

## **The Effects of the Perpetuation of the War in Ukraine on International Competition between Russia and the United States**

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### **Abstract**

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, followed by widespread Western sanctions led by Washington against Moscow, marked the beginning of a new phase of conflict between the United States and Russia along parallel and complementary fronts. Despite some initial success, Russia's military advancements were met with numerous setbacks. Moscow has not only failed to meet its minimum war objectives more than a year after the conflict began but also risks losing its military gains. This article argues that since prolonging the war and thereby weakening Moscow is in the US interest, it is logical for the US and NATO to equip the Ukrainian army and help it resist Russia's advance, as well as support and encourage Kyiv not to surrender and continue the war to retake the separated areas. This extension of the war of attrition is necessary in order to give the economic front of the war against Moscow the time it needs to become effective. Simultaneously, the war has led to a closer relationship between Europe and the United States in the shadow of the Russian threat, the comprehensive, resolute, and continuous support of the entire Western camp to Ukraine, the justification of America's military presence on European soil, and the consolidation of NATO's identity. According to the article's argument, these factors suggest that the war will gradually erode Russia's international standing and influence over time.

**Keywords:** Ukraine War, US-Russia Relations, NATO, Russian Foreign Policy, Arms Race.

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## **Introduction**

Russia's attack on Ukraine on February 24, 2022, marked the beginning of the war in Ukraine (Ellyat, 2022). Prior to the war and for the first few weeks after the start of the war, many analysts predicted a swift Russian victory. Statistics relating to the equipment and military power of the Russian army as the second or at least one of the three best armies in the world compared to the Ukrainian army explain, at least on paper, the prevalence of this analysis (O'Brien, 2022).

Russia, as a nuclear and missile superpower with an extensive ground force equipped with the best types of tanks and a legacy of the former Soviet Union, was about to regain its previous position after approximately three decades as one of the two main poles of the Cold War against the United States. A military superpower in the post-World War II era and the United States and NATO's greatest rival, or, in other words, the justification or primary reason for the formation and existence of NATO.

In 2008, the attack and siege of Tskhinvali and the support of the separatists of Abkhazia and South Ossetia against Georgia marked the beginning of the resurgence of Russian geopolitics in the era following the fall of the Soviet Union (Rezvani, 2020). Moscow was alarmed by the rose revolutions of Georgia (November 2003) and the orange revolutions of Ukraine (November 22, 2004, to January 23, 2005), (Mitchell, 2010) as well as the establishment of pro-Western governments in some CIS countries and the threat of NATO expansion to the East in the strategic regions of the former Soviet Union. The issue of Georgia and Ukraine's membership in NATO and the threat of Western military forces, especially American ones, being deployed on Russia's western and southwestern borders, along the Black Sea and the Caucasus, were not easily manageable for Russia (Rezvani, 2020). This is why Russia and the United States' influence and political competition in Ukraine increased dramatically (Cordesman, 2014).

In 2010, with the inauguration of Viktor Yanukovich's government in Ukraine, (Feifer, 2010) Russification (Arel, 2017-2018) and lack of closeness to the United States and NATO returned to the country's policy. In 2014, however, the influence of the United States and Western-oriented Ukrainian currents prevailed over the influence of Russia and the pro-Russian government of Ukraine, and a second

pseudo-revolution toward turning to the West occurred. But this time, the Kremlin's response was different than in 2004 (Milne, 2014).

Prior to the aforementioned occurrences, in 2002, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia were among the countries invited to the NATO summit in Prague, and on March 29, 2004, they became official members of the NATO alliance. The year 2004 witnessed the largest expansion wave in NATO's history since its inception (Gallis, 2005). In this wave, the three newly independent countries of the Baltic region, which until less than 15 years earlier had been part of the Soviet Union and ruled by Moscow, also joined NATO, thereby establishing NATO's presence on the territory of the former Soviet Union. Obviously, this expansion of NATO towards the East and Russia's borders was not welcomed by the Kremlin, but there was no Russian response at the time (Banka, 2019). A decade later, in 2014, things had changed.

With Russia's invasion and occupation of the Crimean peninsula in 2014, relations between Russia and the West in the post-Cold War era entered a new phase. This event was, without a doubt, a significant turning point in the history of international relations in the twenty-first century. Although the newly established and weak government of Ukraine did not show any particular resistance and the Obama administration neither provided special assistance nor pursued a serious political confrontation with the Kremlin, sanctions were activated against Moscow, although they were not comparable to what was done eight years later in Georgia. In the recent conflict, in addition to a full-scale sanctions campaign against Moscow, the United States and other NATO members have provided unprecedented assistance to the Ukrainian army in an effort to halt the Russian army's westward advance. These aids have included the shipment of arms, monetary assistance, and military advice (Collins & Sobchak, 2023).

The primary question of the article is, given the evidence of the war's extension, which of the two following analyses is correct? With the prolongation of the Ukraine war, it is believed that Russia's relative power will increase against the Western superpower, i.e., the United States and that the international system will enter a new era in which the current order will be disrupted and a multipolar system will be formed as a result of Russia's rise and the United States' decline. Or that the continuation of the war in Ukraine will gradually erode Russia's

strength and position in the international system, thereby benefiting the United States. This article argues that the second analysis is correct, namely that Russia's relative power will diminish as the war drags on, and Ukraine will play a similar role for Putin's Russia as Afghanistan did for the Soviet Union.

In the next section, the causes and contexts of the start of the Ukrainian war in 2022 will be examined. This will show why the Ukrainian war is likely to be prolonged under current circumstances. In the subsequent sections, we will examine the effects of this prolongation, which demonstrates why this paper's argument is accurate.

### **The Causes of the War in Ukraine**

The commitment of the Americans not to expand NATO to the East even one step after the fall of the Berlin Wall is one of the points emphasized by the Russians, who believe the Americans have broken their word and pushed NATO to the East and toward Russia's borders.

US Secretary of State James Baker met with Shevardnadze and Gorbachev in Moscow on February 9, 1990, to discuss German unification. Baker assured Gorbachev, according to the National Security Archives and historian Jeff Engel that NATO would not expand "one inch eastward." Baker claims in the documentary film *Statecraft* that he never made this promise to Gorbachev, as evidenced by the Soviet Union's signed agreement. The agreement was limited to the deployment of NATO troops in the former East Germany. In an interview in 2014, Gorbachev validated Baker's account (Engel, n.d.).

In 2004, fourteen years later, the atmosphere was diametrically opposed to that of February 1990. In both instances, Russia was in a weak position and faced internal political and economic challenges, but the United States relative power had greatly increased. In February 1990 (approximately four months after the fall of the Berlin Wall and approximately one year prior to the dissolution of the Soviet Union), the Soviet Union remained a nuclear power. During the conflicts of the 1990s, the newly independent nations were still protected by the Red Army and governed by former communist politicians and officials. But the 2000s was the American harvest period (Office of the Historian, Foreign Service Institute, n.d.).

More than a decade of political and economic developments in Russia and other independent nations of the former Warsaw Pact (1955-1991) had strengthened the foothold of Western trends in these countries, and liberalization and democratization had been successful in these societies to some extent. Pro-Western currents and the public's support for them had weakened pro-Russian currents. With the change of political and economic systems and the discussion of the membership of the former Eastern Bloc nations in the European Union and its occurrence in the late 1990s and early 2000s, it was time for the expansion of NATO, along with the preparation of the political-social fields (Milne, 2014). Despite its political, social, and economic weakness, the United States never ignored the threat posed by a nuclear Russia with long-range missiles capable of carrying nuclear weapons, as evidenced by its determination to expand NATO in the midst of a crisis in defining the reason for its existence.

America's geopolitical superiority over its former rival in the world reached its zenith with the expansion of NATO towards Russia's borders in the Baltic region and along the western shores of the Black Sea in 2004 when Romania and Bulgaria joined NATO simultaneously with the three Baltic states (Gallis, 2005). Putin reacted differently to the threat of NATO entering Ukraine, the Caucasus, and even Central Asia in the wake of the three color revolutions; Ukraine's orange, Georgia's rose, and Kyrgyzstan's Tulip Rev (March 22 to April 11, 2005) (Olcott, 2005) and Russia's pseudo-encirclement. Putin, who was not yet firmly in power in his current form and, on the one hand, was in competition with his opposition and powerful oligarchs after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and, on the other hand, was the heir of a weak and economically and socially challenged Russia inherited from the Yeltsin era (1991-1999), chose interaction with the United States over confrontation.

During the first two terms of his presidency, Putin's top priorities were to weaken or eliminate domestic political rivals and expand Russia's economic capabilities abroad. Russia was able to join the group of eight industrialized nations and is now ranked among the world's top 10 economic powers, having joined the group of eight industrialized nations and experiencing economic growth (The World Bank, 2011). Without a doubt, Russia would not have made such progress in the first

decade of the 21st century if it had been in direct conflict with or had no interaction with the United States. This issue may have created a deterrent against the United States due to Russia's nuclear and military power, but the Russians' primary objective at the time was to overcome social poverty and restore economic growth. Putin's policy, however, had a justification for not being judged against national pride and for emphasizing Russia's interests through a pacifist approach.

Since the 1990s, the United States has led the world in a unipolar order, which contributed to the aforementioned circumstances. The atmosphere after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks also contributed to these circumstances. In the 1990s and following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, analysts and politicians gradually began to question NATO's *raison d'être*. (Brookings Institution, 2001) After NATO's direct military intervention in the Balkans in the aftermath of the Yugoslav civil wars (the attack on Serbia during the Kosovo War) and the relative stabilization of newly independent countries in parts of the former Yugoslavia, (Mandelbaum, 1999) there was no longer the slightest justification for the continuation of the NATO agreement and the presence of EUCOM forces (US Central Command in Europe). Russia had become so weak and self-absorbed that NATO, led by the United States, could no longer justify its mission to confront it as a threat. After September 11, however, the United States redefined its global mission as the fight against terrorism, thereby redefining NATO's role in the early 21st century. The 2001 American and NATO attack on Afghanistan marked the beginning of this new season (Hoehn & Harting, 2010).

Putin linked the interaction with the United States to the threats to Russia's internal security, such as separatists and fundamentalists in Chechnya (Trenin, 2003). An explanation they later used for their 2015 military presence in Syria (Allison, 2013) (Takhshid & Shoja, 2018). In this new era, the Russian Federation joined the United States-led global plan to combat terrorism. The challenge of Islamic fundamentalism has persisted for the Russians since the Afghanistan war, with the mass transfer of Salafi fighters from Afghanistan to Chechnya during the Chechen independence war. The fact that Afghanistan was not a top priority for Moscow at the time made Moscow less sensitive to NATO's

presence there. Obviously, the Baltic countries and the Black Sea region were of higher concern (Trenin, 2003).

Putin proposed Russia's membership in NATO in order to eliminate the threat posed by this alliance, citing the need to support the alliance's new mission. Putin proposal was rejected by NATO (Rankin, 2021). In this manner, Russia, which was able to recover within eight years, gradually placed itself on the path of confrontation with the NATO expansion plan, from the 2008 war in Georgia to Russia's serious return to power confrontation with the United States since 2014; attacking a part of Ukraine and occupying the strategic peninsula of Crimea.

This unprecedented display of Russian power since the fall of the Soviet Union was Moscow's response to the velvet revolution in Ukraine and the overthrow of its government (Viktor Yanukovich's government) in this country. Even with the membership of its three neighboring countries (the Baltic region) in NATO, this response was in no way comparable to Moscow's response under Putin's command during the Orange Revolution in Ukraine a decade earlier. In this way, the 2014 conflict between Russia and the West in Ukraine, which was accompanied by Russia's complete success in the geopolitical, if not political, issue and the retreat of the West under the leadership of the United States, marked a new beginning in international relations. The West's response in this instance was limited to commercial and economic sanctions against Russia and the country's expulsion from the G8 group, neither of which had a significant impact on Moscow's resolve to pursue its new course. Perhaps the primary reason was that the Obama administration's responses and sanctions in 2014 were unable to significantly weaken Russia's global standing (Collins & Sobchak, 2023).

Since 2014, Moscow's offensive concepts have replaced its previous passive strategies based on weakness and defensive realism. Similar to the ideologies proposed in the theory of Putin's advisor, Alexander Dugin, the doctrine of Eurasianism, which had gradually developed over the course of the previous two decades, became the official ideology of Russia. The unification of Eurasian peoples under Moscow's rule, the redefinition of Russian identity from a nationalistic perspective, and the prioritization of geopolitical strategies as a part of this historical identity are among the characteristics of this ideology,

which has its origins in the country's past. This ideology seeks to preserve the historical identity of Russia and oppose Western liberal democracy, the United States, and NATO. In the post-Soviet era, Moscow escaped Russia's humiliation at the hands of the West, particularly the United States (Shekhovtsov, 2009). This can be viewed as the beginning of a new season of international relations competition between Russia and the United States.

After the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Russia's geopolitical presence in its non-border regions expanded in ways not seen since the Soviet era and the Afghanistan war of the 1980s. Since 2015, the most prominent example of this was the Russian military presence in the Syrian civil war. Also, one year after the Crimean crisis, the conflict between the United States and NATO spread to more remote regions, such as the Eastern Mediterranean. The relative success of Russia in Syria in maintaining its dependent political system and its naval base in the port of Tartus in the eastern Mediterranean against NATO's goal of overthrowing the Assad government has led to the emergence of a new relative military power for Russia in the world, complementing its successes in annexing the strategic peninsula of Crimea (Stent, 2016). Beginning in 2018, Russia and Iran's success in the Syrian war was nearly complete (Borshchevskaya, 2022). On the other hand, the political challenge of Ukraine and Western control over this country continued, as did the government's support for anti-Russian nationalist groups that began in 2014. When Volodymyr Zelensky's government took office in 2019, tensions increased (Stern & Troianovski, 2019). In light of the fact that, according to the new doctrine of the Kremlin and Dugin's philosophy, Ukrainian soil is regarded as part of the historical identity of the Russian land, and as such, they had a problem with the existence of such a country. This is why the issue of Ukraine's accession to the European Union and the NATO treaty was raised and pursued with vigor (Burbank, 2022).

According to Russia's new ideology, the existence of an independent and Western-oriented Ukraine, the imposition of restrictions on Ukrainian Russian speakers, particularly in the eastern regions and near the Russian border, and the growth of anti-Russian Ukrainian nationalism, such as the Azov militias in the dominant far-right movement in Ukraine, (Colborne, 2019) are humiliating and

intolerable. In this situation, the discussion of Ukraine's NATO membership was actually a complement to the Kremlin's half-concealed anger. Considering Russia's power and authority in international relations under Putin's leadership from 2014 to 2019, as well as the prominence of the Kremlin's new anti-Western Eurasianism ideology, the possibility of Moscow's crushing response to Ukrainian movements and provocations was improbable.

The experience of the occupation of Crimea and the inability of the Ukrainian army to fight back, the relatively weak reaction of the Obama administration, the increase in the authority of Russia and Putin compared to 2014, the pause in the Coronavirus crisis, the coming to power of the Biden administration at the beginning of 2021 and its weakness compared to the Obama administration during the Crimean War, and America's failed withdrawal from Afghanistan in the summer of 2021 (Kempe, 2021) are all factors that have contributed to the Russian decision to invade Ukraine.

#### **Russian 2022 Invasion of Ukraine**

The recognition of the autonomous regions of Donbas by Moscow three days prior to the attack on Ukraine, concurrently with the immediate widespread sanctions of the West led by the United States against Moscow beginning on February 21, 2022, marked the beginning of a war along parallel and complementary fronts (Macias, 2022). The noticeable relative superiority of the Russian army in military tools and equipment, as well as in human resources and the number of people, the display of the 64-kilometer military convoy train sent by the Russians to the north of Kyiv in the first days of the attack, (Som, 2022) and the lack of facilities, human capacity, and adequate equipment on the Ukrainian side made the possibility of the fall of the Kyiv government or its conquest by the Russians highly probable, at the very least.

Even prominent politicians and thinkers of American international relations, such as Henry Kissinger and John Mearsheimer, argued in their analyses that the further advance of the Russian army in Ukraine could be halted by accepting the Kremlin's minimum terms for negotiations. These terms included the acceptance of Moscow's sovereignty over Crimea and the protection of the autonomy of the

Russian-populated regions of eastern Ukraine (Bella, 2022) (Chotiner, 2022).

The resistance of the Kyiv government led by Zelensky, the equipping of the Ukrainian army, and the dispatching of previously trained militiamen and volunteers to the battlefronts in the center, south, and East of Ukraine allowed for the possibility of relative success (Globsec, 2022). This issue led to a decline in the perception of Russia's relative success in Ukraine (as well as the failure of the parties' negotiations) without accepting the Russians' conditions.

With the Russian army's withdrawal from Kyiv in the sixth week of the war in April 2022 (Ali & Stewart, 2022) and the relative certainty that the pro-Western Zelensky government would not fall, the initial level of authority and expectation for Russia's performance diminished significantly. The formation of a parallel war between Russia and the West, led by the United States, in the fields of economics and international politics was no less significant than this geopolitical conflict.

On the one hand, the geopolitical issue of the Ukraine war, which formed the core of the Kremlin's decision and desire, was an excuse for strengthening NATO and redefining its weakened identity, which once again made European countries dependent on EUCOM (the United States Central Command in Europe) as they were during the Cold War. And on the other hand, it provided a pretext for launching a massive economic war against Russia in order to separate Moscow from the primary field of world economy and trade and to weaken Russia's sovereignty and society by creating economic challenges within the country.

Another aspect of this parallel war was to politically isolate Moscow. If the geopolitical war creates military costs and human casualties for Russia, the parallel economic-political war has the potential to weaken Russia's economic position in the world and transform it into a second-rate power, similar to the first two decades following the fall of the Soviet Union, accompanied by internal depreciation. The third dimension of this combined war is political isolation, international condemnation, destruction via psychological and media warfare, and international law condemnations.

Therefore, it is logical that Washington wishes to prolong this combined war, particularly its two parallel geopolitical and economic branches, in order to weaken Moscow. In the final two sections of the article, we highlight these two parallel dimensions of the war in Ukraine, which, over time, will diminish Moscow's relative power in international relations, particularly against the United States.

### **One Year after the Start of the War: Expectations vs. Results**

On the verge of declaring war and invading Ukrainian territory, Moscow's highest hopes and objectives were as follows:

1. The fall of Kyiv's Western-oriented government and the creation of conditions for the establishment of a Moscow-backed government that will prevent Ukraine's membership in NATO and the European Union; as a result, the Ukrainian central government in Kyiv would be dominated by Moscow, as it was during the Soviet era.

2. The annexation by the Russian Federation of the separatist and autonomous republics of Eastern Ukraine with a majority Russian-speaking population, such as Crimea.

3. Acceptance of Moscow's sovereignty over Crimea by Kyiv and other nations.

4. Settlement and weakening of the anti-Russian Ukrainian army and Azov battalion militias

5. Increasing the sense of pride and strengthening the national spirit of the Russian people in light of the ideology of Eurasianism; increasing the power of Moscow in the international arena; humiliating American power; and demonstrating the United States' incapacity to play a significant role against Russia.

6. The rise in global energy prices, the lack of cooperation between Europe and the United States as a result of their industries' reliance on Russian gas, and the possibility of Moscow's powerful role in global oil and gas policy.

7. The emergence of a crisis in grain and bread products and the need of the countries of the world for Russia or its decisions in the field of food (Due to the fact that one-third to forty percent of the world's grain exports come from Russia and Ukraine, and the war in Ukraine, as well as the Russian control of the southern ports of this country, would increase the price of bread and other food products at the global level,

and hoarding and a significant portion of price control would be in place.

After several months of threats to increase the number of troops and the pre-war military formation of the Russian army from the beginning of autumn 2021 to February 2022, (Troianovski & Sanger, 2022) this failed to induce the Zelensky government to retreat or surrender out of fear, Russia was compelled to invade and occupy the country in order to achieve its objectives. The fall of Kyiv and the occupation of most of Ukraine's territory (at least East of the Dnieper River) could stabilize Russia's shadow and dominance over Ukraine for years or even decades, as well as show power to other great powers, particularly the United States. In other words, in the event of success, which many prominent American experts believed to be highly probable, the mental hegemony that emerged for Russia from 2014 onwards could multiply within a few months, but reality did not correspond with the dominant mentality.

In the event that none of the aforementioned goals and expectations were met, Russia was expected to achieve the bare minimum, which included:

1. The annexation of the eastern and southeastern parts, i.e., Donbas (Luhansk and Donetsk), Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson, i.e., regions with a majority of Russians (roughly 17% of Ukraine's total population is Russian) (Constantin, 2022), to the territory of the Russian Federation under the guise of accepting their autonomy.
2. Kyiv's government's recognition of Moscow's sovereignty over Crimea

As explained in the following sections of the article, one year after the beginning of the war, Moscow has not only failed to meet its minimum demands but also risks losing its military gains and becoming unstable.

In the scenario described above, Russia's perception of its relative strength vis-à-vis Ukraine and even the United States at the end of 2021 and the beginning of 2022 was exaggerated. The Kremlin's miscalculations and desire to achieve more, such as overthrowing the Western-oriented government of Zelensky and capturing Kyiv, as well as the entire eastern half of the Dnieper River, including Kharkiv and Chernihiv, on the way to capturing Kyiv, (Berkowitz & Galocha, 2022)

can be interpreted as greedy and ambitious. Obviously, Putin and other Kremlin decision-makers were not the only ones who, at the beginning of the war and even during the first weeks and months, had a false impression about the potential and predictability of future events affected by aggressive approaches. This has been the case with the forecasts and expectations of numerous prominent analysts and former Western politicians.

The different facts and outcomes associated with the prolongation of the war in Ukraine and the lack of success expected from Russia, in addition to Ukraine's resistance that exceeded expectations and the support of the United States and the European Union at a high level, caused the battlefield as well as the literature and expert analysis to turn a new page. As the war dragged on, the new conditions and the possibility of Ukraine becoming a swamp for Russia, similar to Afghanistan for the Soviet Union in its final decade, were among the points that were emphasized most (Witte, 2022). There were also a few significant field changes.

The conditions one year after the start of the war in comparison to Moscow's initial objectives and anticipations for the attack on Ukraine:

1. The Zelensky government has not fallen.
2. The military and logistical strength of the Ukrainian army, both in terms of equipment, personnel, and finances, has increased.
3. Closer proximity between Europe and America in the shadow of the Russian threat, the comprehensive, resolute, and continuous support of the entire Western camp to Ukraine, the justification of America's military presence on European soil, and the consolidation of NATO's identity and position.
4. The absence of a global crisis in the price of energy carriers and the control of the oil market by the West, as well as the absence of bankruptcies among European companies and factories, unlike what Moscow had expected.
5. The decline in Russia's military and political authority as the second most powerful army in the world, as well as the Russian army's severe human and logistical losses.
6. Being on the defensive against Ukraine in order to protect the four occupied and annexed territories of the Russian Federation

7. The exorbitant costs of the war for Moscow and the uncertain and bleak outlook for the future of a costly war for the Russians, in addition to the continuation and escalation of the sanction campaign against Moscow.

In a February 2023 speech at Georgetown University, CIA Director William Burns emphasized the importance of the next six months of the war on its long-term course and implicitly confirmed that the war was now on a long-term path (Ekmecic, 2023). The difference between the conditions on the Ukrainian side in February 2023 and February 2022, during the Russian invasion; The quadrupling of the total number of Ukrainian combat forces and the donation of billions of dollars of weapons by the West to Ukraine are additional indicators of Russia's continuous and protracted involvement in the war's geopolitical dimension. According to Mykola Bielieskov, a researcher at the Kyiv Institute of Strategic Studies attached to the Office of the President of Ukraine, in February 2023, sometime after William Burns's speech at Georgetown University, Ukraine no longer faced a shortage of manpower. One year after the start of the war, approximately one million people are employed by the Ukrainian security and defense forces (Hendrix & Korolchuk, 2023).

These instances illustrate the deterioration of the war and its transformation into a quagmire, in which neither Russia nor Ukraine can advance on the battlefield, nor can they withdraw politically, militarily, or in terms of public opinion. As previously stated, the quagmire of Ukraine for the Russian army is similar in many ways to the quagmire of Afghanistan for the Soviet army in the last decade of that government (Witte, 2022), with the exception that the motivations, historical identity, and geopolitical position of Ukraine are significantly greater for the Russians.

The similarity between Ukraine and Afghanistan is not in the position it holds for the Russian government and people or even its geopolitical position but in the effect that prolonging the war will have on the Russian army and the economic problems of the Russian government and society. In both wars (Afghanistan and Ukraine), Washington, as Moscow's main rival in the international arena, has been and continues to support the army or groups fighting against the Russian army. This is the primary factor preventing the Kremlin from achieving

its goals and becoming mired in a difficult and costly quagmire, a lengthy process that will eventually lead to the Kremlin's power and global position being weakened.

### **The Western Sanctions against Moscow**

As history has shown, America's sanctions tool will reveal its consequences over the long term, and with the passage of more time and the analysis of the economic resources and capabilities of the target country, the difficulties caused by living under the sanctions system will become more apparent. Iraq during the Saddam era, Venezuela, and Iran are three examples of oil-rich nations with high energy production capacity in the world. In such countries, it took several years for the effects of widespread sanctions to become significant, and after a decade, the target country becomes vulnerable and fragile, even if it has large energy reserves and employs methods to circumvent sanctions; if it does not lead to its downfall, it will result in a decrease in its relative strength.

Richard Nephew's remarks regarding the United States sanctions war against Russia after Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the beginning of a parallel war reveal a covert plan to prolong the war in Ukraine on both sides, and with its deterioration, the United States can eventually deliver the necessary blows against Russia. These statements by Nephew, one of the foremost authorities on the sanctions system against America's enemies and foes (including Iran), pertain to the second month of the war's onset, a time when many believed the conflict might end soon with a complete or partial Russian victory (Nephew, 2022).

Many did not believe at the time that Ukraine would become another Afghanistan for Moscow. When Kyiv did not fall, the Russian army withdrew from some occupied areas, and the significant equipping and strengthening of the Ukrainian army by the United States and its other Western supporters, confirmation of being on the path to the realization of Nephew's thesis, grew stronger month by month.

Obviously, even if the geopolitical branch of the war is stopped due to a negotiated peace, Russia's withdrawal, or Russia's progress on the field and the surrender of the Ukrainian side (although all of the three scenarios seem improbable in the short term), the Western sanction regime led by Washington against Moscow will continue for years after

the war ends. There will be no impediment to the achievement of the economic branch's long-term objectives.

In any case, it is unlikely that any of the field scenarios will affect the sanctions regime against Moscow. America's objectives include all types of Western commercial and financial sanctions against Russia, the dollar war against the ruble, inflation and internal recession in Russia, and an embargo on Russia's energy sector, i.e., oil and gas exports, which account for the majority of Moscow's income. Russia's increasing dependence on its long-standing rival in the East, China, is a natural consequence that is already apparent.

However, Russia's demands for an economic war with the West did not materialize. The hope to design a parallel economic war for their own benefit with the rise in oil prices and the need of European countries for Russian gas, ultimately harming American and European industries and causing inflation in the West due to the rise in the price of energy carriers, which could have led to an economic and social crisis in the United States and Europe, did not materialize. Moscow's anticipated harsh winter for the Europeans did not occur as expected. Thus it appears that the Americans were more successful than the Russians in designing and implementing the economic war plan, given that approximately a year has passed since the start of the conflict, and its effects are evident.

The control of oil prices and winter management, which the Russians predicted would be difficult or even paralyzing for Europeans, were among the successes of the West in this parallel war against Russia. Perhaps the Russians did not anticipate this level of integration and coordination on the Western front.

On the other hand, according to Nephew's statements, the West's expectations of a blow to the Russian economy will occur over the long term, similar to the experiences of other nations, such as Venezuela during several years of sanctions or Saddam-era Iraq, during approximately twelve years of sanctions (Gordon, 2020). In light of these experiences and the greater power and superior management of the Russian government compared to countries such as Iraq, North Korea, and Venezuela, the United States does not expect a short-term or even a medium-term combined war to be successful.

At least for the United States, this economic war has halted Russia's growth and expansion as a rival superpower in the East. It is as if the sanctions war has acted as a brake on Russia's forward progress, and from Washington's perspective, in the best-case scenario, by prolonging the war and managing the sanctions regime against Russia, the United States could seek a decline in Russia's global power and authority.

### **The prolongation of the war**

The combined conflict in two geopolitical and economic-political branches prevented Russia from achieving its primary objectives. It would not have been possible for the Ukrainian side, which was under intense pressure from Moscow's army, to stand if not for the extensive and widespread, albeit managed, support of NATO members led by the United States.

Continuous provision of weapons and military advisory assistance to the Ukrainian army turned Ukrainian territory into a swamp for the Russian army, which suffered heavy military and human casualties and was defeated or forced to retreat on some fronts (Hendrix & Korolchuk, 2023) (Witte, 2022). In this way, the military branch prepared the ground for the erosion of the war over the course of several months, allowing the other branch, the sanctions war, also to grow and produce lasting results.

After one year, the field and the geopolitical branch of the war have resulted in continuous failures and withdrawal for Moscow, from the siege and abandonment of the attempt to conquer Kyiv, continued withdrawal from the central areas of Ukraine, and finally, maintaining the fronts of the conflict and the Kremlin's effort to strengthen the foothold of the Russian army in the occupied areas (Lister, 2023).

On September 30, 2023, seven months after the attack, in the presence of the four presidents of the self-proclaimed republics and with Putin's official signature, these regions joined the Russian Federation. These regions include Donbas (Luhansk and Donetsk), Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson, which include the southeastern route of Ukraine and the shores of the Black Sea as a land route to the north of the Crimean Peninsula (Sauer & Harding, 2022). This region (Donetsk Oblast) also contains the significant port of Mariupol (the biggest port in the Azov Sea region). In addition, the majority of Ukraine's industrial

capacities with their Soviet-era infrastructures are located in these regions. (Ukraine Port Assessment, n.d.)

In this way, these four regions are the most significant from both a geopolitical and economic perspective; the coasts, ports, and the consolidation of control over Crimea, for example, are geopolitically and economically significant.

Russia has sought to preserve the territories annexed to its territory, whereas Ukraine has sought to reclaim these territories. When Moscow realized it could not meet its maximum demand and counter the West's resolve to support the Kyiv government, it settled for its minimum objectives. The goal was to protect the new autonomous regions dependent on the Kremlin, and the war fronts shrank and became more concentrated. In this manner, the atmosphere became reversed; Russia became defensive operationally, while Ukraine, with the full support of the West, turned on the offensive.

Considering the difficulty of recapturing these areas from the Russian army, the ongoing efforts of the Ukrainian army, the continued support of the United States and other NATO members, and the resolve of the Western Front, there is little doubt that the war will not continue in the short to medium term. It is sufficient to compare the field and combat power of the Ukrainian army one year after the beginning of the war to understand Kyiv's position. On the other hand, maintaining these territories and preventing Russia's defeat in this circumstance has a dignified and identifying effect on the authority and position of Moscow. This is why Russia will use all its power to hold onto these territories.

### **Conclusion**

This article began with a discussion of the causes and motivations for the outbreak of war in Ukraine, which demonstrate the potential for a protracted conflict. The goals and demands of each party, particularly the Russian and American parties, reveal the reason for each party's refusal to retreat. In reality, it is abundantly clear that the conflict in Ukraine is a conflict between the two major world powers of the East and West, Washington and Moscow. Examining the possibility of a protracted war of attrition in Ukraine, we analyzed the mutual benefits and costs to Russia and the United States of the continued conflict.

The focal point of the discussion is Putin's miscalculation of the outcome of the attack on Ukraine and the significant disparity between the actual events and Russia's expectations. In fact, it appears that Moscow has fallen into a trap set by its rival, the United States, which, like a swamp, has no exit. In the meantime, America will not suffer a significant loss, and the cost of sending financial aid and equipment to Ukraine is not that high; in fact, it is the Ukrainian people who will pay the major costs of this proxy war between the two great powers.

Due to Russia's fundamental position to preserve its minimal gains from the war and the four eastern regions annexed to the Russian Federation, the war in Ukraine will be prolonged because Ukraine, with the support and equipment of the West led by the United States, is attempting to retake these regions from Russia, which will be extremely difficult and time-consuming if it occurs. On the other hand, as a result of the Ukrainian army's increased human and weapon resources, it is difficult for Russia to conquer new territory and exert pressure on the Ukrainian side. In this manner, the war will continue until Kyiv refuses to accept Russia's conditions for ending the conflict, which include accepting Moscow's sovereignty over Crimea and four regions separated from Ukraine and continuing to fight on the battlefield.

Since prolonging the war and thereby weakening Moscow is in the US interest, it is logical for the US and NATO to equip the Ukrainian army and help it resist Russia's advance, as well as support and encourage Kyiv not to surrender and continue the war to retake the separated areas.

This prolongation of the war of attrition is necessary to allow the economic front of the war against Moscow the necessary time to become effective. The long-term effects of the sanctions system, in addition to Russia's inability to advance in the field and expend energy to maintain the eastern regions of Ukraine and the continuous equipping of the Ukrainian army and government by America and NATO, make it clear that America, far from the European battlefield, which has not directly engaged in the war with Russia, is seeking benefits from prolonging the war and escalating the crisis in Europe.

The continuous decline of Moscow's international image and authority, long-term political isolation, long-term losses and depletion of military forces, increasing internal dissatisfaction with sanctions and

international isolation, along with the growth of social problems and hidden grievances, and the probability of a long-term decline in the popularity of the government in Moscow as a result of the widening gap between the government and society due to the war or due to the economic problems caused by the sanctions, can be seen from the desires and motivations of Washington to help prolong the war as long as possible.

Also, the destruction of the Kremlin's image in international media and foreign restrictions on Russian citizens, particularly artists, athletes, scientific and academic figures, students, etc., are among the additional costs Russia must bear in this costly hybrid war.

Russia's economic and political dependence on China and India and the countries of the Middle East, particularly the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Iran are additional consequences of this war, which have become apparent about a year after the start of the conflict and could be exacerbated by its long-term erosion. Being as immersed as possible in this quagmire will not ultimately benefit Moscow. The long-term weakening of Russia's political, economic, military, and media power due to the continuation of the war in Ukraine and its effects, especially the extensive Western sanctions system against it, will prevent Russia from becoming a new superpower and from repeating the Soviet Union's position as a pole against the United States. In addition to the political, military, economic, and media benefits that America will receive from the war in Ukraine and the confrontation with Russia in Europe and the rest of the world, especially in the West, the weakening of Russia in a long-term combined war will increase America's relative power in Europe. These achievements include the strengthening of NATO and EUCOM and the political and security dependence of many European nations on the United States.

In other words, in the long term and as a result of the war, Washington will increase its power to the detriment of Russia. In the meantime, the only potential harm to the United States is if China is able to use the war in Ukraine to its advantage. In the worst-case scenario for Washington, one of the two eastern superpowers competing with the United States would be eliminated in favor of the other.

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