indicate that indirect fire in sufficient quantity is still a crucial capability in the 21st century The return of trench warfare in Europe, in evidence since the Donbas War is a case in point. Finally, and most fundamentally, the recognition that infantry, supported by other arms and branches, is the enabler of seizing, holding and defending terrain.

[57] Tuinman and Soldaat. "Officieren weer leren vechten," 113-125; Barno and Bensahel. "The other big lessons the U.S. Army should learn from Ukraine"; Van der Vorm, *The Crucible of War: Dutch and British Military Learning Processes in and Beyond Southern Afghanistan*, 344-346.

[58] Fuller, "What is a military lesson?" 41-44.

high-intensity warfare. Insurgencies, proxy-wars, and even non-kinetic influencing will also be part of the future security environment.[59]

Moreover, despite the ending of the large-scale interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, Western states remain engaged in intrastate conflicts. If anything, security trends in Africa and Asia indicate that Western stabilisation efforts will continue for the foreseeable future. Western militaries cannot solely focus on conventional warfare and need to place their take-aways from the Russia-Ukraine war in a broader contextual perspective.[60]

Another limitation is that the developments in Ukraine are shaped by the interaction between the belligerents. As such, Russia and Ukraine represent complex adaptive systems that are engaged in a competition of adaptation to ensure victory. This means that the responses are in large part shaped by the particular dynamics of the conflict, which will not be applicable to other wars with different participants.[61] Consequently, western armed forces need to look at the challenges one adversary creates for the other, rather than looking primarily at the solution to perceived problems. Moreover, the corollary is that potential adversaries also observe the developments in Ukraine. Both state and non-state actors will scrutinise the adaptions by both Russia and Ukraine and try to develop responses.[62] In addition, 'these will try to offset resulting Western organizational changes by seeking asymmetrical responses.'[63] As such, these three elements suggest that emulation of lessons from the war in Ukraine through solely the neorealistic lens is flawed as the threat perception and mission set in Western states differs from both Ukraine and Russia.

A final limitation to consider when learning from developments in the war in Ukraine can be seen with the neoinstitutionalist lens: learning processes are in part shaped by organisational culture and preferences. As Dyson and Pashchuk describe, the Ukrainian learning process during the Donbas War was shaped by distinct generational cultures within the armed forces.[64] Somewhat counterintuitively, the legacy of Soviet-education has become more prominent in the last year

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[59]   When the US National Defense Strategy of 2018 heralded the return of Great Power Competition and the associated need to recalibrate towards conventional capabilities, it cautioned in an addendum against divesting in irregular warfare. United States Department of Defense. *Summary of the Irregular Warfare Annex to the National Defense Strategy.* (Washington DC, 2020): 2-3.

[60]   Van der Vorm, *Crucible of War*.

[61]   Watling and Reynolds. *Meatgrinder*.

[62]   See for instance: Kilcullen, *The Dragons and the Snakes: How the Rest Learned to Fight the West*; Brun, "'While you're busy making other plans'-The other 'RMA,'" 535-565.

[63]   Finkelstein, "Beijing's Ukranian battle lab."

[64]   Dyson and Pashchuk, "Organisational learning," 141-167

due to combat losses and the recalling of elder officers to the military.[65] This is not to say that one organisational culture is better than the other, but different norms and values will lead to different responses to operational challenges.[66] Solutions for the Ukrainian armed forces during wartime can be unhelpful for Western militaries at peace. In sum, the context of the conflict and the culture and character of participants shape the manifestations of learning processes, and adaptations and are not transferable to other conflicts. These identified limitations in drawing ready-made lessons regarding enduring realities of warfare, technology, command and control and the associated concepts from the war in Ukraine point towards the importance of adaptability in Western militaries when confronted with operational challenges.[67] In other words, besides the question of what to learn, the challenge of how to learn is even more germane.

The above limitations show that there is no clear-cut panacea for enhancing the learning processes in armed forces through observational learning. However, there are ways to circumvent the four above-mentioned limitations and enhance learning processes that can lead to valuable lessons to implement for Western militaries.[68] We suggest four ways to do that. First, by training Ukrainian soldiers and units in European countries, Western militaries are well positioned to learn from Ukrainian experiences.[69] Better yet would be to deploy military observers in an official capacity to complement (military) academics who study the war in the country.[70] Even then, the Ukrainian armed forces will be naturally selective in what to show foreign observers.

Secondly, beyond direct observations, militaries can collaboratively analyse the developments and contemplate an organisational response. For NATO member states, such a study group could be spearheaded by NATOs Joint Allied Lessons Learned Center (JALLC) to ensure a comprehensive analysis across the alliance.[71] A third suggestion is that militaries should study contemporary conflicts beyond Ukraine in order to broaden the view and to assess whether developments from Ukraine proliferate to other theatres. Finally, Western militaries can mimic the direct engagement in wars that generates formative lessons. As described

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[65] Adamsky, *The Culture of Military Innovation.*

[66] Terriff, "Warriors and innovators: Military change and the organizational culture of the U.S Marine Corps," 216-217.

[67] Barno and Bensahel, *Adaptation under Fire: How Militaries Change in Wartime.*

[68] The Economist, *Baptism by Fire,* 12.

[69] Britzky, "How US troops in Germany are training Ukrainians to save one another on the battlefield."

[70] An obvious restriction is that Western officers will be limited to directly observe the Ukrainian efforts.

[71] Dyson and Pashchuk, "Organisational learning," 141-167.

above, observational learning and emulation are important but come with limitations. These efforts should be combined with serious evaluations of exercises, experiments, simulations, and deployments. In that way, the resulting identified deficiencies can be converted to actionable response and put to the test, for example by having a dedicated unit that acts as the adversary and is free to seek any advantage to thwart the training unit's plans.[72]

5. Conclusion

With the reorientation of Western armed forces towards interstate competition and large-scale conventional combat, the observations from the war in Ukraine seem to come at an opportune moment. Analysts and commentators observe both old and new concepts that are put to the test with different conclusions and changes in tactics, investments, and concepts by both belligerents. These observations provide a vital source of information for Western militaries and can guide organisational changes in the realms of the realities of war, technology and command and control. Nevertheless, Western militaries should consider the dynamics and limitations of observational learning and emulation because there are no template solutions.

This chapter discussed these limitations by using neorealism and neoinstitutionalism as frames of reference for observational learning and emulation. We specifically draw attention to various limiting factors. The threat perception and employment of armed forces will be markedly different for most states. Just consider the enduring engagement by Western militaries in various stabilisation and peace support operations. Moreover, the dynamics of adaptation between Ukraine and Russia are highly contextual and potentially irrelevant against other adversaries in future conflict. From the institutional perspective, the extent to which Ukraine's and Russia's military can be used as a benchmark for modelling Western armed forces, appears to be limited. To be sure, there are institutional aspects that deserve emulation, such as Ukraine's demonstrated capacity to absorb diverse equipment and adopt novel technologies. Yet, whether Western militaries can approximate this without the sense of urgency conferred by fighting a war is an open question.

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[72] By assigning this role on a rotational basis, this can inspire creative thinking and enhance adaptability among service members. Units in the field will find (partial) solutions to operational challenges. Initiative in adaptation should thus be facilitated and reinforce the distributed command philosophy of mission command. Still, central guidance to harness bottom-up efforts is essential to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and potential solutions. In this way, experiences from others can be used as reference and inspiration for the organisation's learning processes and thus adopted: Dawes, "Project Geronimo: Sophisticated OPFOR for sophisticated training."

Nevertheless, the importance of adaptation and change, learning from others and how this conflict allows us to focus on the key elements of large-scale conventional war is clear. Still, this does not imply that learning processes and others' lessons can straightforwardly be copied and implemented. To optimally use these observations, it is important to use these insights while remaining aware of the four limiting factors of such learning experiences detailed in the chapter. In the case of learning from observing the Russia-Ukraine war, we suggest the following: deploy observers, institutionalise the learning process, broaden our view by looking beyond the Ukrainian perspective, and study emulation initiatives in other theatres. Undoubtedly, potential adversaries are also closely examining this and other conflicts as well in order to adapt and enhance their effectiveness. Western militaries need to change and adapt wisely to prepare to the best extent possible for a potential large-scale conflict while retaining the agility to adapt to new emerging challenges.

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Revisiting the Synthetic Organisation: Multi-level Bricolage in Turbulent Environments

Eric-Hans Kramer, Guido van Os, Stefan Soeparman, & Robbert Verhulst

Abstract

Commentators and scholars have been reflecting on key lessons that can be drawn from the war in Ukraine. This chapter examines the challenge of developing a fluid response to a dynamic and complex environment and the ability to quickly assemble and disassemble organisational components in response to specific challenges or opportunities, from the perspective of organisational design of military organisations. To address this challenge, we revisit Thompson's 1967 concept of the 'synthetic organisation,' which is rapidly assembled from modular building blocks to respond to crises that are not yet fully comprehended. The synthetic organisation swings into action before it has fully developed its structure. This requirement to develop an organisational synthesis while being 'in action' resonates with later 'chaoplexic' images of modern warfare, as well as the importance of 'bricolage.' The ongoing conflict in Ukraine highlights the importance of support from the international community, including weapons, training, and intelligence, to aid the Ukrainian war effort. To adapt, the Ukrainian military has utilised unconventional tactics and tools to disrupt the enemy's decision-making cycle. We argue that the image of the synthetic organisation is useful for reflecting on the challenges military organisations face to accommodate a complex environment in which the need for chaoplexic warfare and bricolage are simultaneous realities.

Keywords: Synthetic organisations, Organisational networks, Sensemaking, Bricolage

1. Introduction

Most Western analysts seem to agree that the Ukraine conflict marks a geopolitical shift which results in a new strategic orientation for Western armies. Consequently, many European governments have increased military investments. While we do not dispute the emergence of this new strategic orientation, we think that a strategic shift toward large-scale military operations does not necessarily imply a return to Cold War-era organisational forms as well. Reports about the Ukraine conflict suggest that the network is a particularly relevant organisational form on

contemporary battlefields. Incidentally, we believe that the experience with operating in expeditionary taskforces in the last decades has taught valuable lessons to Western armed forces about the potential benefits and challenges of organisational networks. In this chapter, we explore the challenges faced by military organisations in contemporary conflicts, particularly in the context of the Ukraine conflict, by applying a specific conceptualisation of organisational networks.

Comprehending organisational dynamics requires an integrated account of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict. Such an account might appear quite complicated when the overall image of what is transmitted about the Ukraine conflict is considered. Particularly in the early stages of the conflict, small, semi-autonomous flexible Ukraine units were reported to be disrupting the advancement of the Russian army, supported by new technology (drones) and advanced satellite communication technology (Starlink). In later stages reports emphasise images of trench warfare and artillery barrages with huge losses on both sides of the conflict, which seems to be throwbacks to the First World War. Furthermore, the validity of reports is not without doubt, because of the inevitable strategic communication by all sides that have a stake in the conflict. Recognising the complexity of verifying information from diverse sources, we acknowledge that war reporting and systematic observation are distinct in their approaches. Our aim is to understand the organisational dynamics through a lens of synthetic organisational responses. By employing a theoretical framework to analyse a wide range of data from various news outlets, including analyses of the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) and the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), we shed light on how Ukrainian armed forces respond to the complexities and challenges of the modern battlefield. However, we also discuss the wider implications of these organisational dynamics and synthetic responses.

In this chapter we reflect on what we can learn from the experiences in the Ukraine conflict as they are communicated through different reports, newspaper articles and individual accounts. Our primary objective is to untangle the organisational dynamics of the Ukrainian army and its organisational capacity to respond to the challenges in the current battlefield environment. We will begin (1) by introducing the concept of synthetic organisations, which assist in understanding how the Ukrainian armed forces react to the complex and unpredictable events on the modern battlefield. (2). We apply this concept to interpret four intricate organisational dynamics we uncovered during the analysis of multiple sources regarding how the Ukrainian military responded to new developments in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict (3). Furthermore, we discuss the wider implication of a synthetic approach to the military in general. More specifically, we focus on the organisational challenges armies face in contemporary conflicts (4). This means that we do not discuss geopolitical or strategic implications. We focus, however, on the wider organisational implications of the modern battlefield.

2. The synthetic organisation

It has been well established in military studies that during deployment, armies are potentially confronted with danger, intelligent opponents that aim to undermine them and with unexpected events. In organisation science these conditions are currently typically referred to as VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex ambiguous) environments. The challenge for hierarchically stratified systems[1] in such conditions is to develop and maintain a level of functional integration.[2] Also, Von Clausewitz has put the significance of uncertainty central in his way of thinking about war.[3] In organisation science it is commonly accepted that VUCA environments cannot be exhaustively represented in images, maps, or models. Instead, 'organising' in such environments takes place against the background of inevitable – ultimately not reducible – uncertainty. Activities of organising are necessarily 'directed toward the establishment of a workable level of certainty.'[4] Translated to the conditions of armies, this idea implies that the 'fog of war' might be dealt with pragmatically but cannot ultimately be lifted.

Organisation theorist James Thompson introduced the concept of 'the synthetic organization' in 1967 to characterise the challenges of large hierarchically stratified organisations that are deployed to fight crises. We consider this concept to be particularly relevant because it designates at a profound level a problem of organisations that are deployed in VUCA conditions. In Thompson's portrayal, the synthetic organisation needs to deal with several interrelated problems and is challenged by inner contradictions: 'The synthetic organization must simultaneously establish its structure and carry on operations. Under conditions of great uncertainty, it must learn the nature and extent of the overall problem to be solved and the nature and location of relevant resources. At the same time, it must assemble and interrelate the components, and it must do all this without the benefit of established rules or commonly known channels of communication. The synthetic organization cannot take inventory before swinging into action.'[5]

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[1] A hierarchically stratified system is a system that is internally built up of subsystems (Simon, 1962).

[2] Kramer and Moorkamp, "Understanding organizational vulnerability in military taskforces."

[3] Von Clausewitz, 140: 'From this uncertainty of all intelligence and suppositions, this continual interposition of chance, the actor in War constantly finds things different from his expectations; and this cannot fail to have an influence on his plans, or at least on the presumptions connected with these plans. If this influence is so great as to render the predetermined plan completely nugatory, then, as a rule, a new one must be substituted in its place; but at the moment the necessary data are often wanting for this, because in the course of action circumstances press for immediate decision, and allow no time to look for fresh data, often not enough for mature consideration.'

[4] Weick, *The Social Psychology of Organizing*, 3.

[5] Thompson, *Organizations in Action. Social Science Bases of Administrative Theory,* 52-53.

Thompson developed the idea of the synthetic organisation after observing crisis-organisations that – for example – need to respond to earthquakes. At the beginning it might not be very clear what areas are affected the most, what help might specifically be needed, how such areas may be entered, what resources are needed to enter areas, etcetera. This has significant consequences. Such a crisis-organisation needs to act before it has been able to work out these issues. While it has already swung into action, it needs to develop understanding of the nature of the problem, it needs to scramble resources and work out an organisation that can tackle these issues. Particularly in reactive environments, the activities of the synthetic organisation might provoke intelligent responses from opponents which significantly complicates things.[6]

The resulting synthetic organisation is an essentially disharmonious system in which the requirement to deal with one problem (the lack of established rules or commonly known channels of communication), prevents the ability to deal with another (assembling and interrelating components), while solving these interrelated problems is hampered by yet another (the need to learn the nature and extent of the overall problem), while all of these issues are complicated by a necessity to act. The synthetic organisation is an ideal type – it signifies in a pure form a struggle of a large crisis organisation in VUCA conditions – but certainly not an ideal organisation. It is an ideal type of an organisation whose functional integration needs to be established and reestablished from moment to moment, while an extreme VUCA environment continuously threatens organisational disintegration. The concept of the synthetic organisation therefore indicates that taskforces that are deployed in these conditions are on a profound level organisationally vulnerable.

The image of the synthetic organisation can be understood as an early account of a network organisation that needs to be hyperflexible in an extremely demanding environment. In such environments an organisation requires a capability to (continuously) shape and reshape, which results in evolving networks that develop from the bottom up rather than being designed and controlled top down in a traditional sense.[7] The concept of the synthetic organisation has been used before to understand the dynamics in military taskforces deployed in post-conflict missions.[8] Kalkman observes comparable patterns in military disaster response operations.[9] In these analyses, the interrelated issues of building a taskforce out of a selection

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[6] Emery, *Futures We're In*.

[7] Kuipers, Van Amelsvoort, and Kramer, *New Ways of Organizing. Alternatives to Bureaucracy*, 123.

[8] Moorkamp, *Operating Under High-Risk Conditions in Temporary Organization. A Sociotechnical Perspective*.

[9] Kalkman, "Radical and swift adaptive organizing in response to unexpected events: Military relief operations after Hurricane Dorian."

of (sometimes unfitting) building blocks, in response to a VUCA environment was underlined (Kramer, 2007).[10] Further observed was that such taskforces, being made up of building blocks selected from a parent organisation, were structurally underdeveloped at the onset of those missions, while at the same time they could not wait until they had figured out a workable organisational form.[11]

Because the concept of the synthetic organisation is an ideal type that indicates the vulnerability of a hierarchically stratified network organisation in VUCA conditions, we believe that it is valuable as a perspective to make sense of organisational issues in the Ukraine conflict as they appear in different reports. In the next paragraph we turn to these reports and analyse what becomes visible if the concept of the synthetic organisation is used. In the subsequent paragraph, we place the implications of these findings in a wider frame and relate them to contemporary discussions in military studies.

3. What do existing reports on the Ukraine conflict suggest?

The concept of synthetic organisation can help to understand how the Ukrainian army manages and addresses the organisational challenges they encounter on the modern battlefield. Numerous news outlets and research institutions have strived to comprehend both its current developments and historical background. Amidst the wealth of sources, several intriguing, albeit possibly conflicting, organisational dynamics emerge which will be analysed through the lens of synthetic organisational responses.

The first notable dynamic revolves around decentralised units in the Ukrainian armed forces that offer flexibility to organise a quick response. In a New York Times article titled 'A Brutal Path Forward' the focus is placed on the Ukrainian offensive, which progresses methodically, village by village.[12] This approach underscores the significance of numerous small assault teams, often consisting of 8-10 soldiers, engaged in house-to-house and street-to-street combat. Once a street is secured, reconnaissance drones are dispatched to inspect any remaining Russian-held buildings. The Ukrainian armed forces adopted a decentralised mission command, often referred to as the 'island of forces' strategy.[13] This approach empowers platoon commanders to adapt their tactics dynamically to the evolving battlefield

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[10] Kramer, *Organizing Doubt. Grounded Theory, Army Units and Dealing with Dynamic Complexity*.

[11] Kramer, Moorkamp, and Visser, "Learning to organize and organizing to learn: The case of Dutch military expeditionary task forces."

[12] Santora, "A brutal path forward."

[13] Cháves," Learning on the fly: Drones in the Russian-Ukrainian War."

conditions. Early in the conflict, as a quick response, these units performed local counter offences acting as an uncoordinated network. Consequently, smaller, dispersed units demonstrated their ability to ambush and disrupt Russian troops effectively.[14] This tactic was also seen during the Battle of Bakhmut – according to assessments of the Institute for the Study of War (ISW): 'The Russian MoD (ministry of defence ed.) acknowledged the Ukrainian counterattacks uncharacteristically quickly.'[15] Although there was insufficient information, the decentralisation of command helped to cope with a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environment where an intelligent opponent annexed large parts of the country (coping with challenges of the VUCA environment). However, as reporting shows, it also resulted in uncoordinated and fragmented actions, as mentioned by Hall in the Financial Times: 'One of the reasons it was so decentralized was the system wasn't prepared for a crisis,' said an adviser on defence and intelligence in the Ukrainian government. 'People had to do what they had to do. We're not in that position any-more. The bureaucrats are back in Kyiv.'[16] Local and loosely coordinated operations – executed by decentralised units – are a reaction to a dynamic and unpredictable crisis. However, as the conflict unfolded a more centralised command and control structure was increasingly necessary to effectively oversee and coordinate coun-terattacks. Decentralised units became operational building blocks (as coordinated parts of a network) within a more traditional brigade. Charlotte Gall of The New York Times, after conversations with frontline commanders, emphasises, 'They have worked out how to manage the training of fresh soldiers and how to keep replenishing their ranks after losses, even while continuing to fight. Almost every unit has grown in professionalism and size: Battalions have turned into brigades, and volunteer groups into formal army units.'[17]

The second noteworthy dynamic revolves around the rapid adaptability of the Ukrainian armed forces to use new equipment and technological innovations. At the start of the conflict, there was insufficient information on how the battlefield would unfold, and which recourses would become essential. The Ukrainian govern-ment needed to act before it was able to work out future developments, let alone how to organise for that. Given this uncertainty, the Ukrainian army scrambled as many resources together as possible to deal with future complexities (determining relevant inventory). International support resulted in the delivery of, among other things drones, the F16, and PhZ 2000. The challenge then was to use the equipment optimally. Ukrainian soldiers have displayed a high level of skill and ingenuity in

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[14] Hall, "Military briefing."

[15] Institute for the Study of War -01"Russian offensive campaign assessment."

[16] Hall, "Military briefing."

[17] Gall, "On the front line."

leveraging available resources, experimenting with them promptly and improvising when necessary.[18] For instance, the PzH 2000, supplied by Germany and the Netherlands, was seamlessly integrated into the CIS Arta application, an asset the Ukrainian army had been utilising since 2014.[19]As elucidated by Michael May in a 2022 article, 'When Ukrainian military or reconnaissance drones detect an enemy's position, they relay their findings to the system. Subsequently, the technology rapidly identifies artillery units, mortars, missiles, or combat drones within range and determines the most suitable type of artillery for neutralizing the threat. GIS Arta can execute this entire operation in less than a minute.' The example of the PzH 2000 demonstrates the ability to quickly adapt and implement new technologies.

The Ukrainian army also uses off-the-shelf technology. Through improvisation, commercial drones are being deployed with 3D-printed grenade holders to attack Russian tanks. In an article published on the online outlet Unherd, frontline journalist David Patrikarakos paints a vivid picture of the use of drones by engaging with an officer known as 'Coyote,' who: with a grin, retrieves a small blue object, a six-inch rocket with three fins crowned by a golden dome. 'We manufacture it using a 3D printer.[20] It costs approximately $30,' he proudly explains. 'We load it with explosives and then attach it to one of our drones… and release it.' Another officer elaborates: 'Not long ago, we relied on large, expensive tactical drones specially designed for military use. But now, small and medium-sized civilian drones have evolved into distinct military units because of their capacity to inflict significant damage on the enemy.'

A third significant dynamic is the reliance on allies and commercial entities for essential resources. Recently the NATO members, again, announced an aid package.[21] The support of allies is of utmost importance to gain an operational and tactical advantage on the battlefield. However, continually translating demands of Ukrainian armed forces into newly provided equipment, also constitutes a tactical vulnerability and requires organisational flexibility. For example, the CIS Arta is connected to acquired drones and a donated PzH 2000 and operates through a connection provided by StarLink. While Starlink's internet connection and the equipment provided by NATO offer distinct advantages, they also increase dependencies. While allies are willing to assist, political and strategic discussions within and among nations can increase as the conflict prolongs. The reliance on an international network introduces a level of strategic (geo-political) complexity that can have far-reaching implications on the frontline. This is a risk when allies scale

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[18] Cháves," Learning on the fly: Drones in the Russian-Ukrainian War."

[19] May, "The GIS Arta system."

[20] Patrickarakos, "The madness behind the battle of Bakhmut."

[21] Institute for the Study of War-02, "Russian offensive campaign assessment."

back the supply of equipment or cease military training. Also, StarLink can decide to suspend services, which would directly impact the interaction between military units and the use of weapon systems like drones.

A fourth important dynamic are the strategic and tactical shifts demanded by the progress of war and changing conditions of conflict. The Ukrainian army demonstrates organisational flexibility in adjusting to changes on the battlefield. Recent reporting by The Institute for the Study of War indicates that without knowing all the details, the Ukrainian infantry tries to gain control by using the information at hand to understand these new conditions; adjusting its strategy accordingly and acting before the situation is fully crystallised. The Institute for the Study of War provides an example; 'A Ukrainian soldier analyzed the footage of the area and noted that the aforementioned Russian-controlled trench is a strongpoint in an interconnected system of trenches, firing systems, and dugouts that lie between Robotyne and Novoprokopivka.[22] The Ukrainian soldier noted that the trenches are connected by underground tunnel-like structures and that Russian forces are prioritizing the defense of these positions, which have tactical significance in the area between Robotyne and Novoprokopivka.' The Russian army's trenches made Ukrainians alter their tactical approach so as to effectively counter this situation. Although drones play a significant role in disorienting the enemy and scout the area hovering above the trenches for intel on the location of trenches, the storming of trenches hearkens back to First World War and Second World War tactics.[23] Although the Ukrainian army has a lot of technology at hand, a commander states in an article by Andrew Kramer of New York Times, that fighting in trenches is 'boots on the ground' infantry warfare. 'But taking a trench is difficult soldiering. It depends on careful planning around the peculiarities of the landscape and the weather and the actions of individual soldiers, said Kozak, the commander […] The goal is to get as close as possible before the enemy has an opportunity to fire on the soldiers, who are open and vulnerable as they maneuver.'[24]

These four dynamics shed light on the ability of the Ukrainian military organisation to react to unexpected events in warfare. The concept of the synthetic organisations helps to understand these dynamics and provide a theoretical understanding of how Ukrainian military dealt with unpredictable situations where there was inadequate information. They are forced to act before the necessary resources are in place and need to be able to deal with dramatic strategic shifts. It emphasises that in conditions that require hyperflexibility, organisational networks assemble and connect disparate elements. Depending on specific circumstances different

[22] Institute for the Study of War-03, "Russian offensive campaign assessment."

[23] Patrickarakos, "The madness behind the battle of Bakhmut."

[24] Kramer, "Storming a trench is treacherous business."

internal strategies are necessary. These require the ability to work with what is available, rather than waiting for ideal conditions or resources to be in place before acting. They furthermore need to innovate technologically which results in an evolving sociotechnical network in which technological and social aspects need to be viewed in concert. Above it was emphasised that above and beyond other views on network organisations, the concept of the synthetic organisation emphasises the vulnerability of networks. This vulnerability appears to characterise/ be reflected in the Ukraine conflict. For example, the uncoordinated actions of decentralised platoons to cope with unpredictability and the dependence on international network partners for equipment and political support. Thompson suggests that an organisation with synthetic characteristics experiences conflicting demands for which no magic solution is available. The nature of the overall problem the organisation is focused on, is unclear. As a result, goal-oriented and coherent behaviour of a system is difficult; an organisation inevitably needs to swing into action while components still need to be assembled and interrelated, without being able to figure it all out first. The following section will delve into these implications in more detail.

4. Wider implications of adopting the synthetic organisation perspective

After the discussion of the reporting about the Ukraine conflict in the previous paragraph, we want to place the implications of these findings in a wider frame and relate them to contemporary discussions in military studies. In our view, the concept of the synthetic organisation makes specific organisational issues visible which has implications for military organisations in VUCA environments. We need to repeat the qualification that these should be understood as preliminary insights that require further empirical investigation before they can be validly related to events in the Ukraine conflict.

4.1 The chaoplexic paradigm and organisational networks

Above it was emphasised that the synthetic organisation can be seen as an early account of a network organisation, with a distinct emphasis on the vulnerability of such organisations in VUCA environments. The reports about the Ukraine conflict seem to confirm this trend towards constantly evolving networks in response to a VUCA environment. In the realm of military studies, the idea of the network organisation has been prominent since the 1990s. Bousquet has postulated the chaoplexic paradigm in military thinking to denote this development. In his view, this paradigm emphasises the importance of self-organising networks and the ability to

deal with chaotic and complex environments: 'Building on the original insights of chaos theory, complexity scientists turned to the interactions of the different component parts of living systems, and particularly to the new properties and behaviours constituted through the networked self-organization of autonomous agents. Self-organization is the process by which the autonomous interaction of individual entities results in the bottom-up emergence of complex systems, systems composed of many parts which are connected in a non-linear fashion.'[25]

The doctrine on network-centric warfare (NCW) adopted by the Pentagon at the turn of the century is seen by Bousquet as a key event that signifies that development. This doctrine envisions autonomous swarming and self-synchronising warfighting, with units connected by high-speed datalinks which are thought to create a superior battlefield awareness. This development is afforded by advanced (digital) technology. The awareness, speed and proactiveness of resulting networks is thought to be able to undermine the organised coherence of an opponent.[26] These developments are supported by a radical implementations of mission command theory.[27] The resulting military organisation is seen as a dynamically reconfiguring swarm of specialised components that operate like different cells in a body.[28] At the core of this process of self-organisation, the OODA loop (observe–orient–decide–act), formulated by Air Force Colonel Boyd describes the decision-making in combat. Bousquet emphasises that while this OODA-loop is at first sight reminiscent of a traditional cybernetic feedback loop, Boyd considered the orientation phase as part of a perpetual process of 'destruction and creation.' Therefore, according to Bousquet, the OODA-loop is meant to characterise more than a straightforward control loop that describes various stages of information processing.[29] The chaoplexic paradigm conveys an image of future military organisation that is in many ways the opposite of the traditional image of an inflexible top-down controlled hierarchical mechanism that operates according to detailed specifications.

Against the background of this development in thinking about military organisations, the concept of the synthetic organisation is valuable because of its emphasis on vulnerability. As we have seen, the concept of the synthetic organisation emphasises the process of assembling and connecting units in response to an uncertain environment and emphasises the importance of proactiveness. Yet, the synthetic organisation is portrayed as an essentially disharmonious (networked) system that needs to develop an organisational synthesis while in action.

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[25] Bousquet, "Chaoplexic warfare or the future of military organization," 924.

[26] Cebrowski and Garstka, "Network-centric warfare: Its origin and future."

[27] Alberts and Hayes, *Power to the Edge: Command and Control in the Information Age.*

[28] Bousquet, *The Scientific Way of Warfare. Order and Chaos on the Battlefields of Modernity.*

[29] Bousquet, "Chaoplexic warfare or the future of military organization."

The necessity of needing to respond quickly to an unknown environment with an underdeveloped system makes this lack of harmony inevitable. The reports about the Ukraine conflict seem to confirm this underlying messiness. Chaoplexic ideas about continuously reshaping, dynamically reconfiguring networks and about dealing with chaos proactively, can therefore divert attention away from messy processes underneath. This can lead to a far too optimistic view on the ability to create autonomous, self-organising, swarming military units.

4.2 Sensemaking versus information processing

The concept of the synthetic organisation indicates that the initial problem that is confronted by networked organisations in VUCA environments is a problem of 'meaning' before 'information processing.'[30] This indicates that organisations need to make sense of things before they have sufficient information, or even have something that can be called 'information' in the first place. Sensemaking refers to a process by which individuals and organisations interpret and give meaning to their concrete experiences, taking cues from their environment to make sense of ambiguous or uncertain situations.[31] In VUCA environments (and as we have seen above), sensemaking precedes the ability of an organisation to bracket relevant 'information' and to work out a fitting design to systemise collective action.

This is significant, because the image of the synthetic organisation points to certain weaknesses in a one-sided emphasis on information processing in contemporary discussions, more specifically the view that the speed of information processing between actors and nodes in a network is a deciding factor in modern day conflicts. According to Bousquet, this emphasis on the speed of information processing is a flawed interpretation of Boyd's OODA-loop: 'Indeed, it is crucial to note that when Boyd talks about a "quicker OODA loop," he does not simply mean cycling through the sequence of observation-orientation-decision-action faster but rather is referring to all the cross-referencing connections that make the OODA into a complex adaptive system. [...]. Novelty, ambiguity, and deception are thus crucial to surprising, shocking, disorienting, and disrupting the adversary. Merely increasing the speed at which one acts by responding to stimulus from pre-established templates (i.e. without truly orienting) is not in itself a quickening of the OODA loop, a point missed by many subsequent theorists.'[32]

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    [30] Weick, *Sensemaking in Organizations*, 15.

    [31] Weick, *Making Sense of the Organization.*

    [32] Bousquet, *The Scientific Way of Warfare. Order and Chaos on the Battlefields of Modernity*, 182-183.

In Bousquet's account of the OODA loop, it is 'orientation' that occupies the place of sensemaking. Orientation from this perspective refers to reflection on the other steps of the loop, which is the reason why in this account it is not so much the speed but the quality of decision making that is key. The core of Bousquet's argument is that trying to create a 'quicker OODA-loop' is a valid strategy when there is certainty about the validity of the information that is being processed. However, this assumption contradicts notions about a fog of war, about chaoplexity or more in general about a VUCA environment. The last paragraph will go deeper into this point.

4.3 Sensemaking and bricolage

Many studies underline the importance of sensemaking, but few open the black box of sensemaking itself.[33] For that reason, different studies have called for attention on 'normal work' (everyday experiences) of frontline operators.[34] What such studies indicate is that sensemaking during everyday frontline work hardly is an abstracted rational process. In normal work of frontline operators, the conflict between a VUCA environment and existing structures and routines becomes visible. In such cases operators need to find pragmatic solutions and quickly learn from their outcomes. In organisation sciences, the phrase bricolage is often used to refer to this character of a sensemaking process.

Bricolage refers to an ability to improvise – to act without a script and make do with what's available. The bricoleur does not work with a fixed and unchangeable blueprint, operating procedure, or script, but explicitly relates to his environment in a flexible way and adapts as necessary. Bricolage implies a certain nimbleness, an agility to think and act spontaneously on one's feet or in the moment.[35] It is also tied to the reality of everyday work practices. Bricolage requires making the most of available resources, information, and materials by combining them in novel and previously unforeseen ways.[36] This requires a degree of latitude or discretion to determine feasibility. In this sense, bricolage is a strategy of 'minimal structuring,' where the setting of goals does not pre-determine how people should act to achieve

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[33] Moorkamp, *Operating Under High-Risk Conditions in Temporary Organization. A Sociotechnical Perspective.*

[34] Kalkman, "Radical and swift adaptive organizing in response to unexpected events: Military relief operations after Hurricane Dorian."

[35] Sunduramurthy, Zheng, Musteen, Francis and Rhyne., "Doing more with less, systematically? Bricolage and ingenieuring in successful social ventures."

[36] Baker and Nelson, "Creating something from nothing: Resource construction through entrepreneurial bricolage."

those goals.[37] There is a tendency towards unconventionalism, nonconformism and a non-hierarchical approach. As Hadida et al. write, '[It] relies on good communication [...] and on striking the right balance between top-down, pre-planned, explicit, and centralized structuring mechanisms developed to deal with most contingencies [...], and bottom-up, emergent, and more diffuse improvisation and local adaptation to deal with the unforeseen at the task level.'[38] Bricolage allows for unorthodox views and involves a course of action in which different perspectives are considered. In that sense, bricoleurs are designers, but not designers that aim at developing a fixed blueprint.

The concept of the synthetic organisation adds an additional dimension to the notion of bricolage. In organisational science, bricolage is often portrayed as a process occurring within the boundaries of a team or a small group. However, what distinguishes the synthetic organisation is its composition of diverse components that require assembly. The intricacies of designing such an assembly emerge after the organisation has already sprung into action. As a hierarchically stratified organisation, the synthetic organisation is not only confronted with a micro-design issue (how to deal with a particular pragmatic issue), but also with a meso-level design issue (assembling and interrelating components) and a strategic issue (learning the nature and extent of the overall problem to be solved). Sensemaking and bricolage at the micro-level may influence the interrelating of components at the meso-level, which in turn may influence the strategic macro level of a network. In fact, microlevel bricolage may have unforeseen consequences at the meso and macro level. This is a main issue studied by Moorkamp in his analysis of safety in a military taskforce – internally built up of different units from the parent organisation in the Netherlands – during an expeditionary mission.[39] Therefore, we propose to see 'bricolage' in synthetic organisations not merely as a micro level process, but also as a process that takes place in relation to meso- and macrolevels.

This indicates that the experience with working in expeditionary taskforces that Western armies have built up in the last decades might have led them to be confronted by the demands of synthetic organising. Although these expeditionary missions were conducted in a different geopolitical period and although the contemporary geopolitical context might require armies to prepare for more traditional warfighting missions, they might have taught western armies relevant lessons about synthetic organising.

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[37] Cunha, Clegg and Cunha, "Structuring for globalization: The minimal network."

[38] Hadida, Tarvainen and Rose, "Organizational improvisation: A consolidating review and framework," 451.

[39] Moorkamp, *Operating Under High-Risk Conditions in Temporary Organizations. A Sociotechnical Perspective.*

5. Concluding remarks

This chapter is a first attempt to understand the organisational dynamics in the Ukraine-conflict, by using existing organisational concepts as tools to find patterns. The concept of the synthetic organisation draws attention to the important capability of organisations to quickly assemble, connect and dissolve building blocks in quick response to a particularly turbulent VUCA environment, in which the necessity to act in many ways has priority over the importance to understand. The synthetic organisation is tangled in a knot because it cannot take time to take inventory before it swings into action, is unsure about what goals are achievable at the onset, and what relevant resources are. This obviously means that it is difficult to assemble and relate components. These characteristics could be observed in reporting about Ukraine. That means that there is a lot of potential for misadventure in synthetic organisations, which cannot be ironed out through some organisational 'magic bullet.'

The concept of the synthetic organisation underlines that this struggle is an inalienable characteristic of hierarchically stratified organisations that are deployed in VUCA conditions, in which the uncertainties of these environments cannot be transformed into certainties beforehand. Bousquet criticises certain solutions proposed in military thinking that assume that the 'fog of war' and the uncertainties of the battlefield can be mitigated.[40] While it is often assumed that technology can transform uncertainty into certainties – digital technologies that are believed to achieve 'information superiority' – the concept of the synthetic organisation makes clear that it is risky to put too much trust in that route because technology cannot solve the problems of the synthetic organisation at the most profound level. The reporting about the Ukraine conflict indicated the importance of technology and the effort that was put into the implementing drones and satellite communication. However, the concept of the synthetic organisation makes clear that technology did not fundamentally solve the problem of sensemaking. Instead, frontline reporting sketches a timeless account of soldiers coping with the extreme demands of frontline battle, with the useful and essential help of modern technology. What appears from reporting is not a friction-free hypermodern system.

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[40] See Bousquet, *The Scientific Way of Warfare. Order and Chaos on the Battlefields of Modernity*, 208: 'In this way, Clausewitz's assertion that "a great part of the information obtained in war is false, and by far the greatest part is of doubtful character" could be dismissed as an antiquated state of affairs banished by technological progress rather than the reflection of a more enduring condition of armed conflict. However, such a perspective rests on several crucial assumptions such as the infallibility of sensors and computer systems, the inability of adversaries to fool sensors and intentionally create a misleading picture, and that the accumulation of information naturally leads to an unambiguous, consensual interpretation of reality.'

Instead, reporting indicates a kind of banal pragmatism that is transformed into an art of bricolage – with the help of technology. While it might be pointed out that the Ukraine army hardly is an example of an army that was perfectly prepared for this conflict, the concept of the synthetic organisation points out that pragmatic struggles are a fundamental characteristic of hierarchically stratified organisations that need to operate in VUCA environments.[41]

Now that we have analysed reports from the Ukraine-conflict by using the concept of the synthetic organisation and indicated specific challenges for hierarchically stratified networks in VUCA conditions that are not easily solved, what can we learn from this for the effective organisation of armed forces? Based on this preliminary analysis, a few issues appear relevant. While we may have entered a new geopolitical era, that does not mean that we should go back to the era of large – prefabricated – standing armed forces. While the Ukraine conflict certainly has indicated that – for example – the concept of combined arms is not outdated, that does not mean that it needs to be achieved in quite the same way. Therefore, the network regime is a relevant sociotechnical basic form that needs further attention. Particularly in innovation projects, there is an important hazard that new and advanced technology is indeed implemented, only that it gets to be 'bolted to an old organization.'[42] Adding to that, a basic sociotechnical design rule is to de-complexify systems, to avoid the spiraling interconnectedness between nodes.[43] When applied to the network regime, 'just connect everything together through datalinks' is not a sociotechnical design strategy. At the onset we mentioned that during the expeditionary missions of the previous era, the Netherlands armed forces has built up a lot of relevant experience with synthetic organising and particularly in the realm of special forces there are experiments with network forms. Perhaps these can form the basis of a sociotechnical innovation strategy that aims at exploiting the potential benefits of the network form.

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[41] Also take Bousquet's critique on recent developments in military thinking into perspective, that argues that AI and machine learning can improve information processing speed (i.e. quicken the OODA loop) by automating decision making (recent concepts like 'hyperwar' point into that direction): Bousquet, *The Scientific Way of Warfare: Order and Chaos on the Battlefields of Modernity*, 231.

[42] Kramer and Van Os, "Digitalisation, organising and organisational choice: Exploring the challenges of digital transformation using five applied sociotechnical lenses."

[43] Kuipers, Van Amelsvoort and Kramer, *New Ways of Organizing. Alternatives to Bureaucracy.*

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War Diplomacy in Ukraine: Causes and Endings of Russia's Military Invasions

Berma Klein Goldewijk

Abstract

How will the ongoing war end? Following Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, multiple unlikely endings are part of extensive public and academic debates: victory/defeat, an armistice/durable cease-fire, or a political settlement/peace deal. By stepping up to the challenge, this study examines war diplomacy in Ukraine and how it relates to the causes and endings of this war. A closer exploration of how Ukraine employs diplomacy in conducting war validates Tarak Barkawi's earlier statement: diplomacy is not the opposite of war. Diplomacy is not to be aligned with peace *against* war. The main objective is to advance scholarship on war diplomacy by outlining a basic explanatory framework to clarify how war diplomacy links with the causes and endings of war. The central question is: why is war diplomacy showing restraint towards ending the war that followed the Russian 2022 invasion of Ukraine, and what would it imply for explaining the causes of this war? The findings break new ground and trigger some novel inquiries.

Keywords: Ukraine, War diplomacy, Ending war, Causal effects

1. Introduction

Leo Tolstoy, well-known for his epic novel *War and Peace* (1869), had no confidence in the restraint of war. He 'understood that humanity in warfare, for all its virtues, opened up the possibility of a new vice – facilitating and legitimating war rather than controlling its outbreak or ending its continuation.'[1] Samuel Moyn, in his recent book *Humane*, recalls that killing in wars was 'nasty and brutish' at the battlefields of the Crimean War that Tolstoy witnessed in 1854-1855. For Tolstoy, the inhumanity of wars did not make them more infrequent or short: wars would remain and worsen as they broke out too regularly and lasted too long. He doubted Henry Dunant, who saw the battle of Solferino in 1859 and wanted to restrain war by binding it to rules and humanising its conduct. Tolstoy's anxieties were that making war more humane by setting rules brings an elusive peace. A century later,

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[1] Moyn, *Humane*, 45.

political theorist Michael Walzer posited against Tolstoy that the 'restraint of war' by humanising its rules 'is the beginning of peace.'[2] This dispute sets the stage for the core of the following contribution: the restraint of war and war diplomacy in an international rules-based order.

War diplomacy amid an evolving war is a controversial topic. Commonly, diplomacy is seen as the opposite of war. War marks the failure of diplomacy, and it is linked with a process towards peace.[3] Moreover, diplomacy is widely regarded as an alternative to war. Diplomacy conventionally connects to negotiations by which states conduct their relations to move out of war and decide conflicts. Diplomacy scholars have reinforced this approach by aligning diplomacy with peace and excluding war from the definitions of diplomacy. Consequently, diplomacy tends to be defined as distinct from or opposed to war, as the way out of war, and the conduct of international relations and alliances towards peace agreements. However, as proactively undertaken by the Ukrainian government today, war diplomacy breaks the narrow war-peace binary. Tarak Barkawi already argued in 2015 that definitions of diplomacy that bring the term in contrast to war are untenable because diplomatic activities are central to the conduct of war.[4] Diplomacy cannot be defined against war.

Ukraine's war diplomacy, exercised since the onset of the Russian 2022 invasion, is part of significant resistance by Ukrainians. President Volodymyr Zelensky and Defence Minister Oleksii Reznikov, and those behind, relentlessly and publicly reveal the nexus between war and diplomacy. They coordinate with international partners, negotiate and advance political decisions, and successfully strengthen the ongoing military, humanitarian, legal and economic support. Ukraine's conduct of war diplomacy enables international coordination across different spheres and has persuaded Western governments to increase and consolidate their support.

Two principal positions on ending this war appear irreconcilable in public and scholarly discourse. The one focuses on increasing and maintaining Ukraine's military support to strengthen its position on the battlefield towards victory – the other aims at ending this war with an armistice, possibly combined with a political settlement. The one side recalls Russia's ongoing territorial invasions and demands improved Western weapons supply to Ukraine. The other side wants to stop the massive killing, prevent a long war, and avoid further escalation towards an outright confrontation between world powers by calling for a cease-fire or a political settlement. In both positions, a seemingly paradoxical thesis is present. The one manifests the paradoxical suggestion that this war's end will be accelerated by

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[2]   Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, 335.

[3]   Barkawi, "Diplomacy, war, and world politics," 55; Brown, "Diplomacy," 3695.

[4]   Barkawi, "Diplomacy, war, and world politics," 56.

supplying weapons to Ukraine. The other advances the paradoxical proposition that all wars, this war too, must end at the negotiation table.

In this setting, the 'central' question is: why is war diplomacy showing restraint towards ending the war that followed the Russian 2022 invasion of Ukraine, and what would it imply for explaining the causes of this war? The underlying assumption here is that the dynamics on the battlefield both advance and restrain diplomatic efforts: it reinforces Ukraine's war diplomacy with various international coalitions but also reduces external diplomatic involvement by international alliances in the possible endings of this war.

The methodological approach followed is a case study, though the term as such is a 'definitional morass.'[5] Whereas it is commonly acknowledged that significant empirical knowledge comes from case studies, the 'method' tends to be held in low regard, as John Gerring recalls: 'It has a miserable status in various disciplines.' In line with Kathleen Eisenhardt and Melissa Graebner, the case study here will be a research strategy to create theoretical propositions based on an analytical unit from a real-world context and inductively grounded in empirical evidence.[6] The selected analytical unit is Ukraine's war diplomacy. The onset proposition is that this case is representative of the 'causal effects' of international diplomatic restraint vis-à-vis the potential endings of this war.

Hew Strachan advances the theoretical proposition that the 'continuum from causes to outcomes rarely holds'[7] in matters of war and policy. It means that the endings of war do not necessarily reflect its origins. He argues that after first military operational successes, wars may transform into protracted and indecisive conflicts that question 'any sort of continuum between causes, course and consequence.'[8] With Strachan's postulate in mind, this study focuses on war diplomacy and how it links to the causes and endings of the war in Ukraine.

The 'main objective' is to advance scholarship on war diplomacy by outlining a basic explanatory framework to clarify why and how it links with the causes and endings of war. This study mainly outlines some core issues and requires much more comprehensive research: for now, the 'empirical' basis for investigating war diplomacy in Ukraine during an evolving war is minimal and incomplete, if not unachievable. Moreover, the lack of accessible data is nothing unusual during wars: scholarship on war and diplomacy meshes with and accounts for such uncertainties and contingencies.[9]

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[5] Gerring, "What is a case study," 342.

[6] Eisenhardt and Graebner, "Theory building from cases," 25-26, 29.

[7] Strachan, "The causes of war," 12.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Rösch, "Realism, the war," 203.

The interdisciplinary approach here connects the disciplines of international relations (IR), international law, and social and political sciences. It draws primarily on literature from the subfields of war studies and diplomatic studies but also from security, strategic, and intelligence studies. Next to academic sources, think tank reports, government documents, and policy speeches will be used. The first section explores international war diplomacy in Ukraine and how it relates to the causes of this war. The second section examines Ukraine's current war diplomacy and how it connects to the trajectories for ending this war. This Introduction has outlined the problem setting and basic theoretical frame, while the Conclusions present the main findings and further research.

2. Causes of the war and diplomacy

Several explanations of the causes of the war in Ukraine have emerged in the years leading up to and after the Russian 2022 full-scale invasion. They vary from Russia's declining position in shifting powers in the international order, to increased geopolitical tensions, domestic political conditions, autocratic tendencies in the Russian regime, historical worldview influences, and overreach towards Greater Russia.[10] Two leading causes of the war in Ukraine will be selected here for further exploration: the Russian territorial invasions and the expansion of NATO. First, they have taken centre stage in the public domain and academic and policy debates. Second, these two represent a much broader set of causes and meet the criterion of high representativeness in terms of causal effects. Third, they have multiple implications for this study on war diplomacy.

2.1 Russian territorial invasions

The first cause concerns Russian territorial intrusions, culminating in the February 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine. It also involves Russia's February 2014 invasion and March 2014 annexation of Crimea and the September 2022 annexation of the four oblasts in the Eastern part of Ukraine: Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson. The Russian 2022 all-out invasion and military offensive in Ukraine must be regarded as an act of aggression.[11] This invasion was 'unprovoked, illegal, and morally repugnant.'[12] According to Russia's document submitted to the

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[10] Dunford, "Causes of the crisis"; Sæther, "War of broken fraternity'; Götz and Staun, "Why Russia attacked"; Mearsheimer, "The causes and consequences"; Walt, "Liberal illusions caused"; Hauter, "How the war began"; Götz, "Putin, the state, and war."

[11] Welfens, *Russia's Invasion of Ukraine.*

[12] Charap and Priebe, "Avoiding a long war," 2.

International Court of Justice (ICJ),[13] its main 'justification' for the invasion was exercising the right of self-defence against the crime of genocide allegedly committed by Ukraine. For this, Russia's ICJ document, which includes Vladimir Putin's address to the citizens of Russia on 24th February 2022,[14] refers to anticipatory self-defence of the Russian Federation and collective defence of the self-proclaimed governments in the four Donbas regions, invoking Article 51 (Chapter VII) of the UN Charter. Furthermore, in the ICJ document, Russia justifies its special military operation by referring to the NATO bombing of Serbia (1999). The included address by Putin invokes that US-led interventions in Iraq, Libya, and Syria were also exercised in the name of Western self-defence and the defence of human rights in these countries.[15] In various speeches, Putin and Sergei Lavrov denote that such Western interventions and violations of international law have generated in Russia deep distrust in a multilateral system where the UN Security Council is continually bypassed.[16]

This first cause of war, successive Russian territorial invasions of Ukraine, is a grave threat to international security and peace and is shocking because of its anachronistic nature, as Tanisha Fazal observes. Territorial conquest, one country trying to conquer another with internationally recognised established borders, seemed to belong to the past of former centuries.[17] Russia's invasions of Ukraine are a flagrant violation of universally established core principles of international order and law in the UN Charter, including the norm against territorial conquest[18] and states' territorial integrity and sovereignty,[19] which was breached by annexing Crimea and the four Eastern regions.[20] The accusation that Russia has committed a 'crime of aggression' by attacking another state's territory appears to be the most favourable path to hold Russia accountable through international criminal law. However, though the crime of aggression is included in Art. 5 of the Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), where it relates to *jus ad bellum*, the ICC lacks jurisdiction and has no authority to investigate and prosecute Russia for such a crime – though legal openings are under investigation.[21] Possibilities for prosecuting the crime of aggression by amending ICC's Statute or creating an international, *ad hoc* or hybrid criminal tribunal are being widely explored.

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[13] Russian Federation, "Document (with Annexes)," 4.

[14] Putin, "Address by the President," 2022b.

[15] Russian Federation, "Document (with Annexes)" 11-12; Putin, "Address by the President," 2022b.

[16] Lavrov, "Genuine multilateralism," 110; Lavrov, "On law, rights," 233-234; Putin, "Address by the President," 2022b; Lonardo, *Russia's 2022 War against Ukraine*, 61.

[17] Fazal, "The return of conquest?" 20.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Salari and Hosseini, "Russia's attack on Ukraine."

[20] Fazal, "The return of conquest?" 24-26.

[21] Salari and Hosseini, "Russia's attack on Ukraine," 13, 21.

2.2 Eastward expansion of NATO

The second cause is the much-debated expansion of NATO in Eurasia and, to a lesser extent, Ukraine's connections with the EU. Russia repeatedly invokes NATO expansion to justify its interventions. It also appears as the core of explanations by some realist thinkers in IR, notably the US political scientist John Mearsheimer.

In December 2021, when Russia amassed military troops on the Ukrainian border and pressures escalated, Russia's Foreign Ministry presented an ultimatum as a diplomatic offensive directly addressed to the US[22] and NATO.[23] It concerned legally binding 'security guarantees' for Russia that the West should agree on: NATO should not admit any new members, including Ukraine; NATO should refrain from any form of military activity in Ukraine and former Soviet states; and the US was to withdraw its nuclear weapons from Europe. Diplomatic exchanges on this ultimatum failed. For Russia, the ultimatum had to express that NATO enlargement is a risk or threat and that the rules-based international order functions to its permanent disadvantage, as Russian Military Doctrines and National Security Strategies recall since 1993.[24] Russia's deep-seated sense of insecurity due to perceived threats by NATO,[25] its alleged entitlement to a sphere of influence in Eurasia, and its basic security needs caused it to challenge the international order by invading Ukraine, seen to be drifting to the West.[26]

For John Mearsheimer, the main cause for the current war in Ukraine is Western expansion, explicitly since NATO's April 2008 Bucharest Summit announcement of a potential NATO membership of Ukraine and Georgia. Already in 2014, when Russia annexed Crimea, Mearsheimer wrote that the 'taproot of the trouble is NATO enlargement, the central element of a larger strategy to move Ukraine out of Russia's orbit.'[27] In 2022, after Russia's full-scale invasion, he noted that the 'taproot of the crisis is the American-led effort to make Ukraine a Western bulwark on Russia's borders.'[28] His basic argument concerns international stability, the potential threat that great powers are sensitive to in their neighbourhood,[29] and the provocative effect of NATO enlargement in the Russian sphere of influence.[30] For Mearsheimer, the West's 'fault' with NATO expansion is this: treating Russia as a rising power that

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[22] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (2021b), Draft Treaty.

[23] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (2021a), Draft Agreement.

[24] Götz and Staun, "Why Russia attacked," 484.

[25] Putin, "Address by the President," 2022a; Putin, "Address by the President" 2022b.

[26] Götz and Staun, "Why Russia attacked," 483, 486; Mulligan, "Erosions, ruptures," 261.

[27] Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine crisis," 77.

[28] Mearsheimer, "The causes and consequences," 18.

[29] Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine crisis," 82.

[30] Mearsheimer, "The causes and consequences," 22, 25.

needs to be contained, not seeing it as a declining power.[31] However, Mearsheimer could also have reversed his argument to the opposite effect: Russia caused the West to expand NATO because it was in decline, thus posing a specific threat. Anyhow, Mearsheimer sees no end to this war unless Ukraine pushes for the state's neutrality by divorcing itself from the West.[32]

Various others have come in such classic battles on geopolitics, great powers, and spheres of influence involving two schools of thought in IR, the liberals and realists.[33] Above all, realism seems to be back in the public and academic spotlight.[34] Stephen Walt attributes the cause to Western 'hubris, wishful thinking, and liberal idealism,'[35] or 'idealistic illusions' of 'open-ended NATO enlargement.'[36] Following the widely published Russian ultimatum and Mearsheimer's and Walt's statements after the 2022 invasion, fiery public debates reignited on this take of the leading cause for the war: NATO expansion as the West's principal responsibility and the West's fault.

Underlying such ardent debates on NATO expansion as the main war's cause is a moral question with political consequences. Certainly, Mearsheimer raised a relevant core issue: the Western responsibility for the causes of the Russian war in Ukraine. This question requires much further debate. However, his 'normative judgement' that the cause of this war is the West's fault seems incorrect: Russia's invasions and annexations are not more reasonable or less to be politically condemned because, purportedly, others (the West) have done worse. The argument on the morally offensive character of NATO's expansion in the Russian sphere of influence fails precisely at this point of comparative reasoning. Next, for a moral condemnation of NATO enlargement as the West's fault, the wrong consequences of NATO's interventions must be causally connected to Russia's invasions of Ukraine: the appropriateness of this can be disputed. Remarkably, the Russian Federation uses the same sort of comparative reasoning with normative judgements on the wrongs done by the other side. The Russian ICJ document, in its included February 2022 address by Putin, compares the legitimacy of the operation in Ukraine to Western interventions and the use of military power in Iraq, Libya, and Syria, thus suggesting Western double standards and hypocrisy.[37] However, moral condemnation regarding such wrongs fails when comparisons of dissimilar contexts and statements of facts produce generalised normative claims.

[31] Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine crisis," 83, 88.

[32] Mearsheimer, "The causes and consequences," 24.

[33] Edinger, "Offensive ideas," 1873-1874.

[34] Rösch, "Realism, the war," 203.

[35] Walt, "Liberal illusions caused."

[36] Walt, "Why do people hate realism."

[37] Russian Federation, "Document (with Annexes)"; Putin, "Address by the President," 2022b.

2.3 Diplomacy in Ukraine and the causes

As Barkawi asserts, diplomacy cannot be put against war to align it with peace. Diplomacy is not the opposite of war, and diplomatic activities are not necessarily an alternative to war: they are central to conducting war and making world politics.[38] In war and conflict, there has always been diplomacy. How has Ukrainian diplomacy evolved since its independence in 1990, by what means has it met the earlier effects of the two causes of the war examined above, and how has international diplomacy become involved?

In 1994, the *Budapest Memorandum* granted Ukraine's territorial integrity and explicitly established extended security assurances to Ukraine by Russia, the UK and the US: this was part of arrangements by which Ukraine transferred the Soviet-made nuclear weapons on its territory to Russia.[39] The UK and the US entered diplomatic exchanges after bilateral negotiations between Russia and Ukraine were blocked when Ukraine did not obtain guarantees for its security from Russia by handing over nuclear weapons to a potential adversary.[40] The 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit offered Ukraine the first serious prospects for accession to NATO. However, few countries in the West delivered on the repeated promises of NATO membership: France and Germany opposed it in 2008, and the Western partnership failed to ensure a stable security partnership for Ukraine.[41] Fortified after 2008, Russia consistently and frequently reported that it would regard Ukraine's potential NATO membership as threatening its security, initially opposing it with diplomatic means.[42]

A new chain of diplomatic negotiations followed after Russia annexed Crimea in March 2014 and started a secessionist war in Ukraine's eastern Donbas region,[43] by which it responded to the Euromaidan protests and the ousting of pro-Russian Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych in February 2014. By then, diplomacy had advanced in two forms to safeguard the sovereignty and independence of Ukraine and prevent further escalation. The May 2014 *Trilateral Contact Group*, which included Ukraine, Russia, and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), addressed the tactical and security aspects of the conflict region. The June 2014 *Normandy Format* between Ukraine, Russia, France, and Germany addressed talks on a cease-fire and broader strategic and political issues towards a

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[38] Barkawi, "Diplomacy, war, and world politics," 55-56.

[39] Yost, "The Budapest Memorandum," 508.

[40] Shymanska, "Rethinking the Budapest Memorandum."

[41] Edinger, "Offensive ideas," 1875; Welfens, *Russia's Invasion of Ukraine*, 53.

[42] Welfens, *Russia's Invasion of Ukraine*, 50.

[43] Eichensehr, "Contemporary practice," 595.

settlement. It negotiated two rounds of cease-fires in the Donbas, formalised in two *Minsk Agreements* of September 2014 and February 2015. This *Normandy Format*, clearly including Russia, overtly acknowledged the occupied regions of Donbas as belonging to the territory of the Ukrainian state, to be returned through a political process.

Various issues, however, undermined the implementation of the Minsk Agreements. First, Russia agreed to talk on the Donbas but ruled out talks on Crimea. Second, Russia had a constant ambiguous status as a mediator and belligerent while denying its role in Ukraine and calling it an internal conflict between Kyiv and the Russian-backed rulers of Donetsk and Luhansk.[44] Third, the parties never agreed on the sequence of political and security-related provisions. The Minsk Agreements fully elapsed after Russia formally recognised the independence of Donetsk and Luhansk on 21st February 2022, three days before its full-scale 2022 invasion, subsequently annexing Ukraine's four eastern oblasts in September 2022.

In hindsight, the above-outlined diplomatic developments in the decades before the Russian 2022 invasion have produced an overall 'negative-sum' diplomatic outcome due to the 'zero-sum' diplomatic approaches pursued by Russia, the US and EU countries. Timothy Colton and Samual Charap, in their 2017 book, analyse this zero-sum conduct as a policy where each partner wanted to win and defeat the other.[45] Ultimately, this resulted in a negative-sum scenario, where all parties were disadvantaged, the outcomes were ruinous, international security deteriorated, and each 'ends up worse off at the end of the day.'[46]

2.4 Subconclusion

The two leading causes above have generated competing explanations with causal effects. A clear picture of the implications of both causes and how they precisely interact has not yet emerged from the Ukraine war and requires much further research. At this point, the question can be raised whether the alleged threat of Russia by NATO expansion meets the specific standard of a 'just cause' for Russia's all-out territorial invasion of Ukraine. Though the cause of NATO expansion may have been made intelligible, as explained before, this does not make it a just cause for massive territorial invasions. Russia may have legitimate interests regarding its international status and sphere of influence in Eurasia. However, initiating an unprovoked aggressive territorial invasion of Ukraine offers, by contrast, Ukraine a

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44 Fischer, "Peace talks," 2.

45 Charap and Colton, *Everyone Loses*, 23, 86, 93, 95, 104-105, 122, 151.

46 Charap and Colton, *Everyone Loses*, 20.

just cause to defend itself. At this stage in the war, the act of aggression still remains open-ended unless accountability can be established for the crime of aggression.

The irreconcilable positions of Russia and Ukraine became clear immediately after Ukraine's independence in 1990, most notably after the 1994 Budapest Memorandum. After negotiations on surrendering Soviet nuclear weapons left on Ukraine's territory, Russia, the US, and European countries failed to implement Ukraine's security guarantees in the Memorandum. With the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Russia severely violated the Budapest Memorandum and raised general doubts about the reliability of international security assurances.[47] In addition, few countries in the West delivered on repeated promises of Ukraine's NATO membership after NATO's 2008 Bucharest Summit. The 2014-2015 Minsk Agreements became obsolete after Russia's full invasion in 2022.

In sum, the constantly failing implementation of Russian and Western security assurances to be provided to Ukraine became typical of international diplomatic approaches since Ukraine's independence. In hindsight, international diplomacy manifestly failed as an instrument for the prevention of successive Russian territorial claims in Ukraine.

3. Endings of the war and diplomacy

Where diplomacy is associated with ending war and achieving peace, it is considered war's alternative. However, diplomacy is not to be regarded 'as inherently opposed to war.'[48] In such efforts, a faulty premise,[49] as Barkawi calls it, is at work of equating diplomacy with paths 'out' of war. It does not mean, of course, that diplomatic initiatives to promote peace should be disregarded. The point is that approaches of diplomacy-towards-peace tend to make diplomacy the 'antidote' to war. The objection is that such approaches inherently risk overlooking and neglecting Ukraine's war diplomacy as it has evolved since the Russian 2022 invasion. This war requires a reconceptualisation of diplomacy as integral to war and part of its conduct. In this sense, it has been argued that war diplomacy is part of making and using force.[50]

To date, neither Ukraine, Russia, the US, the EU, nor China have publicly envisaged when and how precisely this war will end: no explicit exit strategies for withdrawing military support from Ukraine have been designed. By contrast, the

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[47] Yost, "The Budapest Memorandum," 530.
[48] Barkawi, "Diplomacy, war, and world politics," 56.
[49] Barkawi, "Diplomacy, war, and world politics," 59.
[50] Barkawi, "Diplomacy, war, and world politics," 57.

explicit position of the US, expressed by President Joe Biden, is to support Ukraine 'for as long as it takes.'[51]

Samuel Charap and Miranda Priebe from the RAND Corporation have elaborated three core trajectories for ending this war: a decisive victory, a truce (armistice), or a political settlement.[52] Their primary interest is to avoid protracted conflict to minimise further escalation risks: a long war in Ukraine would involve increasing military, economic, and human costs and threats of nuclear escalation. In their view, such risks outweigh the possible benefits of a long war. The three trajectories for ending this war will be briefly outlined below, partially following Charap and Priebe but adding other authors, after which the feasibility of each will be assessed.

3.1 Trajectory victory

The victory of one side over another implies defeat. It usually means reclaiming or taking back occupied territories and regime change by installing a new leadership.[53] Moreover, a 'decisive victory' is linked to the defeat of the old order, ultimately overthrowing a losing state, as John Ikenberry,[54] Tarak Barkawi and Shane Brighton note.[55] Russian state-owned news agency RIA Novosti leaked that Putin's original objective was to overthrow Kyiv in a few days, remove the state leadership, and then announce a new world order.[56] Putin quickly abandoned this maximalist objective[57] but most likely persists in the aims to end Western global dominance and ensure that 'Greater Russia' returns to its 'rightful position' as a world power in the international order.[58] However, an overall Russian decisive victory, in the above meaning of complete territorial conquest and regime change in Ukraine, seems unlikely at this point of the war.

At this stage, a decisive victory for Ukraine is also improbable. Even a complete territorial reconquest of 'all' of Ukraine's territory, including Crimea and the Donbas areas Russia has occupied since 2014, would 'not' constitute a decisive victory, according to Charap and Priebe.[59] They argue that forcing the Russian military out of Ukraine would not produce such a decisive outcome because of Russia's

[51] The White House, "Remarks by President Biden."

[52] Charap and Priebe, "Avoiding a long war."

[53] Charap and Priebe, "Avoiding a long war," 11-13.

[54] Ikenberry, *After victory*, 74-75.

[55] Barkawi and Brighton, "Powers of war," 138, 140.

[56] Johnson, "Dysfunctional warfare," 5.

[57] Freedman, "Why war fails: Russia's invasion," 21.

[58] Johnson (2022), Dysfunctional warfare, p. 5.

[59] Charap and Priebe, "Avoiding a long war," 12.

continuing future threats of reinvasion or other large-scale offensives. For a decisive victory, 'Ukraine would have to deny Russia the *ability* to contest its territorial control [italics mine],'[60] which means the military destruction of Russia's capability to conduct a war. Moreover, political regime change with Putin's replacement in Russia is neither a guarantee for the end of Russia's territorial control in Ukraine nor the end of the war. In addition, Ukraine's stated goal is not regime change in Russia but, as explicitly voiced since 22nd December 2022, to retake Ukraine's territory, including Crimea and the occupied Donbas areas.[61]

3.2 Trajectory armistice

The second way to end this war is through an armistice or truce agreement as an enduring cease-fire. An armistice would freeze the frontlines, bring them under highly militarised external control, and end the active military combat between Russia and Ukraine in a long-term perspective. It would establish various *mechanisms*, such as demilitarised zones and monitoring instruments, to ensure compliance with the agreement and prevent warfare from flaring up.[62] An armistice does not address the causes of the war, leaving the Russian invasions and territorial claims unresolved. It would also leave aside the political drivers and grievances beyond territorial issues, such as reparations by Russia for the suffering and damage inflicted on Ukraine. A series of partial or temporary cease-fires or operational stops might precede such a truce as, for example, the third UN-Arab League Joint Special Envoy to Syria accomplished.[63]

However, an armistice would be 'morally' objectionable since it would institutionalise or consolidate the current territorial status quo by durably freezing the frontlines. In this perspective, Putin called for a cease-fire in his official speech at the September 2022 annexation of the four oblasts: he was ready to negotiate on the provision that Ukraine unequivocally recognised the annexation.[64] Ukraine's diplomatic position is that it will not talk about peace until Russia has completely withdrawn, including from the annexed four regions in Eastern Ukraine and Crimea. Considering the two positions, it would be morally abject to freeze the Russian illegal annexation of territories since it would amount to subordination under aggressive totalitarian rule and leave excessive violence and war crimes without accountability. In light of the above-mentioned first cause for this war

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[60] Charap and Priebe, "Avoiding a long war," 13.

[61] Charap and Priebe, "Avoiding a long war," 12-13.

[62] Charap and Priebe, "Avoiding a long war," 13-14.

[63] Klein Goldewijk, "International mediation," 116.

[64] Putin, "Signing of treaties."

(Russia's territorial invasions), the basic conditions for any form of an armistice are guaranteed sovereignty, territorial integrity, and cultural-historical recognition of all members of all concerned regions without forceful integration.

3.3 Trajectory political settlement

The third path to ending this war is a political settlement (peace treaty) involving international diplomacy by Ukraine, Russia, and guarantor states. It would comprise an armistice (as an enduring cease-fire) and address some core political issues. Not all issues would have to come to the table: the status of the annexed territories could be left unresolved because a settlement on sovereign independence and pre-2014 territories would require unlikely negotiated compromises between Ukraine and Russia.[65] Advances could be made in such a settlement on reparations to compensate for the destruction of Ukraine or on conditions for relief of Western sanctions on Russia. The question here is whether Western alliances should lift sanctions on Russia until and unless Putin recognises Ukraine's pre-2014 borders.[66]

The most awkward question concerning negotiations regards this issue of 'concessions.' For now, discussions on which concessions Russia would guarantee to end this war or what Ukraine is prepared to concede are inappropriate and morally inept. The leading question should not be what might compel Russia into negotiations and concessions since any untimely compromise will protract this war. Additionally, it has been argued that negotiation is impossible until Russia assesses its prospects to be deteriorating. Proposals emerged, including by Jack Watling, that the West should convince the Kremlin that its prospects in a protracted war are limited and its position on the battlefield continues deteriorating.[67] Along the same lines, others refer to China and argue that if China's support of Russia could be weakened significantly by the West, Putin would come under substantial pressure to adapt to negotiations towards a political settlement. Nonetheless, this presupposes that the West will re-establish diplomatic, political, and economic relations with Russia under Putin's regime, which seems unlikely.[68] A political settlement or a formal peace agreement might eventually be inevitable, but reaching such a diplomatic outcome to end the war is premature and improbable in the short term.

Finally, the three trajectories for ending this war (by victory, armistice, or political settlement) are distinguished and differentiated, though no sharp divisions can be drawn: there is always overlap. Moreover, combinations exist between victory,

[65] Charap and Priebe, "Avoiding a long war," 14.

[66] Fazal, "The return of conquest?" 26.

[67] Watling, "Ending Russia's invasion."

[68] Welfens, *Russia's Invasion of Ukraine*, 163.

a longstanding cease-fire, and a political agreement. As Jack Watling pointedly writes, it is a false dichotomy to maintain 'that it is for the military to deliver victory and for the diplomats to deliver a lasting political settlement.'[69]

The three forms of ending the war may align with but are certainly not identical to the strategic directions Ukraine's war diplomacy takes. In its war diplomacy, Ukraine determines how much risk and loss it is prepared to accept and how it responds to the interests of partnerships and antagonists that also influence the course of the war. The question thus remains to what extent this war will be heading towards outcomes that benefit the West and other major powers.

3.4 Diplomacy in Ukraine and the endings

The earlier discussed binary understanding of war and peace profoundly affects diplomacy. This war-peace dichotomy prevents the conception that part of the role of diplomacy is, as Barkawi contends, 'the organisation and facilitation of the coercive capacities essential to the construction and maintenance of international and local orders.'[70] In the decades leading up to Russia's 2022 invasion, as shown in the former section of this paper, there have been some international diplomatic efforts to strengthen coercive capacities and deter Russia from Ukraine. These efforts, however, failed to prevent the full-scale invasion and annexations.

In February-March 2022, several 'bilateral negotiations' on an armistice between Ukraine and Russia took place in Belarus and Turkey. They resulted in Ukraine's ten-point Istanbul Communique of 29th March 2022.[71] Mediated by Turkey, this document is Ukraine's response to the Russian ultimatum: it offers far-reaching concessions under an open number of guarantor states, including Russia. Ukraine's Istanbul Communique proclaims Ukraine's permanently neutral status by remaining nonaligned with any blocs and not joining military coalitions or hosting foreign military bases. It requires, in turn, international legal security guarantees from guarantor states under a Treaty, their promotion of Ukraine's membership in the EU, and their armed security assistance when under armed attack. It also proposes clarifying the status of Crimea within fifteen years by diplomatic and not military means and having the remaining points resolved by the two presidents.[72] The Communique speaks about the withdrawal of troops but does not include the demand that Russian forces depart behind the 2022 pre-invasion lines. In April 2022, Ukraine immediately followed up and demanded a cease-fire

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[69] Watling, "Ending Russia's invasion."

[70] Barkawi, "Diplomacy, war, and world politics," 56.

[71] Faridaily, "Ukraine's 10-point plan."

[72] Faridaily, "Ukraine's 10-point plan."

agreement with Russia and a security treaty with a group of guarantor states, but now excluding Russia. Nevertheless, Russia insisted on its role in providing Ukraine with security guarantees through the UN Security Council.[73] Russia also maintained its demands from the ultimatum of December 2021 on security guarantees for Russia from the US and NATO. Ongoing diplomatic exchanges were deadlocked when Putin proclaimed the annexation of Ukraine's four oblasts, Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson, on 30th September 2022. In response, on 4th October 2022, President Zelensky signed a decree rejecting further direct talks.[74]

Diplomacy during war usually means that the parties continue communication even when relations are suspended.[75] Backchannel or shuttle diplomacy is resorted to when relations are absent or strained. On a few occasions, this has contributed to concrete but limited results. Amid the ongoing war, Turkey and the UN mediated that Ukraine and Russia agreed and disagreed on the reopening of Ukrainian grain exports via the Black Sea.[76] This initiative did not require Russia or Ukraine to compromise on broader strategic interests. In addition, from 2022 through 2023, various international diplomatic initiatives were taken towards negotiations on specific aspects or a wider peace settlement, among others proposed by heads of state from Turkey, France, China,[77] and a group of African countries. However, these proposals remain explorative as yet and offer little prospects as long as Russia occupies large parts of Ukraine.

The war diplomacy strategy by Ukraine seems to be composed of some core elements. First, since Russia's invasion of Crimea in 2014 and, more particularly, since 24th February 2022, Ukraine's war diplomacy is survival diplomacy that is primarily 'conditional on the battlefield' and international military support. Ukraine has coordinated its international diplomacy with numerous alliances, including the Ukraine Defence Contact Group, whose Ramstein meetings have become most influential since 26th April 2022. They have consolidated ever-expanding Western military backing and weapon systems for Ukraine. Second, as from the Russian 2022 invasion, Ukraine tends to use an 'incremental approach' to war diplomacy: it has adopted a stepwise and aggregate diplomatic strategy to defend the country and prepare counteroffensives.[78] With this type of war diplomacy, Ukraine has decisively influenced substantial foreign and defence policy changes in Western countries, such as the *Zeitenwende* in Germany.[79] Moreover, it is transforming

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[73] Fischer, "Peace talks," 3.

[74] Klingert, "Zelenskyy signs decree."

[75] Berridge, *Diplomacy: Theory and Practice*, 230.

[76] United Nations, "Black Sea grain initiative."

[77] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "China's position."

[78] Potomkina, "Exploring the secrets."

[79] Scholz, "The global Zeitenwende"; Blumenau, "Breaking with convention?"

and strengthening NATO's and EU's cooperative security policy and institutional responsiveness.

Ukraine's war diplomacy strategy appears to succeed in combining several diplomatic instruments. First, it comprises 'conventional diplomacy' involving bilateral (between governments) and multilateral interactions (with intergovernmental organisations), including the UN, mainly dealing with legal matters and negotiating tribunals. Second, Ukraine reinforces 'public diplomacy' and 'intelligence disclosures' as foreign policy instruments aimed at strategic communication with the public of its own and other states. In the run-up to and immediately after the invasion, continually updated intelligence, supported primarily by the US and the UK, combined two pre-emptive exposure functions: warning the general public of an impending Russian invasion and preventing Russia from shaping the information environment by undercutting its public influence on Western audiences. This approach is framed as a 'pre-emptive' approach to openly using intelligence to inform and influence the wider public and deter Russian activities.[80] It has been argued that by pre-empting Russia's deceptive narrative, the war in Ukraine represents a 'watershed moment' and a 'profound new reality'[81] in the diplomatic use of intelligence. Third, the strategic and diplomatic use of intelligence as a 'coercive instrument' has come into sight, whereby coercion is not limited to economic sanctions and military means. In this sense, coercive disclosure has been conceptualised as an instrument similar to how military force is leveraged in coercive diplomacy.[82] Though intelligence disclosure as a coercive instrument did not deter Russia and failed to dissuade it from invading Ukraine, it has (at least partially) succeeded in publicly disrupting Russia's plans and actions.

3.5 Subconclusion

Whereas Russia and Ukraine are convinced they will eventually win, neither side will presumably gain a decisive victory in the sense mentioned above. Moreover, the annexation by Russia of the four oblasts in Eastern Ukraine marked the definite end of bilateral negotiations at the beginning of October 2022. Since then, ever-increasing military support to Ukraine by a wide coalition of partners intends to create at least the 'leverage' to deliver Ukraine's victory and, in this way, strengthen its position for post-victory negotiations and diplomacy. When connecting this option for ending the war with the first discussed cause of this war (the Russian territorial invasions), the argument is that there can be no lasting armistice or

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[80] Dylan and Maguire, "Secret intelligence," 34, 47, 61.

[81] Zegart, "Open secrets," 54, 56.

[82] Riemer and Sobelman, "Coercive disclosure," 278.

political settlement with Russia until Ukraine has regained the status of its territories, including the annexed four Eastern Ukrainian oblasts and Crimea. Strachan's proposition on the discontinuity between the causes and endings of war becomes relevant at this point. After a victory, he remarks, the victors, in their hubris, 'read a war's outcome as evidence that their cause was right and their methods of fighting justifiable,'[83] without recognising that a seemingly decisive victory may only be a moment in war's transformation towards a protractive and indecisive one, without clear objectives or focus anymore.

The space for achieving any form of a political settlement on the status of the annexed and occupied territories between Ukraine and Russia has decreased since the start of this war. If Ukraine's Istanbul Communique at the end of March 2022 provides a clue for a future political settlement, Ukraine would primarily want a treaty with guarantor states to reinforce security assurances with compliance mechanisms to put Russia off. In turn, Russia would claim Ukraine's state neutrality and institutionalise Ukraine's nonalignment with NATO. The latter concession is unattainable. At this point, it becomes clear that any ambiguous war ending that formalises some settlement of the territorial losses of Crimea and the four Donbas oblasts also reinforces the history of failures of the international diplomatic trajectories outlined in the first section of this paper. The risk of such diplomatic efforts is repeated zero-sum behaviour, with the same negative-sum result that emerged in the past decades, where 'the pie or pool of available benefits shrinks.'[84]

4. Conclusions

This study has shown that widespread concerns about how and when the war in Ukraine ends have not been the driving force in the war diplomacy advanced by Ukraine. Ukraine's incremental approach to war diplomacy has delivered tenacious defence with stepwise battlefield gains that do not point towards a decisive victory. However, it was also argued that the core question must not be whether an armistice or internationally negotiated political settlement is feasible to end the Russian war in Ukraine. Asking this question is rooted in the contested assumption that diplomacy links to paths out of war towards peace. Barkawi's statements that diplomacy and war are not inherently antagonistic have been verified and substantiated in this sense. Since they are no opposites, diplomacy should not inherently be connected to peace 'against' war.

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[83] Strachan, "The causes of war," 12.
[84] Charap and Colton, *Everyone Loses*, 20.

International diplomacy bears the imprint of many wars. Still, it is mainly seen as settling disputes between states peacefully and ending wars by negotiation. By contrast, this study of war diplomacy in Ukraine endorses what Barkawi had outlined much earlier: diplomacy amidst war manifests an international infrastructure that organises and facilitates persuasive capacities indispensable to international and local orders. The impacts of the aggressive Russian invasions go far beyond Ukraine and involve the rules-based international order: diplomacy and war have always been at the heart of the transformation of the international order, involving divisions, ruptures, and changes. As John Ikenberry illustrates, the effects of wars have continually altered the dynamics of the international order and the diplomatic relations involved: the type of order that emerges after wars, going beyond the balance of power politics, depends on the ability of powerful states to make commitments and the way they restrain power.[85]

War diplomacy in Ukraine was positioned in the setting of causes and endings of the war. The paradoxes of the relationship between war and diplomacy emerged. The argument advanced was that the diplomatic options for ending this war differ as the narratives on the causes of this war differ. For example, Samuel Charap and Miranda Priebe, while recognising Russia's territorial invasions as the leading cause of this war, argue that the human and other costs of a long war are too high and that some combination of an armistice and political settlement should be negotiated. By contrast, John Mearsheimer's take on NATO expansion as the main cause made him argue that Ukraine should accept the ending of the war to become a neutral state or concede territory in exchange for international stability that prevents Russia's defeat. However, it was also confirmed here that there is no straight continuum between the causes and ends of war, as Hew Strachan argues. His proposition on the 'discontinuous' relation between the causes and the endings of war, not only for the defeated but also for the hubris of the victor, brought up the contingency and unpredictability of war and its policies.

The central question was why war diplomacy is showing restraint towards ending Russia's invasive war against Ukraine and what it would imply for explaining its causes. The onset proposition was that the case of Ukraine's war diplomacy is representative of the causal effects of international diplomatic restraint regarding the possible endings of this war. The assumption was that the dynamics on the battlefield tend to advance and confine diplomatic efforts by strengthening Ukraine's war diplomacy with international coalitions and restraining wider international diplomatic interventions on how this war will end. In this sense, Russia's invasive and aggressive 2022 war in Ukraine challenges the principle of diplomatic restraint substantially: restraint has become a deliberate strategic choice in international

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[85] Ikenberry, *After Victory*, 4-6, 24, 37-44.

diplomatic efforts to avoid outright confrontation with Russia and further escalation.

A few other findings emerged from this study, breaking some new ground. First, how Ukraine conducts war diplomacy is existential and critical to regaining and preserving its territorial integrity and sovereignty. Second, as argued, widespread public and academic concerns about how and when this war ends have 'not' been the driving force in Ukraine's diplomatic process. Ukraine has not focused its present war diplomacy on a comprehensive effort to enforce an armistice or a peace deal to end the war. Therefore, it was suggested that some outcomes of the above-outlined trajectories for ending the war are improbable, whereas others are morally unacceptable. Third, Russia is exclusively accountable for initiating this war. However, the war is also a product of contradictions of international diplomacy and the structural non-implementation of security guarantees that Ukraine demanded since its independence in the early 1990s. Such failures have become evident after the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, the 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit, and the 2014-2015 Minsk Agreements. Fourth, the outcomes that this war delivers will primarily depend on Ukraine's war diplomacy: any trajectory for ending this war is incrementally created on the battlefield and highly depends on how this situation develops. Fifth, ending this war by diplomatic means will, for this reason, depend on the leverage created by international support for Ukraine's position on the battlefield. Ukraine is backed with Western arms supplies to defend itself and retake territories and will need international support until its territorial integrity is guaranteed.

This study on war diplomacy triggers novel inquiries based on the findings and limitations. First, the emphasis was on only two major causes for this war: a fuller explanation of the causes might bring up the interplay of multiple causal triggers and require further research. Potentially, this could involve the connection between this war and the future of diplomatic restraint in the international order as well as the current international implications of failing diplomatic negotiations in Ukraine's recent past. In fact, the international diplomatic use of restraint has received little attention in current public and scholarly debates on Ukraine: this is a significant under-theorisation gap that needs follow-up research. Further developing this will also require a more explicit focus on the significance of this war for alleged accelerating shifts, ruptures and divisions in the international order and the norms and institutions that sustain it.

Second, the links between the causes and endings of this war need to be deepened and broadened with the question of what keeps this war going: the duration of the war. Such dynamics appear fundamental for further analysis of the causes and what makes this war difficult to end. It entails the empirical identification of critical events for causal analysis. The process tracing method will be useful for

tracing and analysing chains of evidence that connect the causes-endings debate to the protraction of war in Ukraine. Third, scholarship on war diplomacy was advanced here by focusing on a basic explanatory framework: the explanations were primarily framed by connecting war diplomacy in Ukraine to work done by Barkawi, Strachan and Ikenberry. In the unfolding towards a protracted war, the dynamics of international diplomacy are also changing: diplomacy by the US, NATO, the EU, and non-Western states seems to become increasingly responsive, agile and adaptive, which requires more in-depth investigation.

Leo Tolstoy was right in his rebuttal of Henry Dunant: the inhumanity of wars did not shorten them, and wars could not be tamed; they would remain, break out too regularly, and last too long. Tolstoy's anxieties about making war more humane by humanising its rules still hold: the restraint of war has yet not broken war's barbarity and it grants an illusory peace. The aggressive Russian invasion has spoiled the moral scope for a political settlement: a negotiated compromise between Ukraine and Russia in an international rules-based order that upholds territorial integrity is presently not the appropriate diplomatic strategy to restrain this war.

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———. "Address by the President of the Russian Federation." 21 February, 2022a. http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828.

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CHAPTER 28

When Will It End? Assessing the Duration of Putin's War with Ukraine

Robbert Fokkink & Roy Lindelauf

Abstract

The war in Ukraine has continued for more than a year without an end in sight. Estimating the duration of such a conflict that is a combination of attrition and manoeuvre is difficult. In a general sense both sides are drawing resources from their respective pools of manpower, (artillery) ammunition and other supplies to slowly wear down their opponent. It is likely that the war will end once one of both parties runs out of their resources. In this chapter we use mathematical models and open source data to estimate when the war will end and how, within given bounds of uncertainty.

Keywords: Russia-Ukraine war, Conflict prediction, War of attrition, Mathematical model

1. Introduction

The war in Ukraine has been going on for more than one and a half years at the time of writing. Vladimir Putin's evident plan of a short war with a quick victory has run into the quagmire of trench warfare and continuing military escalation. When will this conflict end, and how?

Most interstate wars do not last that long (median duration one year).[1] We are witnessing a war-of-attrition[2] in which the opponents wear each other out by destroying military capability and economic resources. Eventually, in the absence of a decisive battle, one side (or both) will collapse because of lack of resources or because of a regime change. The likely outcome of a long war is a frozen conflict,[3] but how long will it take before it reaches this state? We evaluate which resources are crucial and estimate when they run out, and consider the likelihood of a regime change, to predict the duration of this war.

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[1] Bennett and Stam, "The duration of interstate wars, 1865-1985," 239-257.

[2] Maynard Smith, "The Theory of Games and the Evolution of Animal Conflicts," 209-221; Malkasian, "A History of Modern Wars of Attrition."

[3] Wolford et al., "Information, Commitment, and War," 556-579.

The standard mathematical model for the duration of a war is a hazard model.[4] Such models often involve dozens of finely tuned input parameters.[5] We base our analysis on the simple and robust model of Vuchinich and Teachman, which has one parameter only. Its value depends on possible future events such as: success or failure of Russian mobilisation, the outcome of the American elections, the amount of EU financial support, etc. We estimate their effect based on data of recent conflicts, such as the Yugoslav Wars and the Arab Spring.

Historically, wars last long if the nations are large, the armies are matched, the domestic support is strong, and if only two states are involved.[6] All these conditions are in place. Decision makers need to realise that this war is likely to last for years. The World Bank anticipates that rebuilding Ukraine will cost 349 billion dollars over the next ten years.[7] Will the war even be over by then?

2. Current state of the war

The point of a war-of-attrition is to make the opponent run out of resources.[8] We divide resources into (a) human capital, (b) financial costs and military equipment, (c) public support for the war and eagerness to fight. In other words: men, money, and morale. We quantify these parameters from open-source data. Some care is required. The amount of data is limited and biased: even before the start of the war, Russia and Ukraine have been involved in a disinformation war.[9]

2.1 Resources: Men, money, and morale

Manpower. Russia has one of the largest armies in the world at about 800,000 active soldiers. Ukraine has about 200,000 (see Fig 1). Both countries can tap from significant numbers. On 21st September 2022 Russia announced the first mass mobilisation since WWII[10] and an estimated 700,000 men fled the country to avoid being drafted.[11] Most have come back and now are facing strict rules to avoid

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[4] Allison, *Event Historical Analysis, Quantitative Applications in the Social Sciences*; Horvath, "A statistical model for the duration of wars and strikes," 18-28.

[5] Bennett and Stam, "The duration of interstate wars, 1865-1985," 239-257; Collier, Hoeffler, and Söderbom, "On the duration of civil war," 253-273.

[6] Idem.

[7] The World Bank, "Ukraine recovery and reconstruction needs estimated $349 billion."

[8] Malkasian, "A History of Modern Wars of Attrition."

[9] Meijas and Vokuev, "Disinformation and the media: The case of Russia and Ukraine," 1027-1042.

[10] Shuster and Bergengruen, "Inside the Ukrainian counterstrike."

[11] Reuters, "Kremlin rejects reports that 700,000 have fled Russia."

another evasion.[12] Ukraine has imposed martial law and can potentially draft 10 million soldiers.[13] Men aged 18 to 60 are not allowed to leave the country.[14]

Soldiers suffer from fatigue and can only continue combat for a limited time.[15] Twenty percent of soldiers in Afghanistan or Iraq experienced PTSD[16] and forty percent suffered from anger and hostility issues.[17] The actual war in Ukraine will create a higher stress than combat in Afghanistan or Iraq. The leaked Pentagon papers estimate that in the first year of the war 190-220,000 Russian soldiers had been killed or wounded, versus 125-131,000 Ukrainians.[18] At this rate both countries need to enlist at least 200,000 new active soldiers per year. Another round of Russian mobilisation is expected[19] while the West is expanding its military support and training of Ukrainian forces. Russia is a larger country and has a much larger resource of manpower. However, the Ukrainian army is significant and can continue to match Russian forces for many years to come.
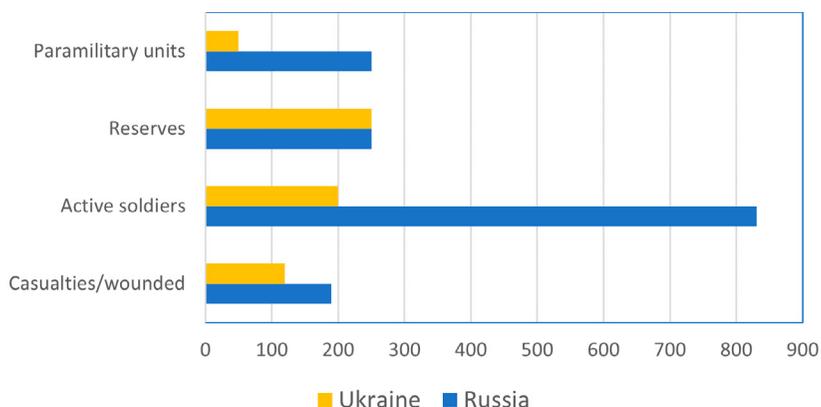
Figure 28.1: A comparison of the armed forces (numbers in thousands) illustrates that Russia has strength in numbers. Source: Statista, comparison of the military capabilities as of 2023

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[12] Picheta, "Russians fear a second wave of mobilization, as Putin prepares to make it harder to avoid a military call-up."

[13] The Defense Post, "Ukraine could draft all men under 60 to fight Russia."

[14] The number of Ukrainian men avoiding the draft runs into tens of thousands, BBC: Deserters risk death fleeing to Romania, 8 Jun 2023.

[15] The author Robert Graves noted in the first world war that after "a year or fifteen months" officers were often worse than useless: Graves, *Goodbye to All That.*

[16] Hoge et al., "Combat duty in Iraq and Afghanistan, mental health problems, and barriers to care," 13-22.

[17] Jakupcak et al., "Anger, hostility, and aggression among Iraq and Afghanistan War veterans reporting PTSD and subthreshold PTSD," 945-954.

[18] BBC, "Who leaked top secret US documents."

[19] ABC News, "Russian military announces plan to expand, create new units."

Economic power. At a GDP of 200 billion dollars Ukraine's economy is much smaller than Russia's GDP of 1780 billion dollars. The main trade partner of both Russia and Ukraine is Russia's ally China (14.5% share of exports for both countries). Other main trade partners of Ukraine are Poland (6.7%), and Russia (5.5%). For Russia, the other main trade partners are the Netherlands (7.4%), and the United Kingdom (6.9%).[20]
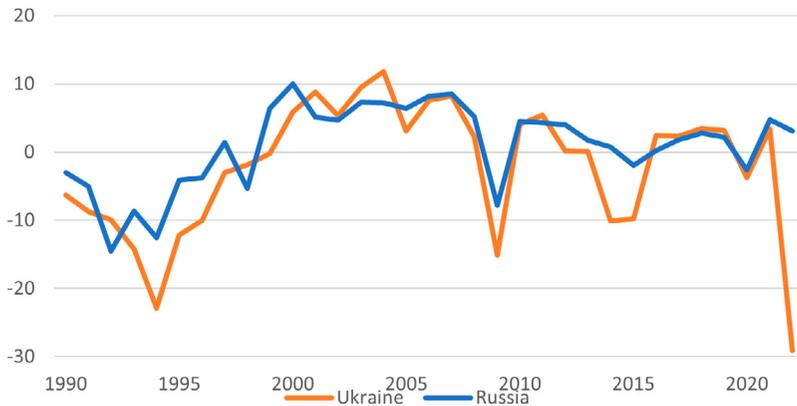
Figure 28.2 Growth percentage of GDP between 1990 and 2022. Source: World Bank. The economies were in sync until 2021, but Ukraine's economy shrunk sharply in 2022

It was expected that the economic sanctions imposed by the EU and the USA would cause significant harm to Russia. However, this appears not to be the case. A recent analysis found no negative economic effect at all, while some companies even benefitted from the sanctions.[21] Energy exports transferred from the EU to China and India. Direct imports from the EU dropped sharply, but seem to have found a roundabout way through Armenia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzia.[22]

Ukraine's economy took a hit. It shrank by 30 percent in 2022, or 60 billion dollars[23] mainly because of reduced grain exports, which continue to be threatened by a possible Russian blockade. The destruction of the Nova Kakhovka dam may turn its richest farmland into a desert within a year.[24] For the time being, Ukraine

[20] In terms of exports according to the World Bank.

[21] Gaur, Settles, and Väätänen, "Do economic sanctions work? Evidence from the Russia-Ukraine conflict," 1391-1414.

[22] Chupilkin, Javorcik, and Plekhanov, "The Eurasian roundabout: trade flows into Russia through the Caucasus and Central Asia."

[23] CNN, "Ukraine's economy shrank by more than 30% in 2022."

[24] BBC, "Ukraine dam: Floods devastate tracts of rich farmland."

receives substantial economic support.[25] The total allocated support over 2022, including weaponry, financial, and humanitarian aid is between 50 and 100 billion dollars.[26] The total support from the West that has been allocated or rewarded up to June 2023 is 200 billion euros and counting.[27] This money flow, which is roughly 0.1 percent of GDP per country, will be necessary for the duration of the conflict. As of now, three quarters of Americans and Europeans support continuing economic and military aid to Ukraine.[28] Will the support remain that high when inflation and national deficits continue to rise?

Public support. Initially, Vladimir Putin's support within Russia seemed to be strong. The initial protests against the war were suppressed by mass arrests.[29] The Levada center, an independent poller, reports that a solid majority supports the war (70 percent support and 40 percent strong support), but that an increasing number of people think it is time to start peace negotiations (55 percent in June 2023). Of course, any estimate on public support has a large margin of error as Russia is a totalitarian state without tolerance for even the slightest criticism.[30] Sentiment analysis of open-source data[31] does show that public sentiment has become more negative due to the large number of Russian casualties.[32] Public support in totalitarian states can suddenly crumble without prior warning.[33] Prigozhin's rebellion in June 2023 did not attract the anticipated public support, but it was a sign that Putin's hold on power is not absolute. Regime change is a possibility.

Volodymyr Zelensky's approval rating jumped from 38 to 94 percent.[34] Support of the war remains strong with 85 percent of Ukrainians not open to any territorial concession to stop the war.[35] Russia's relentless bombing of civilian targets is likely to strengthen public support rather than weaken it, as civilian morale only hardens under aerial bombing.[36] Zelensky is popular in the EU and the USA, where he tops

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[25] European Commission, "Commission proposes stable and predictable support package for Ukraine for 2023 of up to €18 billion."

[26] Tian et al., "Developments in military expenditure and the effects of the war in Ukraine," 547–562; Antezza et al., "The Ukraine support tracker: Which countries help Ukraine and how?" 1–65.

[27] Kiel Institute for World Economy, Ukraine Support Tracker.

[28] Brookings Institute, "23 Feb 2023 – Eurobarometer, 12 Jan 2023."

[29] The Guardian, "More than 4,300 people arrested at anti-war protests across Russia."

[30] New York Times, "A child's drawing, a dad's antiwar posts, and Russia's latest orphan."

[31] Filterlabs.ai provides real time analysis of Russian attitudes towards the war in Ukraine, https://www.filter-russia.com.

[32] Politico, "AI can tell us how Russians feel about the war. Putin won't like the results."

[33] Koster et al., "Mass-mobilization with noisy conditional beliefs." 55-77.

[34] Statista opinion poll.

[35] Kyiv International Institute of Sociology.

[36] Horowitz and Reiter. "When does aerial bombing work?" 147-173.

the list of most trustworthy world leaders.[37] His position is secure and Ukraine's morale is likely to remain high.

2.2 War of attrition

The front line more or less stabilised two months after the failed Russian invasion and stretches over roughly one thousand kilometres, from Kherson along the Dnepr River to Zaporizhzhia to Donetsk and along the border of Luhansk province to the Russian border.[38] Russia now controls a major part of the Ukrainian provinces Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia, which it claimed as its own on 30th September 2022. It has established a land bridge to Crimea, which was one of its strategic objectives,[39] and has fortified the front line with trenches and mine fields.[40] The provinces under Russian control are devastated. Before 2014, the income level was higher than average in Ukraine, but the proxy war that has been going on for a decade devastated the area. Already during 2014-2017 more than 3 million civilians had fled and tens of thousands died.[41] The war rages in a no-man's land.

The military losses on both sides are steadily increasing at a constant rate. According to the warfare analysis website Oryx, Russia has lost total equipment of over 12,000 (tanks, aircraft, vehicles, missile carrier) while Ukraine has lost over 4,000. These numbers are based on verified open data and are likely to be an under-estimate of the actual losses. The losses are starting to make a dent. Russia has lost 2,000 out of 3,000 active tanks and has re-opened factories for production.[42] The war is also taking a toll on its aircraft, which by the summer of 2024 may have reduced to 75 percent of its prewar strength.[43] Ukraine's losses are less significant, but its recent counter offensive has already taken a toll of roughly ten percent of its equipment.[44]

In almost every major war, armies run out of ammunition.[45] Indeed, artillery fire has gone down significantly due to shortages on both sides.[46] The leaked

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[37] Pew Research Center, 17 Apr 2023.

[38] Institute for the Study of War.

[39] The Guardian, "Mission accomplished?"

[40] Reuters, "Digging in."

[41] Mykhnenko, "Causes and consequences of the war in Eastern Ukraine: An economic geography perspective," 528-560.

[42] Forbes, "Russia might restart production of the T-80 Tank. Don't expect it to happen soon."

[43] Bohnert, TheRandBlog, "The uncounted losses to Russia's air force."

[44] Peck, Center of European Policy Analysis, "Surprised That Ukraine is taking combat losses? You shouldn't be."

[45] Bruce, "To the last limits of their strength the French army and the logistics of attrition at the Battle of Verdun 21 February – 18 December 1916," 9–21.

[46] CNN, "Russian artillery fire down nearly 75%."

Pentagon papers predicted that Ukraine would run out of ammunition in May 2023 and that Kyiv would no longer have air-defecse cover.[47] That did not happen. Ukraine receives ammunition from the EU and the US, which are both increasing production of shells and ammunition.[48;49] Russia increased its production and receives ammunition from North Korea.[50] As a stopgap both Russia and Ukraine use ammunition that dates back to WWII.[51]

Both sides extensively use drones. Within half a year, one thousand Russian drone strikes had been recorded, mostly targeting civilians[52] but also critical infrastructure.[53] Ukraine in return targets Russian military infrastructure. Kamikaze drones are not an immediate game-changer on the battlefield[54] but they do drain the air defence systems. The surface-to-air missiles that take out drones cost 100,000 dollars a piece.[55] Defensive MANPADs are less expensive at 30,000 dollars a piece[56] but still more expensive than drones. The use of drones is a punishment strategy[57] to inflict such high costs on the opponent that war becomes unaffordable in the long run.

2.3 Summary

The current rate of attrition can be compensated by both parties. They can continue the war for years and there is no sign that they will start peace talks anytime soon.[58] The countries do experience the strain of the war. Ukraine's population is under constant attack and its economy is getting increasingly worse. Russia's morale is vulnerable. For now, public support seems to be sufficiently strong to supply the necessary manpower, but this may suddenly change. The main question of course is: when exactly will the strain of the war become too much?

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[47] Time, "4 major takeaways from the Pentagon leaked files."

[48] European Council, Press Release, 5 May 2023.

[49] US DoD, "Large quantity of defensive munitions earmarked for Ukraine."

[50] Reuters, "Russia seeking munitions from North Korea."

[51] Forbes, "Desperate for artillery."

[52] Irish Times, "8006 recorded deaths."

[53] @vonderleyen, "I strongly condemn the Russian drone attack on the port of Izmail in Ukraine. These and other attacks against civilians are war crimes Russia will be held accountable for, 23 Aug 2023

[54] Deveraux, "Loitering munitions in Ukraine and beyond"; Kunertova, "The war in Ukraine shows the game-changing effect of drones depends on the game," 95-102.

[55] Defense Express, "How much GLMRS missiles for HIMARS cost."

[56] Withington, "Terrorism: Stung by stingers," 16-17.

[57] Bennett and Stam, "The duration of interstate wars, 1865-1985," 239-257.

[58] Al Jazeera: "Experts have said the prospect of meaningful talks remains distant."

3. Forecasted timelines under various scenarios

War is the continuation of politics by other means, and therefore it is driven by a rational weighing of costs and benefits. A war ends once its goal has been reached or when the costs have run up too high. However tragic, the decision to end a war is rational and open to a mathematical analysis. The simplest and most robust model for war duration is Vuchinech and Teachman's. It essentially has one parameter that has been calibrated on a data set of 110 wars between 1810 and 1980.
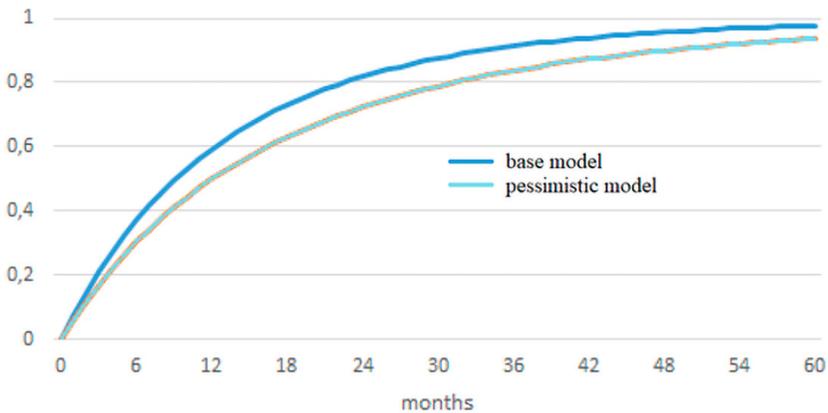
Figure 28.3: Probability that the war ends according to Vuchinek and Teachman. It is a Weibull hazard rate model with shape parameter 0.74 (95% conf interval (0.64,0.84)) and base rate of 0.07 (after 18 months of war). The pessimistic model has a shape parameter of 0.64. The longer the war lasts, the less likely it is to end soon.

Bennett and Stam refined the Vuchinech-Teachman model, by adding parameters and by distinguishing different types of wars.[59] In the Bennett-Stam classification, the war can best be described as type OPDP, punishment strategies by both sides with minimal tactical battles. These wars last longer, which is why the pessimistic model of Vuchinech and Teachman seems most appropriate. According to this model, the probability that the war between Russia and Ukraine will be over within a year is fifty percent, see Figure 28.3. The probability that it will last for another three years or more is twenty percent. We emphasise that the Vuchinech-Teachman model averages the timelines of many wars. As of now, with no bilateral talks in sight, the fifty percent probability of the war lasting more than one year is likely to be an underprediction.

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[59] Bennett and Stam, "The duration of interstate wars, 1865-1985," 239-257.

3.1. Possible future developments

Scenario A – The West withdraws its economic and military support. The western financial and military support of Ukraine keeps its economy going and enables its current military offensive. This support may reduce because of economic or political reasons. The Eurozone faces a stubbornly high inflation that could push its economy into recession. The American presidential elections next year may be won by a pro-Russian candidate.[60] One year from now, western support may decrease significantly. How will this affect the war?

A loss of financial aid is likely to cause an economic meltdown of Ukraine's economy, which is severely weakened already. This does not mean that the country loses its ability to fight. Serbia and Montenegro faced severe hyperinflation after the outbreak of the Yugoslav War.[61] Economic sanctions wrecked its economy[62] but the war lasted for another seven years. Collier et al.[63] estimate that an economic meltdown increases the hazard rate by 0.015. The hazard rate at a certain time encapsulates the probability that the war will not last any longer given that it lasted until that time. Compared to the current hazard rate of 0.07 after 1.5 years into the war, the expected increase of 0.015 is within the uncertainty range of the parameter and henceforth the effect of an economic meltdown on the length of the war is negligible.

A loss of military aid will force Ukraine to stop its offensive actions and diminish its air defence against drones and missiles. It may even force Ukraine to end the war with an unfavorable peace agreement. Right now, military supplies for Ukraine will be delivered for the coming year and it is unlikely that this will stop before the end of the next year.

Scenario B – Public support breaks down in Russia. Russia's main weakness is a possible loss of public support for the war. Knowledge about collective action under oppressive regimes is limited.[64] Once a dictator is ousted there are three possible outcomes: replacement by another autocracy, regime survival with leadership replacement, or democratisation. In the last 75 years, less than a quarter of ousted

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[60] Politico, "'I like that he said that': Trump revels in praise from Putin."

[61] Inflation peaked at 313,563,558 percent in 1994, the second highest level ever recorded and lasted for two years, the second longest period recorded in history.

[62] Petrovic and Zorica Vujošević, "The monetary dynamics in the Yugoslav hyperinflation of 1991-1993," 467-483.

[63] Collier, Hoeffler, and Söderbom, "On the duration of civil war," 253-273.

[64] Teorell, *Determinants of Democratization: Explaining Regime Change in the World, 1972–2006.*

dictators were replaced by a democratic leader.[65] The recent popular uprisings during the Arab Spring showed an even more dismal result for democracy:

Country	Days	Outcome
Egypt	18	Government overthrown
Borders ofIsrael	22	No regime change
Tunisia	28	Government overthrown
Bahrain	33	Governmental changes
Djibouti	43	Minor protests
Libya	190	Government overthrown
Lebanon	292	Governmental changes
Iraq	315	Start of war on terrorism
Algeria	378	Lifting state of emergency after 19 years
Yemen	397	Government overthrown
Morocco	407	Governmental changes
PLA	604	Resignation of prime minister
Jordan	629	Governmental changes
Oman	630	Governmental changes
United Arab Emirates	653	Protests quelled
Kuwait	661	Governmental changes
Saudi Arabia	704	No regime change
Mauritania	797	Minor protests
Egypt	874	Government overthrown
Sudan	1001	No regime change
Yemen	1061	Government overthrown

Table 28.1: Time-scale (avg=464, stddev=325) of Arab spring mobilisation dynamics. Number of days is counted between the protest start date and the final outcome. Most protests had no effect. Some resulted in minor governmental changes. Only 6 out of 22 protests caused a regime change, none of which resulted in a lasting democracy, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arab_Spring

Information (repression) plays another important role in protests, political mobilisation and eventual regime survival.[66] Initial protests may reveal information about the lack of regime support, leading to more people joining the protest, which

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[65] Geddes, Wright, and Frantz. "Autocratic breakdown and regime transitions: A new data set," 313-331.

[66] Magaloni and Wallace, "Citizen loyalty, mass protest and authoritarian survival."

can cascade into a sudden uprising.[67] An overthrow of a government by public uprising typically goes through a back and forth between protests, repression, more protest and repression until in the end protest is no longer controllable.[68] So far, we have not witnessed such a process in Russia, which has seen far fewer public protests than its neighbour Belarus.[69] The time-scale on which such protests escalate from initial micro-mobilisation to eventual regime change, can be long and ranges between 1 month and 1-2 years (see Table 28.1). Regime change is a possibility, but it is unlikely to happen soon.

Scenario C – Ukraine's offensive succeeds. Ukraine began its counter-offensive in June, three months ago. It has not made any noticeable progress. Russia's defence line of trenches and mine fields is formidable[70] and a breakthrough seems unlikely. However, there are reports that Russian troops are worn out and on the brink of abandoning their positions.[71] In the most optimistic scenario, Ukraine pushes through and is able to sever Russia's supply lines to its troops in Crimea. This will not immediately end the war, but it will put Ukraine in a stronger position and may induce both parties to start negotiating.[72] According to the convergence principle,[73] negotiations are only likely to begin if both parties are sufficiently close to their military objectives. At the moment, Russia is much closer to that state.

Scenario D – A multilateral intervention forces a ceasefire. The principal role of the United Nations is to maintain international peace and deliver humanitarian aid. It has overwhelmingly passed a resolution that calls on Russia to leave Ukraine and it has called for a sustainable peace.[74] Any UN initiative can be vetoed by Russia, as a permanent member of the Security Council. However, if the war lasts for many more years, as it may very well do, a multilateral solution through mediation by the UN or other states will get more likely. UN interventions were relatively successful after the end of the cold war, but less so in more recent years because of the diminishing dominance of the USA (Kreps). World leaders of major countries are calling for peace talks.[75] These calls will become louder in the coming year.

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[67] Koster et al., "Mass-mobilization with noisy conditional beliefs." 55-77.

[68] Carey, "The dynamic relationship between protest and repression," 1-11.

[69] Weidmann, Nils B., and Espen Geelmuyden Rød. "Making uncertainty explicit: Separating reports and events in the coding of violence and contention." *Journal of Peace Research* 52, no. 1 (2015): 125-128.

[70] BBC, Ukraine war: Satellite images reveal Russian defences before major assault, 22 May 2023

[71] The Defense Post, Russian troops to abandon frontlines due to 'collapsing' morale, 24 Aug 2023

[72] Financial Times, Ukraine 'ready' to talk to Russia on Crimea if counteroffensive succeeds, 5 Apr 2023

[73] Slantchev, "The principle of convergence in wartime negotiations," 621-632.

[74] António Guterres, UN Security Council 9421st meeting, 20 Sep 2023

[75] Reuters, "Brazil's Lula condemns invasion of Ukraine, touts peace initiative," 19 Apr 2023; "China Ministry of Foreign Affairs: China to continue contributing to political settlement of Ukraine crisis," 9 Aug 2023; CBS News, "Macron pushes Ukraine peace talks in meeting with Xi," 7 Apr 2023.

4. Conclusion

The war in Ukraine has been going on for 18 months at the time of writing. The course of the war is unclear and dependent on future developments that are hard to predict. The war is likely to last one more year, and has a relatively high chance of lasting more than three years. The most likely outcome of the war, which seems to have reached a stalemate, is a frozen conflict. A more desirable outcome would be a multilateral solution and restoration of Ukraine under the guidance of an international peacekeeping force. As of now, this is not within sight.

Robbert Fokkink

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