Strategies of the Sides in the Russia-Ukraine War

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Abstract

The research into the strategies of the sides in the Russia-Ukraine war is of great relevance, as it is one of the most intense conflicts on the territory of Europe since World War II. Further, the violent actions committed by the Russian Federation on the territory of Ukraine have had an unprecedented impact on the international peace architecture and international relations; they have caused a humanitarian, economic, and social crisis on a regional and global scale. The present research may, most notably, help understand the causes and consequences of the conflict. For this reason, this paper aims to analyze and cover the peculiarities of the main military and political strategies of Ukraine and the Russian Federation in the context of the 2022 war, as well as evaluate specific actions the enemies took against each other as international actors. The updating of the states’ strategies should be noted, as previously Ukraine was regarded only in the context of European integration and reforms, while the full-scale war increases Ukraine’s subjectivity, particularly in terms of planning and implementation of military decisions and more proactive diplomatic efforts. Russia’s strategies were considered in the context of Western theoretical models aimed at establishing it as a regional leader with extensive military potential. Moreover, the beginning of the full-scale war proved that in the situation of the military conflict against Ukraine and its allies Russia’s strategic resources are limited, which calls for further research. The results of this investigation provide a theoretical basis for further research in the field and are of importance for the understanding of security issues, and safeguarding of peace and stability not only in Ukraine and Europe but all around the world.

Keywords

Ukraine; Russia; NATO; Military Strategy; Grain Deal; Armed Conflict.

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**Introduction**

Strategic studies is an interdisciplinary approach in modern scientific research. As an intellectual trend, strategic studies appeared during the Cold War when the threat of a nuclear conflict demanded calculating numerous possible scenarios of interaction in the climate of a bipolar world. Current research in the abovementioned field establishes the security issue as an important element of politics and military power, being an indispensable condition of the strategy. It has been pointed out that ignoring war as a component of the state strategy may lead to fatal consequences (Betts 1997).

Ideological and theoretical origins of strategic studies come from the school of political realism, according to which the state ensures the accomplishment of its national interests and sovereignty by all military and political means available. This understanding stipulates the state’s need to have a strategy to survive and function in the global world. Political elites, facing a crisis of the lack of leadership along with the global world, play a prominent role in formulating the national interest and choosing the strategy (Kissinger 2022).

The specificity of the strategic approach is associated with the problematic character of lasting peace in the context of global politics. Proponents of the strategic approach do not rule out the possibility of a period of peaceful changes and peaceful co-existence of states. However, they are sceptical about the prospect of a “permanent peace” based on the radical transformation of world politics. Advocates of the strategic approach believe that a conflict cannot be fully stopped with an effective strategy, only mitigated (Baylis et al. 2002).

Strategic concepts of the Cold War have been already projected in the case of the Russia-Ukraine war, particularly in the phase which began in 2014. The 2014-2022 war, on the one side of which there is Russia, a country with nuclear weapons, using proxy powers, namely the so-called Luhansk and Donets People’s Republics (LDPR), on the other – Ukraine, a country with lower military potential, but a rapid reformation of its armed forces according to the NATO standards, was called limited and hybrid (Freedman 2014).

Since the beginning of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, several questions regarding the causes, course, and consequences of the Russia-Ukraine war and the strategies of its parties have arisen in the scientific community; and it calls for special research and analysis. So far, various sides of the Russia-Ukraine armed conflict have been studied, for example, B. Renz (2023) criticizes the failure of Western deterrence due to the lack of a clear strategy and false assumptions about the Kremlin’s motivations. Garcia and Modlin (2022) challenge overly simplistic views of China’s relationship with Russia and explore the complexities of Sino-Russian relations and the Russia-Ukraine war. Johnson (2022) analyzes the false premises and weak strategy of Russia’s invasion, emphasizing Ukraine’s resilience and the impact of Western support. Kudlenko (2023) explores the roots of Ukrainian resilience beyond leadership, focusing on societal values and a vision of a Euro-Atlantic future. Driedger and Polianskii (2023), Kunertova (2023), Chávez and Swed (2023) delve into expert forecasts, drone warfare, and the use of tactical drones in the context of conflict. Works by Rodrigues Vieira (2023), Flockhart and Korosteleva (2022), Götz and Staun (2022) and others explore such themes as weapon interdependence, a multi-order world, and Russia’s strategic culture. Taken together, these
contributions provide a multifaceted understanding of the dynamics of war, offering valuable insights for analysis and future strategic considerations. This article is based on strategic studies, examining the dynamics of the Russia-Ukraine war, and formulates the currently topical strategies of its sides. Moreover, the article is not only focused on the study of the current strategy of the Russia-Ukraine war, but at the same time, special attention is paid to the analysis of the 2014-2022 period in regulatory components, which became preparatory to a more intensive war of Russia against Ukraine. This paper also explains how the aggressive actions of the Kremlin against Ukraine became a logical continuation of the implementation of the strategic culture formed in the Russian Federation long before the aggression began.

The strategies of the sides in the Russia-Ukraine war at the phase which started in 2022 are only now beginning to be researched; the war preserved some part of its limited nature due to the refraining from using nuclear, chemical, and bacteriological weapons. The hybrid component has also been preserved to some extent – media activity during the war in Ukraine should be the subject of separate thorough research. At the same time, the full-scale invasion of the armed forces of the Russian Federation of Ukraine and their direct aggression caused thousands of casualties among civilians (the actual number exceeds that presented by official data, however) and was followed by the outbreak of violence and escalation of the military conflict. Therefore, the paper aims to establish the main military and political strategies of Ukraine and the Russian Federation in the context of the war in 2022. The practical value of the research is an in-depth understanding and analysis of the actions of Ukraine, Russia, and their respective allies which will allow further prognosis of events.

Failure of the Political and Diplomatic Strategy of the Russia-Ukraine War in 2014-2021 and the Beginning of the Full-scale Invasion

Taking into account that the beginning of the 21st century was marked by crisis developments in the global world order, Russia’s strategy in the conflict with Ukraine can be viewed as an asymmetrical challenge to the Western world. The asymmetry is presented in Russia’s lower military potential compared to NATO, but it was balanced by other “hybrid” means of warfare, informational and economic in the first place. However, Monaghan (2015) points out that

“The gaps in how the West and Moscow are addressing the similar future operating environment are notable. Perhaps the most important element of this gap is in the approaches to “asymmetry.” In NATO, this has been understood as Russia adopting other, non-conventional means in attempt to off-set Western conventional superiority. It appears, however, that Russian thinking about asymmetry is different, and can include a conventional military superiority in a specific place and at a certain time. Western forces have gained much experience in Iraq and Afghanistan of a specific kind of combat. But the examples of what has happened in Eastern Ukraine, and subsequently in Syria – and what exercises suggest that Russian armed forces are preparing for – are instructive in terms of understanding conventional asymmetry” (Monaghan 2015).
The abovementioned Monaghan’s (2015) words were proved true by the events in 2022; while leading a “hybrid” phase of the war in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine in 2014-2021, Russia had never abandoned its main scenario of occupying all Ukrainian territories. The reliance on the “shameful peace” – the Minsk agreements, according to which Ukraine had to give up the sovereignty of its territories – only advanced the implementation of the main scenario, as it quickly became clear that Ukraine would not settle for the concessions of the Minsk-2 agreement.

The military conflict phase was characterized by Russia’s militarization and mobilization of public opinion regarding the full-scale war in an informational and propagandist plane, spending resources on subversive, intelligence-gathering, and military-technical activities in Ukraine. Ukraine was mobilizing social resources to develop a network of volunteers helping its armed forces, transition to NATO standards in the management structure of the Armed Forces, introduce weapons, particularly national technologies. Hence, each side was employing the number of social resources available at the time and in a way that provisioned escalation of confrontation in the next phase.

According to Puri (2015), in conflicts where military victory is not likely to be achieved, states can consider the possibility of talks, although combined with military measures. Some states genuinely consider the possibility of peace, offering to include armed groups in a national political process, if the latter renounces violence. Other states simply hold talks to buy time, reduce the level of international criticism, or secure support from allies. They may use talks to gain intelligence about the armed group and manage to cause divisions within it. At the same time, the armed group may also be stalling for time, sending to negotiations people that do not represent hardliners, while the violence rages.

The mistake of the Minsk II option for the Russia-Ukraine war was that each of the sides started considering the victory in the war to be a more realistic outcome than establishing a disadvantageous compromise. It was equally important that the EU, namely France and Germany in their role of mediators, were unable to influence Putin’s position regarding the de-escalation of the conflict. It is also essential to address the traditional approach of the OSCE, who withdrew their staff from the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine amid the war. Mediators are usually involved in negotiations to resolve both international and non-international armed conflicts. Mediation may be defined as a “structured communication process, in which an impartial third party works with conflict parties to find commonly agreeable solutions to their dispute, in a way that satisfies their interests at stake. Mediation processes include four main phases: the preparatory phase for agreeing on negotiations (‘talks-about-talks’), mediated negotiations, agreement, and implementation” (OSCE 2014).

In the situation of the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine, caused by the aggression of the Russian Federation, the main negotiation format was the work of the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) in Minsk, which discusses security, humanitarian and economic issues of the conflict through the mediators from the OSCE, Ukraine, and Russia. Solutions developed by the TCG shall be implemented and coordinated in the Normandy format – a summit of the heads of the states involved in the resolution of the conflict – Ukraine, Russia, France, and Germany. The first step to settle the conflict and decrease the intensity of military encounters was the adoption of the Law of Ukraine
“On special order of local self-government in certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions” (2014), adopted by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. Adoption of this statutory instrument indicates a transition from the confrontation strategy to the issue resolution strategy according to the classification of the conflict resolution strategies.

In particular, the Law provisions no-prosecution guarantees for the participants of the events in Luhansk and Donetsk Regions in 2014. Article 3 specifies that “According to the law the state guarantees non-admission of criminal prosecution, institution of criminal, administrative action and penalty against persons - participants of the events on the territory of Donetsk, Luhansk regions.” Article 4 states that

“(…) Local authorities, local executive authorities in the manner and within the authority provided by the Law of Ukraine On the principles of the State language policy (2013), other laws of Ukraine, international treaties of Ukraine, which were recognized as binding by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, facilitate the usage of the Russian and other languages in oral and written form in education, in mass media and create opportunities for their usage by public authorities and local authorities, in legal proceedings, in economic and social activity, at cultural events and in other spheres of public life in selected areas of Donetsk and Luhansk Regions”. (On special order (…) 2014)

Article 5 of the Law provisions that “In certain selected areas of Donetsk and Luhansk Regions the laws of Ukraine introduce a special procedure for appointment of heads of the prosecutor’s office authorities and courts according to which local authorities can participate in the matters.” Articles 6-8 concern support and possibility to sign agreements on social and economic and cross-border cooperation,

“(…) strengthening and deepening of good neighbourly relations between territorial communities (hromadas), local authorities of selected areas with administrative and territorial units of the Russian Federation based on agreements on border cooperation.” According to Article 9 “in selected areas of Donetsk and Luhansk Regions by decisions of city, township, village councils’ people’s militia units, which shall have the authority to protect public order in the settlements of these areas, may be created”.

The main thesis of the Law is laid out in the Transitional Provisions which establish interrelation and implementation of the measures outlined in preceding articles with the condition of holding extraordinary local elections on the territories not controlled by Ukraine: “Articles 2-9 of the Law take effect from the day local authorities in selected areas of Donetsk and Luhansk Regions, elected at the extraordinary elections, held by the Constitution of Ukraine, this and other Laws, enter into office”. (On special order (…) 2014)

Separate clauses of the Law of Ukraine “On special order of local self-government in certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions” (2014) served as the basis for the first Minsk protocol, signed by the representatives of Ukraine, OSCE and pseudo-republics on 5 September 2014; 19 on September 2014 a respective Memorandum was approved by the TCG, it was supposed to ensure the first step: full and all-inclusive ceasefire. The document was signed in dire circumstances of the offensive of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and firefights in Ilovaisk, where the Ukrainian army suffered significant
losses. From this perspective, the primary emphasis is on security issues, and it allows us to conclude that from the Ukrainian side, it was a strategy of conflict resolution and not one of rivalry. That is to say, a political and diplomatic approach was adopted here, not one of force.

The escalation of the conflict made the sides modify their arrangements, which led to the signing of the Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements (Minsk II). Ukrainian society found Paragraphs 9 and 11 to be the most high-profile ones. Per Paragraph 9,

“(...) Reinstatement of full control of the state border by the government of Ukraine throughout the conflict area, starting on day 1 after the local elections and ending after the comprehensive political settlement (local elections in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions based on the Law of Ukraine and constitutional reform) to be finalized by the end of 2015, provided that paragraph 11 has been implemented in consultation with and upon agreement by representatives of certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in the framework of the Trilateral Contact Group”. (Package of measures (...) 2015)

The implementation of Minsk II was reinforced by the UN Resolution. Attempts to implement the aforementioned Paragraphs led to mass rallies in 2015 and 2019. Consistent implementation of the Minsk agreements, written in a somewhat dubious manner regarding Ukrainian sovereignty, became a significant factor not only in foreign relations between Ukraine and other countries but also in its domestic political life. Taking that into account, during the period from 2015 to 2020 Kremlin constantly appealed to the letter execution of Minsk II recognizing in what situation of instability it would put Ukrainian political powers. Apart from the Donbas issues, the matter of Crimea annexation by the Russian Federation remains open. In this case, a political and diplomatic strategy based on the interests of international political actors may also be observed.

On 22 February 2022 the next phase of the Russia-Ukraine war began, as the escalation of the military conflict was accompanied by open aggression of the Russian Federation. The attack on Ukraine was happening from at least 9 directions, including the city of Kyiv, Kyiv region, Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, Mykolayiv, Odesa (Zmiinyi – Snake Island) and Chernihiv regions. All other regions, which were not invaded directly, succumbed to devastating missile strikes. From that moment on the strategy of the Russian Federation was to abandon the Minsk format and destroy Ukraine as a state. At first, justifying the invasion of Ukraine with the words: “Its goal is to protect people who have been subjected to bullying and genocide... for the last eight years. And for this we will strive for the demilitarisation and denazification of Ukraine” (Osborn and Nikolskaya 2022), V. Putin then constantly changed his rhetoric to explain the purpose of the so-called "special military operation". This is not surprising, since long before that, for example in his dialogue with the US president of that time George W. Bush at the 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest, Putin already voiced his anti-Ukrainian narratives, such as: “You have to understand, George, that Ukraine is not even a country. Part of its territory is in Eastern Europe and the greater part was given to us”; and six years later, the Kremlin began to translate Putin’s ideas into action. Furthermore, in his article published in 2021 "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians", Putin denied the historical formation of the state of Ukraine and its original name, stating it was artificially created by the Bolsheviks at the behest of Lenin: “All of these lands were called Malaya Rus (Little Russia) and the name "Ukraina"
Russia’s strategic goal to destroy Ukraine as a state or transform it the way it needs was embodied in the ultimatums of the so-called “special military operation”: demilitarization of Ukraine; Ukraine has to abandon the integration into NATO, and give up its cultural and historical policy (i.e. denazification in Kremlin’s propagandist terms). In his speech on 24 February 2022, the Russian President stated that Ukrainian statehood is artificial, and extension of NATO to the East poses an existential threat to the existence of Russia. Therefore, the challenge was posed not only to Ukraine but to the whole Western world, the US and the EU in the first place (Lepskiy and Lepska 2022).

Russia’s war against Ukraine, since 2014, is an example of the strategy of bypassing confrontation between states and changing the enemy’s political, economic, and ideological system. This approach was not invented by Russia, as it originates from Western strategic doctrines. According to revisionist theorists, the army may be used indirectly in conflicts, relegating to the background, while non-military means become the most forceful and violent. For example, Minic (2023) in his study concludes that very eloquent descriptions have been produced for decades in Russian military theory and show that the SVO, such as the annexation of Crimea and the subversion of the Donbas (in a different version of the bypassing), is the result of 30 years of theorizing the bypassing of armed struggle. Thus, the so-called "special military operation" (SMO) is the implementation of a plan to combine sabotage and indirect actions with a direct armed attack, and, as predicted by Russia's military leadership, this is the scenario that will lead to the collapse of the Ukrainian state in a few days. Accordingly, Russia’s large-scale military invasion of Ukraine – “is not a premeditated return to traditional and high-intensity warfare, but an accident due to the tropism of bypassing armed struggle”. However, inaccurate analysis, assumptions, and convictions about the efficiency
of the bypassing of armed struggle "led the Russian military and political elites to overestimate both the ability of indirect means to achieve political goals and their capacity to use these means rationally", which led to the failure of their plans in the war against Ukraine in 2022 (Minic 2023).

Along with military operations, Russia continued to employ the means of a “hybrid war”, i.e. economic pressure on European countries, primarily in the energy sector, and propagandist media outreach activities to change public opinion of Europeans concerning the Russia-Ukraine war. Ukraine’s strategic goal is to protect its national sovereignty and statehood and ensure opportunities for its socioeconomic and political development.

**Russia’s Key Methods of Waging War against Ukraine**

There are significantly deeper aspects to Russia’s motives of military aggression against Ukraine than a desire to expand its state borders and exert direct influence on the political system of another neighboring state, which, in turn, chose a vector of development completely different from the one planned by the Russian political elite. Russia uses its accumulated military potential in the armed conflict in Ukraine only as one of its mechanisms in the Russia-Ukraine war. To understand that this aspect of its strategy is not a key one, it is enough to trace the dynamics of the change of narratives expressed by Russian authorities concerning the causes and goal of the so-called “special military operation” depending on their defeats on the battlefield.

Russia wanted to occupy the territory of Ukraine through a lightning-fast invasion and later accumulate all power in their hands with about 120,000 regular troops. Ukrainian military experts estimated that to occupy the territory of Ukraine, the aggressor needs at least 500,000 regular troops and the same number of a reserve army. However, Russian authorities were covering the lack of military force with absolute confidence in carrying out their plan in a matter of days. When Russia’s initial plans fell through and it suffered military defeat, it started changing its tactics towards using remote methods of warfare.

One of the significant explanatory elements of the nature of Russia’s strategy in the Russia-Ukraine war is its strategic culture. Russia’s discourse is based not only on its status as a country leader of the world order but its “great powerless” on the territories of the post-Soviet region in the first place. In this context, Ukraine plays a major value role, as Russia sees Ukraine’s territory as a defense shield for its national security interests against the West, as well as a symbol of Russia’s entrenched views on its existence as a great state. Russia’s strategic culture is a result of radical narratives and the way Ukraine and its cooperation with the West were represented by Kremlin officials. In turn, this is an important interpretation of the means of Russia’s political and military strategy in the war and on the global stage (Götz and Staun 2022; Kordan 2022).

Strategic priorities of the Russian Federation at the level of ideological discourse were to search for local identities of the Donbas region and oppose them to the ideological messages of Ukraine’s central government. The orientation to the ideological messages different from those in other regions of Ukraine in the documents of local authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk regions can be traced back to the 2000s: Nationalism was contrasted with internationalism, separate cults of heroes were developed, Decrees of the President of Ukraine were not accepted, e.g. Decree of the President
of Ukraine on awarding Stepan Bandera the title of Hero of Ukraine (Baginsky, 2018). Another key mechanism of Russia’s strategy in the Russia-Ukraine war is to constantly ensure tendencies of blurring the lines between war and peace. From 2014 till February 24, 2022 such manipulation and substitution of concepts allowed Russia to interpret the Russia-Ukraine war as a “civil war” in Ukraine at an international level, hence international community treated it as a “domestic conflict” between the central government and authorities of Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Therefore, this war was commonly regarded as some kind of a “Ukrainian crisis”. Russia, in this particular case, was not seen as an aggressor or belligerent but rather a “mediator”, which allowed Russian authorities to avoid international and criminal liability for starting the war against Ukraine (Perepelytsia 2021; Fox 2022). Such development of events enabled Russia to significantly build up its military potential over the course of eight years, preparing to launch a full-scale war in Eastern Europe with an ambition to change the world order in the future.

Indicatively, after changing the eight-year war phase in Ukraine by launching a full-scale offensive on February 24, 2022, shelling and bombarding civil cities and villages, Russia’s supreme political leaders were pushing three main goals of the so-called “special military operation”; military assistance to the self-declared Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics, “denazification”, and “demilitarization” of Ukraine. However, eventually, the latter two narratives lost their relevance for Russian officials in defining the goal of their actions. On August 15, 2022 at the so-called military-technological forum “Army-2022” Vladimir Putin claimed that “the Russian army is fulfilling its duty, fighting for Russia and liberating Donbas” (Ukrinform 2022c). Although the effect of the substitution of concepts does not work for Russia’s benefit anymore, its political leaders are not going to abandon it; they just change the categories depending on their defeats on the battlefield, providing distorted information about the real goal of the war in Ukraine. However, American experts from the ISW assess that as of mid-August 2022 Kremlin’s objectives remained unchanged: “Regime change in Kyiv and securing territorial control over most of Ukraine” (Stepanenko et al. 2022).

Russia’s illusion of its “greatstateness” on the map of the modern world order, which is the source of its territorial ambitions in many ways, is based on Russia’s considerable natural gas and oil potential, as well as its possession of nuclear weapons. But it does not grant them the real status of the great state. Since Russia’s economy cannot support a war of such scale for a long time anymore, its government resorts to the brutal method of its warfare strategy – nuclear blackmail and missile terror on the entire territory of Ukraine, to cause chaos among the population of Ukraine and force Ukrainian government to agree to Russia’s conditions for ending the war. But the widespread use of military force, which contradicts the objectives of the so-called “special military operation”, demonstrates that the real goal of Russia’s war against Ukraine is to destroy Ukraine as a state and its people, thereby changing security architecture in Eastern and Central Europe and expanding Russia’s area of influence and control (Marples 2022; Driedger 2023).

Despite Russia’s unachievable objectives and potential actions, end-of-war talks may probably be held when Ukraine gains a strategic advantage on the battlefield. Ukraine’s international partners witness Russia’s constant failures, world leaders are ready to further give Ukraine military, political, and diplomatic support in defending and preserving its state, as the world realizes that any terms or conditions proposed by Russia are aimed at prolonging the war and occupying new Ukrainian
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territories, thus achieving Putin’s imperialistic goals (Ukrinform 2022e). Even the Kremlin’s strategy of irresponsible nuclear rhetoric, military mobilization, and untruthful attempts to recognize Ukraine’s temporarily occupied territories as part of Russia after illegal fictitious “referendums”, most likely will not deter the EU’s resolve to aid Ukraine in exercising its legal right to defend its territory against the Russian aggression under the UN Charter (Ukrinform 2022d).

The deal signed between Ukraine and Russia on July 22, 2022 under the mediation of the UN and Turkey to renew the exports of Ukraine’s wheat and other agricultural produce from some Black Sea ports, which were blocked by Russia since the early spring, was widely praised by the international community. It had initially been envisaged that the conditions of the grain deal would drive down market prices and mitigate the food crisis and global famine, especially in North Africa, the Middle East, and other countries dependent on the import of Black Sea agricultural products. However, the day after the grain initiative was signed, Ukrainian ports in Odesa were under Russian missile attack. Thereby, Russia breached its obligations to guarantee the continuous functioning of the grain corridor. Russian Ministry of Defense justified their actions by stating that, according to their words, they attempted to destroy the depot with Harpoon anti-ship missiles, imported to Ukraine from the US, a Ukrainian navy ship, and disrupt a Ukrainian navy ship repair facility. Although later, explaining the situation to Turkey, Russia denied any involvement in the missile strikes on Odesa port (Glauber and Laborde 2022).

Initially, the Grain deal was signed for 120 days, i.e. till the end of November 2022, but it can be extended upon the agreement of the parties. As of November 17, 2022, Ukraine and Russia have not reached an agreement on the extension of the deal. Ukraine without imposing any additional conditions or demands along with the UN advocate for further compliance with the terms and conditions of the Grain initiative, as for the period of its operation Ukrainian grain export has not reached its pre-war rate, which is explained by the level of intensity of shipment, as Ukraine uses only 3 of its 17 ports.

Russia uses the Grain deal as an opportunity to employ its now classic war strategy – blackmail. Russia’s Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov explains that Russia is uncertain about extending the grain deal since the parties did not fulfill Russia’s requirements; “logistic sanctions” have not been lifted, and the export of Russian grain and fertilizers has not increased, although it was previously agreed. Using this dissatisfaction, Russia threatens to block further operation of the Grain deal, contributing to a global food crisis (Olson 2022). Accusing Ukraine of a drone attack on the fleet in temporarily occupied Crimea, Putin claimed during a TV press conference that those drones flew through the same Black Sea pass that was agreed upon for Ukrainian grain ships. Therefore, backed by this explanation, Russia suspended its participation in the Grain deal in late October, but due to a significant international backlash against such actions, Russia joined the deal again in a matter of days. These actions, albeit short-term, resulted in wheat prices increasing by 3.2% globally (Cunningham 2022).

It is obvious that Russia’s policy regarding the Grain initiative is used for manipulation and aimed to send a signal to the lead countries that Russia is the one with significant influence over the situation on the global market. Since Russia’s “grain” blackmail may not only result in the increase of prices
in the countries dependent on Ukraine’s grain export but also cause negative consequences for those that have never bought it. Apart from the threat of contributing to a global food crisis, through such actions, Russia seeks to deprive Ukraine of budgetary and foreign exchange revenues, create an excess of grain on the domestic market, and in case of the inability to store it, cause further loss of the grain stocks (Ukrinform 2022a). In the face of such circumstances and potentially high threats, the world will be trying to find an alternative, among others to find an overland route; although in such a case there are also some potentially negative consequences, they cannot be compared to the threat to the safe future of humankind.

Military cooperation between Russia and Iran has also had a significant impact on the course of the Russia-Ukraine war. Having at its disposal only an arsenal of mainly light and small-sized unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) with a short-range and limited flying capacity, Russia critically needed to replenish its weapons capabilities with UAVs of different types, particularly attack drones and loitering munition (“kamikaze” drones). After not receiving military assistance in the form of modern UAVs from China, Russia enlisted active support from Iran, which produces combat UAVs and uses a couple of models in order to complete the implementation of its ballistic missile program. By using Iranian “kamikaze” drones on a regular basis, Russia managed to limit the usage of its finite ballistic missile capabilities, which Russia may save to use in future military operations against Ukraine. The main features of Iranian loitering munition drones are that they are relatively small, portable, and easy to launch, but their main advantage is that they are hard to detect and can be launched from a long range (Atwood 2022).

Russia primarily uses Iranian “kamikaze” drones to attack the energy infrastructure of Ukraine and leave millions of Ukrainians without heating power and critical services to force the Ukrainian government to participate in negotiations under public pressure. Iran’s contribution to the improvement of Russia’s military capabilities and its support in the war against Ukraine affected the Middle East countries in taking a more proactive position, as they among other things started to provide ambitious assistance to Ukraine in response to Russia’s military-technical support of the Tehran regime. Accordingly, the first Middle East countries to become allies of Ukraine were those directly suffering from Iran’s actions and its direct cooperation with Russia. Apart from a tactical shift in the Russia-Ukraine war, Iran’s mass supply of weapons to Russia has several strategic influences on both regional and international security with a potential ability to disrupt global geopolitical balance (Eslami 2022). As UK Foreign Secretary James Cleverly said, Iran had become one of Russia’s main military supporters and their cooperation poses a threat to global security (Maishman and Hancock 2022).

Alternative exit strategies for this war are offered by sceptics of aid to Ukraine. Hungary did not condemn the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and Prime Minister Orbán regularly criticized Western sanctions against Russia. In October 2023, Orbán called his actions a strategy of peace as opposed to a strategy of war; his strategy is manifested, in particular, in maintaining communication channels with all parties to the conflict. A separate line of negotiations between Ukraine and Hungary concerns the lifting of sanctions from the Hungarian OTP bank, which is connected to the Russian Federation. This is a condition of the Hungarian side in the context of lifting the blocking of 500 million Euros from the European Peace Support Fund for the provision of arms to Ukraine (Khan 2023). In October
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2023, the European Commission proposed to revise the 2021-27 EU budget worth €1.1 trillion ($1.2 trillion) to give Ukraine €50 billion and spend another €15 billion on migration. However, Hungarian Prime Minister Orbán and Slovakian Prime Minister Fico criticized this decision at the European Union summit. The latter stated that “Ukraine is among the most corrupt countries in the world and we are conditioning what is excessive financial support on guarantees that European money, including Slovak, will not be embezzled” (Government Office of the Slovak Republic 2023).

Sceptics’ position regarding the provision of aid to Ukraine will continue in the context of the start of negotiations on Ukraine’s accession to the EU. In September 2023 the Hungarian Prime Minister stated that Hungary will not support Ukraine in any issue in international affairs until the language rights of ethnic Hungarians there are restored (Gyor and Than 2023).

Allocating aid to Ukraine faces opposition from some members of the Republican Party, which also affects the election of the Speaker of the House of Representatives and will be a significant factor in the US election campaign in 2024. However, at the end of 2023, Ukraine still retains bicameral support in Congress, although part of President Biden’s proposals to increase spending on aid to Ukraine causes more difficulties in its implementation (Greve 2023).

Ukraine’s Military Path and Proactive Diplomacy in Achieving Strategic Goals

Ukraine’s strategic goal is to defend its national sovereignty and statehood, ensure opportunities for its socioeconomic and political development. Military and social mobilization are backed by significant public support and unanimity of the political elite regarding the continuation of military actions until Ukraine wins. Such consolidation of society and elites is backed up by sociological surveys conducted in the first 9 months after the full-scale invasion. For example, according to the survey conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) 86% of respondents living in all regions of Ukraine, except for the temporarily occupied territories, answered that it is necessary to continue the military action, even if the shelling of Ukrainian energy infrastructure continues (KIIS 2022; Kravchenko 2022).

The military component of Ukraine’s strategy in this Russia-Ukraine war is presented in the article by the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine Valerii Zaluzhnyi and people’s deputy of Ukraine Mykhailo Zabrodskyi “Prospects for running a military campaign in 2023: Ukraine’s perspective”. The authors point out that the basis of Ukraine’s successful military campaign was laid by significant volumes of military and technical assistance from Western partner countries. This assistance is used and will be used to successfully counterattack the enemy, taking into account certain disproportions in the resources between the Ukrainian and Russian armies, the point which the authors particularly stress. The authors think that fighting Russians’ impunity for their actions and inflicting strikes on legitimate targets on the enemy’s territory will be the next top priority tasks of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (Ukrinform 2022b).

The military component of Ukraine’s strategy is connected with the intensification of diplomatic efforts after February 24, 2022. Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine Dmytro Kuleba and Minister of Defence of Ukraine Oleksii Reznikov held dozens of hours of negotiations with allies to ensure an uninterrupted supply of weapons, resulting in the implementation of the “Ramstein” format with regular meetings
of defense ministers to discuss and provide Ukraine with military and technical assistance. It should be said that the “Ramstein”, also known as the Ukraine Defense Contact Group, provides consolidated, systemic, and consistent military support to Ukraine by promptly responding to the requests of the Armed Forces of Ukraine for armament, military equipment, and ammunition. The political element of the format showcases an unprecedented unanimity of more than 50 countries in support of Ukraine and its people. Modernization of the Armed Forces of Ukraine in the course of the war is an important factor in foreign relations and it is becoming a strategic goal.

Apart from intensive cooperation with its long-term partners, Ukraine is establishing a dialogue with the countries with which diplomatic cooperation was not active in the previous years – African and Asian countries are also the focus of Ukrainian issues now. The vote in the United Nations proves overwhelming support of Ukraine in the war by the majority of member states of the General Assembly, while the UN is working on an international legal framework for Russia to be held accountable for its aggressive invasion. Whereas the subjectivity and international reputation of Ukraine are enhancing, a more decisive policy of the EU countries regarding increasing Ukraine’s capacities in the war is a distinctive feature of world politics in 2022. In the meantime, some countries attempt to persuade Ukraine to engage in negotiations with Russia, claiming that cold peace is better than a hot war. In reaction to this, Ukraine refuses to hold talks with Putin personally, leaving space for a manoeuvre in the future, emphasizing that they do not exclude the possibility of negotiations with Russians if Russia withdraws from all occupied territories. In this regard, American officials say that the Ukrainian side must decide for themselves when and on what terms the negotiations should be held, while the mission of the West is to ensure Ukraine’s strong position in such talks in the future. Accordingly, it can be concluded that the main element of Ukraine’s strategy is the full de-occupation of its territories by military means in conjunction with active diplomatic efforts aimed at financial, economic, and military-technical assistance from other countries.

Strategic goals for the integration into the EU and deepening cooperation with NATO were enshrined in amendments to the Constitution of Ukraine with an emphasis on supreme bodies of state power. For example, Ukraine’s Fundamental Law states that

“(…) The President of Ukraine is a guarantor of the implementation of the strategic course of the state for gaining full-fledged membership of Ukraine in the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization”; the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine “provides the implementation of the strategic course of the state for gaining full-fledged membership of Ukraine in the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization”; and the authority of Ukrainian Parliament, Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, includes “determining the principles of internal and foreign policy, realization of the strategic course of the state on acquiring full-fledged membership of Ukraine in the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization”. (Constitution of Ukraine 1996)

It should be said that the amendments to the Constitution of Ukraine were made under the procedure by a special law (On amendments to... 2019) at the end of the term of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine of the previous convocation and were signed by the President of Ukraine.
The decision adopted by the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine on September 14, 2020 “On the National Security Strategy of Ukraine” (2020) states that the strategy of the national security of Ukraine involves

“(…) restoration of peace, territorial integrity and sovereignty on the temporarily occupied territories in Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine based on international law”,
and “taking international legal, political and diplomatic, security, humanitarian, and economic measures to end an illegal occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol by the Russian Federation”.

These provisions are specified in the Strategy for Ensuring State Security enforced just before the full-scale war in February 2022. Notably, the document states that:

“The state security policy is aimed at prevention, timely detection, and precluding of external and internal threats to the state security of Ukraine, stopping intelligence, terrorist, subversive and other illegal encroachments of intelligence services of other countries, as well as organizations, separate groups and persons on the state security of Ukraine, elimination of conditions that may lead to such threats and causes of their occurrence”.
(On the Strategy for Ensuring (…) 2022)

In the Strategy of the de-occupation and reintegration of the temporarily occupied territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol, the attention is focused on the implementation of the complex of diplomatic, military, economic, communication, humanitarian, and other measures. The issues of compensation for damage caused by the Russian aggression and payment of reparations, protection of citizen's and human rights and freedoms, and establishment of mechanisms for an inclusive dialogue are especially prominent in the Strategy.
(On the Strategy of Deoccupation (…) 2021)

In the matter of diplomatic measures and negotiation process with Russia’s current government, till September 2022 Ukraine had never refused to engage in a dialogue with the official Kremlin. However, after yet another annexation of Ukrainian territories consisting of four regions of Ukraine – Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson regions – had been announced, the President of Ukraine stated that negotiations with Vladimir Putin are not an option anymore. Certain tracks of contact between Bankova and the Kremlin remain in the process of a prisoner exchange, extension of the Grain deal, and resumption of operation of the Ukrainian ammonia pipeline which has to deliver Russian fertilizers to the port of Yuzhny in Odesa.

The situation around the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (Zaporizhzhia NPP) remains difficult, as it is controlled by Russian soldiers and power engineers and monitored by the official IAEA mission. Russian officials regularly make statements emphasizing that the station now operates under Rosatom and hence all personnel have to sign contracts with the Russian company. Nuclear blackmail is one of the peculiar features of this military campaign, as in February 2022 Russians captured the Chornobyl Nuclear Power Plant (Chornobyl NPP), using the territory of Belarus. The dialogue concerning the release of the Zaporizhzhia NPP and the resumption of power supply continues at the level of international contacts.
Ten points of peace, presented by President Zelensky to the international community, namely in his addresses to the UN and US Congress, prove Ukraine’s commitment to restore its full sovereignty, prosecute those responsible for the military aggression, ensure payment of reparations to Kyiv, establish security guarantees ensuring that military aggression against Ukraine will not be repeated in the future. In the military sphere, Ukraine will insist on the transfer of a sufficient number of tanks and armoured vehicles to successfully liberate its territories, as well as long-range missiles and aircraft, which will eventually happen. Moreover, autumn and winter 2022-2023 demonstrated the change in the positions of the majority of EU countries regarding the transfer of heavy offense weapons to Ukraine.

Blocking the funding of aid to Ukraine in the EU and the USA in late 2023-early 2024 may change the dynamics of the military conflict and at the same time lead to the correction of Ukraine’s strategy to regain control of its national borders. In addition, there are certain factors of instability caused by the turbulent global socio-political dynamics, the emergence of new contradictions both between global players and at the regional level - the terrorist attacks of Hamas and the military operation of Israel, the elections in the USA, and other events distracting attention from the Russia-Ukraine war, which can create prerequisites for its more protracted, but less intense nature.

In the article of the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine Valerii Zaluzhnyi in The Economist, it is emphasized that without the introduction of innovative technologies in the field of armaments, the Russia-Ukraine war will reach a dead end. Positional warfare is more beneficial to Russia because it has potentially greater manpower and continues to produce the types of weapons it needs. Only a technological breakthrough, in particular in the production of missiles, drones and other weapons will be able to provide the necessary advantage for Ukraine on the battlefield (Zaluzhnyi 2023).

Important discussions are taking place among NATO commanders and heads of defense departments of Ukraine’s partner countries. The production of arms and ammunition by Western partners is viewed as not covering a significant part of Ukraine’s needs, and defense funding by NATO member countries at the level of 2% of national GDP is regarded as insufficient for the scale of a European war (Landale 2023).

**Conclusion**

The strategic approach to studying the Russia-Ukraine war illustrates its advantages concerning the consideration of the national interests of confronting states, changes in global politics, accounting for all resources for the continuation of the war, and potential negotiation positions. Both sides of the military conflict had been preparing for the war from 2014 to 2022, with Russia launching aggression, and Ukraine, on the other hand, developing defense operations. The Kremlin’s aggressive actions against Ukraine were a logical continuation of the implementation of its strategic culture developed in Russia long before the aggression. The period from 2014 to 2022 was a preparatory one for a more intensive war but it transformed the Ukrainian army into a more combat-effective state and consolidated Ukraine’s political elite around the idea of confronting the enemy. Pro-active diplomacy and efficient information campaigns became Ukraine’s advantage, while Russian
propaganda was only effective in mobilizing public opinion in support of the war in Ukraine. The trend to strengthen strategic capabilities will be increasing in the latter half of the 2020s, and Russia will be losing its economic, political, and social capabilities. In an environment where Ukraine is supported by a significant number of allies, whereas Russia is constrained under the pressure of sanctions, the only condition for the end of this war will be for Russia’s government to reinterpret their military goals and objectives, which were initially set inadequately to political and security reality. Meanwhile, Ukraine’s victory or relative success will challenge not only Russia’s influence but the very idea of the superiority of autocracy in the post-Soviet region. In that respect, the Russia-Ukraine war may be the prologue to the transformation of European security architecture. Ukraine’s strategy for accession to the EU and further integration into NATO will likely be implemented in the event of its success on the battlefield. Russia will likely go through demilitarization and reparations and be brought to international accountability, which, however, does not eliminate the possibility of the relief of sanctions in case the Kremlin’s political regime transforms.

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