

# The Strategic Implications of the Protracted Russian-Ukrainian War

## Uzun Süren Rusya-Ukrayna Savaşının Stratejik Sonuçları

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### Abstract

Long-standing disputes between Ukraine and Russia escalated into a heated conflict in February 2022, resulting in significant repercussions across international politics, European security, the NATO alliance, regional dynamics, and military strategy. This article aims to explore these effects in detail. Primarily, the article concludes that the Russia-Ukraine war has disrupted the post-1990s rules-based global order that had ensured peace among major global powers for over three decades. Furthermore, the forcible violation of an independent state's borders by Russia, irrespective of international law, poses a grave threat to Europe's security. In response to the visible threat posed by Russia, the NATO alliance rallied and strengthened under the leadership of the United States. European states began prioritizing defense capabilities to deter potential threats from Russia. Moreover, the conflict underscored the increased importance of artillery, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), air defense systems, and electronic target detection in military strategy.

**Key Words:** Russia, Ukraine, war, strategy, impact.

### Öz

Ukrayna ile Rusya arasında uzun süredir devam eden anlaşmazlıklar Şubat 2022'de sıcak çatışmaya yol açtı. Savaşın uluslararası politika, Avrupa güvenliği, NATO ittifakı, bölgesel sorunlar ve son olarak savaş stratejisi açısından çarpıcı sonuçları olmuştur. Bu nedenle bu makale, tüm bu etkileri detaylı bir şekilde analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Makale, esas olarak, Rusya-Ukrayna savaşının, büyük küresel güçler arasında otuz yılı aşkın süredir barışı garanti eden, 1990'lar sonrası kurallara dayalı küresel düzeni bozduğu sonucuna varıyor. Ayrıca, Avrupa'nın güvenliği, bağımsız bir devletin sınırlarının uluslararası hukuka aykırı olarak Rusya tarafından zorla ihlal edilmesi nedeniyle bir tehdit altındadır. Rusya'dan gelen görünür tehdidi gören NATO ittifakı ABD liderliğinde toparlanarak yeniden güçlendi. Avrupa devletleri Rusya'dan gelen tehditleri caydırmak için savunma yeteneklerine öncelik vermeye başladı. Son olarak, bu savaş özellikle stratejik açıdan topçuların, insansız hava araçlarının (İHA), hava savunmanın ve elektronik hedef tespitinin rolü önemli ölçüde arttığını göstermiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Rusya, Ukrayna, savaş, strateji, etki.

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## Introduction

Russia has transcended the economically tumultuous years following the collapse of the Soviet Union, experiencing a resurgence propelled by the escalating prices of oil and other fossil fuels. This revitalization has seen Russia persistently endeavor to reclaim its historical position as a grand state for over a decade. This imperialistic aspiration has profoundly influenced Russian foreign policy for years.

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Eurasian ideological paradigm, championed by ideologist Alexander Dugin, has significantly shaped the formation of Russia's new foreign policy. He, perpetually skeptical of NATO and the West, has played a pivotal role in this ideological shift. Driven by a desire to emulate the zenith of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), Russia's ruling elites and ideologists have concentrated their efforts on restoring the image of a prestigious Russia. Consequently, since the mid-2000s, Russia has gradually deviated from its policy of normalization with the West, which had been in place since 1990, particularly in its relations with the USA and NATO. This policy shift has been predominantly championed by Putin, who succeeded Boris Yeltsin as the new Russian president.

Since the 2000s, the Russian Federation (RF) has been bolstering its influence in the "near abroad"<sup>1</sup> countries, which are considered the 'backyard' of Russia. With Vladimir Putin, Russia initially subdued the insurgent separatist republics within its borders. After securing internal political and economic stability, Putin shifted his focus to external issues involving countries within Russia's "near abroad" sphere. Consequently, the origins of Russia's attack on Ukraine can be traced back to this policy change.

The RF has also sought to establish full control over the newly independent states that emerged after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.<sup>2</sup> As a revisionist state since the early 1990s, Russia has employed various methods of subversion against its neighbors in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus.<sup>3</sup> These methods include destructive propaganda, economic and political sanctions, strategic use of migrant flows to undermine territorial sovereignty, support for secessionist movements, destabilization of political stability, coercing government changes, and, ultimately, overt invasions as part of its "near abroad" policy.<sup>45</sup>

1 Near abroad is the name of the declared Russian foreign policy, which is conceptualized as a sphere of influence and non-intervention of other countries in territory of former Soviet lands where Russian speaking people exist.

2 Sertif Demir, "The 2022 Russia-Ukraine War: Reasons And Impacts", *Bölgesel Araştırmalar Dergisi*, VI/1, 2022, p. 13.

3 Ioannis E. Kotoulas and Wolfgang Puztai, "Geopolitics of The War In Ukraine", *Foreign Affairs Institute*, p. 14

4 Demir, "The 2022 Russia-Ukraine War...", p. 13.

5 Ioannis E. Kotoulas, Wolfgang Puztai, Geopolitics of The War in Ukraine, Foreign Affairs Institute, p. 14; See further information on topic: C. Clover, *Black Wind, White Snow: The Rise of Russia's New Nationalism*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016; A. Clunan, *The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence: Aspirations, Identity and Security*

It is important to note that the RF is the only country in the world that occupies, directly or indirectly, parts of four other countries' territories by force. Specifically, Russia has occupied part of the Kuril Islands since 1945, Transnistria since 1991, Abkhazia and South Ossetia since 2008, Crimea and Donbass since 2014, and now additional territories in Ukraine since 2022.<sup>6</sup> These lands belong to Japan, Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine, respectively.

After gaining independence, Ukraine strove to become a fully sovereign country, distancing itself from Russia's sphere of influence. However, following its resurgence, Russia focused on intervening in Ukraine's domestic politics by supporting pro-Russian parties and civil society organizations in Ukraine. Russia perceives Ukrainian lands as its historical territory and considers Ukrainians to be of Russian origin, a claim Ukrainians firmly deny.

Prolonged disputes between Ukraine and Russia culminated in a hot conflict in February 2022. The war, ongoing for over two years, has had significant consequences for international politics, European security, the NATO alliance, regional issues, and warfighting strategy. Therefore, this article aims to analyze all these outcomes in detail.

The article concludes that the Russia-Ukraine war has profound effects on global and regional politics. The conflict has disrupted the post-1990s rules-based global order. The security of Europe is threatened due to Russia's forcible violation of the borders of an independent state.

To conduct this analysis, a qualitative and narrative research methodology was chosen, utilizing scholarly studies and research.

## **Understanding the road to Russian-Ukraine war**

There are many factors that account for the war between the two countries. One significant reason can be attributed to the outcomes of Western bloc policies toward Russia. In the 1990s and 2000s, the Western bloc persistently exploited Russia's weakness to expand NATO and the EU into Eastern Europe and the Balkans. This sowed seeds of resentment and anger in an isolated and fragmented Russia, sentiments that were utilized by the country's autocratic regime. It is important to note that the West also supported the Russian autocratic regime in the 1990s to oust the Communist regime.<sup>7</sup> Thus, whether intentionally or unintentionally, Western policies incited the Russian Federation (RF) to adopt aggressive policies, either in response to perceived Western humiliation or within its neighborhood sphere.

Russia has gradually overcome its period of weakness, leaving behind the economically chaotic years following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Rising prices of oil and other fossil fuels revitalized Russia. This resurgence has led Russia to persistently seek to reclaim its historical grand

*Interests*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019.

6 Kotoulas and Pusztai, "Geopolitics Of The War In Ukraine", p. 18

7 The West silently watched the tanks bombardment of Duma, Russian Parliament, when it rejected Boris Yeltsin demand in 1991. Duma heavily comprised of old regime members at that time. It is undemocratic attempt to bomb a parliament, without looking the political views of parliaments inside the building.

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state position for more than a decade. This imperialistic dream has deeply influenced Russian foreign policy. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Eurasian ideological mindset, pioneered by ideologist Aleksandr Dugin, who is skeptical of NATO and the West, has had massive implications on the formulation of new Russian foreign policy.

The Russian revisionist policy is rooted in its historical imperialist mindset. The Russian Empire has taken different forms over the centuries during the tsarist and Communist periods. On the other hand, the transition to a Western-style democracy has not fully developed in Russia due to various factors. As a result, the foundations of democratic life have not been deeply established in Russian society. Furthermore, the limited democratization attempts in the 1990s are remembered as a period of humiliation and chaos in Russia.<sup>8</sup> Democratic accountability has no place in the Kremlin's regime<sup>9</sup>, which gives Putin free rein to govern the country without any democratic checks. Consequently, unchecked political power in Russia, ruled by an autocratic leader, now utilizes foreign policy to extend his influence.

The political structure of this country has been divided and polarized between pro-Western and pro-Russian orientations since the end of the Cold War. Political struggles between these two groups culminated in the victory of the pro-Western side in 2014, which triggered Russia's aggressive and revisionist policies toward Ukraine.<sup>10</sup> These dynamics are often explained through the views of strategic competition between Russia and the West, Russia's geopolitical concerns, the protracted Russia-Ukraine disputes, and Putin's personality and ambitions.<sup>11</sup> Additional factors include the alleged restriction of rights for Russian-speaking populations in Ukraine and claims of Nazification practices by some Ukrainian paramilitary groups.

The West has largely ignored Russia's concerns about Ukraine, while promoting democracy, human rights, and neo-liberal economic policies. This stance alarmed Russian rulers and elite groups, who feared the spread of Western values into Russia. Moreover, Brzezinski's remark that "*without Ukraine, Russia ceases to be an empire*"<sup>12</sup> significantly influenced imperial-minded scholars and civil society in Russia. Fearful of increasing Western influence in Ukraine,<sup>13</sup> Russia resorted to force to control and punish Ukraine, using the pretexts of protecting Russians in Donbass and expediting de-Nazification.<sup>14</sup>

8 Russia's War in Ukraine: Myths and Lessons, p. 4.

9 Ibid., p. 5.

10 M.E. Jr. Aleprete, 'Minimizing Loss: Explaining Russian Policy: Choices during the Ukrainian Crisis', *Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* XXXIV, 2017, pp. 53-75 cited in Ioannis E. Kotoulas, Wolfgang Puzsai, *Geopolitics Of The War In Ukraine*, Foreign Affairs Institute, p. 7.

11 Demir, "The 2022 Russia-Ukraine War:..."

12 Pavel Baev, *Russia's War in Ukraine Misleading Doctrine, Misguided Strategy*, The French Institute of International Relations (IFRI), Oct 2022, p. 7

13 An Analysis of the Russia/Ukraine Conflict, 03/17/2022, HHS Cybersecurity program, <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/an-analysis-of-the-russia-ukraine-conflict.pdf>

14 Ibid.

Russia has consistently criticized American hegemony and its superpower role. However, observing a perceived American decline since 2008-2009, Russia has emphasized the necessity of global multi-polarity. Finally, witnessing the chaotic withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan in the summer of 2021, Putin might have believed that the American response to his actions in Ukraine would be limited.

Russia has never forgotten the 2014 Maiden Revolution in Ukraine, which transformed the Ukrainian state and society and brought the country closer to the West. In retaliation, Russia occupied the Crimean Peninsula and parts of eastern Ukraine in 2014.<sup>15</sup> However, these invasions did not satisfy Putin, who aspired to fully occupy Ukraine.

Since Russia did not face a strong reaction from the EU, NATO, or the US when it invaded Crimea and eastern Ukraine in 2014, a similar tepid response was expected when it launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The main reason for the West's weak response in 2014 was German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who feared that confronting Russia would disrupt energy security. Additionally, the West's participation in the 2018 World Cup, hosted by Russia, helped legitimize the occupation of Crimea and mitigated global negative perceptions to some extent.<sup>16</sup>

Before attacking Ukraine, Russia set forth several preconditions to the West, which were unacceptable. These included<sup>17</sup> guaranteeing that NATO would not expand further towards Russia's borders, nor deploy weapons near Russia; reversing the decision made at the 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit, which paved the way for Ukraine and Georgia to join NATO; securing a legally binding agreement between the US and NATO to refrain from deploying strike weapon systems near Russian borders; halting military exercises near the Russia; and renewing regular dialogue between Russia, the US, and NATO. It appeared that Russia proposed these conditions with the understanding that they would likely be rejected, as it was highly improbable that the US, NATO, and the West would agree to them.

## **Strategic Implications of Russia Ukraine War**

The war that began in February 2022 has profound implications in several ways. First, Russia's invasion of Ukraine directly challenges the Western-oriented, rule-based international order established after World War II. This conflict has fundamentally altered the global political discourse that emerged after the 1990s, as well as the core principles, norms, and values designed to prevent interstate wars. The post-1990 paradigm, which assumed that neo-liberal concepts and liberal international institutions and international laws

15 See the detailed analysis of Crimean occupation in Mehmet S. Erol, "The Ukraine-Crimea Crisis or the Second Yalta Process", *Karadeniz Arařtırmaları Merkezi*, XXXX, 2014, pp. 1-14.

16 Seevan Saeed, The Impact of the Russia-Ukraine Conflict on the Middle East: The Role of Turkey, *The Commentaries*, III/1, 2023, p. 156.

17 Russia's War in Ukraine: Myths and Lessons, Discussion Paper, Estonian Ministry of Defence, p. 9.

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would prevent wars and resolve security concerns, has been called into question. The utopian belief, advanced by neoliberal scholars in the 1990s, that wars between nations had come to an end, has been thoroughly discredited.<sup>18</sup>

In reality, this war has revived the idea of nation-states seeking territorial expansion. It is a consequence of Russia's revisionist policies, which have dragged the world back into power struggles and arms races reminiscent of the period before the two world wars. This signifies a return of geopolitics as a dominant force in global politics.

The strategic implications of this war will be analyzed under the following headings: implications on international politics, regional issues, European security, NATO expansion, and war-fighting strategy.

### ***Impact on International Politics***

Since the 1880s, the USA has been the world's predominant economic power, and since 1945, it has been the leading cultural and military power. It shaped the global political and economic landscape through the Bretton Woods agreements and the establishment of the United Nations, NATO, and other security organizations. Since World War II, the USA has been the only country with a global power projection, emerging as a superpower after 1990. The world order was designed based on neo-liberal institutionalism and interdependence theories, which posited that cooperation, mutual economic dependence and global governance would mitigate power rivalries among nation-states. This implied that global governance, led by the US, would act as a central authority over states, establishing a rule-based international order.

As the architect of the unipolar system, the USA shaped and guided global politics in line with its national interests. The prevailing idea during this period was the perpetuity of the neo-liberal economic and political order, as claimed by Francis Fukuyama in his book "The End of History." The neo-liberal order was expected to foster trust among nations through interdependence, economic and political cooperation, regional and economic integration, and the propagation of neo-liberal norms, principles, and values by international organizations and the United States. Consequently, nation-states, whose powers were restricted by global governance, where non-state actors like international organizations played a significant role, would no longer have geopolitical concerns, and wars between nations would disappear. These idealistic discourses shaped international politics. However, first of all, the US violated these principles by invading Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, and forcibly overthrowing Gaddafi in Libya and being a primary fighting power in Syria against central government.

The decline and subsequent dissolution of the Soviet Union led to the creation of the Russian Federation, viewed as the main successor to the Soviet Union. A humiliated Russia sought to re-establish its authority over for-

18 Kotoulas and Pusztai, *Geopolitics of The War In Ukraine*, Foreign Affairs Institute, p. 11.

mer Soviet territories following recovery from economic and political turmoil. As the successor to the Soviet Union, Russia aimed to regain control over these territories, including Ukraine, after its economic and political revival. The goal of the Ukrainian invasion was to reverse the perceived decline that had been ongoing since 1991.

The current intellectual advisors and influential figures shaping Russian politics possess an imperial mindset inherited from the Tsarist and Communist periods. The Eurasianist ideology, centering on the Altın Ordu (*Golden Horde*) state policy, remains a significant political discourse, though less influential than in the 2000s. Historically, democracy and its rules were not nurtured in Russia due to inherited political genes. As a federative state with many non-Russian and non-Christian societies, Russia fears that a democratic regime would lead to its disintegration. Therefore, supporters of Western-style democratic reforms are forcibly repressed.

On the other hand, Western civilization, which has guided the world for the last five hundred years, seems to be in decline due to the economic success of Asian countries. Strategic competition between global powers is now a significant phenomenon, as Asian countries, namely China and India, have achieved massive economic growth in recent decades and are challenging the global economic and political supremacy of the West.

Global politics is currently shaped by two primary blocs: the Western Bloc, led by the United States, and the Eastern Bloc, consisting of Russia, China, and North Korea. In economic terms, the BRICS countries are challenging the West's long-standing political and economic superiority, although Brazil and South Africa are less involved in security and political competition.

The trend towards multi-polarity in global politics has become increasingly evident, especially with the Russia-Ukraine war. For instance, the Eastern Bloc refused to participate in Western-initiated sanctions against Russia over its invasion of Ukraine. While BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) countries avoided providing military equipment to Russia due to fear of US sanctions, they continued their economic cooperation with Russia. China, the world's second-largest economy, refrained from providing military support to Russia to avoid the potential US sanctions but maintained economic, political, and cultural relations with Russia, helping to legitimize its invasion of Ukraine.

In conclusion, the Russia-Ukraine war has profoundly disrupted the foundations of the post-1990 global order that the United States led for more than three decades.

### ***Impact on European Security***

NATO was an essential security organization safeguarding the trans-Atlantic region during the Cold War. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Europe

was freed from Soviet pressure and threats. However, in the following years, Europe faced new types of challenges, risks, and threats that needed to be addressed. The realist discourse predominantly adhered to a state-centric perspective on security until the 1990s. However, the notion of security has undergone a transformation in response to the emergence of a new array of threats and risks. This evolution has led to the inclusion of many ‘non-traditional’ threats and risks within the idea of security. The Copenhagen School has broadened the scope of the security concept<sup>19</sup> within the framework of securitization theory to encompass not just military features but also economic, political, sociological, and environmental dimensions.<sup>20</sup>

NATO and the EU Common Defense and Security Initiative were combating these risks and threats. Despite these new challenges and threats, there were no conventional threats to invade Europe as there were during the Cold War. The EU has integrated the security concerns of its member states, and for the first time in its history, Europe has been free from the wars and conflicts that plagued the continent in past ages.

The EU and NATO expanded into Eastern Europe and the Balkans to ensure the security of Europe after the Cold War. Except for Ukraine and Serbia, former Warsaw Pact members and the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union became members of the EU and NATO. Given these facts, the traditional military threat to Europe had disappeared until Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Russia’s attempt to invade Ukraine posed a direct military threat to European security, as it sought to forcibly change the borders of an independent state, which is no longer acceptable in the globalized world. This situation prompted the EU and NATO to start increasing their defense spending. Germany, which had limited its military power to self-defense, allocated 100 billion Euros to increase its defense capacity. This has started an arms race similar to the one in Europe before the two world wars.

The war has underscored the importance of certain countries in terms of providing support to Ukraine and hosting Ukrainian refugees. For example, Poland has been a pioneer in providing military aid to Ukraine and has hosted a significant number of Ukrainian refugees.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, Poland has facilitated the purchase of American military assets and their delivery to Ukraine, as the US seeks to avoid direct confrontation with Russia.

- 19 Sertif Demir and Muzaffer E. Yılmaz, “An Analysis of the Impact of the Syrian Crisis on Turkey’s Politic-Military, Social and Economic Security”, *Gazi Akademik Bakış* XIII/26, 2020, 1-19.
- 20 Barry Buzan, “The English School: A Neglected Approach to International Security Studies”, *Security Dialogue* XLIV/2, 2015, 126-143; Demir and Yılmaz, “An Analysis of the Impact of the Syrian Crisis on Turkey’s Politic-Military, Social and Economic Security”, 1-19; Sertif Demir and B. Alper Dalmis, “NATO’ s Historical challenges and Crises”, *Codrul Cosminului*, XVIII/1, 2022, 203-228
- 21 Mehmet Seyfettin Erol, Dogacan Başaran, “Rusya-Ukrayna Savaşı Bağlamında Polonya’nın Artan Jeopolitik Önemi- *The Increasing Geopolitical Importance of Poland in the Context of the Russia-Ukraine War*”, *Uluslararası Kriz ve Siyaset Araştırmaları Dergisi*, VI/1, 2022, pp. 13-39



As a matter of fact, treaties aimed at creating confidence-building measures signed between the Soviet Union or its successor, the Russian Federation, and the USA or NATO members just before or after the end of the Cold War were revoked one by one. For example, Russia officially withdrew from the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) of 1990, which restricted conventional forces in Europe.<sup>22</sup> Russia also annulled its approval of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and withdrew from the Open Skies arms control treaty, which permitted unarmed surveillance flights over member countries.<sup>23</sup>

On the other hand, during the first Trump presidency, in 2019, the US formally annulled the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty), signed in 1987 between Washington and Moscow, based on the claim that Russia did not comply with the treaty by developing and deploying new cruise missiles and that China was not a signatory to the treaty.<sup>24</sup> These examples highlight the lack of trust between the Russian Federation and the US. Furthermore, the Russia-Ukraine war has also been a major factor that increased distrust between the parties.

It is clear that the conflict has triggered a new arms race reminiscent of the 1930s, just before World War II. To list a few developments: Washington has sped up arms production to replenish the stocks sent to Ukraine; Paris plans to increase its military expenditures by a third by 2030; Berlin lifted its long-standing restriction on deploying weapons to conflict areas; Moscow increased its army strength from 1 million to 1.5 million through new mobilizations;<sup>25</sup> and Germany allocated 100 billion Euros to increase its defense capacity.

On the other hand, EU countries, especially Germany, were dependent on Russian gas for energy provision. Russia leveraged its energy resources against the EU to discourage intervention in the war. The EU has tried to diversify its energy sources by shifting gas imports from Russia to other countries, reopening nuclear energy plants, utilizing alternative renewable energies, and returning to coal usage. The EU's decreased energy imports from Russia have reduced Russia's energy income, which could also be used to support its political leverage.<sup>26</sup>

In summary, the invasion of Ukraine expedited the distrust between the West and Russia, leading to the complete annulment of the confidence-building environment established after the 1990s that helped sustain a conflict-free period in Europe.<sup>27</sup>

22 Burc Eruygur, Russia formally withdraws from Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, 07/11/2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/russia-formally-withdraws-from-treaty-on-conventional-armed-forces-in-europe/>.

23 Benoît Vitkine, "Russia withdraws from two arms treaties and tests a ballistic missile", *Le Monde*. November 9, 2023,

24 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intermediate-Range\\_Nuclear\\_Forces\\_Treaty](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intermediate-Range_Nuclear_Forces_Treaty).

25 Jill Lawless, "Global impact: 5 ways war in Ukraine has changed the World", 22 Feb 2023

26 Brian Michael Jenkins, *Consequences of the War in Ukraine: The Economic Fallout*, Rand Cooperation, March 7, 2023

27 Ibid.

## ***Impact on NATO Alliance***

Considering that NATO emerged after World War II in response to Soviet aggression against Europe, there were arguments that NATO was no longer needed following the dissolution of the Soviet bloc in 1990. However, NATO endured as new threats and risks had the potential to destabilize Europe as a whole.

Almost twenty years later, NATO was again a subject of debate regarding its feasibility and usefulness. This debate intensified when Trump described NATO as “obsolete” in his first term and French President Macron declared that NATO was experiencing “brain death.”<sup>28</sup> These statements were internal threats to NATO’s unity rather than external ones. Russian President Putin may have believed that NATO’s response to his actions in Ukraine would be limited due to its internal divisions and weaknesses.<sup>29</sup>

However, two significant developments seem to have resolved the debate about NATO’s internal coherence: Biden’s presidency in January 2021 and Russia’s attack on Ukraine in 2022.<sup>30</sup> Russia’s aggression towards Ukraine has reshaped NATO’s role and importance in European security. With Putin aiming to build a “new Soviet-style empire,” it is indisputable that no European country will be safe without NATO protection.

Moreover, the Russia-Ukraine war has triggered NATO expansion. The United States and its close ally Britain saw Russia’s invasion of Ukraine as an opportunity to extend NATO’s reach eastward. Sweden and Finland, historically neutral countries, perceived Russia as a significant threat and sought NATO membership.<sup>31</sup> Finland has since joined NATO, and Sweden’s membership is forthcoming, further extending NATO’s borders with Russia. Ironically, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, intended to prevent NATO expansion, has led to the alliance’s growth and increased the potential for Ukraine’s future NATO membership.

President Putin hoped the invasion would divide the West and weaken NATO. Instead, the military alliance was revitalized. NATO united against Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, with all members except Türkiye (due to its economic and historical ties with Russia and Ukraine) and Hungary (due to its government’s closeness to Putin) and supported the Ukrainian Army’s defense capabilities.

NATO has been providing multinational training to the Ukrainian Armed Forces through the NATO-Ukraine Comprehensive Assistance Package. The Ukrainian army achieved the status of NATO Enhanced Opportunities Partner after passing NATO inspections. Additionally, the command and control system of the Ukrainian Army was fundamentally transformed

28 Demir and Dalmis, “NATO’s Historical Challenges”.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

to align with NATO Command Structures.<sup>32</sup> Ukraine's successful resistance against Russian attacks can be attributed to this new command and control logic as well as military assistance provided by NATO and individual nations. Thus, Ukraine's unexpected resilience thwarted Russia's ambitions. The war demonstrates that Russia's rhetoric does not translate into the realization of its goals.

Ultimately, NATO's consistency and reliability were tested during the Russia-Ukraine war. The alliance passed this test, and its members' commitment to NATO was strengthened and solidified. However, it remains highly debatable whether this thesis will hold after January 20, 2025, during the second term of Donald Trump, who is notably skeptical of NATO.

### ***Impact on Regional Issues***

In the 1990s, Russia faced internal conflicts among various sub-groups and uprisings against the central authority as they sought independence. After recovering from economic and political chaos, Russia focused on suppressing internal unrest with harsh measures. Under Putin's leadership, Russia announced its "near abroad policy," aimed at expanding Russian influence in former Soviet territories. This included initiating new economic, political, and military organizations within its sphere of influence, leveraging the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which replaced the Soviet Union. For example, the Eurasian Economic Community (EAC) was established and later replaced by the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), an economic union of five former Soviet states. Similarly, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) was formed in 2002 as a military alliance of six former Soviet states.

The war in Ukraine has also altered the dynamics of Russia's "near abroad" policy in the Black Sea region, the Balkans, the Caucasus, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia.<sup>33</sup> Countries within this policy's scope are concerned about Russia's aggressive actions against Ukraine. The invasion of an independent state has alarmed other countries about potential Russian aggression towards them in the future, especially since there are significant populations of Russian origin in every country that emerged from the former Soviet Union. Russia can exploit these populations to expand its influence, destabilizing the countries within its "near abroad" policy.<sup>34</sup>

After the war began, some countries, such as Kazakhstan and Armenia, restricted their cooperation with the Russian Federation. The Armenian Parliament approved membership in the Rome International Criminal Court (ICC), which has recognized human rights violations by Russian forces, with Putin as the main culprit. He must be arrested by any ICC member country if he is within their borders, causing friction between Russia and the

32 Kotoulas and Pusztai, *Geopolitics of The War in Ukraine*, p. 50.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid, p. 14

pro-Western Armenian administration. However, Armenia's Constitutional Court annulled the Parliament's decision, indicating Russia's influence over Armenian state organs.

Armenia's decisions were influenced by Russia's stance in the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflicts in 2020 and 2023, revealing Russia's unwillingness to use force to support Armenia, a CSTO member. The main issue is that Nagorno-Karabakh is Azerbaijani territory, occupied by Armenia in 1991, meaning the CSTO has no right to intervene. Putin stated that there is no threat to Armenian lands, as the conflict is within Nagorno-Karabakh. Furthermore, Armenia initiated the conflicts in 2020 and 2023, making its claims unfounded.

Meanwhile, Russia's military capacity is weakened due to its engagement in Ukraine, limiting its ability to intervene in other conflicts. These indicate that Moscow's military and political weakness is becoming increasingly evident.<sup>35</sup> Kazakhstan has reduced relations with Russia and increased anti-Russification policies. Other former Soviet states like Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan maintain close relations with Russia but refrain from directly criticizing it for the invasion of Ukraine.

China, fearing US sanctions, has refrained from providing military aid to Russia but has not criticized Putin or the war. Both nations have exchanged visits during the conflict.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO),<sup>36</sup> a powerful regional organization, is expanding but remains neutral in the Ukraine war. None of its members participated in US, NATO, and EU sanctions against Russia. However, Russia wants to strengthen its influence over the SCO and leverage it to gain support for its actions in Ukraine. But, the SCO focuses on combating terrorism, separatism, and radicalism, and promoting trade, political, and cultural cooperation. Influential members like China and India avoid involving the SCO in the Russia-Ukraine war.

Russia has also increased its influence in Africa through substantial financial investments and military aid, including the deployment of Wagner mercenaries. Although some African countries maintain strong relations with Russia are unwilling to be part of the war in Ukraine.<sup>37</sup>

## ***The Protracted Russia-Ukraine War: Implications for Modern Warfare***

The protracted Russia-Ukraine war has had profound effects on war tactics

35 Emil A. Souleimanov and Yury Fedorov, "The War in Ukraine: Risks and Opportunities For the 'Post-Soviet South'", *Middle East Policy* XXX, 2023, p. 97-98.

36 See for the SCO in detail: Sertif Demir and Ayca Eminoglu, "Küresel Rekabetin Karşılaşılmalı Bir Analizi: Kuzey Atlantik Antlaşması Örgütü (NATO) Ve Şangay İşbirliği Örgütü (ŞİÖ)- A Comparative Analysis Of Global Competition: North Atlantic Treaty Organization And Shanghai Cooperation Organization, *Erciyes Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi* LII, 2018, pp. 115-142.

37 Kotoulas and Pusztai, *Geopolitics of The War in Ukraine*, p. 38.

and strategy. To analyze these implications, it is crucial to understand the Russian Armed Forces' (RAF) concept, particularly its adoption of the hybrid warfare doctrine articulated by former Russian Chief of General Staff General Valery Gerasimov. The "Gerasimov doctrine" or "hybrid warfare doctrine" involves achieving political objectives through predominantly non-military means—such as information warfare, cyber-attacks, diplomacy, and economic pressure—combined with limited or indirect use of conventional forces.<sup>38</sup> This approach was partially successful during the 2014 annexation of Crimea.

The RAF has learned lessons from the wars of the last three decades, including the role of air forces in the invasions of Iraq in 1991 and 2003, America's invasion of Afghanistan from 2001 to 2021, and Russian war tactics in the Syrian crisis since 2014. These conflicts demonstrated the significant role of air power in warfare. However, air power was successful in these wars primarily because the opposing forces lacked sufficient air defense capabilities and did not pose a threat to the bases of American or Russian air elements. Consequently, air forces operated in areas largely free from significant threats.

This study focuses on the important lessons learned from the Russia-Ukraine war for future force structure and warfighting principles. While it does not delve into the RAF's strategic, operational, and tactical failures, it is essential to highlight the strategic reasons for these failures. These include strategic inconsistencies between Putin and the command group, the use of heavy conventional forces without adequate air support, initiating the war under unsuitable geographical conditions, lack of coordination among various land force groups, applying war techniques suited for desert regions to densely forested and muddy terrain, underestimating the Ukrainians' will to defend their homeland, failing to consider Western support for the Ukrainian Army post-2014, and being unprepared for a prolonged conflict. Ultimately, Russia's failures in the war with Ukraine were due to poor planning.<sup>39</sup>

### *Hybrid warfare*

One of the major lessons learned in the Russia-Ukraine War pertains to hybrid warfare.<sup>40</sup> The RAF has been employing hybrid warfare tactics against the Ukrainian Army, utilizing the Wagner Group, officially known as Private Military Company (PMC)-legionary private forces, in the Donbass region since May 2014. The Wagner Group played a significant role in the annexation of Crimea through

38 Tetyana Malyarenko & Borys Kormych, "The Barbarism of Hybrid Warfare", March 17, 2022, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/barbarism-hybrid-warfare>

39 Bradley Martin, Sean Barnett, Devin Mccarthy, *Russian Logistics and Sustainment Failures in the Ukraine Conflict*, RAND, January 1, 2023

40 See the detail information about Hybrid war and it implementation in Crimean occupation in Mehmet Seyfettin Erol - Şafak Oğuz, "Hybrid Warfare Studies and Russia's Example in Crimea", *Gazi Akademik Bakış*, IX/17, 2015, pp. 261-277.

subversive actions. Recognizing this, Ukraine's military leadership, along with the US and NATO, have closely studied Russia's hybrid warfare strategies to counteract them effectively.

While hybrid warfare appears successful in principle, its long-term efficacy remains uncertain. In June 2023, the Wagner Group rebelled against the RAF central authority, putting Putin's government in a precarious position. They rejected the central command and control structure and continued to fight independently. Despite their battlefield successes, the RAF top brass distrusted the Wagner Group's semi-autonomous actions.<sup>41</sup>

A key legal issue with hybrid warfare is the denial of responsibility by actors for their operations, attempting to evade legal consequences.<sup>42</sup> The Wagner Group, as a legionnaires' group, operates without the RAF accepting responsibility for its actions. This raises the question of accountability for war crimes committed by Wagner forces in Ukraine. Hybrid warfare, therefore, inherently violates international and national laws, including humanitarian protections for non-combatants. Adhering to the rules of war is essential for all warring parties.

#### *Role of UAVs and Satellites*

Another major lesson from the Russia-Ukraine War concerns the use of satellites and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).<sup>43</sup> UAVs have proven essential across all military branches and at every echelon, particularly for land forces. They are emerging as highly capable combat tools for future operations. The current conflict in Ukraine and the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict in 2020 have demonstrated the profound impact of drones can have on achieving decisive victories. For instance, satellite target detection and high-precision drone attacks significantly delayed the forward movement of the Russian army, halting progress in some areas. Given their effectiveness, UAVs must be integrated organically into military units to enhance situational awareness and target acquisition.<sup>44</sup> However, UAVs are highly susceptible to enemy counterattacks. In the Russia-Ukraine War, 90% of the UAVs employed were lost.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, UAVs must be both inexpensive and easily attainable to ensure sustainability in prolonged conflicts.

#### *Configuration of Maneuver Groups*

The configuration of maneuver groups must be designed according to the specific characteristics of the battle, terrain, and weather. This is a key lesson from the Russia-Ukraine War. Although supported by combat and combat service support, each maneuver group must be equipped with sufficient combat manpower. The RAF was restructured after the 1990s to reflect the needs of modern warfare, shifting from the Cold War division-regiment-battalion command and control design to a brigade-battalion design. Each battalion group was designed to inc-

41 Baev, *Russia's War in Ukraine Misleading Doctrine, Misguided Strategy*, p. 10.

42 Malyarenko & Kormych, "The Barbarism of Hybrid Warfare".

43 Mykhaylo Zabrodskyi, Jack Watling, Oleksandr V Danylyuk and Nick Reynolds, *Preliminary Lessons in Conventional Warfighting from Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: February–July 2022*, RUSI, 2022, p. 2.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

lude combat, combat support, and combat service support elements.<sup>46</sup> Typically, a battalion group consists of maneuver, artillery, air defense, electronic warfare, and logistics units. However, within this structure, only about 200 out of 800 personnel are infantrymen directly engaging the counter-part.<sup>47</sup> This limited combat power within each battalion group has proven problematic.

Battalion groups were designed for fluid battlefields requiring superior mobility, making them unsuitable for performing key tasks in more static or defensive scenarios.<sup>48</sup> Russian strategy traditionally envisioned these battalion groups for offensive operations.<sup>49</sup> When the Russian advance halted and the conflict shifted to a more defensive posture, these battalion groups proved ineffective.<sup>50</sup> This highlights the need for a more adaptable and versatile force structure that can operate effectively in both offensive and defensive roles.

#### *Air Defense Capability*

The war reveals that air defense capability is crucial in current and future operations. Russia, having seen the role of air power in Middle East operations, relied heavily on air power and high-precision weapons. Consequently, at the beginning of the war, they underestimated Ukraine's air defense capability, which was bolstered by support from the USA and NATO.

Ukraine's air defense force was used very efficiently, significantly reducing the impact of Russian air force attacks. This hindered Russia's ability to dominate airspace, resulting in most strikes being delivered from high altitudes with low precision. Additionally, the number of sorties was too low to make a significant impact, and close air support for advancing units was effectively non-existent.<sup>51</sup> This miscalculation underscores the importance of robust air defense systems in modern warfare.

#### *Artillery*

The conflict has underscored the crucial role of artillery. Currently, the battle has transformed into an artillery war, with both sides entrenched. This situation is reminiscent of the battles between Nazi and Soviet forces in World War II. The side with more artillery guns and the ability to supply artillery ammunition holds a significant advantage in winning the war. It's worth noting that Ukraine thwarted Russia's attempt to seize Kyiv by countering with massive fires from two artillery brigades.<sup>52</sup>

Additionally, the heavy reliance on artillery has resulted in a shortage of ammunition for both warring sides. While Russia seeks to obtain artillery ammunition, notably from North Korea, Ukraine primarily relies on U.S. artillery stockpiles. The U.S. is urgently working to replenish its depleted stockpiles through NATO allies.

46 Baev, *Russia's War in Ukraine Misleading Doctrine, Misguided Strategy*, p. 16-17.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid, p. 13.

52 Zabrodskyi, et. al., *Preliminary Lessons in Conventional Warfighting from Russia's Invasion of Ukraine*, p. 2.

### *Strategic Stockpiles*

In modern warfare, there is no safe haven for protecting war assets such as ammunition or weaponry. The enemy can strike across the entire operational area. Survival depends on dispersing all war weaponry, equipment, and stocks during conflict. Ukraine effectively evaded Russia's initial wave of strikes by dispersing its arsenals, aircraft, and components of its air defences.<sup>53</sup> As the destructiveness and detection capacity of war assets and weapons increased with technological progress, dispersing stockpiles across the country appears to be the best course of action.

### *Humanitarian and Material Costs*

The Russian-Ukraine war has evolved into a war of attrition, with each side attempting to wear down and outlast the other.<sup>54</sup> This attrition has led to significant casualties, depletion of equipment, ammunition, and supplies, placing a heavy burden on both parties.<sup>55</sup> Consequently, Russia and Ukraine are focused on reconstituting units and rotating forces on the frontlines, revealing the critical importance of strategic stockpiles.<sup>56</sup> Given the prolonged production timelines for modern high-tech ammunition and equipment, maintaining these stockpiles is crucial.<sup>57</sup>

In addition to triggering a humanitarian crisis unseen in Europe since World War II, the conflict has resulted in immense material and human losses for both sides. For instance, Russia has reportedly suffered substantial casualties, with US intelligence estimating an 87% loss of troops, translating to 315,000 out of 360,000 pre-invasion ground forces. Besides, Russia also lost 2,200 of 3,500 tanks; 4,400 of 13,600 infantry fighting vehicles and armored personnel, meaning a 32 percent loss rate.<sup>58</sup> In order to maintain a steady supply of human resources, Putin approached North Korea for military personnel support to sustain the war. Similarly, Ukraine has also suffered significant losses. Ukraine's personnel resources are insufficient to sustain the war, which has put the country in a difficult position since the conflict began. The depletion of young soldiers in the Ukrainian army is difficult to replenish due to lack of enough young population.

From now on, military expertise should revise casualty and attrition rates in wars based on the experiences of World War II, as the destructiveness of weapons has increased with technological progress.

### *Electronic Warfare and Detection*

The war demonstrates that possessing advanced sensor-based tech-

53 Ibid.

54 Russia's War in Ukraine: Military and Intelligence Aspects Congressional Research Service <https://crsreports.congress.gov>, R47068, Updated Sep 2023

55 John Q. Bolton, "The More Things Change", *Military Review Online Exclusive*, July 2023, p. 1.

56 "Russia's War in Ukraine: Military and Intelligence Aspects Congressional Research Service", <https://crsreports.congress.gov>, R47068, Updated Sep 2023

57 Bolton, "The More Things Change", p. 1.

58 Katie Bo Lillis, "Russia has lost 87% of troops it had prior to start of Ukraine war...", CNN, Wed December 13, 2023.



nologies, electronic warfare capabilities, and UAVs, along with access to satellite imagery, provides a strategic advantage. Electronic detection will be crucial in future operations for locating enemy command centers and critical bases.

The Russia-Ukraine War underscores the significance of sensor-based technologies, electronic warfare, and unmanned aerial systems. Access to satellite imagery and the ability to detect small electronic signatures can provide a decisive advantage in identifying enemy command centers, ammunition depots, and other critical bases.<sup>59</sup> Electronic detection capabilities will likely play a pivotal role in future military operations.

## Conclusion

The Russia-Ukraine war has profound effects on global and regional politics, strategic warfare, and European security. It represents a direct challenge to the Western-oriented, rule-based international order established after World War II, reviving the notion of nation-states seeking territorial expansion. This has led to a renewed focus on geopolitics and an arms race reminiscent of the pre-World War eras.

The security of Europe is threatened by Russia's violation of an independent state's borders, prompting NATO to strengthen under US leadership. European countries are prioritizing their defense capabilities to deter future threats from Russia. The role of artillery, UAVs, air defense, and electronic detection tools in modern warfare has increased significantly.

Despite the conflict, the possession of nuclear weapons by Russia and the US has deterred escalation and confrontation between them.<sup>60</sup> The war has showcased Ukrainian resilience and determination, fundamentally altering post-1990s global political discourse and emphasizing the importance of strategic preparedness and technological superiority in modern warfare.

Although American policy is not the focus of this paper, it is clear that there will be a significant difference in how Biden and Trump approach the Ukraine-Russia war and its trajectory. After assuming office on January 20, 2025, Trump is likely to reduce American military support for Ukraine. Additionally, given his close ties with Putin, Trump could serve as a moderating influence between the two countries, potentially altering the course of the war in ways that would create unfavorable conditions for Ukraine. This underscores the importance of leadership transitions in shaping international relations and conflict outcomes.

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