

The First Phase of the Russian Invasion of Ukraine 2022

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Changing Character of War Centre

The Prelude to the Invasion

In H.G. Wells' *War of the Worlds*, published just over 100 years ago, there is a memorable and chilling opening: 'No one would have believed ... that as men busied themselves about their various concerns they were scrutinised and studied, perhaps almost as narrowly as a man with a microscope might scrutinise the transient creatures that swarm and multiply in a drop of water. With infinite complacency men went to and fro over this globe about their little affairs. ... Yet, ... intellects vast and cool and unsympathetic, regarded this earth with envious eyes, and slowly and surely drew their plans against us.' The themes of Western complacency, the scrutiny of predictable Western policies by hostile actors, and the 'cool and unsympathetic, envious eyes' of Vladimir Putin seem horribly apt in light of the events that unfolded in February 2022. The warning signs were there, and acknowledged, but few thought Putin would be so foolish as to launch a war of conquest against Ukraine. As Wells narrates: 'the chances were a million to one. But still they came.'

On 17 December 2021, Vladimir Putin's government issued a list of demands, which it called 'security guarantees', and made accusations that the West had 'aggressively expanded' NATO despite alleged assurances dating back to 1990 that it would not. That December, Russia was still treated as a serious nuclear armed actor but the majority opinion was that Russia would never take the risk of launching a war. The build up of over 100 Battalion Tactical Groups and a force estimated at 190,000 men was seen a gigantic exercise in bluff and brinkmanship. Yet to other analysts, Russia's demands seemed designed to provoke and there was concern that Russia was planning a false flag attack to justify some operation in Donbass. The United States and its European allies took the view that diplomacy could resolve the crisis. Russia would be warned, while national leaders, and the representatives of the European Union, would make their way to Moscow or Geneva to engage in talks.

What Russia wanted was impossible to deliver. The demand to withdraw all allied forces back to a line established before 1997 would effectively demilitarize all of the Eastern European countries. It would create a realm of influence and control for Moscow, effectively re-establishing the Soviet sphere. At this time, analogies to the Soviet or Tsarist period were frequently advanced. Those who had been studying Russia for years saw things differently. The

demands seemed to emanate not from the Russian elites but from Putin himself. In the summer of 2021, the Russian leader had written an essay on Ukraine which diminished its significance as a nation with his own falsified history, asserted that it was run by neo-Nazis *and* libertines, and demanded that it should never be permitted to join either the European Union or NATO. Such nationalistic claims had been heard before and the essay was dismissed by most policy makers. On the other hand, Russia's aggression against Georgia in 2008, the cyber attack on Estonia, the military modernization program, and especially the coup de main annexation of Crimea had alerted Eastern and Northern Europeans to the threat. By contrast, southern and central Europeans, especially Germany, thought that Putin could be 'accommodated' and diplomacy would resolve differences. Southern Europeans were more concerned about economic crises and a large flow of migrants from Africa and the Middle East following the so-called 'Arab Spring' unrest and the subsequent conflicts it unleashed.

As early as 28 February 2022, Putin's stated objectives were leaked by accident by RIA Novosti.¹ It seems that the intention had been to secure Kyiv in just two days. The plan had been to announce on 26 February that a new world order had been ushered in. The rapid takeover of Ukraine was supposed to have presented the West with a *fait accompli*, like operations in Belarus and Kazakhstan, but also a new, more robust Russian foreign policy. Putin aimed for the end of Western global domination, and the abolition of its rules. He claimed that 'Anglo-Saxons' rule the West, so the 'German project' to run Europe represented a challenge to them. He forecast that a split between Europe and the Anglo-Saxons was inevitable. He also stated that Russia was in a conflict with the West. He argued in the planned statement that 'Greater Russia' (including Ukraine and Belarus) has returned to its 'rightful position' as a world power. Along with China, the challenge to the West he believed would prove irresistible.

The statement seemed to confirm that Putin aimed to conquer Ukraine in its entirety, then he would poise conventional forces on borders of Ukraine and Belarus, and move nuclear forces into Belarus to counter NATO while these manoeuvres were completed. At this stage some pundits thought Putin unhinged, but a long term analysis of Putin's motives indicated he was consistently aggressive. His actions were, in his estimation, a culmination of brinkmanship and military preparations that had paid dividends over 20 years: subduing Chechnya, preventing Georgia joining NATO, intimidating the Baltic countries, seizing Crimea and the Donbass, and persuading the West not to interfere in his 'near abroad'.

The Russian leader and his elites think in terms of geography and military strength, not public opinion or international diplomacy. To Putin, only elite opinions matter. The masses and small

¹ <https://web.archive.org/web/20220226051154/https://ria.ru/20220226/Rossiia-1775162336.htm> (Accessed 29 February 2022).

countries are expected to fall into line with the Great Powers. It is an interpretation of the world where status is measured only by size and strength.²

Putin had evaluated Western power as geographical ‘expansion’, not on Eastern European popular opinion, so for him democratic movements were merely the orchestration of covert forces. For the Russian leaders, ‘Colour Revolutions’ were not genuine public uprisings, they were the products of US and Western intelligence, a view they hold because that is exactly how they themselves would make use of them. For Putin, the West has been dismantling any threats to its global domination, including Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Iran, through revolution, invasion, or economic tools: he believed Russia was next. In his calculus, the only powers that can stand against the West are Russia and China.

This outlook explains Putin’s demands of 17 December 2021. He demanded the establishment of a Russian sphere of influence over Eastern and South East Europe; the suppression of the Caucasus and Central Asia; and the construction of a new global order, where Russia and China act as replacements of the West, and the Western world is confined to the Atlantic. These grandiose ambitions were supposed to be expressions of power, but they looked very much like statements of fear. Putin was afraid of popular, democratic protests and movements, he was afraid of globalization and favoured autarky. He feared Western technological advance which threatened to leave Russia as a declining state, and he was afraid that, after the humiliating end of the Cold War, he would lose any chance of resurrecting Russia’s power.³

The result was an unnecessary, illegal, and immoral war that could serve no purpose and which could only deprive Putin of the ambitions he had set out. Far from a demilitarized Eastern Europe to ‘guarantee security’ for Russia, the Europeans announced their desire for greater security through rearmament. If stability at home had been the objective, Putin faced the most significant wave of protest of his entire administration. If he wanted to make Russia a great and respected power, then the economic consequences of his decision were disastrous and the reputation of the country lay in tatters. Even if he could win battles in Ukraine, the war was a strategic failure from the start.

The War in the Tactical-Operational Dimension

The initial Russian plan, to seize Kyiv in a lightning ‘coup de main’ air assault operation at Antonov Airport, reinforced by the rapid drive of armoured columns from the Belarusian

² Keir Giles, *Moscow Rules: What Drives Russia to Confront the West* (The Chatham House Insights Series, Brookings Institution, 2018); Mark Galeotti, *We Need to Talk About Putin: How the West gets him wrong* (London: Ebury, 2019).

³ See ‘Address by the President of the Russian Federation, February 21, 2022’ <https://larouchepub.com/other/2022/4909-address-by-the-president-of-th.html> (Accessed February 2022).

border, failed because of the quick reactions and determined resistance of Ukrainian forces.⁴ Elsewhere, the expected blitzkrieg faltered too, as Ukrainians destroyed vehicles at a significant rate. The advancing forward elements of the Russian army outstripped their logistics. Some vehicles broke down, others ran out of fuel, and troops turned to looting to find food. Despite a year of preparations, the Russian army stalled, and the offensive failed.

There were a host of other, even more significant problems in the functioning of the Russian army. But at the strategic level, matters got worse for Moscow in those first days. In the West, Ukraine was winning the information war and this was hardly surprising given the egregious Russian breach of international law. At the UN, despite holding the chair of the Security Council, Russia was humiliated. Its ‘special military operation’ was exposed as a blatant rupture of *jus ad bellum*. Its subsequent conduct trampled over customary international law, the law of armed conflict, and *jus in bello*. Precluded from obtaining a resolution at the Security Council, the UN General Assembly voted overwhelmingly to condemn Russia’s actions. Only a handful of states abstained. Significantly, one of those was China.

On the ground, Ukrainian resistance and President Zelensky’s dignified yet impassioned leadership drew global admiration. The Ukrainian troops at Cherniyiv prevented the capture of the main route towards Kyiv for a crucial week. Kharkiv’s resistance also proved effective. One or two units that penetrated into the city were practically wiped out and commentators remarked how similar this was to the fate of Russian forces in the First Chechen War.

Russia had pinned so much hope on the success of its coup de main that it did not open the offensive with overwhelming fires, as its military doctrine required. This was evidently a political gamble to seize the capital rapidly and decapitate the Zelensky government, just as the Soviets had done in Kabul in 1979 when they seized Afghanistan. The failure to use their considerable firepower, except to create confusion, meant that even the poorly prepared Ukrainian defences remained intact, including their air defences. But what emerged was that the Russian air force was barely in use at all. Its close air support had either failed or was simply inadequate.⁵ Subsequently it appeared that there was a lack of coordination capabilities with ground forces and suggestions that Russian pilots either couldn’t communicate with ground elements or that they were concerned that they might be shot down by their own side.

The multiple axes of the Russian offensive were designed to stretch Ukrainian defenders but the five main routes could not be supported with sufficient fire power and air cover, which meant progress was slower than expected. The consequence was that Russian casualties, in both vehicles and men, were much higher. Russian paratroopers who had landed outside Kyiv were

⁴ Coup de Main Air Assault at Antonov (Hostomel) <https://twitter.com/i/status/1496849053824471041>

⁵ Justin Bronk, ‘The Mysterious Case of the Missing Russian Air Force’, *JRUSI*, <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/mysterious-case-missing-russian-air-force> (Accessed February 2022).

killed, wounded and scattered. Russian reconnaissance units were captured or destroyed. These incidents impacted Russian morale negatively and encouraged the resistance.

Even the organization of the Russian forces appeared to fail. The assembly of Battalion Tactical Groups (BTGs), consisted of 1 tank company, 3 mechanized infantry companies, 3 batteries of artillery and missile launchers.⁶ These were too weak to penetrate far into depth. The attrition of losses or breakdowns caused much smaller units to arrive on their objectives, with disastrous results. The vast columns of road-bound vehicles heading towards Kyiv were thus halted, offering a ripe target for any Ukrainian drone or air attacks. It would take more than a week to sort out the confusion, bring up fuel and supplies, and reorganize the column to permit access to armour and artillery. There was evident confusion and frustration on the Russian side. The solution was to revert back to using massive volumes of firepower to clear routes and reduce urban areas.

There was some expectation amongst Russian troops, from both prisoners and intercepted communications, that they thought they would be greeted as liberators. Ukrainian resistance had come as a shock. Western military specialists were surprised by another factor, specifically that Russian drills at the tactical level were lower than expected. There was evidence of indiscipline. Basic 'battle discipline' (such as alertness, the management of logistics, moving tactically across the terrain to avoid casualties) was also sub-standard. Observers noted that Russian troops remained mounted in vehicles, and had not dismounted to fight in support of their tanks. This meant Ukrainians, with both advanced Anti-Tank Guided Weapons (ATGW, such as NLAW and Javelin) and basic anti-tank weapons, such as Rocket-Propelled Grenades, were effective.

Russian tactical errors have assisted Ukraine's defence in depth. Ukrainian forces chose to contest every axis, and in the north they were successful, although it proved harder to hold on in the south. Ordinarily, the Russian army would pulverize any resistance with its artillery, but that attempt to thrust deep into the country gave the Ukrainians the opportunity to slow and in places stall the Russian advance.

Against the greater numbers and fighting strength of Russian forces, the Ukrainian strategy was eventually going to be reliant on resistance in urban areas. Hasty barricades were constructed, suggesting that Ukrainians intended to draw their opponent into costly urban battles. With the advances stalled, Russian commanders would turn to surrounding and bombarding cities, but this would leave their supply lines vulnerable to rural interdiction by smaller groups of Ukrainian troops. It was evident that the Russian response would be the deliberate destruction of cities and towns, as they had done in Syria. The humanitarian consequences were always going to be

⁶ For strengths and weaknesses, see: <https://www.benning.army.mil/armor/eARMOR/content/issues/2017/Spring/2Fiore17.pdf#:~:text=The%20Russian%20battalion%20tactical%20group%20%28BTG%29%20is%20a,firepower%2C%20electronic%20warfare%20%28EW%29%20and%20air-defense%20artillery%20%28ADA%29> (Accessed March 2022).

harrowing. In a sense this has only deepened Ukrainian determination and empathy from the West.

Russia was surprised that its occupation forces met with spirited public protests, and even unhappy receptions from formerly pro-Russian Ukrainians. There were two responses by Moscow. First, Rosgvardia troops, whose sole task is robust internal security, moved in to occupy eastern provinces. Second, Russia attempted to stage a fake popular ‘welcome’ in Kharkiv soon after it fell. As in other false flag operations, it failed because it was exposed. On 13 March 2022, Kherson’s mayor was detained and Russian forces staged a declaration of a Kherson People’s Republic, to emulate the model of Luhansk and Donetsk. This act reinforced suspicions that Putin intended to overrun and expunge Ukraine as a state, with the statelets incorporated into Russia. The Duma had already proposed that Luhansk and Donetsk, like Crimea, should be incorporated, a request Putin was only too glad to accept.

Russian Special Forces, air attacks and missile strikes were then made on Ukrainian gas, oil, and energy installations around the country, but there was considerable alarm when the fighting led to a bombardment at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant.⁷ The IAEA and UN held emergency sessions as the threat of radiation leaks intensified. Nevertheless the Russian shelling and airstrikes continued, evidently thinking that the concerns for civilian safety would weaken Ukrainian resolve.

But Ukrainians continued to put up a fierce resistance. Sumy was contested. Ukrainian troops got behind Russian lines and used handheld anti-tank missiles against a train carrying fuel for Russian armoured vehicles. A military airfield, close to the border but inside Russia, was struck with a missile. At Kharkiv, street fighting intensified, until resistance became impossible. The loss of Kharkiv led Zelensky to urge more vociferously than ever that the West should prevent Russia’s use of the skies, supply anti-aircraft systems, and give them more munitions.

To secure the Black Sea coast, having been unable to make progress out of the Donbass, Russia made amphibious landings 30 km from Mariupol, one of the early operational objectives. However, even though surrounded at the end of the first week, resistance continued. Russia was subsequently in breach of the law of armed conflict – shutting off electricity and therefore water supply and power generation for hospitals. There was the same pattern of intensive bombardments of civilian areas. Several attempts to provide a safe evacuation for civilians failed because shelling continued. Evacuation transport was destroyed. Mariupol was a particularly tragic case, but it pointed to the intimidatory optics that Putin sought: destruction and terror was supposed to force the Ukrainians into capitulation. The decision to destroy and then to cut off

⁷ ‘Ukraine nuclear plant: Russia in control after shelling’, *BBC News*, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-60613438> (Accessed March 2022).

the means to survive, and then to bombard the civilian population, was deliberate and gave some indication of how other urban areas would be treated.

The Second Operational Phase

Despite Russia's habit of measuring its progress by territory taken, one could not assume any areas were under Russian 'control': Ukrainian forces were still operating in areas marked in red on maps. More importantly, Ukrainian public sentiment opposed the occupation. Even former pro-Russianists now doubted the value of the invasion. Despite Putin's ability to overrun cities and provinces, analysts noted that he lacked the manpower to hold on to his gains. Moreover, he could not simultaneously garrison and suppress Ukraine while posing a threat to NATO, unless he intended to complete his plans by stages separated by long intervals of consolidation.

Militarily, it was not just a shortage of troops that mattered. From the start, Russian logistics were chaotic and limited. A vast column of vehicles was stalled north of Kyiv, where supply and fuel problems demanded a major reorganization. Even after a week the situation had not been resolved. Formations only managed to advance a mile a day. Two fronts eventually emerged at Kyiv – one to the northwest and the other to the northeast. Putin no doubt assumed that, with relatively short lines of resupply to Russia and Belarus, these forces could be sustained in their offensive indefinitely.

For the Russian forces, success was now dependent on air strikes, missile salvos, and the overwhelming firepower of artillery. The trouble was that the Russian air force was suffering progressively because Ukrainian air defence was still potent, and, if Europeans and Americans kept up the stream of munitions, it would strengthen over time.

So, time now became the critical factor. The deterioration of the Russian economy and resupply of Ukrainian resistance meant Putin was actually in a race to reduce the cities, and take Kyiv in particular, before the economic damage at home worsened to the point where it could no longer be stabilized. The Ukrainians needed to hold on, and draw as much support as they could from the West, particularly in air defence technologies, intelligence feeds, and financial support. Their hope was to hold Kyiv, for months, until the Russians were exhausted and the attrition of their manpower ground their army to a halt.

The Russian army calculated that it would have to shift to a 'rubblization strategy', reducing urban resistance by shelling them into oblivion, and cutting off all vital supplies. Terrorized civilians would either flee or capitulate, they reasoned. Anyone showing fight would be flattened. In essence, they would conclude the war through the application of maximum force. The process is slow, expensive, and so destructive as to render any peace unfit to serve the name. The problem with such a strategy was that it merely deepened the disgust about Russia felt around

the world. Some Western critics tried to analogize Russia's invasion to America's war in Iraq, but it was evident that the US forces had been far more precise and efficient than the Russians twenty years later. The model of urban warfare appeared to be a re-run of the war in Syria.

Russian Calculations

Fear of NATO intervention was undoubtedly growing in Russia. Putin threatened nuclear escalation as a 'response to Western economic measures', and hinted that the financial squeeze being placed on Russia could be construed as act of war. As a means to prevent Western intervention, such threats had some effect, but the damage being done to the Russian economy was severe. The Rouble plunged to half its value in a day and continued to dive thereafter. While the Europeans and British debated the importance of sanctioning oligarchs, it was the sanctioning of the Russian central bank by the Western powers, especially the United States, that was really creating the greatest effect. The oligarchs, for all their supposed influence, were clearly not part of the Kremlin's calculus at this point at all. Indeed, the supposed importance of oligarchs was just one of many misconceptions of pre-war period which was still lingering even when the new reality of events was being played out.

There were early attempts at diplomatic off-ramps. Zelensky offered border talks on the grounds that his people would expect him to make every effort to bring the invasion to an end. Russian delegations wanted to meet inside Belarus, but Zelensky's team knew the history of such tactics which could endanger the delegates. Instead, three rounds of talks were held on the border: but nothing was resolved. The visit of the Israeli Prime Minister to Putin, on a Sabbath - reflecting the seriousness of the issue, found the Russian leader as implacable as ever.

The Kremlin's response to growing international criticism and details of the conflict was to cut off social media and make moves to sever the Internet altogether so as to isolate the Russian public and force them to depend on Rusnet. Arrests of protestors continued. The litany of the Kremlin's repressive measures therefore brought back the Soviet Union in spirit and in practice.

Yet, despite the evident failures, where Putin's objectives to improve Russia's security, in the region and at home, had become counter-productive, he believed he could still win. He intended to cow the West, survive through China's potential economic assistance, and crush all opposition with dictatorial measures that he could now justify. He calculated that he could withstand public opposition at home (13,000 were arrested by March 7, 2022). He thought that the West could not sanction oil without crippling itself. He believed that he could prevent NATO intervention with threats, including Western calls for the provision of combat aircraft and No Fly Zones for Ukraine, and even the provision of defensive weapons by a missile strike on a training facility formerly used by NATO trainers. Putin believed it was only a matter of time before he could

defeat Ukrainian resistance and there was no doubt it was in his officers' interests to convey a positive view of progress. The arrest of FSB chiefs only served to underscore how hazardous it would be to oppose the Russian leader, but it also revealed how Putin was, once again, trying to ensure that he was not blamed for any failures.

Western Calculations

The UK and Allied strategy was primarily a concern not to escalate and intervene directly, thereby invoking NATO's article 5. Some referred to the dilemma imposed by Budapest Agreement, signed by Ukraine, Russia, the US, and UK on the former's integrity, which had been guaranteed on the basis of its nuclear disarmament. Russia's invasion was a unilateral abrogation of the agreement, so the West felt it was legitimate to re-arm Ukraine. There was, however, great timidity in supplying any more than defensive hand held air defence (Stingers) and anti-tank missiles (NLAWs, Javelin). Poland offered to supply, via the United States, a squadron of MIG29 aircraft, but the Biden administration refused through concerns about escalation. The Americans wanted to contain the conflict. This was in part because the public appetite for intervention was very limited indeed. After years of conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan, there was a degree of public weariness, although no one, except the extreme fringes of Western politics, doubted the legitimacy of Ukraine's cause.

For the West, no direct intervention was likely while alternative means were available, specifically sanctions, diplomatic persuasion, and weapons transfers. There were new dilemmas imposed when Zelensky called for foreign volunteers to come and fight in the conflict. British and Allied nations' volunteers did indeed set off to join an International Legion. Untrained volunteers were clearly a liability if committed to the war, so efforts were made by the Ukrainians to organise, filter, and select the experienced personnel, and establish training for the rest.

Putin was obviously aware of the arrival of foreign volunteers and the shipments of munitions. There were veiled threats of full retaliation, including a nuclear option, if NATO intervened. There were even hints from Putin that economic sanctions constituted an act of war anyway. While the West tried to avoid any form of escalation, Putin was content to ratchet up the violence and threats. His calculation was that the West simply lacked the courage to intervene. In part, this was accurate. President Macron of France and Chancellor Olaf Scholtz of Germany had made diplomatic efforts in vain and they wished to avoid any intervention. By contrast, the British and Polish were seen to be more sanguine and less idealistic about the Russians. The UK, Poland and Romania were nevertheless limited in what they could achieve alone, so the emphasis was on ensuring a united NATO front.

The European Union surprised commentators in making statements about the need to transfer arms and there was an uncharacteristically rapid set of resolutions about sanctions, reflecting the unity of feeling across the continent. There were some problems in the execution, not least in Germany's continued reluctance to follow up on some promising statements. Berlin's agreement to spend more of its GDP on defence, a commitment it had made in 2014 but never fulfilled, was welcomed, but with some scepticism. Given the weaknesses in German forces, there would be a very long way to go to make Germany a credible defence actor.

What was missing was a sense of the outcomes the Western allies wanted. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson opted for the simple 'Putin must fail', and the widely-held assumption was that Ukraine must be liberated, with borders restored to the status quo ante bellum. But the details were unclear, reflecting uncertainties about the borders, the levels of destruction, the chances of escalation, and, above all, the outcomes of the conflict.

It was difficult to forecast, but it was clear that there would be mounting Ukrainian civilian losses, which would create pressure to do more. It was also evident there was a humanitarian crisis. In less than two weeks, two million had fled the conflict and it was expected that refugee numbers would swell to 5 million, or more, in the largest movement of civilians in Europe since 1945. The reception and support of these refugees required significant organization. Poland and Moldova led these efforts, while German civilians and non-government organizations did their part, but there was no centralized approach and it seemed that Europe had not learned the lessons of the migration wave that had followed the conflicts of the so-called Arab Spring in the Middle East and North Africa.

China's Calculations

It was also thought that China would offer packages of support to prevent the collapse of Russia, although Beijing wanted to see its old rival weakened and it did not want to lose access to lucrative Western markets. China wanted there to be only one Asian superpower, but there was confusion in Beijing. Neither could they let Russia fail entirely, nor could they antagonize the West to the point where China too was subjected to sanctions. China opted for quiet encouragement to Moscow and public announcements of tacit disapproval, and united the two approaches with the predictable condemnation of the United States. Having subjected Australia to retaliatory sanctions in 2021 when Canberra called for an investigation into the origins of covid, the Chinese now denounced sanctions as ineffective. Communist double-speak was all too evident in Beijing, as it was in Moscow.

Nevertheless, Russian television viewers and polls, surveys of Chinese citizens, and similar assessments of Indian opinion revealed approval for Putin's 'special military operation'. There were populations only too willing to believe the conspiracy theories or to find reasons to blame the United States. The narrative was usually that the US had invaded or intervened militarily in a

number of countries, so it was in no position to criticise Russia. Others wanted to believe Russian stories of ‘neo-Nazis’, who were ‘backed by America’ being rooted out of Ukraine. On the whole though, the majority of global opinion condemned the Russian invasion and there was disgust at the lies being peddled by the Kremlin. On 10 March 2022, Sergei Lavrov, the Russian Foreign Minister, even gave a press conference denying that Russia had invaded Ukraine at all. Of course, there was narrative consistency, because Russia argued that it was only engaged in a ‘special military operation’. Nevertheless, the inventions of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs seemed to take on the air of the absurd, with claims that Ukraine had been planning to attack Russia with nuclear weapons, which it does not possess.

China was therefore in a dilemma, trying to assert its national interests but at risk of being caught on the wrong side of history.

A Global War?

Among the less certain developments, there was the possibility of an extension of Russian coercion to the Arctic, Mediterranean, and Atlantic, and to Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia. In other words, there could be global ramifications. In the short term, Putin drew private military companies back from Africa and the Middle East, and, by 11 March, he was calling for volunteers from within Russia and the former Soviet sphere to join the conflict on the Russian side, suggesting heavier losses than expected. Meanwhile Zelensky too called on Ukrainian peacekeeping personnel to return to the homeland. Men of fighting age were already being told they could not join their escaping families. There were poignant scenes at the rail stations and at the borders, as men said farewell to their children, wives, and parents, before turning back to take up arms against the invasion.

In mid-March, there was still little appetite for any military intervention by NATO, even as a limited war. The primary reason for this aversion was to avoid direct conflict with Russia that could become a nuclear exchange, but there was little consideration given to escalation control. It was purely a question of avoidance, largely through inexperience with how deterrence works in practice. There were questions of legal and collective security too: if any single NATO member engaged in the conflict then the entire alliance would be involved. Such a move was really dependent on President Biden, but there was no sign that he would make this decision. The risk of Poland or another NATO member being attacked was still there, of course, and there was intensive planning. US and British forces reinforced the Eastern European flank of NATO with albeit modest numbers, while Poland announced a significant increase in defense spending.

The prevailing hope one heard in the Western capitals was for civil unrest in Russia, or a palace coup, which might lead to a change of government. Such ideas had little basis in any fact. Indeed,

Russian polls indicated that the invasion of Ukraine had made Putin more popular as a 'strong leader', not less so. Oligarchs could be dispossessed and ejected from the West, but they could easily be ignored by Putin. Public protests in Russia could be closed down by the heavy handed tactics of the police, and furthermore condemned as Western inspired attacks on Russia. Sanctions would take years to have an effect and were used by the Kremlin as 'evidence' of Western aggression. Internal changes in Russia would require a much greater coincidence of setbacks: high inflation, deteriorating services, incompetent authorities, a succession of policy failures and military defeat. Then, and only then, might civil unrest unseat the President.

The Changing Character of War

Much seems familiar in the Russian war in Ukraine. The conflict is conventional but like all such wars it is augmented with unconventional methods. The fighting has been intense and marked by the suffering of civilians. In terms of mass, Russia has the advantage but Ukraine has been forced overcome this asymmetry of strength by using light infantry tactics to delay and destroy armoured formations, many of which have inexplicably been confined to roads. In terms of preparation, Russia initially had the advantage but this has been eroded by the economic measures imposed by the West and by Ukraine's steady mobilisation of its manpower and the provision of foreign equipment.

In information warfare, Ukraine has been able to win support from the West against a clear breach of international law and Russian aggression. However, in Russia, there is considerable support for the Kremlin's 'special military operation'. One must therefore assess this as a balanced factor since both sides have galvanised their populations.

Assessing the determination to win and the role of leadership, there is clearly a difference of styles between the popular and warm Zelensky and the remote and cool Putin, but the Ukrainian morale and determination has been admirable, while there is some evidence that, amongst certain units, Russian military morale has suffered. Most of the Russian public appear to be completely unaware of the details of the conflict, being fed purely a diet of military successes.

In conventional wars, the belligerents will appeal to other powers to join a coalition or provide support. Russia has made a direct appeal to China to provide arms, and to Syria for volunteers. Ukraine has looked to the West for both of these resources, and for intelligence and surveillance. The majority of global opinion has condemned Putin, so the balance remains in Ukraine's favour in terms of support.

Technological performance has been a feature of the assessments of conventional wars, and in this conflict Ukraine's anti-armour weapons have been very successful indeed. Russia possesses advantages in the numbers of advanced fighters, like the SU-35, it can deploy and in missiles

(over 900 had been used by 15 March 2022). Russian also possesses more artillery and surface to surface missiles, such as the Grad, although Ukraine has some of the same type. Both forces possess drones, for surveillance and strike. It is here that Ukraine could possess an advantage since Russian formations are easier to find and strike compared with the dispersed Ukrainians. Russia has relied on area bombardments, with a few precision guided systems, but while these do significant damage to urban areas, it is far easier to survive these attacks, giving the Ukrainians an advantage in urban warfare.

War also demands recovery from setbacks and adaptation. The failure of the Russian coup de main required a significant adjustment of strategy and tactics. Russia moved to a slower and more deliberate use of firepower to make progress. Levels of resistance and logistics challenges made progress slower still, which has imposed vast costs on the Russian economy.

Finally, in the character of war, we can differentiate by strategies. In terms of cost-benefit analyses, Putin's war is no longer worth the military success that might be achieved. It could prove to be a classic example of operational achievements failing to turn into strategic victory. Putin has failed to grasp that Ukraine is now in an existential war and it will resist. Russia cannot now achieve its strategic ends and risks a culminating point of stalemate. Putin may be tempted to break the log jam with unconventional weapons, but it seems more likely he will try to achieve a military success with the grinding capture of Kyiv and a long war to seize the whole country. He will be calculating that the West will never intervene for fear of nuclear retaliation. For Putin, the war is existential, even if it is not for his countrymen. Ukraine can exhaust the Russian army and impose attrition. It can also extend the Russian front but opening up new threats geographically and conceptually, such as in cyberspace. Ultimately, Ukraine may be able to compel the Russians to make a choice: to persist and suffer irreparable losses, or desist and achieve some compensatory peace.