The Russo-Ukrainian War: Causes, Effect, & Implications

J. Michael Greig
Professor
Department of Political Science
University of North Texas
Our Agenda

What has happened:
• Why did Russia invade Ukraine, what has happened, and we should we care?

What could happen next
• How could this conflict escalate?
• How could this conflict end?

Implications:
• for Geopolitics
• for Germany
• for China
• for Food Insecurity & Conflict
Why Should Americans Care About Ukraine?

• Russian invasion up-ends the rules-based international order

• Ukraine is a democracy with aspirations to join the EU & NATO

• Ukraine borders 4 NATO countries

• UNHCR projects nearly 7M refugees, most of which will go to NATO allies

• Success in Ukraine could embolden further Russian aggression
European Strategic Environment

How NATO Expended Eastwards
European countries by year they joined NATO

- 1949
- 1952-1982
- 1999
- 2004-2009
- 2017-2020
- Current aspirations to join

Map excludes NATO members the United States and Canada
Source: Nato

The Suwalki Gap: a nightmare for NATO

Map showing NATO, Non-NATO, and Russia-aligned countries.
Sources: NATO, media
# NATO Enhanced Forward Presence – Baltic Battle Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Lead nation</th>
<th>Current participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>Tapa</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>Denmark, Iceland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>Ādaži</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Albania, Czech Republic, Iceland, Italy, Montenegro, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>Rukla</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Iceland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>Orzysz</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Croatia, Romania, United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Key Background Events

• November 2013
  • Ukraine parliament prepares to sign and association agreement with EU
  • President Victor Yanukovych pulls out of deal
  • Protests in Kyiv’s Independence Square (Maidan); Violently repressed, more protestors join

• February 2014
  • After months of occupation by protesters, violence breaks out
  • “Revolution of Dignity” – 130 killed
  • Russia occupies Ukrainian territory of Crimea
  • Russia backs separatist fight in Donbas

• 2015 Minsk Accords – ends major fighting in Donbas in exchange for autonomy
Russian Troop Buildup – February 14
Initiation of Conflict – February 24
Status of War – May 26

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of May 26, 2022, 3:00 PM ET

* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but not occupied.

Map by Carlos Antonio Gómez Rodriíguez, Karrin A. Dupont, and Thomas Bergeron © 2022, Institute for the Study of War and ASU Critical Threats Project

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of May 26, 2022, 3:00 PM ET

* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

Map by Carlos Antonio Gómez Rodriíguez, Karrin A. Dupont, and Thomas Bergeron © 2022, Institute for the Study of War and ASU Critical Threats Project
Human Effects of the War – (May 2022)

- UK Defence Ministry estimates 15,000 Russian troops killed
- UNHCR estimates 3,998 Ukrainian civilians killed, 4,693 injured
- UNHCR estimates that 6.6M refugees have fled Ukraine to-date
Contemporary Russian Narratives & Assumptions

- **Recurring Russian Narrative**: Foreign defeat puts the country on the brink of ruin, stronger leader mobilizes nation to ultimate victory
  - Stalin & World War 2
  - Putin

- **Russian assumptions**:
  - West is in the midst of an inevitable, irreversible decline
  - Western decline is a consequence of the failure of democracy & domestic conflicts rooted in tolerance and multiculturalism
  - U.S. sees Russian success as a threat to be addressed
  - Russia is special, is the bulwark for traditional values against Western decadence

- Implication for Russia: Ukraine is a battleground with the West
  - NATO may not think that it is at war with Russia, but Russia thinks that it is at war with NATO
Explanations for Putin’s Invasion of Ukraine

• Protection of civilians in Donbas

• Security threat from Ukraine
  • Viktor Zolotov: “We don’t have a border with Ukraine. It is America’s border, because they are the masters there … So we must move further to defend our country”

• NATO

• Putin revisionist history: Ukraine is:
  • “an inalienable part of our history, culture, and spiritual space”.
  • “not a real country”

• Threat of a democratic, prosperous Ukraine
What is Putin’s Endgame in Ukraine?

- Take control of territory in Donestk and Luhansk
- Create a “frozen conflict”
- “Finlandization”
- Install a Russian-friendly puppet government
- Eliminate Ukraine as a state
What Was Russia’s Initial Military Strategy?

- Early missile strikes against major Ukrainian cities and military facilities
- Effort to rapidly move forces on Ukrainian roads – create sense of momentum
- Effort to rapidly capture Kyiv
- Expectation: Government falls & military commanders surrender quickly
Why Did Russia Employ this Strategy?

- Goal: Quick victory, limit destruction

- Why?
  - Blunt Western sanctions by creating a fait accompli
  - Minimize potential for domestic opposition
  - Friendlier environment for new government

- Problem: strategy runs contrary to Russian doctrine and facts on the ground

- Solution: return to Russian military doctrine
How Has the West Responded?

• Two battlefields in Ukraine

• Military:
  • U.S. & NATO have said that they will not deploy military personnel
  • Currently providing military aid to Ukraine

• Economic:
  • SWIFT ban
  • Freezing of Russian foreign reserves
  • Import/export bans
  • Banning of dollar and euro transactions
  • Energy boycotts
  • Corporate boycotts: BP, Exxon, Shell, Maersk
What Did Russia Miscalculate?

- Effectiveness of early Russian strategy

- Resilience of Zelensky government & information control

- Ukrainian military resistance greater than expected
  - Russia, 2022: ~200K troops
  - Soviet Union, 1943: ~1.5M troops

- Cohesiveness of international economic response
  - Coordination between EU and U.S.
  - Sanctions unprecedented in size and scope
What Did the West Miscalculate?

• Massing of Russia troops was a bluff or a limited action

• Need to impose costs for previous Russian aggression
  • Estonia – 2007
  • Georgia – 2008
  • Crimea – 2014

• Degree that previous sanctions/trade ties would change behavior

• Extent to which domestic problems signaled weakness
Options for the West

- Ramped up sanctions
  - Tougher sanctions bring costs
  - Not a “free lunch”, inevitable Russian retaliation

- Resistance support

- Non-lethal covert efforts in Russia

- No fly zone

- Military intervention
Pathways for Potential Escalation

- No fly zone
- Russian attack against supply convoy or depot
- Allied freelancing
- Mistake
- Use of weapons of mass destruction
Is Nuclear War Possible?

- Russia’s military doctrine sees nuclear weapons differently than U.S. doctrine
- Tactical nuclear weapons
- Escalate-to-deescalate
What Next?

- Key question – is there an off-ramp for Putin? Does an off-ramp matter for Putin?

- Some potential outcomes:
  - Russian victory
  - Negotiated settlement
  - Russian “victory”
  - Collapse of the Putin regime
Henry Kissinger on Outcomes in Ukraine

• Speaking at the World Economic Forum in Davos, former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger said on May 23rd:

• The West should not get swept up “in the mood of the moment” and that “Negotiations need to begin in the next two months before it creates upheavals and tensions that will not be easily overcome. Ideally, the dividing line should be a return to the status quo ante. Pursuing the war beyond that point would not be about the freedom of Ukraine, but a new war against Russia itself.”

• Comments set off much discussion and controversy

• Criticism of “outsourcing of American foreign policy” and potential for “salami tactics”
Implications from the Russo-Ukrainian War
Implications for Geopolitics
Geopolitical Challenge of Russia’s Invasion

- Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has challenged a fundamental principle of international relations since the end of World War 2 – borders are sacrosanct.

- Before Ukraine, it had been more than 30 years since one country sought to conquer another internationally recognized country (Kuwait).
  - “State death”

- Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida on Russia’s invasion of Ukraine – “it has undermined the very foundation of the international order”
  - Argued that has triggered the greatest foreign policy challenge since WW2
  - Japanese sanctions, asset freezes, humanitarian & non-lethal military aid
Martin Kimani, Kenyan Ambassador to the UN

• “We agreed that we would settle for the borders that we inherited. We chose to follow the rules of the OAU and United Nations Charter, not because our borders satisfied us, but because we wanted something greater – forged peace.”

• Implications for other territorial disputes:
  • Armenia-Azerbaijan
  • Sudan-Ethiopia
  • China-Taiwan
  • South China Sea
Why Does Russia’s Invasion Matter Beyond Ukraine?

- For the U.S., a revisionist Russia poses a security threat to Western allies, limits the ability of the U.S. to pivot resources to the Pacific to counter a rising China
  - Russia is more immediate threat, China greatest long-term challenge
- Requires reconsideration of long-term U.S. and NATO strategy for dealing with Russia
- Putin has shown a willingness to both revise borders & run significant risks
  - Challenges assumptions of NATO-Russia relations, which is the framework for Western approach to dealing with Russia
From Deterrence By Punishment to Deterrence By Denial

- Deterrence can be built on two distinct foundations:
  - Attack and I will make you hurt enough to not make it worth it
  - I will defeat any attack that you make

- On its eastern flank, NATO has adopted a limited force posture built around tripwires in Poland & the Baltics

- Russia’s invasion of Ukraine will likely make this strategy less tenable
Likely Changes to NATO Force Posture

• Establishment of long-term NATO presence in eastern flank

• Significantly increased NATO regional deployments

• Increased European defense budgets
  • Enhance NATO capacity
  • Hedge against reliance on U.S.

• U.S. posture shift will likely prioritize land capacity, allow for increased naval capacity in Pacific
Some Potential Ukraine Scenarios & Implications

• Full Russian victory – puppet government, divided Europe
  • Russian regional hegemony
  • Increased regional threat

• Limited Russian victory (annexation) – divided Europe, more easterly line
  • Crimean land bridge

• Stalemate – Return to pre-February 2022 status quo
  • Continued risk of return to conflict

• Full Ukrainian victory – Russian withdrawal from the Donbas
  • Eventual Ukrainian EU membership
  • Likely westward shifts in Moldova, Georgia, potentially Belarus
What Does the U.S. Want?

• Long-term stability along Russian border

• Reduction in Russian capacity/willingness for future revanchist action

• Balancing act – chastened Russia, but not so weakened it becomes a China client or a failed state
Early Consequences of Russian Aggression – NATO expansion

• Finland and Sweden have both applied to join NATO

• 2019: Clear majority of Finns oppose joining NATO
• March 2022: 61% of Finns supported joining NATO

• Sweden has held a policy of non-alignment for more than 2 centuries

• Finnish and Swedish militaries are closely intertwined, separate but related decisions
Process for Joining NATO

- Aspiring state informs alliance of intention to join
- After consultation, NATO members send invitation to apply
- Applicant state demonstrates that it meets NATO’s political, economic, and military criteria
- Accession protocol sent to all 30 NATO national legislatures for ratification
What Would the Addition of Finland & Sweden Mean for NATO?

- Highly capable forces
  - Finland – large reserve force
  - Sweden – strong air, naval, submarine force

- Nearly the entire Baltic Sea becomes NATO coastline

- Integrated NATO control of area makes defense of 3 Baltic republics easier

- Both countries likely to follow Norwegian model of NATO membership
  - No permanent NATO bases, no nuclear weapons
  - “Reassurance model”
Potential Danger Zone for Finland and Sweden

• Joining alliance is not immediate

• Ratification takes time
  • Croatia & Albania – 11 months
  • Potential for slow walking by a legislature

• What does Russia do before Finland & Sweden are covered by Article V
  • EU Article 42.7 – aid to members that are victims of aggression
  • Alternative security guarantees:
    • Norway, Denmark, Iceland
    • United Kingdom
    • United States
Turkish Opposition

- Turkish President Erdogan (5/19): "We told relevant friends that we will say no to Sweden's and Finland's entry into NATO and we will continue our path like that."

- Why is Turkey opposed?:
  - Kurds – Erdogan on Sweden (and Finland): “like guesthouses for terror organizations”
  - Leverage – F-16 purchases
  - Domestic politics – 2023 Turkish presidential elections
  - Turkish perceptions

- Ibrahim Kalin (5/25): “We have made it very clear that if Turkey’s security concerns are not met with concrete steps in a certain timeframe the process will not progress,”
Other Potential Challenges to Western Unity

- Disagreement on goal in Ukraine
  - North/East vs. South/West divide

- Imbalance in sensitivity to costs
  - Chief costs are security for some, economic for others
  - Energy supplies

- Disagreement on future NATO expansion
  - Ukraine? Georgia? Moldova?

- Diverse major power interests over Russia & path to engagement
  - France, Germany, UK, United States
Implications for Germany
Germany’s “Zeitenwende”

- German Chancellor Olaf Scholz declared on February 27th that Russia’s invasion was a “turn of the times” resulting from Russian aggression that sought to overturn the European order.

- Scholz declared that “what is needed to secure peace in Europe will be done” and Germany would provide arms to Ukraine because “there could be no other answer to Putin's aggression.”

- Germany pledged €100B investment for the Bundeswehr
  - Spending increase to 2% of GDP

- Willing to send weapons to active conflicts
Understanding Germany’s Approach to Post-Cold War Security

• Germany has generally adopted a modern version of Ostpolitik that emphasized economic engagement (“change through trade”) with Russia
  • Responsibility for World War 2
  • Gratitude for reunification

• Focused on “cooperative security” – a non-zero sum approach to security
  • Emphasized diplomacy over all other foreign policy tools

• Military reticence resulted in “benign neglect”
  • “Dynamic availability management”
  • April 2022 – 150 of 350 Puma infantry fighting vehicles, 9 of 151 Tiger attack helicopters operational
Zeitenwende – Somewhat Less than Advertised?

• Other NATO members have criticized German slowness to deliver arms and support more extensive sanctions on Russia
  • Adrij Melnyk, Ukrainian ambassador to Germany (5/20): “the chancellor doesn’t want to deliver” weapons to Ukraine. “One can get the impression that they are waiting for a cease-fire. There the pressure will be off Germany, and then there will be no need to make any more courageous decisions.”

• Germany unable to deliver tanks to Ukraine until July
  • At least partially rooted in German lack of preparedness – lack of ammunition
  • German military leader said he was “fed up” and the army was “more or less-empty handed”

• German parliament has yet to pass the €100B special fund proposed in Feb

• Net effect: Bundeswehr becomes a less hollow, more credible force able to fulfill NATO commitments

• Russian oil ban
The war raises many questions. Can violence be fought with violence? Can peace only be established without weapons? We should discuss both questions with respect. But one thing is clear: we support Ukraine so that violence does not become the norm.

- @Bundeskanzler Scholz

Der Krieg wirft viele Fragen auf wie: Darf Gewalt mit Gewalt bekämpft werden? Schafft man Frieden nur ohne Waffen? Wir sollten beides mit Respekt diskutieren. Klar ist aber: Wir stehen der Ukraine bei, damit Gewalt sich nicht als Mi...

7:39 AM · 5/27/22 · Twitter for iPhone

103 Retweets 845 Quote Tweets 297 Likes
Implications for China
Ukraine’s Implications for Taiwan

- Both policymakers and analysts have highlighted the potential for China to draw lessons from Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

- Logic:
  - Russia weakens the norm against territorial aggression.
  - Russian success signals the inability of the West to respond to revisionist powers.
  - China operates with a stronger hand in Taiwan than Russia in Ukraine.

- Survey: 77% of Japanese expressed concern that Russia’s actions in Ukraine could bring spillover effects for Taiwan.
Taiwan Backgrounder

• Following the Chinese communist revolution, Republic of China leaders fled to Taiwan

• China (People’s Republic of China) sees Taiwan (Republic of China) as a renegade province

• One China Principle (1992) - Tacit agreement between China and Taiwan that there is only one China
  • Disagreement on which government is the rightful ruler of China
  • U.S. says Taiwan’s status is “unsettled”

• 1979 – U.S. broke diplomatic relations with Taiwan and established relations with China (PRC)
  • But, the U.S. also passed the Taiwan Relations Act – established unofficial ties with Taiwan and allowed for arms sales
  • $25 Billion in arms sales in 2017/2018
Why Is Taiwan Important?

• CCP sees Taiwan as central to its legitimacy
  • After return of Hong Kong (1997), Taiwan is last home territory to be reintegrated
  • Xi: National Rejuvenation (2049) requires reunification

• U.S. – Taiwan Relations Act & policy of “strategy ambiguity”
  • Credibility of regional commitments
  • 9th largest U.S. trading partner

• Japan – sees defense of Taiwan as “existential”
  • Joint Japan-U.S. battle plan for Taiwan

• Australia – November 2021, Australian Defense Minister Dutton declared that it would be “inconceivable” that Australia would not fight to defend Taiwan
Key Ukraine-Taiwan Comparisons

• Similarities:
  • Both Taiwan and Ukraine are countries where a great power asserts territorial claims
  • Both Russia and China are nuclear powers
  • Change in the status quo creates regional ripple effects
  • Neither Taiwan nor Ukraine are formally allied with the U.S., but the U.S. is an important source of support to both

• Differences:
  • Scope of geographical challenge for invasion
  • Power imbalance between defender and invader
  • Power trajectory of Russia and China
Effects of the War in Ukraine for China

- Provides signal of Western response and ability to remain resolved
- Provides information about scope of potential economic effects for an invasion of Taiwan
- Offers a useful distraction from U.S. efforts to pivot toward Asia
- Provides an opportunity to take advantage of a weakened Russia
- Disrupted trade & supply chains
- Raised questions about regional hedging strategies
- Challenge of managing relations with Russia and the U.S. simultaneously
- Increases complexity of efforts to bifurcate relations between the U.S. and Europe
  - Promotes polarization
From the U.S.: Gaffe, Policy Change, or Something Else?

- May 23, 2022 – President Biden responded “Yes” when asked if the U.S. would be “willing to get involved militarily to defend Taiwan”
  - Many analysts suggested this was a change in policy

- White House quickly clarified that this was not a policy change

- Why this matters in the context of Ukraine:
  - Strategic ambiguity has 2 components:
    - Make the Chinese fear the potential for high costs if they invade Taiwan
    - Make the Taiwanese sufficiently uncertain about the U.S. response to an invasion – mitigate moral hazard problem
Implications for Food & Conflict
The Importance of Russian & Ukrainian Agricultural Production

• Ukraine and Russia are large net exporters of grain, corn, and sunflower oil

• Russia and Belarus are top exporters of key fertilizers

• 2021 Russia & Ukraine:
  • 1st & 5th largest exporters of wheat
  • 2nd & 1st sunflower seed producers (~12% of vegetable oil market)
  • Russia and Ukraine account for ~13% of global traded calories
Dependence on Ukrainian Food Production

- According to the UN Food & Agriculture Organization:
  - 50 countries depend on Russia or Ukraine for more than 30% of wheat
  - 26 countries depend on Russia or Ukraine for more than 50% of wheat

- Forecast: 2022 Ukraine wheat harvest likely to be 20-30% smaller
  - Russian blockade of Odessa cuts key market route
  - Planting for next year already significantly impacted

- Consequences: World Food Programme estimates that 115M people depend on Ukraine for at least 50% of their wheat
  - Conflict could drive 47M people into acute food insecurity
Wheat Price Shocks: 2017-2022

Wheat is a versatile grain that can be grown in a variety of climates and dates back to 10,000 B.C. The price of the US Dollar is one of the main driving factors of wheat prices as well as supply-demand imbalances. Wheat is traded on several exchanges such as the CBOT Group, Mercado a
Wheat Price Shocks: YTD 2022
Food as a Weapon

• European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen – 20M tons of Ukrainian wheat stuck in country
  • Russia bombing Ukrainian grain warehouses, withholding own grain exports
  • “using hunger and grain to wield power”

• Russia currently blocking maritime traffic from Ukraine
  • 90% of Ukrainian food exports shipped through black Sea

• Attacks on Ukrainian ports
Impact of Russian Blockade
Conflict & Acute Food Insecurity

• Can provide a motivation for conflict
  • Heighten social grievances → Foster motivations for rebellion
  • Provide motivation for individuals to join violent actors

• Food insecurity can deepen sectarian divisions and promote intercommunal violence

• Urban protests & unrest – particularly within democracies

• Food as a local weapon
Economic Impact of Food Price Shocks
Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, regardless of how it ends, will bring reverberations across the international system.

Some of these effects are predictable.

Others are less predictable.

A key uncertainty is how Russia itself will cope with its decision.

Role of hubris is an important lesson.

- Applies to foreign analysis of Russian military’s performance.