



Warfare in a New Epoch: The Return of Big Armies

Vasily Kashin, Andrei Sushentsov

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16/1 Tsvetnoy Boulevard St., Moscow, Russia, 127051

Participants in the situational analysis:

Yevgeny Buzhinsky,

Chairman, PIR Center, Lieutenant-General (retired), RIAC member and vice-president

Vasily Kashin,

Senior Research Fellow, Director, Centre for Comprehensive

Ilya Kramnik,

Research Fellow, Risk Assessment Group, IMEMO, Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS)

Sergei Markedonov,

Lead Research Fellow, Euro-Atlantic Security Centre, MGIMO University

Viktor Murakhovsky,

Chief editor of the «Arsenal» magazine, Military expert, colonel (retired)

Alexander Nikitin,

Director, Euro-Atlantic Security Centre, MGIMO University

Nikolai Silayev,

Director, Lead Research Fellow, Laboratory for Intellectual Data Analysis, MGIMO University

Dmitry Stefanovich,

Research Fellow, Sector of Military Economics and Innovations, Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS)

Andrei Sushentsov,

Programme Director, Valdai Discussion Club; Dean of the School of International Relations at MGIMO University

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Big War: Past to Present

The high-intensity warfare in Ukraine represents the largest military conflict in terms of forces involved, casualties, and duration since the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war. But it is only the scale of the fighting that warrants comparison. Politically, the current events are unique in recent history.

The Iran-Iraq war was a clash of two regional powers, caused by differences between them. The military operations launched by the US-led coalitions against Iraq in 1991 and 2003 were about the world leader attacking an enfeebled regional power. What's more, Iraq was totally isolated for ten years by 2003 and unable to buy or maintain sophisticated weapon systems. The Falkland war in 1982 and the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict in 2008 involved highly unequal adversaries, which made these engagements so brief.

Is there a basis of comparison?

The conflict in Ukraine is the result of differences between two great powers, the United States and Russia. Therefore, the nearest historical precedent for the Ukraine conflict is the Korean War that ended almost seventy years ago. It was vastly different in terms of tactics and military equipment but rather close to the current developments in its political aspects. In both cases, a great nuclear power had to commit its forces in a protracted military campaign against a non-nuclear regional state that gets military support and military equipment from a hostile nuclear power. In both cases, the conflict is about the future of the world order, not the fate of the country hosting the theatre of operations.

In his speech on the US Asia policy in January 1950, US Secretary of State Dean Acheson left Korea outside America's "defence perimeter" in Asia, designed to oppose what he called the "Soviet imperialism."¹ The American entry into the war had less to do with the fate of Korea than the fear that the Communists' victory on the Korean Peninsula would be a prologue to their victorious march through Asia and the world. After the war, President Dwight Eisenhower conceptualised this view as the "domino theory."

¹ См.: Dean Acheson's 'perimeter Speech' on Asia (1950) // Alpha History. URL: <https://alphahistory.com/coldwar/dean-acheson-perimeter-speech-asia-1950/>

The outcome of the Ukraine conflict, whatever it is, will decide the future of the US-led global order. Even before the start of Russia's special military operation (SMO), US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told the UN Security Council on February 17, 2022, that "The stakes go far beyond Ukraine. This is a moment of peril for the lives and safety of millions of people, as well as for the foundation of the United Nations Charter and the rules-based international order that preserves stability worldwide."² Later, there followed repeated statements linking the outcome of the fighting in Ukraine to the fate of the current global order established by the United States and its allies unilaterally and in their own interests.

In combination with the nuclear factor, these high "stakes" have predetermined the nature of the current conflict. Like the USSR in Korea, the United States uses its own armed forces in Ukraine in a limited, but highly sophisticated, way. Like in Korea, this involvement is designed to minimise the likelihood of a vertical escalation.

The Soviet Union sent to Korea its fighter aviation units, air-defence artillery, and radar troops. Though based in rear areas, these forces played an important role in the war. During the conflict, the Soviets downed hundreds of US warplanes and killed numerous American servicemen. But the USSR's involvement as such was a factor of even greater strategic importance. It was the Soviet Union that prevented the US-led UN forces from taking advantage of their air superiority, cutting the Chinese and North Korean supply lines, and isolating the area of combat operations. This resulted in a protracted war with considerable US losses (36,000 killed and over 100,000 wounded) and an uncertain outcome.

In Ukraine, US reconnaissance satellites, aircraft and drones are part of an integrated reconnaissance strike force that includes Ukrainian-controlled fire weapons, such as missile systems. American targeting is probably behind most Ukrainian long-range strikes that kill Russian soldiers.

Like in Korea, the hostile superpower's limited involvement in combat operations is no secret for the other side. The desire to avoid escalation was a constraining factor for the US in the 1950s. The same sentiment is deterring Russia from attacking the enemy forces involved in the conflict. The United States did not strike at the Soviet fighter aviation bases. Russia so far has refrained from shooting down US space

² Secretary Antony J. Blinken on Russia's Threat to Peace and Security at the UN Security Council // U.S. Department of State. 17.02.2022. URL: <https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-on-russias-threat-to-peace-and-security-at-the-un-security-council/>

satellites, the lynchpin of Ukrainian reconnaissance, communications, and command-and-control systems.

Today, the superpowers and their closest allies that are not directly involved in the military campaign are responsible for delivering the bulk of supplies to those bearing the brunt of the fighting. This requires a lot of resources. According to the Kiel Institute for the World Economy, foreign aid to Ukraine between January 2022 and May 2023 amounted to €165 billion, and this figure continues to grow.

We do not know how much money the USSR spent on the Korean War. The weapon consignments sent to Korea mostly consisted of surpluses and trophies left from the Great Patriotic War, but even these cost a great deal. In some cases, the USSR supplied to its Chinese and Korean allies advanced weapons, such as MiG-15 fighter aircraft, which also cost a pretty penny amid post-war efforts to restore the Soviet economy and the extreme poverty in the USSR.

Like the Korean War, the campaign in Ukraine is waged in the shadow of nuclear weapons, which are not used but set the framework for military operations. At a certain stage, escalation inevitably leads to consideration of nuclear options. During the Korean War, Gen Douglas MacArthur urged President Harry Truman to authorise the use of nuclear weapons so as to avoid the threat of defeat. Russia has never officially declared an intention to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine, despite the West's allegations that it is fond of wielding its "nuclear club." Nor did it give any cause to think that their use was seriously contemplated. The Russian statements related to a potential nuclear escalation were aimed at preventing NATO's open interference in the conflict (we are referring, for example, to no-flight zone options discussed during the first few months of the special military operation) and proved quite effective.

The Korean War was triggered by differences between the two Korean regimes. Although it was the North that launched the massive attack that sparked the war, both Korean regimes harboured extreme animosity for the other in the pre-war period and were hatching plans to establish control over the Korean Peninsula. There were regular armed clashes between them (which is reminiscent of the situation in Donbass between 2015 and 2021). Many of these skirmishes were initiated by the South, which was as ambitious and tough as the North.

The North regarded the conquest of the South as essential for its political survival. Fearing threats from the South, the North was acting based on inaccurate and excessively optimistic information about the internal

MAJOR WARS AND CONFLICTS IN THE POST-WORLD WAR II PERIOD

Several crises in the post-World War II period had the real potential of escalating into a full-fledged, protracted war, possibly followed by nuclear escalation. Both the Korean War and the armed conflict in Ukraine are conflicts over the future of the world order

The threat of a major war and a break-up of economic ties will inevitably cause



structural readjustment
of the system of international
relations



diversification
of the global
financial system



the gradual emergence
of several centres of industrial
and technological growth

● Losses

Iran-Iraq War 1980-1988

180,000



Iraq

500,000

Iran

The Iran-Iraq War was a clash between regional powers. The military operations of the US-led coalitions against Iraq in 1991 and 2003 were conflicts between a global hegemon and a weakened regional power

Georgian-South Ossetian conflict of 2008

184 • Georgia

67 • Russia

The conflict took place in conditions of extreme inequality of forces of the parties, which predetermined its fleeting nature

Vietnam War 1965-1975

58.1
thousand

Total losses



USA

1,1
million

Vietnam

2
million

Civilians

One great nuclear power was forced to send its troops into a protracted war with a non-nuclear regional state receiving military and military-technical support from another hostile nuclear power

Falklands War 1982

250

United Kingdom

1,000-1,500

Argentina

Korean War 1950-1953

137.9
thousand

South Korea

36.6
thousand

USA

4.5
thousand

Allies

215-406
thousand

North Korea

183.1
thousand

China

Particularly the Soviet actions did not allow the UN troops led by the United States to realize their air superiority, disrupt the supply lines of Chinese and North Korean troops, and isolate the combat area; the result was a protracted war with significant American losses and an uncertain outcome

Sources: www.topwar.ru, news agencies

political situation in the enemy camp. North Koreans believed that one decisive and successful strike would lead to the downfall of the South Korean regime, much like how Russian elites underestimated the West's readiness to provide substantial military and military-technical assistance to Kiev, enabling Ukraine to continue its military resistance.

The war for the future

Both the Korean War and the Russian special military operation in Ukraine are examples of confrontations over the right to play a specific role in shaping the future international order. Both emerged during periods of structural transformation of the international relations system.

The Korean War

The Korean War marked a significant step in the establishment of a bipolar system of international relations, reflecting the trend towards American hegemony that emerged after World War II. Had the United States achieved a convincing victory on the Korean Peninsula by defeating the communist forces and unifying the region under the control of the Seoul regime, the emergence of bipolarity might have been prevented or postponed indefinitely.

The absence of a clear American victory, despite substantial efforts by the United States (during the Korean War, certain emergency economic management practices dating to World War II were reinstated, including price and salary controls) led to the emergence of a comparable adversary for America. The ensuing Soviet successes in industrial development, rocketry, and nuclear technology, along with achieving nuclear parity, further solidified this trend.

On the other hand, while failing to attain its global objectives, the United States managed to avoid a severe defeat. South Korea was saved, the system of American alliances was strengthened, and the United States restructured and improved its policies in the military and military-economic spheres.

In the decades that followed, the United States found itself on the defensive, while the Soviet Union was on the offensive, spreading its influence across the world. Nevertheless, the United States was able to

maintain its position as the “number one superpower” until the moment when, in the 1970s, the USSR began to visibly approach its decline.

The subsequent major shift in the world order – the transition from bipolarity to unipolarity in the late 1980s to early 1990s – was not accompanied by hostilities due to the one-sided surrender by the Soviet Union of its positions in international politics, followed by self-dissolution.

Changes in the structure of international relations are based on shifts in the balance of power in the economy, industry, science and technology, and even in culture and ideology. These changes accumulate until they transition into a qualitatively new phase. As a result, states face both new strategic threats and opportunities. These threats and opportunities are compelling enough to prompt countries to incur the significant expenses and enormous risks associated with modern warfare.

The threat of a major war persists throughout the transitional phase in the evolution of the world order. The fact that the Korean War, being an undoubtedly unique conflict of the late 1940s to early 1960s, concluded with an armistice was not predetermined; it was a stroke of luck for all of humanity. Several crises during that period had the potential to escalate into full-fledged prolonged war, possibly with subsequent nuclear escalation.

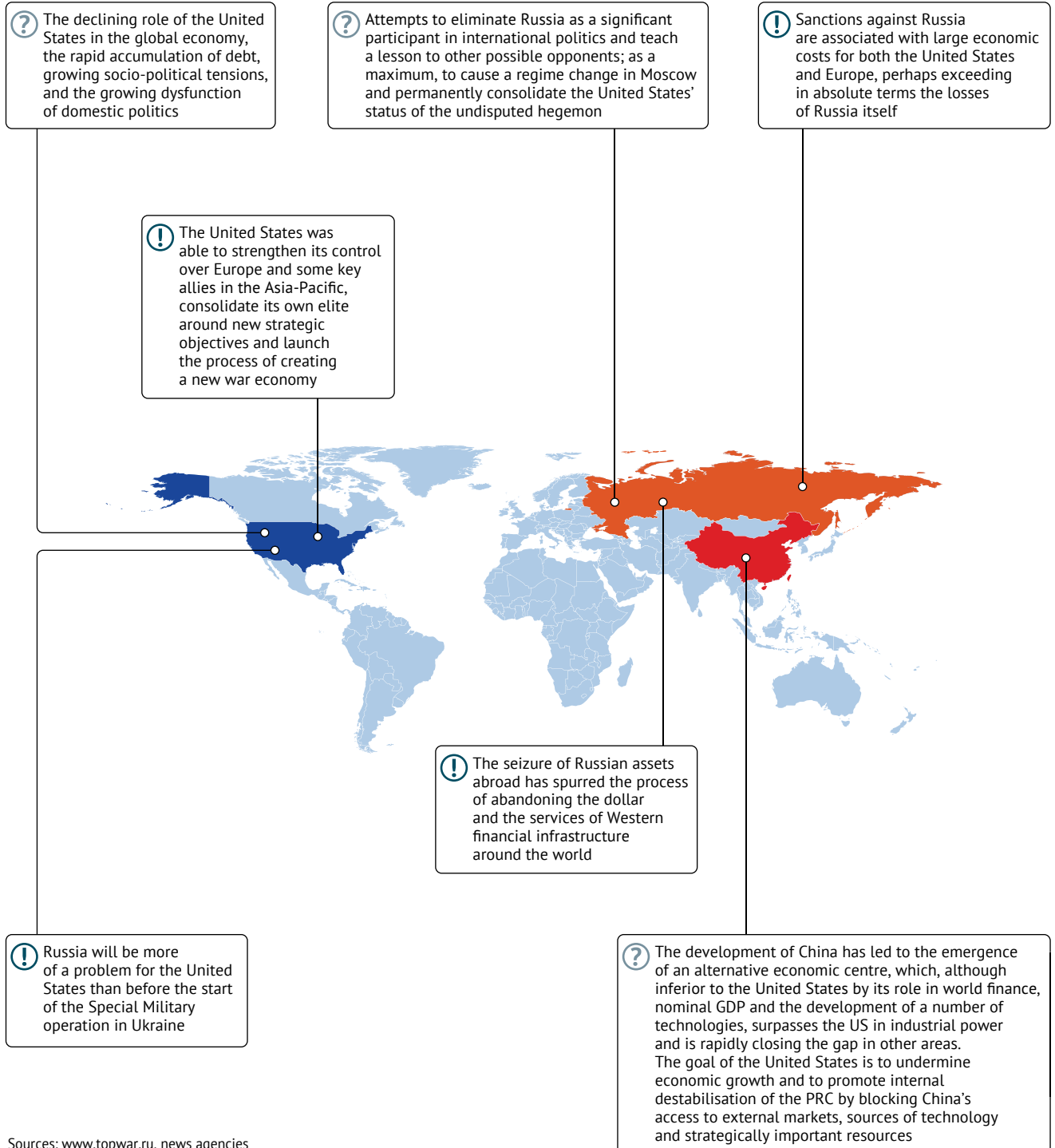
Ukraine conflict

In the context of the Ukraine crisis, Russia as a great power – while directly involved in it – is not the primary driver of ongoing changes in the global balance of power, although it does contribute to them. The changes are largely linked to the internal weakening of the United States, which can be seen in its declining role in the global economy, rapid accumulation of debt, mounting socio-political tensions, and increasing dysfunction in domestic politics. Against this backdrop, China’s progress has led to the emergence of an alternative economic centre, which, while trailing the United States in terms of its role in global finance, nominal GDP, and the level of development of certain technologies, far surpasses them in terms of industrial capacity and is rapidly narrowing the gap in other areas. The development of other non-Western nations may not have progressed at such a dizzying pace, but has also considerably complicated America’s position.

The logic followed by the United States and its partners in these circumstances was openly described in public statements by Western politicians. They perceive Ukraine as a tool for inflicting a strategic defeat

THE CAUSES OF FUTURE MAJOR WARS AND THE CONSEQUENCES OF CURRENT CONFLICTS

? Causes ! Consequences



on Russia, which may be not their largest, but certainly their most resilient and active opponent on the international stage. This defeat, at a minimum, is supposed to diminish Russia's role as a significant player in international politics and teach a lesson to other potential opponents, while the maximal outcome would be regime change in Moscow and firmly establishing the United States as undisputed hegemon. The main tools it chose to achieve these goals were providing military support to Ukraine and imposing all-out sanctions on Russia. Combined with drawn-out hostilities and mounting casualties, the collapse of the Russian economy was expected to destabilise the country and force it to withdraw from the conflict, fully defeated, within a matter of weeks.

By wiping Russia off the geopolitical chessboard, the United States sought to concentrate all resources, its own and those of its allies, on economically isolating and exerting military pressure on China. America's goal is to undermine China's economic growth and trigger internal destabilisation by cutting off China's access to external markets, sources of technology, and strategically important resources. The sheer scale of China as an adversary makes success possible only if the US marshals all its resources toward achieving this goal.

Regardless of where the final border will be after the conclusion of the special military operation, it can be said that the Ukraine conflict has already become a serious strategic failure for the United States. The United States has already incurred significant losses due to its inability to prevent Russia from launching the special military operation, to bring about its swift defeat, and to protect its partner, Ukraine, from casualties and destruction. The sanctions against Russia have been associated with major economic costs for both the United States and Europe, possibly exceeding the losses suffered by Russia in absolute numbers. The seizure of Russian assets abroad has accelerated the process of moving away from the dollar and the services of Western financial infrastructure worldwide.

Despite the hostile actions of the collective West and the restrictions imposed on it, Russia managed to avoid economic and domestic political destabilisation, embarked on the militarisation of its economy, and expanded its army. There's a strong likelihood that following the campaign, whatever its outcome may be, Russia will present a greater challenge to the United States than it did prior to the start of the special military operation.

Speaking of the "successes" of the adversaries, it's worth noting that the United States managed to solidify its control over Europe and certain key allies in the Asia-Pacific region, to consolidate its own elite around new strategic objectives, and to initiate the process of creating an innovative military economy.

Even though Russia has not yet eliminated the hostile regime in Ukraine, it has significantly undermined Ukraine's economic and demographic potential (due to mass emigration), which reduces the ability of the US to use Ukraine as a strategic asset against Russia in the future. Considering the scale of economic destruction in Ukraine, it's quite possible that in the foreseeable future Ukraine might transform from a strategic asset into a strategic liability, requiring tens of billions of dollars annually for its upkeep. In Russia, the special military operation in Ukraine became a tool for radical changes in domestic policy, elite nationalisation, and a re-evaluation of the fundamentals of economic policy. These changes likely couldn't have been achieved amid all-too-familiar stability.

The United States is preparing the ground for the possibility that the conflict in Ukraine may end in a ceasefire without a comprehensive political settlement, similar to the Korean War model. This does not align with Russia's plans for achieving the objectives of its special military operation. In any case, the Ukrainian conflict will serve as a prelude to subsequent large-scale military conflicts in other parts of the world.

Big Wars in a New Era

The military campaign in Ukraine is by no means a local cross-border confrontation, or an intervention by a superior force against a weaker state, or a war against a guerrilla force. In the decades past, major powers were mostly involved in these three types of hostilities which distorted the economics of their defence policies and degraded their military prowess.

How armies are born and the uselessness of experience

At the early stages of the conflict, both the Russian and the Ukrainian armies showed that they lacked the skills they needed to wage a full-scale war. Mistakes in their command and supplies resulted in significant losses for both sides.

The challenges they faced went beyond the fact that their military science and tactics proved to be inadequate when the conflict broke out. Trained during the previous era, the army command was ill-prepared psychologically for dealing with the high losses, while under constant

threat from high-precision weapons, with new reconnaissance and guidance tools, as well as the new part played by political factors in waging the war.

In these conditions, major countries found that the experience they had been accumulating for decades in fighting insurgencies or confronting weaker adversaries proved to be not only useless, but also harmful. This problem had been identified earlier. In particular, it is a fact that the Soviet military command had a reason for not encouraging the study of the experience of the war in Afghanistan. During the perestroika, Soviet generals who did this could face criticism for being too rigid and backward, even if it is now clear that they were absolutely right.

By early 2023, the partial mobilisation in Russia eroded the overwhelming superiority in manpower Ukraine had enjoyed in 2022. The confrontation evolved into trench warfare, at least as of writing this report, while the attempts by both sides to launch a decisive offensive failed short of their objectives.

Over the past year, both armies have undergone radical changes. It is through their involvement in combat actions and therefore having to pay a very high price in terms of losses that Russia and Ukraine witnessed the birth of armies equipped to fight a full-scale land war of the first half of the 21st century.

Russian and Ukrainian armies have now mastered a unique know-how in terms of their tactics and personnel training. A big war calls for a major transformation so deep that a country which lacks the relevant experience in its recent past and comes into the conflict carrying the burden of taking part in hybrid, counter-terrorism, anti-insurgency, peacekeeping or humanitarian operations is unlikely to succeed in this effort.

The Hamas attacks on Israel on October 7, 2023 and the subsequent armed conflict clearly demonstrate that the Ukrainian conflict has become a landmark in the development of the art of warfare.

Tactics of the Israel Defense Forces, one of the most experienced and best-equipped armies in the western world, has been commented on in the most derogatory terms by participants in the special military operation in Ukraine as well as military experts, both Russian and Ukrainian.

According to the commenters, Israeli reconnaissance at the tactical level was weak by the standards of the conflict in Ukraine. There was no protection against combat drones massively used by the enemy, while the personnel lacked the skills to counter them. It was noted that dense

concentration of troops and vehicles in the open, deployment of artillery pieces at little distance from each other and next to ammunition would be unthinkable in Ukraine due to the efficiency of counter-battery fire and permanent drone threat. Based on the experience of fighting in Mariupol, Soledar, and Bakhmut, the tactics of Israeli infantry fighting in urban areas looks obsolete and primitive.

It is well possible that Asian armies, which have not have any combat experience over the past 30 years, including China, Japan, South Korea and Vietnam, are better equipped to operate in this new reality than those who have spent these years chasing bearded Muslim men with rusted RPG-7s across hills and deserts, all while thinking that this is what war is.

Manufacturing policy: Back to the basics

The Ukraine conflict proved yet again the wisdom of Friedrich Engels' words that "warfare became a branch of the grande industrie."³ But the West seems to have forgotten this truism, having shifted its manufacturing to countries with cheaper labour. This, in turn, led to a paradox when a coalition of 50 countries supplying Ukraine could not match Russia in terms of providing artillery shells for the front.

Russia too lost much of its manufacturing potential during the post-Soviet period and had to deal with multiple bottlenecks in this regard. While it has been able to ramp up defence manufacturing faster than the West, the pace still failed to meet the expectations of the Russian military.

Just like in the previous eras, but with due consideration for the advances in technology, to succeed in warfare one needs the capability not only to make more high-technology weapons and equipment, but also to manufacture products which fall into the middle or even lower tiers in terms of their technological sophistication. This can include trucks, unguided artillery munitions and rifle bullets, military uniforms and gear.

One thing worth remembering is that a country can place all its processing and extracting capabilities as well as agriculture at the service of the military cause in one way or another. At the same time, the services sector is practically useless and falls by the wayside when it comes to supporting military efforts, except for transport, ICT and medicine.

³ Engels to Nikolai Danielson. September 22, 1892.

Since services dominate within the GDP structure of the modern-day economies, it is almost useless as an indicator for gauging national military capabilities. The fact that services account for a big chunk of US and EU economies at about 78 percent and 73 percent of their respective GDPs, may well point to their relatively limited ability to convert this economic might into a military asset.

This becomes apparent considering how developed countries have been struggling to supply weapons to Ukraine, even though the G7 countries alone account for 44 percent of the world economy compared to Russia's 3.2 percent. But this seemingly small share is offset by highly developed extracting sectors, agriculture and relatively developed manufacturing.

This presents the balance of military power across the world in a new light. For example, China alone has a manufacturing output that is double the combined output of the United States and Japan, the G7's two largest economies.

Major military powers are now pondering whether to revert to the basic industrial policy principles dating back to late 19th and early 20th centuries and prioritising the ability to scale-up defence manufacturing.

Can defence manufacturing be autonomous?

Today, unlike the first half of the 20th century, there is no country in the world capable of achieving full autonomy in defence manufacturing, which is attributable to the increasingly complex production chains, and the fact that all military products or strategic civilian goods now require a larger mix of materials, components and equipment.

The United States largely relies on a network of alliances with industrial powers, not only in terms of uniting their military efforts, but also to promote industrial cooperation in defence manufacturing. As for Russia, it is less dependent on cooperative links in defence manufacturing. Still, Russia cannot satisfy its internal demand for manufacturing equipment and some electronic components.

China has probably come closer than any other country to achieving the level of autonomy the USSR had enjoyed at its peak, even if Beijing has still some way to go since it continues to rely on imported components for some of its systems.

Other countries are even more vulnerable, primarily the European nations where defence manufacturing would probably cease altogether in the event of any major disruptions in the international supply chains.

In today's world, depending on the international division of labour for making strategic goods creates a major vulnerability with various countries systematically seeking to capitalise on this factor as they strive to weaken their adversaries.

The United States and the European Union imposed blanket sanctions on Russia in the hope of not only leading its economy to a precipice, but also undermining its defence manufacturing. This plan failed, largely due to a misguided understanding of how manufacturing works in Russia and to the developing countries' supportive attitude towards Russia, which even helped keep some delivery channels open.

Disrupting the adversary's production chains has emerged as a priority in the unfolding Cold War between the United States and China. The Americans have banned exports of advanced microchips and equipment for making them to China, while the Chinese imposed restrictions on exporting components and materials for making solar panels outside of the country.

In these uncertain times, the great powers have been pressed to re-shore the manufacturing of their main strategic civilian products and the key armaments, as well as to seal off their production chains. In fact, aspiring to great power status now entails being self-reliant in producing these products even if this comes at a price in terms of poorer quality and higher costs.

Informational incursions into a military conflict

Using information as a component of modern-day warfare has become an effective tool for supporting allies and waging proxy wars. Over the past decades efforts to develop military technology focused on reconnaissance, monitoring, communications and command, while almost all countries, including the great powers, continued to largely rely on Cold War-era technology in all other sectors. Still, new reconnaissance and intelligence gathering, communications and command facilities have radically changed the way older weapons are used.

In Ukraine, the United States has succeeded in substantially

improving the capabilities of the Ukrainian Armed Forces by effectively communicating to the Ukrainians data from its constellation of reconnaissance satellites, the biggest of its kind in the world, as well as from its long-range radar detection aircraft deployed in NATO's Eastern European countries, and from American electronic intelligence and cyberoperations centres in these countries. The communications systems used by the Ukrainian Armed Forces rely on US technology and Starlink, which is also a US-made system Russia does not have. This kind of assistance is of prime importance to the Ukrainian Armed Forces, dwarfing even the deliveries of lethal weapons, including guns, tanks and missiles.

It seems that in the early stages of the conflict, Ukraine benefited from satellite data it received from the West to fire its most destructive strikes from Tochka-U, an old Soviet-era missile system, or MRLs that were just as old. When Ukraine received modern systems like the HIMARS, they failed to make a radical difference in terms of their performance, since it was the intelligence data from the Western satellites that was the key factor here, coupled with Russia's countermeasures, including its air defences, camouflage, dispersal and fortification tactics. The stream of intelligence data remained unchanged, while Russia improved its air defences and electronic warfare capabilities, and also got better at concealing and dispersing its troops.

This informational component enables the West to have a serious impact on the way the military campaign unfolds by feeding real-time intelligence to Ukraine and sharing communications infrastructure. This does not lead to escalation, but only as long as politicians and the military stay within the existing paradigm. Sooner or later, the fact that this non-lethal involvement entails heavy losses will make information infrastructure involved in the conflict a legitimate target regardless of its original purpose.

The evolving propaganda

What sets Ukraine apart from the preceding conflicts is that it unfolds in a totally new media environment in which the warring parties have little, if any, control over the information flows.

When major countries confronted poorly armed adversaries in a hybrid conflict, their propaganda machines could easily cope with this new reality. **First**, the invaders were in control in terms of way the war advanced and its pace. Facing an enemy that was virtually unarmed, they could minimise public exposure to any traumatising events like casualties, entire units becoming trapped in an encirclement, or letting the enemy take prisoners. **Second**, whenever the events took a turn for the worse, they could just leave everything behind and get out, just like the United States did in Afghanistan.

However, this becomes impossible in a full-scale conflict. Both sides, whether winning or losing, suffer heavy losses, trauma and make ill-advised steps all the time, from the first to the last day of the conflict.

For example, Nazi Germany won its last major victory over the USSR in the Battle of Bautzen on April 21-30, 1945, when the Germans overpowered a combined Red Army and Polish force during the Soviet offensive against Berlin. The Germans killed Soviet and Polish generals, encircled a Soviet division, and the battle resulted in several thousand casualties. Even if this did not have any major bearing on the Soviet offensive against Berlin, it is not hard to imagine how this defeat could have affected public opinion with the war nearing its end, that is if anyone had known about these losses.

However, there is no way major failures or misguided steps can be concealed in the new media realm. All you can do is recognise them, and then move quickly to find out what happened, explain it and reassure everyone that it will not happen again. During the special military operation, Russia was the first to realise this, making hundreds of Telegram channels its main propaganda tool. Every channel targets a specific audience by offering various takes on covering what happens on the battlefield. But taken together, they are all designed to support the war effort and mobilise popular support for the main objectives of the ongoing military campaign.

The West, including Ukraine, has chosen a different approach to its military campaign in the media space. While they do use social media and messengers, they have chosen to focus on the traditional media in a massive propaganda effort backed by the prestige of the leading Western so-called independent outlets. Unfortunately, this has led to the recurring publication

of misinformation that can be easily debunked. Since the audience can see through these efforts, this undermines trust in these media outlets. The same applies to Western and Ukrainian politicians. For example, in early 2023, Vladimir Zelensky talked about people forming long queues at conscription centres and mentioned a civilised mobilisation effort, while people went online to upload hundreds of videos showing men being chased around Ukrainian cities by conscription officers.

Ukraine tightened its war-time censorship during the conflict and sought to bring the media sector under the government's centralised control by introducing something close to a blanket ban on discussing combat action on social media, cracking down on any information about the destruction and damage caused by Russian strikes and their effectiveness while exaggerating the performance of Ukraine's air defences.

Even Western countries supporting Ukraine have voiced their concern about the scale of propaganda, fearing that the media may not reflect the real situation. This sentiment is becoming increasingly widespread in Ukraine where the government has had to take draconian measures in order to draft conscripts into the army.

And all this is happening despite all the resources allocated to the propaganda effort, the care they take to craft their messages, the lingering reputation of the international English-language media, as well as the costly publicity stunts by the Ukrainian Armed Forces to keep the faith in their victory alive and boost the morale of their allies. Quite often this comes at a huge price, as was the case with the incursion into the Belgorod Region's Graivoronsky District in May 2023.

Overall, the special military operation has demonstrated that in today's world, full-scale military action requires new methods in terms of preparing society to accept inevitable losses and deprivation, as well as covering the way the military campaign unfolds. Shaped by circumstances rather than design, Russia's approach has many shortcomings, including the rapid spread of unverified data, regular panic attacks and the use of a decentralised network of media resources in internal political struggles. However, it also offers certain advantages such as facilitating a frank dialogue with millions of Telegram subscribers or being able to send updates about the special military operation in real time to people outside the special military operation zone. This means that the communication lines are open for interacting with the public.

The Consequences of Major Wars for Society and the Economy

Unlike the “hybrid” wars of the 1990s-2010s, full-scale hostilities like the special military operation do not let society “hide” or “shut itself off” from their impact. They tend to cause serious psychological trauma to people, dividing time into “before” and “after” the conflict. The inevitable involvement of significant numbers of the people in a military campaign through conscription, mobilisation, or recruitment of contract soldiers from all population groups turns the events into a national cause.

Ideology

Such endeavours are impossible without society rallying around unifying ideas that go beyond common but important values like patriotism and “defending territorial integrity.” The Russian Constitution prohibits mandatory state ideology in its very first chapter. Amending it would require the adoption of a new Fundamental Law. However, in reality, a consolidating state ideology began to form spontaneously after 2014, and this process accelerated with the onset of the special military operation. Some ideas began to acquire a legislative dimension (such as conservative legislation), while others were perceived by society as new universally accepted norms, the violation of which triggered extremely hostile reactions (this includes established societal views on the historical achievements of the Soviet Union and its role in World War II).

Emigration

The inability of a portion of Russian society to embrace new rules and a new system of values has led many to emigrate. Perhaps, this trend may be a factor in changing the composition of the Russian elite. At the same time, there is a significant population outflow from Ukraine, both to the West and to Russia.

FEATURES OF MODERN WARFARE



A powerful industrial base capable of ensuring the sustainable functioning of the military-industrial complex and strategically important industries in conditions of disruption of external relations



For successful combat operations, it is important to ensure not only an increase in the production of high-tech military equipment, but also the urgent production of products related to the medium- or low-level technology: trucks, unguided ammunition for small arms and artillery weapons, clothing and equipment for military personnel



The great powers are in a hurry to transfer to their territory as much as possible and close the production chains of the main types of strategically important civilian products and the most important types of weapons



The GDP indicator is virtually useless for assessing the military potential of a country. The extremely high share of services in the GDP of the USA (about 78 percent) and the EU (73 percent) indicates their very low ability to convert economic power into a military power. The G7 accounts for 44 percent of the world economy, as opposed to Russia (3.2 percent of world GDP with extremely powerful extractive industries, agriculture and moderately developed manufacturing industry)



Dependence on the international division of labour in the production of strategically important products is a serious vulnerability in the current conditions



The uselessness of past combat experience. In Russia and Ukraine, armies, capable of operating in a full-scale land war at the technological level of the first half of the 21st century, have emerged



Extreme reduction in cost and mass distribution of means for delivering long-range precision strikes. Kamikaze drones with a range of hundreds and even thousands of kilometres cost in the range of thousands to tens of thousands of dollars



Space as a means of global influence and power replaces and in every way surpasses such traditional tool as the navy. Increasing space power should be a nation's overriding goal, based on both national defence and foreign policy needs



The growth of the information component in modern military operations significantly increases the ability to support allies and conduct "proxy wars." Russia has made hundreds of Telegram channels its main propaganda tool, each targeting a different audience with different approaches, but all of them supporting the war effort and helping to rally the population around the main goals of the current military campaign



The main forces in the field of military technology are aimed at developing reconnaissance, surveillance, communications and control means



The inevitable involvement of significant masses of the population in a military campaign – as a result of conscription, mobilisation or the recruitment of contract soldiers from all groups of the population – turns what is happening into a national affair

Advantages of mass armies

The impossibility of conducting military operations with small professional armies in the current conflict, the transformation of warfare into a national cause as was the case from the mid-19th century through the mid-20th century, should lead to the re-emergence of certain old political priorities. This trend should not be seen in an entirely negative light.

For instance, during the era of mass armies, one positive aspect was the attention most governments paid to universal education since schools were regarded as a crucial element in training and nurturing future soldiers, upon whom the survival of the state depended. The rise of mass armies is also linked to the development of healthcare in the late 19th – early 20th centuries, as well as the emphasis on mass participation sports (as opposed to high-performance sports, which turned into a form of show business during the Cold War). During the initial phase, these trends are already evident in Russia.

Interest in foreign policy

In the new reality, there is a growing interest in foreign policy among broad groups of people. Unlike during the period of stability in the 2000s and 2010s, when international relations were primarily the domain of a few specialists and didn't arouse widespread public interest, everyone can now see the connection between global events and their personal well-being. Unlike in the past, a state cannot afford to conduct foreign policy solely based on its own considerations, leaving the explanation of its actions on the international scene to propaganda. Instead, there's a demand for direct, candid, and open communication with the public about the reasons behind decisions, including acknowledging mistakes.

Industrial base

In terms of economic policy, a powerful industrial base has once again become a mandatory attribute of a great power. This base should be capable of ensuring the stable functioning of the defence complex and strategically important sectors even in the face of disrupted external connections. For Russia, critical objectives that require significant efforts include the revival of the machine-building industry and the microelectronics manufacturing.

Priority spheres

In this new era, the state must prioritise not just industry, but also agriculture, ICT, and transport. It is vital to invest more in science and education. This is important both for internal development amid disrupted external ties and fewer opportunities for international collaboration, and for raising the intellectual level of conscripts joining the army.

Developing air defence and civil defence systems

During the special military operation, it became clear that there had been a significant decrease in the cost and widespread distribution of means for conducting long-range precision strikes. For example, kamikaze drones with ranges of hundreds or even thousands of kilometres are available at prices ranging from thousands to tens of thousands of US dollars. Such weaponry is potentially easily accessible even to non-state actors.

In light of this, it is necessary to reconsider approaches to the security of infrastructure, the backup of critical sites and systems, and the development of air defence systems. A new perspective on civil defence systems is needed as well, including the construction of dedicated protected facilities, training of the public, and improvement of the public administration system.

Space power

A powerful orbital grouping is not only a crucial factor in the effectiveness of one's armed forces but also an ideal means of influencing the balance of power and the course of hostilities anywhere in the world, as became evident during the special military operation. The ability to provide real-time reconnaissance data and targeting from satellites for one's own or allied forces, while also ensuring that they have reliable space communication, makes it possible to significantly alter the course of warfare without any risk and at a moderate cost. Outer space as a tool for global influence and projection of force replaces and surpasses the traditional tool which is Navy. It appears that building up space capabilities should be a paramount goal for the state, stemming from the national defence needs as well as the foreign policy requirements.

Brave New World

The redistribution of power and influence in the world, along with the shifting power dynamics among major nations, has become the catalyst for extremely acute differences between them. As these differences intensify, they engulf ideology, the economy, and scientific-technical and humanitarian ties. Factors that used to prevent major powers from escalation in the past are weakening. These countries are now facing a real threat of large-scale non-nuclear conflicts against comparable adversaries, for the first time since the 1960s.

Such conflicts may lead to the escalation of the threat of a nuclear conflict, although they don't necessarily have to culminate in the use of nuclear weapons. Nuclear weapons rather establish the geographic and political framework within which major powers wage such wars, and also impose limitations on the use of some non-nuclear armaments.

The armed forces that emerged in the post-Cold War period do not respond adequately to this new level of military threats. Significant quantitative growth of modern armies is required. Furthermore, conflicts like the one in Ukraine cannot be fully fought by military formations constituted on a voluntary basis, as demonstrated by the experiences of both Russia and Ukraine. Mobilising the population into the armed forces becomes inevitable, as does the preservation and expansion of conscription practices.

The threat of a major war and politically motivated severance of economic ties will inevitably catalyse the diversification of the global financial system, leading to the gradual emergence of several independent industrial and technological growth centres with different potentials.





Each such centre will represent an alliance of states varying in power, pursuing the path of economic and industrial integration and aiming for expansion.

For small and medium-sized nations, the natural desire will be to maintain maximal political autonomy for as long as possible through diversifying their external ties. They will attempt to form coalitions to counter the pressure of great powers that seek to force choices upon them. It is possible that such "small and medium-sized" coalitions will evolve into "military and economic" alliances over time and compete with each other around great powers.

Each centre will strive to acquire its own clear-cut ideological and value-based platform, which in different countries and groups of countries will constitute a combination of political concepts, ideologies, and nationalism in varying proportions. The greater role played by ideology will contribute to alienation among these centres, a deepening of the lines of division, and less room for foreign policy manoeuvring for the ruling elites. All major countries will be forced to resort to ideological frameworks for their foreign and domestic policies, with restrictions on the range of permissible opinions and freedom of speech (a trend that is already observed among all major players in global politics).

The prevailing form of conflict between great powers will be proxy wars of a new type, namely, large conflicts in which a major nuclear power grants its client access to its information capabilities (satellite reconnaissance and targeting, communication infrastructure, etc.), as well as military technology and expertise, and, if necessary, carries out limited direct intervention in the conflict where it will not provoke nuclear escalation.

However, the threat of a direct military clash between great powers and nuclear war will persist and, perhaps, become even more acute than during the Cold War. The key goal of diplomacy in this new world will be to develop a toolkit that will make it possible to endure decades of turbulence without nuclear bombardment. This can only be achieved within the framework of rigorous foreign policy realism and the gradual development of rules and restrictions on competition.

 valdaitweets
 valdai_club
 valdaiclubcom
 Международный
дискуссионный
клуб «Валдай»
admin@valdaiclub.com
valdaidiscussionclub