



Russian rocket launchers during joint exercise with Belarus, February 4, 2022. Photo: Belarus MOD/EYEPRESS

# The Ramifications of the Russia-Ukraine War

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Russia's invasion of Ukraine began a few months ago and continues at full intensity. For Moscow, the objective of the war with its western neighbor was to bring about a change in the world order that would position Russia as a highly influential global power. Regardless of whether the war continues and develops into a long war of attrition or some arrangement for ending it is reached, it is clear that the rules of the game have changed, and therefore the war's significance and implications for the world order should be assessed.

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The Russia-Ukraine war of the past several months continues at full intensity, with no military victory or negotiated settlement acceptable to both parties in sight. At this stage, however, it is already possible and essential to draw conclusions about the implications of this war. For the Russians, the war is not confined

to Ukraine. As the Russian regime repeatedly declares, [this is a war against NATO and the West](#) as a whole. [Russia also claims](#) that it began the war because of a threat by NATO to Russia's security and great power status stemming from NATO's eastward expansion, including an effort to include Ukraine in this trend. The objective

of this war, therefore, is to change the world order and position Russia as a highly influential global power. Once this war ends, the rules of the game in the international arena will likely be changed, and this in turn will ultimately influence the shaping of a new world order.

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### The Course and Nature of the War

Russia's entry into a military conflict with Ukraine began with the aim of avoiding a protracted military campaign and bringing about the replacement of the Ukrainian government, or at least distancing Ukraine from the West, through a short operation. The Russian effort to achieve these goals deep in Ukrainian territory was halted by effective Ukrainian resistance, [with Russia suffering heavy losses](#). This resistance was achieved, inter alia, thanks to NATO, which trained the Ukrainian army and assisted it by [supplying advanced weapons](#), sharing intelligence, and enabling it to wage massive technological warfare, including the use of innovative and advanced systems. These compounded the difficulties and challenges suffered by the Russian army, including logistical problems, inadequate training, and lack of motivation among the Russian soldiers. All these factors have resulted in a prolonged military campaign that, as of the writing of this article, appears far from conclusion.

Following the failure of the military move in the Kyiv area, Russia shifted its war effort to southern and eastern Ukraine to attain important strategic targets. Here too the Russian advance is very slow, and Russia is attempting to undermine Ukraine's effective defense by attacking cities deep in Ukrainian territory,

such as the [attack on the shopping center](#) in Kremenchuk, with the aim of destroying civilian infrastructure and urban areas, causing heavy losses, and encouraging the local population to flee. All of this is accompanied by [severe harm to the civilian population](#). This mode of operation is designed, inter alia, to exert pressure on Ukraine and demonstrate to the neighboring and other countries in the area of the former Soviet Union how much damage Russia can inflict if they try to join NATO and the West. For example, when Lithuania, a NATO member, sought to enforce European Union sanctions against Russia and prevent the passage of goods from Russia proper to the Kaliningrad enclave, Russia insisted that it reserved the right to respond to this measure. Russia is thereby again raising the threshold of threats against the West, in continuation of the threat that it posed by [raising the nuclear alert](#). All of this is done in the framework of new rules of the game that Russia has introduced into the international arena.

Negotiations have taken place from the first week of the war, as of now with no results. The war therefore does not seem to be ending any time soon, and the parties are not discussing terms for such an end. It appears that through the military and economic aid they provide Ukraine, the Western countries, headed by the United States, want to drag Russia, to its detriment, into a protracted war, together with a cognitive effort aimed at the public and the government establishment in Russia itself. President Biden has [stated this goal](#) publicly. At the same time, the United States and the NATO countries are taking care to avoid a direct conflict with Russia and escalation into a world war.

It is in Russia's interest to end the military conflict quickly, whether through a substantial military achievement or a consensual arrangement attained in negotiations. Russia has already achieved some of its strategic objectives: the conquest of most of the Donbas region, which it hopes to control completely,

and cities such as Kharkiv and the port city of Mariupol, which is regarded as an important city because of its size, strategic location, and importance on a cognitive level. The conquest of the southern coastal strip enables Russia to cut Ukraine off from the Black Sea, which is liable to cause major damage to Ukraine's imports, exports, and supply chains. Controlling this strip will allow Russia future access to the Transnistria separatist area in Moldova, which will pose a threat to Moldova, a country that was part of the Soviet Union, and the neighboring NATO members. In addition, as part of the effort to obtain complete control over conquered areas, Russia is forcing them to grant local residents Russian citizenship or to carry out a population exchange.

Russia's repeated statements on willingness to hold discussions with Ukraine and the West highlight Russia's growing motivation to end the war. Continuation of the military conflict exacerbates internal pressure in Moscow from those opposed to a continuation of the war and jeopardizes the regime's survival. The longer the conflict lasts, the greater the threat inside Russia and the internal friction among the governing factions. Of the alternatives available to Russia, a war of attrition is the worst because it poses a serious threat to Putin's continued rule. Power struggles among the governing elites were already noticeable in the tense weeks preceding the invasion, such as a [letter to Putin](#) from the Russian officers organization published in the media demanding that the Russian government not invade Ukraine. Expressions of similar views in the ruling elite have increased with the escalation of Western sanctions against Russia that have put the country on the verge of a severe economic crisis [close to bankruptcy](#) (for the moment, Russia appears to have contained this crisis). The struggle for the succession to Putin intensifies as the war drags on, with leading figures in the Russian Federation security service [voicing severe criticism](#) of the army and the military campaign in Ukraine, under

Minister of Defense Sergei Shoigu. All of this exacerbates the situation and encourages a crisis in the Russian power centers.

To date, throughout the months of warfare in Ukraine, Russia has successfully contained the threat to its governmental stability and overcome its internal opposition. Inter alia, enforcement measures have been instituted, accompanied by a propaganda campaign, with tens of thousands of demonstrators against the war and opposition figures arrested and imprisoned. A curfew has been imposed in a number of cities, and many media channels regarded as free have been shut down. Nevertheless, the threat still stands, and is expected to grow as Russia and the existing government near possible elections. As of now, based on the Russian constitution, elections for the presidency of the Russian Federation are scheduled to take place in March 2024—unless President Putin changes the constitution.

Russia therefore wishes to end the war on reasonable terms that will enable it to boast of a military accomplishment, and perhaps also provide relief from the sanctions against it. For its part, the West is determined to drag Russia into a war of attrition that will undermine the regime's legitimacy and heighten the pressure on Russia and the domestic power struggles.

## The Conflict in the International Arena

In the two decades since Putin rose to power, Russia's drive has been to spearhead a new world order, in which it positions itself as a strategic global power. Ensuring Russian influence in the former Soviet space is of primary importance, because it will maintain Russia's power vis-à-vis Europe and the West in general, which Russia regards as an essential condition for its survival. As the war between Russia and Ukraine escalated, the neighboring countries observing the events from the sidelines realized its implications and the measures incumbent on them to maintain their national interests. Bilateral agreements



and international guarantees such as the 1994 [Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances](#)—in which both Russia and the United States made a commitment to respect the territorial integrity of Ukraine—are an excellent example of the erosion in the quality of international promises and guarantees and the ability of the countries issuing them to back them up. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has generated a domino effect in which new agreements and rules of the game are put to the test, reflected in the steps taken by countries such as [Finland and Sweden](#), which remained neutral until a relatively late stage of the war between Russia and Ukraine but now seek to join NATO. This bolsters the advantage and importance of NATO as a military alliance of proven effectiveness in providing security to its member countries, serving as a deterrent, and relocating substantial military forces, such as the [decision](#) to put 300,000 soldiers on high alert in Eastern Europe.

Beyond this, the bitter and bloody battles taking place and the renewed clashes of military forces on European soil at an intensity not seen since World War II, in combination with Ukraine's ability to withstand Russian forces effectively with the help of advanced Western weaponry, highlight the importance of military power. This encourages additional countries to increase their military power by strengthening their [military industries](#), increasing their defense budgets, and readying their national armies in the most advanced way.

Russia's lack of success in achieving a decisive victory in Ukraine sends a signal to other areas in the post-Soviet sphere of influence, among them Kazakhstan and its ruler, President Tokayev. Despite the aid provided by Russia to the Kazakh government in the recent coup attempt in January 2022, it appears that Kazakhstan is trying to demonstrate its independence, and presumably intends to create other, more effective alliances in order to preserve its interests. It cannot be ruled out that the trend of Kazakhstan distancing

itself from Russia is a result of China's growing influence in Asia.

In addition, other significant processes are underway in Europe, such as the widely publicized rapprochement between Ukraine and Poland and the possibility that the [two countries will sign an agreement](#). In response, and as part of its subversion operations, Russia is trying to arouse opposition to such cooperation. Similarly, in Hungary, which has hitherto demonstrated neutrality with respect to European policy on sanctions against Russia, Moscow hopes to stimulate public sentiment about the return of territory in Ukraine that Hungary has claimed was previously under its control, such as the [Zakarpattia](#) region. As part of its promotion of a new world order, Russia is thereby acting to shape Ukraine's territorial future.

Despite the drama of recent months, mutual nuclear deterrence has been maintained. This too has implications, and an understanding is emerging that nuclear arms will enable countries to defend their security interests. Russia, which was a partner in the rules of the game established during the nuclear era of the Cold War, is still observing and playing according to the rules of nuclear deterrence, despite its [threats](#). It can therefore not be ruled out that this will increase the motivation of players in the Middle East and elsewhere to obtain nuclear weapons.

The economic aspect also has weighty implications for the world order. [The severe sanctions](#) imposed by Western countries have resulted in heavy economic pressure within Russia. Confounding the expectations, however, Russia has managed to contain the economic challenge and even to suppress it for the time being. The picture that Moscow now portrays is that Russia has [stabilized its economy](#) and ensured stamina for the government and its military campaign. The tightening of its relations with China, Iran, India, and other countries in Asia and the Middle East, combined with reliance on reserves planned ahead of time,

allows Russia to increase its pressure on Ukraine, and to persevere in its struggle against the West in the energy sphere, due in part to the realization that at this stage, Western Europe has [no effective alternatives](#) to the Russian oil and gas market. Although [European countries](#) will strive to rely on alternatives, inter alia through an effort to appeal to Middle East countries and [Israel](#), the embargo on Russia could prove more costly for Europe than for Russia.

Furthermore, Russian pressure and threats against countries and regional actors that it will [halt the supply of energy](#) have exposed especially great dependence on Russian oil and gas. Such pressure and threats have proven themselves, in view of the consent of some of the actors to conditions set by Russia, among them the continuation of trade with Russia in rubles. It cannot be ruled out that Russia will step up its pressure with the approach of winter, when European dependence on Russian energy sources will increase.

In addition to the grave energy crisis pervading Europe, the Russia-Ukraine war has aggravated the global food crisis and weakened Ukraine's ability to export wheat and other grains to countries around the world. About one tenth of global wheat imports come from Ukraine, and the war has therefore caused a sharp increase in prices worldwide. [Middle East and African](#) countries, which consume about 40 percent of the wheat supplied by Russia and Ukraine, have also seen a severe crisis and extreme price rises. This is liable to further increase internal instability in countries in these regions and lead to regional crises. Russia might thus strive to increase the dependence on it as a wheat supplier, and to eliminate such dependence on Ukraine on the part of various countries.

At this point, the economic campaign has a number of important consequences for both Russia and other countries. First, as the war in Ukraine continues, economic pressure has leveraged the West's ability to push Russia into negotiations with Ukraine and reach understandings. Inter alia, the purpose of the

Western sanctions was to exert public pressure on the Russian regime. While in the short term it appears Russia has managed to contain and overcome the sanctions, in the long term, the economic pressure is liable to affect Russia and the public. For its part, Russia will attempt to find alternative ways of bypassing the sanctions. The question remains whether the West will achieve the desired results in the short term.

Second, [President Putin's statements](#) in international economic forums indicate that Russia regards the economic pressure against it and the counter-influence it has on Europe and the West as a "boomerang effect"—another tool it can use to change the world order. In other words, Russia believes that the inflation raging throughout the West and the economic burden on people caused by higher prices and supply chain problems will bring about internal political changes and the rise of new elites in Western countries, and will cause internal instability in other regions, such as the Middle East and Africa. Russia expects this effect to be of great assistance to it in shaping the new world order.

Finally, the [energy crisis afflicting Europe](#) also indirectly affects Israel. Israel's natural gas reservoirs make it an important player in the energy field in both the regional market—the Middle East—and the European market. Indeed, the European Commission appears ready to promote purchases of Israeli natural gas. In addition, the emerging agreement to transfer gas from Israel to Lebanon via a pipeline passing through Jordan and Syria is unprecedented and could have a regional impact. Although this transaction began before the war broke out, continued progress by Israel and Lebanon in this direction indicates that Israel is also becoming an important player in the energy sector in both the Middle East and Europe.

## **Russia, the Middle East, and Israel**

Russia has taken a series of measures against Israel since the beginning of the war. These include reconnaissance aerial patrols that

challenge flights in the Syrian border area, harsh public criticism of Israel for its relations with Palestinians with respect to Jerusalem, direct ties with Hamas and the Palestinian Authority, criticism with an antisemitic tone (by the Russian foreign minister), and open criticism of Israeli attacks against Iranian targets in Syria. The severest criticism involved the attack on Damascus International Airport, including a summons of the Israeli ambassador and submission of a draft resolution to the UN Security Council. All of this may indicate Russia's interest in at least preserving its status with Syria, Iran, and other countries as a regional power, because the Ukraine war has also damaged Russia's status in this region. As the Russians see it, their dominance in Syria is an essential interest, inter alia because this gives them a significant foothold in the Middle East; their port in Tartus in Syria provides them with strategic access to the Mediterranean Sea, the soft underbelly of NATO; and the location of Syria near parts of the Caucasus are of strategic importance to Russia. This could also reflect Russia's interest in igniting a regional crisis involving Israel directly or indirectly that will position Russia as a power against the United States and its allies and help establish Russia's status in the region. Nor can motivation on Russia's part to divert international attention from matters pertaining to Ukraine to other issues be ruled out. Although maintaining stability and preventing the Iranians from consolidating themselves in Syria is very important to Russia, Moscow wants at least to signal to the Syrians and the Iranians that it is concerned about them and is on their side.

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These aspects are linked to Russia's efforts to reshape the international map and impel it to create new alternatives and alliances against

the United States and its allies. Such measures will enable Russia to maintain its status as a global power. They also serve Russia's interest in the short term by generating an image of processes and achievements, instead of stagnation. Displaying achievements at these stages of the war eases the internal pressure on the Russian government.

## Conclusions

Although the Russia-Ukraine War is not over, initial conclusions and lessons can already be gleaned. Above all, the war points to a trend of efforts to shape a new world order, and Russia's actions force other countries to compete in this framework.

This trend obligates Western and other countries to calculate a new route and exercise better judgment about new future international agreements. First and foremost, this concerns the countries of the former Soviet Union. It also affects Israel, which has become an important international actor in these circumstances, inter alia because of its attempts to mediate between Russia and Ukraine. Although these attempts have yielded no significant results, they have highlighted Israel's importance in the international arena. Russia perceives Israel as the only Western actor that is not a party to the Western sanctions, and which is therefore capable of maneuvering between the parties and striving to reach agreements. At the same time, despite Israel's efforts to maintain its independent stance in the conflict, these matters are beginning to be relevant to the choice of a future path, and Israel must weigh its considerations well. Inter alia, as the world order is reshaped, Israel will have to examine who are its strategic partners and the terms whereby these partnerships and alliances can be maintained. For example, in an array of considerations in which the United States is Israel's most strategic and important ally, it cannot be ruled out that a time will come when Israel has to make decisions about its policy toward China. In addition, Israel must take

into consideration its natural energy resources and their effect on the international struggle in general, and the regional struggle in particular.

Furthermore, this campaign includes lessons with a direct impact on the military sphere concerning combat doctrine, including the question of the effectiveness of military action on the ground battlefield, the question of the need for investment in and development of advanced weapon systems, the question of cognitive warfare, and more. Israel should consider the relevant strategic, tactical, and technological significance of the war.

Although it is difficult to determine when and how the war will end, a number of possible scenarios are discernible at the present time. While Russia is making slow progress toward its strategic goals in eastern and southern Ukraine, the course of events indicates a possible war of attrition that will continue until one of the following three events occurs:

- a. The Western countries, led by the United States, lead Russia and Ukraine to agreements and an end to the war. The West's motivation for achieving an end to the war can result from constraints and pressure from Ukraine, which has suffered heavy losses, and from the realization that Russia has exhausted its means of exerting pressure on the West, and will now agree to play according to Western rules.
- b. Russia exhibits motivation for ending the war and finding a solution for an arrangement with Ukraine. Such a scenario can materialize, assuming that Russia's internal considerations show that the array of pressures on the home front and concern about instability, the threat to the government, and economic difficulties make the price of ongoing war too high for the Russian regime if it enters a prolonged war of attrition. If such an event materializes, Russia will claim that it has set in motion a process of upsetting and redesigning the world order, created a threat and anxiety

among countries that were part of the Soviet Union, and achieved acceptance of Ukraine's non-membership in NATO.

- c. Russia stops the war following the regime's collapse and instability. A change in the regime as a result of Western or internal pressure is liable to bring Russia to halt the war and direct its resources to deal with the destructive events of the type described above.

Any halt in the war means negotiations on some terms. At this stage, it is difficult to discern the results of the war, but the course of events indicates the possible ramifications and scenarios described above.

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