

WAR AT THE GATES

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Abstract

The conflict in Ukraine, now in its third year, has evolved into a complex geopolitical confrontation with limited prospects for resolution. Initially, diplomatic efforts focused on compromises or territorial concessions failed, as both Russia and NATO consolidated their positions. Strategic miscalculations on both sides have raised the stakes, transforming the conflict into a broader struggle for influence. For the West, the conflict represents a test of NATO unity and US global leadership, while for Russia it is an existential battle against perceived NATO encroachment.

The protracted war has shifted the goals. Russia, initially seeking a quick victory, now prioritizes dismantling Ukraine's military potential and providing a buffer against NATO expansion. In contrast, the US and its allies aim to shore up Ukraine's resistance while preserving NATO cohesion, despite mounting financial and logistical challenges. With diplomatic solutions stymied by mutual distrust, military escalation seems increasingly likely.

Demographic and economic constraints are further pushing both sides toward decisive action. Russia faces time pressures from demographic decline and NATO's ongoing rearmament. Likewise, prolonged engagement strains NATO unity and risks exposing broader vulnerabilities in the Western alliance. A potential U.S. withdrawal under a new administration could shift responsibility to NATO's European members, threatening Ukraine's cohesion and defense capabilities. As entrenched positions and geopolitical imperatives harden, the conflict underscores a critical inflection point in global power dynamics, where the window for a negotiated solution is narrowing and the risk of a broader confrontation is growing.

Keywords

conflict, geopolitics, escalation, diplomacy

Introduction

The conflict in Ukraine, now approaching its third year, has evolved into a complex geopolitical struggle with significant global implications (Batta, 2024). Initially, many hoped for a diplomatic resolution or a quick military outcome. However, both sides are now deeply

entrenched, with strategic miscalculations by both Russia and the West pushing the conflict toward an escalation that may be difficult to reverse.

Decision-making dynamics have shifted from individual political will to a broader, more deterministic set of geopolitical realities. The interplay between past choices and the military reality on the ground is now driving the conflict, severely limiting resolution options. The accumulation of historical decisions, rather than current political will, plays an increasingly significant role in limiting viable options for resolving the conflict in Ukraine. As diplomatic channels struggle to find common ground, attention is shifting toward military solutions, and the initial intentions of each actor, be it the United States and its allies or Russia, have evolved, adapting to a new strategic reality. This study delves into the implications of these accumulated choices for potential paths to resolution in Ukraine, with an emphasis on shifting priorities and the role of international alliances, highlighting how political constraints shape military and diplomatic strategies.

This analysis explores how the accumulation of previous decisions, particularly by the United States, NATO, and Russia, has shaped the trajectory of the war and made a negotiated solution increasingly unlikely. The conflict is no longer simply a territorial dispute or political contest, but a broader strategic struggle, with the potential to escalate into a broader confrontation.

Methods

This study examines the ongoing war through a strategic lens, focusing on the interests and shifting objectives of the key actors: the U.S., NATO, and Russia. By analyzing military developments, political shifts, and international relations, the analysis provides insight into the prospects for a resolution or further escalation. The paper assesses how the changing nature of the war and past strategic errors have influenced the current situation, making it increasingly difficult to avoid a wider conflict.

This analysis utilizes qualitative research based on statements and policy documents from the major stakeholders, including the U.S., NATO, and Russia, combined with secondary sources examining policy analyses and geopolitical commentaries. Specific emphasis was placed on identifying how the statements and actions from these parties reveal shifts in strategic objectives, and how these shifts contribute to the escalation or perpetuation of the conflict.

Results

It is quite evident, from the chronology of the conflict itself, how the hypothesis of a diplomatic solution was stubbornly discarded by the West, at least until the prospect of a dramatic defeat on the field of the Ukrainian armed forces became all too clear.

The Russian proposals to negotiate a comprehensive solution on European security, which included the open problems in Ukraine, and advanced up to a few days before the start of the military operation, were indignantly rejected (proposals that, at the time, were far more favorable for Ukraine, providing only for an autonomous status for Donbass, and not independence), as were the subsequent attempts to reach a mediation, first through the Russian-Ukrainian talks in Minsk, then with the quasi-agreement of Istanbul. The room for negotiation was however precluded by the fact that the US-NATO plans envisaged a different development of events.

The main aim was to inflict a *strategic defeat* on Russia, in the belief that by bringing the situation to a kinetic military conflict, and thus finding justification for a huge amount of hostile economic measures (sanctions), this would end up causing an unsustainable crisis in Moscow. In addition to this, Washington had the no less important - much less trumpeted -

aim of causing a clear separation between the Russian Federation and European countries, with the dual aim of interrupting a process of integration of their mutual economies (seen as a prelude to a possible development of a powerful Eurasian bloc) and, in the short term, putting the European Union out of the game as a possible economic-commercial competitor, depriving it of the irreplaceable lifeblood of low-cost Russian energy sources.

More generally, the willingness to seek diplomatic solutions - and therefore, necessarily, mediations that cannot fully satisfy all parties - in the current global geopolitical context appears increasingly rare. This is clearly due to the worsening of the confrontation, and to the fact that Western elites attribute an irreconcilable dimension to it, while in turn - for example - for the Russians all this is perceived as an existential threat. Fundamentally, and regardless of the specificity of the wrongs and rights in individual contexts, the issue must be framed in a long-term historical process, which is accelerating at this stage. We mean the decline of American imperial hegemony, and more broadly that of Western colonial hegemony. This decline obviously causes great alarm among Western elites, who see in it the concrete risk of a drastic reduction in their political and economic power, and therefore have made the choice to go to war with those countries that they believe can lead this process of *subversion* of the world order (as they have built it).

From the Russian point of view, which for a series of historical and geographical reasons is today at the forefront of this confrontation, the never-dormant Western ambitions to get their hands on Russia (on its immense resources, for starters), which have also recently been reiterated in various ways, are understandably seen as an existential danger. What characterizes the perception of the conflict, from the Russian side, is that it is not a question of defending a hegemonic role - much less of imagining one - but of Russian national and state unity, its identity, as they have been historically defined.

Once this point of view is assumed, it becomes clear that for Moscow there is not much room for mediation, at least on the fundamental aspects. Which, obviously, are only secondarily attributable to territorial issues, which themselves assume importance only in the more overall framework, which concerns the security of the Russian Federation; security that feels threatened by the abstention of NATO, and by its growing characterization as anti-Russian.

It follows that for Russia, pushing away - in space and time - this threat is an essential objective. Just as, once the path of military confrontation has been undertaken, the already narrow margins for negotiation are gradually further rarefied by the conflict itself. Obviously, in fact, the longer the conflict drags on (and therefore the higher the cost sustained by Russia), the more important it becomes to fully achieve the objectives. Furthermore, the evolution of the conflict on the ground strengthens the Russian position and its unavailability to make substantial compromises.

Discussion

As the conflict in Ukraine has unfolded, the feasibility of a diplomatic solution continues to diminish. Initially, there were potential openings for non-military solutions; however, the intricate web of conflicting interests among the major players, Ukraine, the United States, NATO, and Russia, has led to more rigid positions. The early goals of the great powers, particularly the destabilization of Russia from the United States' perspective and Ukraine's attempt to maintain sovereignty, have been complicated by the emergence of Russia's response to perceived existential threats and recalibrations of the NATO alliance, transforming initial intentions into deeply rooted strategic necessities. This context sets the stage for analyzing how a protracted conflict has evolved beyond simple tactical disagreements into an entrenched geopolitical struggle.

Not secondarily, moreover, the conflict is burdened by its historical roots which, without

going too far, can be identified at least since 2014, when the 'colorful revolution' in Maidan Square, openly instigated by the United States (Victoria Nuland, McCain; see Pazzanese, 2019; Walsh & Capelouto, 2013) and managed in the streets by the far-right nationalist and pro-Nazi formations, will lead to the overthrow of the legitimate elected government of Yanukovich. Following that insurrection, the new Ukrainian government - chaired by Poroshenko, and agreed in its composition by Nuland and the US ambassador to Kiev - will start a strongly Russophobic policy, which in turn will lead to the secession of the oblasts of Donetsk and Lugansk, giving rise to the civil war.

It is interesting to note, in this regard, how some analytical studies (Qaisrani et al., 2023; Osimen & Ade-Ibijola, 2022; Osimen, Adi, & Micah, 2022) of the conflict tend - as it seems to be the case lately - to remove from the description of the historical context the elements that appear to be different from the thesis that they intend to demonstrate (Cameron, & Mitchell, 2012; Simchi-Levi, D., & Haren, P. 2022). With an approach that in my opinion is not very scientific, for example, in these studies there is no trace of proven historical events (the coup that overthrows the legitimate Ukrainian government, brazenly piloted by the United States, the Russophobic aggression in the eastern areas of the country, the deception of the Minsk agreements, etc.), and they *start the story* at the most opportune moment - a bit like, not by chance, what happens with the conflict in Palestine, which is preferred to present as if it began on October 7, 2023 (Wikipedia contributors, 2024; Carl, 2023).

The attempt to resolve the conflict, in its internal phase in Ukraine, and materialized in the Minsk I and II agreements, actually arose first and foremost from the difficulties encountered by the Ukrainian army in fighting against the militias of the separatist republics. Unfortunately, these agreements - which formally were supposed to serve to start a process of pacification - were instead conceived from the beginning, by Western diplomacy (USA, France and Germany) as a mere subterfuge, necessary to give Kiev's armed forces time, with NATO's assistance, to recover and regain the offensive capacity necessary to overcome the separatist republics. This was later publicly claimed by both the then German Chancellor Angela Merkel and the then French President François Hollande.

Obviously, this has definitively undermined Western credibility, and the confidence of the Russian leadership in the reliability of the commitments undertaken by NATO countries (Global Times, 2022).

The current state of the conflict in Ukraine sees radical positions with limited prospects for a negotiated solution. Both Russia and the West have made strategic miscalculations that have exacerbated the conflict, and both sides have invested heavily in mutually exclusive objectives. Russia's primary goal is a military victory that will ensure its security and prevent further NATO expansion. German Defense Minister Boris Pistorius, for example, based on what was previously stated by the Bundeswehr General Staff, believes that it is necessary to "*be ready for war by 2029*" (Loevenich, 2024), while the British Army Chief of Staff, Sir Raleigh Walker, has warned that the combination of threats could lead to a clash with the *shock axis* (Russia, China, Iran and the DPRK) by 2027-28 (Haynes, 2024). Not to mention the fact that European countries are investing heavily both in a renewed large-scale industrial production of ammunition, and in a series of adaptations of logistical infrastructure to military needs. There is even a NATO plan (*Oplan Deu*) that provides for the deployment of 800,000 men and 200,000 vehicles and heavy equipment on the Eastern front [7].

For the West, a defeat in Ukraine would have severe political and strategic ramifications, threatening the very foundations of NATO and the US-led global order. A negotiated resolution now seems unlikely, as both sides are deeply entrenched in their positions. The war is likely to continue for some time, with each side seeking to achieve its strategic objectives through military means. Russia, in particular, is determined to avoid any outcome that would leave room for Ukraine to be considered a potential NATO member or a future military threat.

The evidence suggests that the conflict in Ukraine is as much a demonstration of regional sovereignty as it is a crucial moment in the alignment of global power. Each actor's initial objectives have adapted to meet new realities, with both NATO and Russia consolidating their positions and strengthening their commitments in a conflict they now see as essential to their security and influence. For the United States, the imperative of preserving NATO unity and deterring Russian expansion complicates any potential withdrawal or significant reduction in support. Russia, interpreting the conflict as a necessary means of consolidating a security buffer against NATO, likewise shows no inclination to compromise. The combination of NATO's strengthened military posture in Europe and Russia's new defensive strategies suggests that both sides see the conflict as preparatory to a possible broader confrontation, in which military engagements are poised to escalate. The demographic and economic dimensions further complicate the conflict, with demographic decline in both Russia and Europe adding urgency to resolve the conflict. These dynamics underscore an increasingly narrow window within which both NATO and Russia must achieve their respective objectives, potentially exacerbating the risk of military escalation should diplomatic solutions remain elusive.

Obviously, in all of this the mutual perception as a threat has great relevance. From the European point of view, the Russian intervention in Ukraine represented a shock that, also for obvious political reasons, quickly led to completely erasing the entire history of the previous decade, leaving Moscow's Special Military Operation as a sudden and inexplicable event. From the Russian point of view, there is instead the awareness of a constant military push by NATO ever closer to the borders of the Russian Federation, and a declared desire for European rearmament in an anti-Russian function. Even the publicly claimed duplicity (see Merkel and Hollande, on the Minsk agreements) has contributed to sowing distrust. Significantly, reading what authoritative think tanks in the NATO sphere write, reinforces the Russian fear of an aggressive desire on the part of the Atlantic Alliance (see Marcinek, 2024; Wolff et al., 2024).

The changes introduced by Donald Trump's election to the Presidency of the United States, in relation to the conflict in Ukraine, are difficult to assess for the moment. Trump's declared intention to end the war is not necessarily destined to translate into an actual outcome in this sense, also because - from what appears - his negotiation plans seem too optimistic, and above all unrealistic. First of all because they do not seem to take into account the reality determined on the battlefield, where Russia is clearly prevailing (which determines a position of strength on the part of Moscow), and because they seem to completely ignore the security needs that determined Russia to intervene militarily. According to leaks in the international press, the peace plan envisaged by Trump would essentially be based on the following points:

- freezing of the conflict along the current line of contact
- creation of a demilitarized zone along the border, guarded by European military forces
- Ukraine's refusal to join NATO for the next 20 years
- US military support for Kiev's armed forces
- more recently, Trump seems to have taken up the idea (advanced by several European countries) of an interposition force, composed of soldiers from European armies, which would then act as a guarantee for Ukrainian security.

It is quite clear that these bases are completely unacceptable to Russia, since what is being offered is, on the one hand, what it already has (the territories of Novorossia conquered so far), and on the other, a long postponement of Ukraine's formal membership in NATO. Conversely, Moscow would find itself with European NATO armies deployed on the border while, sheltered by this *sanitary cordon*, the Ukrainian army rearms and reorganizes.

If these premises were to be confirmed by the first concrete actions of the new administration (in any case not before January-February 2025), the most likely outcome will not be so much an actual peace agreement, but rather a substantial withdrawal of the United States from

its current position as the largest military supporter of Ukraine. As a result, it will probably be the European NATO countries that will take full responsibility for the Ukrainian war effort. This will produce on the one hand a crisis in NATO's internal relations, across the Atlantic, and on the other an inevitable weakening of the Ukrainian armed forces' capacity to resist. In that case, it is to be expected that the war will continue until Kiev's fighting capacity is completely exhausted.

1. The Diminishing Likelihood of Diplomacy

The conflict in Ukraine has reached a strategic stalemate, with the possibility of diplomacy fading further as the war continues. Initial hopes for a negotiated settlement, possibly involving territorial compromises or mutual concessions, have diminished over time. Russia's position has hardened, and trust between the parties has eroded, partly due to the failure of previous agreements like Minsk I and II. On the Western side, early ambitions of using the conflict to politically destabilize Russia have not materialized. Instead, the war has bolstered Moscow's resolve, making a settlement based on territorial exchanges increasingly unrealistic. Discussions in the West about a potential resolution now revolve around preserving NATO unity without conceding defeat, but this outcome remains improbable as both sides remain deeply entrenched. From the Western perspective, the conflict initially appeared to be an opportunity to weaken Russia's regional influence. However, as the war has dragged on, the strategic goals of the United States and NATO have shifted, acknowledging the long-term challenges and costs of sustaining military and economic support for Ukraine. For NATO, maintaining credibility and cohesion is critical, as a perceived defeat would not only undermine the alliance but embolden adversaries like China and Iran. At the same time, the ongoing conflict has exposed internal strains within NATO, as member states face growing financial and logistical burdens. On the Russian side, the war is framed as existential, with NATO's presence in Ukraine viewed as a direct threat to national security. Russia's annexation of Ukrainian territories and efforts to degrade Ukraine's military infrastructure reflect its aim of securing a decisive military outcome to guarantee Kyiv's non-alignment and to prevent NATO's further expansion. In a recent interview with *Newsweek* (O'Connor, 2024), Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov reiterated Russia's conditions for a peace deal (and opposition to any ceasefire): "*full AFU withdrawal from the DPR [Donetsk People's Republic], LPR [Luhansk People's Republic], Zaporozhye, and Kherson oblasts; recognition of territorial realities as enshrined in the Russian Constitution; neutral, non-bloc, and non-nuclear status for Ukraine; its demilitarization and denazification; guaranteeing the rights, freedoms, and interests of Russian-speaking citizens; and lifting all sanctions against Russia.*" A complete capitulation, indeed.

2. Russia's Evolving Objectives: Victory by Force

Russia's war aims have evolved from seeking a quick military resolution to pursuing a long-term strategy to neutralize Ukraine's military capabilities. Moscow no longer sees negotiations as a viable option, believing that only a decisive victory can ensure its security and avoid future conflict with NATO¹. For the United States, the conflict has become a test of NATO's cohesion and a way to counterbalance Russia's strategic partnership with other powers such as China. Both sides now view the war as central to their broader security and influence, significantly reducing the chances of non-military compromise. The West has invested heavily in Ukraine's defense, both militarily and economically, seeing the war as a crucial test of its geopolitical leadership. A perceived failure in Ukraine would have far-reaching consequences, damaging NATO unity, weakening U.S. global influence, and accelerating changes in the

1 For example, a proposal to change Russian nuclear doctrine, Lavrov, quoting Putin, said: "*We will take adequate decisions based on our understanding of the threats posed by the West. It is up to you to make conclusions*" (O'Connor, 2024).

global order, such as the de-dollarization of the international economy. In contrast, a Russian victory would strengthen Moscow's position while also bolstering allies such as China and Iran, reshaping global power dynamics. For NATO, the protracted conflict has necessitated significant investments in military assets and infrastructure in Europe, including renewed commitments to arms production and preparation for future clashes with Russia.

3. The West's Strategic Investment: The Need for a Victory

The West, particularly the United States, has invested heavily in Ukraine's defense, both militarily and economically. A defeat or negotiated settlement that does not result in a clear Western victory would have catastrophic political and strategic consequences. NATO's credibility and unity would be severely undermined, and the perception of Western weakness would encourage adversarial powers like China and Iran to challenge U.S. global dominance. Moreover, a perceived defeat in Ukraine would hasten a broader shift in the global order, accelerating the process of de-dollarization and weakening U.S. military influence worldwide. This is especially concerning as NATO and the U.S. continue to view Russia as a long-term threat. The current situation, in which both sides are heavily invested, leaves little room for compromise. A negotiated settlement that is perceived as a defeat for either side would risk unraveling the fragile international order that the U.S. has constructed over decades.

The conflict has already prompted several nations to pursue policies that aim to reduce dependency on the U.S. dollar, a shift that could weaken the economic leverage of the United States in the global economy. A Russian victory, while potentially bolstering Moscow's strategic influence, would also empower its allies, such as China and Iran, thereby reshaping power dynamics in multiple global regions, particularly the Middle East.

For NATO, the consequences of prolonged engagement include significant financial and logistical strains, compelling the alliance to consider extensive strategic deployments and increased military investments in Europe, with renewed commitments to arms production and logistics to support a hypothetical future confrontation with Russia.

4. Escalation and Stalemate

The current state of the conflict suggests a deepening stalemate, with both sides heavily invested in a prolonged confrontation for strategic reasons. Russia believes it is gaining an advantage on the battlefield, not just through territorial gains but by crippling Ukraine's military and industrial potential. The West, meanwhile, continues to supply Ukraine with advanced weaponry, hoping to either reverse Russia's successes or force a settlement favorable to NATO. However, the longer the war continues, the more entrenched the positions of both sides become, increasing the risk of escalation.

Both Russia and NATO face internal constraints that limit the feasibility of an indefinite conflict. Russia is under pressure from its declining population and mounting war costs, creating a narrow window for achieving its objectives before its military capabilities begin to strain. It is also true that, currently, the European NATO countries have problems with the recruitment of new troops, and could encounter difficulties in mobilizing in the event of a conflict with Russia. At the moment, the forces are estimated to amount to 1.9 million men, a contingent that should be sufficient to counter the Russian armed forces, even if, in reality, the Europeans would have difficulty attracting the 300,000 additional soldiers foreseen in the new defense plans. But, obviously, these problems would only arise in the event of a (relatively) limited conflict; in the event of general mobilization, through conscription, the demographic gap would make its full weight felt (Slaughter, 2024).

Simultaneously, NATO is rearming and restructuring, and while its forces currently lack the readiness for large-scale mobilization, this situation will change over time. Russia is acutely aware of these dynamics and seeks to resolve the conflict before NATO completes its

military buildup. Similarly, demographic and economic pressures within NATO countries, particularly in Europe, highlight the challenges of sustaining long-term engagement, pushing both sides toward strategies aimed at decisive outcomes in the coming years.

Ultimately, the war in Ukraine has become a contest over the global balance of power, with both NATO and Russia viewing it as critical to their respective security and strategic influence. The growing rigidity of their positions and the mutual perception of the conflict as existential make a diplomatic resolution unlikely in the near term. Instead, the focus remains on achieving military objectives to shape the future of the region and prepare for potential future confrontations, raising the risk of further escalation.

In light of these elements, a reasonable time frame within which Russia must face the conflict and resolve it is predictably quite short: between five and seven years maximum. Which, moreover, almost coincides with Putin's presidential term. To think that the Russian leadership will not go that far is pure naivety. And unfortunately, even if Western propaganda continues to paint the Russian leader as the ogre who wants to conquer the whole of Europe, in reality what they think in the chancelleries is that he will never dare to do so, and that in any case he would not have the strength (Bild, 2024).

5. The Diminishing Likelihood of Diplomacy

Initially, there were hopes for a diplomatic resolution, possibly involving territorial compromises or an exchange of Ukrainian territory in return for some form of Russian concessions. However, as the war has dragged on, the possibility of such a compromise has diminished. Western leaders, particularly in the U.S., initially hoped that the war could be a means to destabilize Russia politically. But this objective has not materialized. The war has instead strengthened Russia's resolve and made any settlement based on territorial exchange less realistic. Today, the only potential diplomatic solution being discussed in the West involves a deal that could allow NATO to preserve its unity without fully admitting defeat. This would likely include a deal over Russian-controlled territory and defining Ukraine's future relationship with NATO. However, such a solution remains highly unlikely as both sides have hardened their positions and mistrust is deep, particularly after the failure of previous agreements, such as Minsk I and II.

U.S. and NATO Perspective: The Western alliance initially engaged in the Ukraine conflict with the intention of weakening Russia's regional influence, hoping that sustained military support could destabilize Russia politically. Over time, however, as the conflict dragged on, the U.S. has had to reassess its ambitions, particularly given the toll on NATO unity and its potential impact on American credibility and influence globally. With NATO's own long-term stability at stake, there is increasing pressure on member states to support policies that could either deter Russia militarily or prompt a favorable settlement.

Russian Perspective: Russia, meanwhile, views the presence of NATO in Ukraine as an existential threat, prompting it to discard any earlier interest in a negotiated settlement that would allow NATO influence to persist. Its annexation of regions within Ukraine, along with its focus on degrading Ukraine's military infrastructure, underscores its determination to achieve a military outcome. The conflict has led Russia to view a negotiated solution as practically impossible, given what it perceives as the West's consistent unreliability and its own strategic imperatives.

6. Russia's Evolving Objectives: Victory by Force

Russia entered the conflict expecting a quick resolution through military means, but the situation has evolved significantly. Russia now views the war as existential, not just to protect its security from NATO but to safeguard its political system from a perceived Western-driven destabilization. The conflict has hardened Russia's stance and shifted its war goals. Moscow is no longer interested in compromises or negotiations, but in achieving a decisive military

victory that would ensure Ukraine's non-alignment and prevent NATO from expanding further. Russia's strategic objectives have moved beyond territorial annexations in eastern Ukraine. The goal now is the complete destruction of Ukraine's military capacity and its potential as a future threat. Russia's view is that only a military victory will guarantee long-term security and eliminate the possibility of future conflicts with NATO, as negotiations or compromises are seen as futile or insufficient. Both the U.S. and Russia have realigned their objectives as the conflict unfolded, abandoning earlier aspirations of rapid solutions in favor of long-term military engagement. For the United States, the conflict is increasingly seen as a way to uphold NATO's cohesion and delay Russia's potential alliance strengthening with China. Russia, on the other hand, is resolute in its goal to create a buffer zone within Ukraine, aiming to forestall any future Western military buildup along its borders. With each side perceiving the conflict as central to their respective security, the possibility of a non-military compromise has substantially diminished.

7. The West's Strategic Investment: The Need for a Victory

The West, particularly the United States, has invested heavily in Ukraine's defense, both militarily and economically. A defeat or negotiated settlement that does not result in a clear Western victory would have catastrophic political and strategic consequences. NATO's credibility and unity would be severely undermined, and the perception of Western weakness would encourage adversarial powers like China and Iran to challenge U.S. global dominance.

Moreover, a perceived defeat in Ukraine would hasten a broader shift in the global order, accelerating the process of de-dollarization and weakening U.S. military influence worldwide. This is especially concerning as NATO and the U.S. continue to view Russia as a long-term threat. The current situation, in which both sides are heavily invested, leaves little room for compromise. A negotiated settlement that is perceived as a defeat for either side would risk unraveling the fragile international order that the U.S. has constructed over decades.

The conflict has already prompted several nations to pursue policies that aim to reduce dependency on the U.S. dollar, a shift that could weaken the economic leverage of the United States in the global economy. A Russian victory, while potentially bolstering Moscow's strategic influence, would also empower its allies, such as China and Iran, thereby reshaping power dynamics in multiple global regions, particularly the Middle East.

For NATO, the consequences of prolonged engagement include significant financial and logistical strains, compelling the alliance to consider extensive strategic deployments and increased military investments in Europe, with renewed commitments to arms production and logistics to support a hypothetical future confrontation with Russia.

8. Escalation and Stalemate

The situation has now evolved into a strategic stalemate. Neither side is in a position to win outright, and both are heavily invested in prolonging the conflict for strategic reasons. From Russia's perspective, it is winning on the battlefield, not just in terms of territorial gains but in terms of crippling Ukraine's military and industrial potential. Russia is prepared to continue the war until it achieves a complete military victory, which it sees as necessary to prevent the re-emergence of Ukraine as a future threat.

The West, meanwhile, continues to supply Ukraine with advanced weaponry, hoping to reverse Russia's gains or force a settlement favorable to NATO. However, the longer the war continues, the more entrenched the positions of both sides become. The U.S. and NATO cannot afford a situation where they are seen as losing, especially when facing the strategic challenges posed by other global powers, like China.

Given these dynamics, there is a growing risk that the conflict will escalate into a broader

confrontation between NATO and Russia, particularly if Russia perceives that NATO is not changing its hostile policy, or if a decisive military breakthrough by either side shifts the balance of power.

Russia's demographic constraints, coupled with the urgent need to leverage its existing military assets, highlight the importance of a conflict timeline that is not overly drawn out. The demographic pressures that Russia faces are also real. Russia's population is significantly smaller than that of NATO members, particularly the United States and Europe. European NATO nations are similarly constrained by demographic and especially recruitment challenges, which would complicate any large-scale mobilization against Russian forces. Both Russia and NATO face internal problems that limit the feasibility of an indefinite conflict, pushing each side toward strategies that can achieve decisive results in the coming years.

9. Time Constraints for Russia

Russia faces some time constraints in this conflict. Russia's declining population, coupled with the costs of the war, means that Russia has a limited window to achieve its goals before its military capabilities begin to strain. Likewise, Russia is aware that NATO is mobilizing and restructuring its military capabilities. While NATO forces are currently substandard, this will not remain so indefinitely. Russia must resolve the conflict before NATO completes its military preparations or completes its rearmament phase. The need for a relatively quick resolution is accentuated by the fact that a prolonged conflict will strain Russia's military capabilities and could ultimately lead to strategic disadvantages.

Conclusion

The conflict in Ukraine demonstrates the limits that past decisions place on current choices, creating a situation in which diplomatic solutions are increasingly constrained by geopolitical imperatives. The United States and Russia, locked in opposing but equally existential struggles, find themselves with little room for concessions. For NATO, the resolution of the conflict must include the preservation of credibility and deterrence, while for Russia, ensuring a buffer against NATO invasion has become non-negotiable. The potential for a diplomatic resolution, while still technically possible, would require unprecedented shifts in strategy among European NATO members, potentially including a reduction in military aid to Ukraine, a cessation of infrastructure adaptations for conflict scenarios, and more generally anything that could be interpreted as a potential threat. The drive for rearmament that is affecting European countries, even if it is justified by the fact that in recent decades they have essentially relied on the cover of the US *umbrella*, allowing their armed forces to decline to very low levels, and allowing the war industry to concentrate almost exclusively on exports and profit, cannot but appear threatening in the eyes of Moscow, as it is accompanied not only by a fiercely anti-Russian rhetoric, but is embodied in a series of measures explicitly aimed at strengthening military capabilities on the Eastern front, accumulating operational brigades, increasing the production of ammunition, developing cross-border transport networks (the so-called *military Schengen*), creating logistics hubs, etc. All in the service of an armed confrontation with Russia, which is expected within a few years. See, in this regard, the aforementioned statements by the German Minister of Defense, Boris Pistorius, and those of the Chief of Staff of the British Army, Sir Raleigh Walker. On the clearly aggressive intentions, see for example what the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) stated regarding the Black Sea (considered absolutely strategic by Moscow). In one of his reports, behind a language apparently concerned with defending European interests, the will to chase Russia out of the Black Sea emerges (Simeonova, 2024). To avoid a wider confrontation, European nations, particularly Germany, France and Poland,

must reconsider their military support for Ukraine. A reduction in aid, combined with a diplomatic push to de-escalate hostilities, could potentially offer a way out of the current stalemate. This may sound like abandoning the Ukrainians to their fate, after having encouraged them for a long time to resist and inducing them to believe that active support would last indefinitely. Which in fact is not far from reality. However, this falls within the scope of strategic errors committed by Western leaderships, which cannot be remedied by erasing the consequences. At this point, it would be necessary first of all to take responsibility for these errors, and therefore a dose of realism, which takes note of the evolution of the conflict, and accompanies Ukraine towards a solution that represents, if nothing else, a *damage reduction*.

However, as time passes, the likelihood of such changes appears increasingly tenuous, suggesting that the conflict in Ukraine could persist until one side gains a decisive military advantage or a substantial reorganization of alliances occurs. Thus, without significant changes in the strategic calculus of the key players, the conflict in Ukraine could serve as a precursor to further escalation, with demographic pressures and existential considerations converging to push Russia and NATO into an ever-tightening stalemate.

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