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# **DISSECTING NATO CHIEF'S REMARKS ON UKRAINE RUSSIA WAR**

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## About the Author

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# Introduction

The Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), remarked in an interview with the German media group Funke, on 17, September 2023,

*“Most wars last longer than expected when they first begin... Therefore, we must prepare ourselves for a long war in Ukraine”<sup>1</sup>*

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, intended by Russia to be a swift operation to topple the Ukrainian government has evolved into a protracted and enduring conflict spanning over a year and a half. History has witnessed much longer wars, such as the war in China between the Han dynasty and the Xiongnu nation which lasted almost 300 years, the Crusades, fought between Christians and Muslims that lasted around 200 years and more recently, the Korean War, which is still technically ongoing due to the absence of a peace treaty, for 73 years now.<sup>2</sup> However, the Russia-Ukraine war’s prolonged nature begs questions as to why we witness such extended wars and why there are stark disparities between initial expectations and the unfolding reality. The Chief also added,

*“There is no doubt that Ukraine will eventually be in NATO”<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> NDTV, “Prepare for Long War in Ukraine, Warns Nato Chief,” NDTV.com, September 17, 2023, <https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/prepare-for-long-war-in-ukraine-warns-nato-chief-4397032>.

<sup>2</sup> Kek Koon Wee, “Opinion: Russia-Ukraine War Seem Long? China’s Longest Dragged on for 300 Years,” South China Morning Post, January 8, 2023, [https://www.scmp.com/magazines/post-magazine/short-reads/article/3205954/if-russia-ukraine-conflict-seems-long-already-consider-chinas-longest-war-lasting-nearly-300-years?campaign=3205954&module=perpetual\\_scroll\\_0&pgtype=article](https://www.scmp.com/magazines/post-magazine/short-reads/article/3205954/if-russia-ukraine-conflict-seems-long-already-consider-chinas-longest-war-lasting-nearly-300-years?campaign=3205954&module=perpetual_scroll_0&pgtype=article).

<sup>3</sup> NDTV, “Prepare for Long War in Ukraine, Warns Nato Chief,” <https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/prepare-for-long-war-in-ukraine-warns-nato-chief-4397032>.

While Ukraine was vaguely promised future membership in 2008, there has been no substantial timeline for such induction.<sup>4</sup> Russia's invasion of Ukraine can be attributed in part to the perceived expansion of NATO towards the east, despite previous assurances that such eastward expansion would not occur.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the Chief's reassurance of Ukraine's membership plays a substantial role in the conflict.

## NATO's Role in the Conflict

Despite Ukraine not being a member of NATO, the organisation's and its members' assistance has been substantial. NATO has pledged EUR 500 million for assistance in food, clothing, fuel, communications, etc. Individual member countries have committed around EUR 100 million for military and humanitarian assistance.<sup>6</sup> The United States has emerged as the largest contributor at \$75 Billion. The United States assistance to Ukraine represents the most substantial aid package provided to any nation by the U.S.<sup>7</sup> Besides the United States, Germany, Denmark, Poland, and the Netherlands are significant contributors. Compared in terms of the proportion of GDP, Norway and Lithuania have pledged

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<sup>4</sup> Adam Taylor, "That Time Ukraine Tried to Join NATO — and NATO Said No," The Washington Post, September 4, 2014, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2014/09/04/that-time-ukraine-tried-to-join-nato-and-nato-said-no/>.

<sup>5</sup> Becky Sullivan, "How NATO's Expansion Helped Drive Putin to Invade Ukraine," NPR, February 24, 2022, <https://www.npr.org/2022/01/29/1076193616/ukraine-russia-nato-explainer>.

<sup>6</sup> "NATO's Response to Russia's Invasion of Ukraine," NATO, November 6, 2023, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_192648.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_192648.htm).

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Masters and Will Merrow, "How Much Aid Has the U.S. Sent Ukraine? Here Are Six Charts.," Council on Foreign Relations, December 8, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/article/how-much-aid-has-us-sent-ukraine-here-are-six-charts>.

the highest proportion of their GDP at around 1.5% of their GDP while the U.S. lies at around 0.3% of their GDP.<sup>8</sup>

## The Reason for a Prolonged Conflict

To examine the Chief's statements regarding the longevity of the war, we must realise that not all wars are fought for the same reason, nor have the same longevity. Wars can range from those waged for economic gains like the Opium Wars (1839-1860) and the Japanese Invasion of Manchuria (1931-1932) or for territorial gains like the Mexican-American War (1846-1848) and Serbo-Bulgarian War (1885-1886).<sup>9</sup> Religious sentiments can also trigger some like the Greek War of Independence (1821–1829) and the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) and so do nationalistic sentiments like the World Wars.<sup>10</sup> While the threat posed by NATO's continuous expansion eastward can explain Russia's invasion of Ukraine, at the heart of the conflict lies an ideological struggle. The Russia-Ukraine war, grappling with the contrasting views of the two nations on the origins of Ukraine, rooted in cultural and historical similarities, can be classified as an ideological war.

### Ideological War

On 12<sup>th</sup> July 2021, the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin published an article titled 'On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians'. In the article, he writes,

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<sup>8</sup> Henrik Pettersson, Rachel Wilson, and Lou Robinson, "Aid to Ukraine: Where the Money in Their War against Russia Is Coming From," CNN, October 6, 2023, <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/10/05/world/ukraine-money-military-aid-intl-dg/index.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Goodman, "The 8 Main Reasons for War," Owlcation, October 15, 2023, <https://owlcation.com/social-sciences/The-Main-Reasons-For-War>.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Goodman, "The 8 Main Reasons for War," Owlcation, October 15, 2023, <https://owlcation.com/social-sciences/The-Main-Reasons-For-War>.

*“When I was asked about Russian-Ukrainian relations, I said that Russians and Ukrainians were one people – a single whole.”<sup>11</sup>*

Putin maintains a strong belief that Ukraine is a part of Russia. He contends that Russia and Ukraine have shared history which lays down the foundations of their culture and that the Kievan Rus period and the period of the Soviet Union point to the identity of the two nations as one.<sup>12</sup> However, Ukraine argues that it cemented its statehood following a referendum in 1991 where 92.3% of voters preferred an independent Ukraine.<sup>13</sup> When such contrasting sentiments exist, it is hard to deny that the war can be categorised as an ideological one.

Ideological wars are prolonged because there is limited scope for realpolitik. Realpolitik is the approach of governance, based on practical solutions rather than ideological beliefs and sentiments. The difficulty of ideological wars lies in that, the parties are unable to settle due to a fundamental disagreement. A war is only stopped when both parties agree that stopping the war is a better alternative than its continuation.<sup>14</sup> The countries in an ideological war cannot reach a state where both parties can agree on such an agreement. A settlement is never reached because of the absence of a middle ground. For the oppressor, a settlement that compromises their key objectives for invasion is undesirable as their core beliefs will not align with a settlement. For the oppressed,

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<sup>11</sup> Vladimir Putin, “Article by Vladimir Putin ‘on the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians,’” President of Russia, July 12, 2021, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Billy Perrigo, “How Putin’s Denial of Ukraine’s Statehood Rewrites History,” Time, February 22, 2022, <https://time.com/6150046/ukraine-statehood-russia-history-putin/>.

<sup>14</sup> Marnix Provoost, “What Is Russia’s Theory of Victory in Ukraine?,” Modern War Institute, March 31, 2023, <https://mwi.westpoint.edu/what-is-russias-theory-of-victory-in-ukraine/>.

a settlement depicts an implicit acquittal of the oppressor and their invasion.<sup>15</sup> Such was the case when the United States refused any offers of settlements with the Taliban after the 9/11 attacks. When the Taliban offered a settlement, President George W. Bush said, “There's no need to discuss it... There's nothing to negotiate about. They're harbouring a terrorist and they need to turn him over.”<sup>16</sup>

The same pattern can be seen with Russia and Ukraine. Despite several rounds of peace talks, the settlements have stalled because neither side is willing to compromise. Henry Kissinger, former US Secretary of State, proposed that Ukraine allow Russia to retain control over Crimea, essentially restoring the situation to pre-invasion status.<sup>17</sup> Mykhailo Podolyak, the Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine, replied with,

*“Mr. Kissinger still has not understood anything ... neither the nature of this war, nor its impact on the world order.”<sup>18</sup>*

Ukraine agitated over Russia’s threats and invasions, is not willing to compromise on their demands. Such is also the case with Russia, exhausted of its resources and pushing for a bigger strategy of reviving the USSR. A settlement will not give either side, what they desire.

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<sup>15</sup> Christopher Blattman, “The Hard Truth about Long Wars,” Foreign Affairs, October 4, 2023, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/hard-truth-about-long-wars>.

<sup>16</sup> “U.S. Rejects New Taliban Offer,” ABC News, October 15, 2001, <https://abcnews.go.com/International/story?id=80482&page=1>.

<sup>17</sup> Al Jazeera, “Kyiv Slams Kissinger over Call to Negotiate with Russia for Peace,” Al Jazeera, December 19, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/12/19/kyiv-slams-kissinger-over-call-to-negotiate-with-russia-for-peace>.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

## The Geopolitics Involved

Another issue clouding the Russia-Ukraine conflict is the elaborate geopolitics behind the invasion. Russia's intentions on the regions it wishes to annex remain dubious. In 2014, Russia annexed Crimea with the assistance of a pro-Russian President at the time, Viktor Yanukovich.<sup>19</sup> Russia stationed their troops near the port of Sevastopol with ease after Yanukovich extended Russia's lease on the port till 2042.<sup>20</sup> After the government was toppled due to popular protests, Russia took the chance to enter Crimea, a primarily Russian region.<sup>21</sup> A referendum held on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2014, although doubted for its credibility, showed that 97% of the population in Crimea wished for it to be a separate state.<sup>22</sup> On 18<sup>th</sup> March, Putin signed a treaty which handed over the control of Crimea to the Russian Federation. Although this did not receive significant international recognition, it allowed Russia to make advancements in other parts of Ukraine.<sup>23</sup>

Also in 2014, Russia established pro-Russian, separatists in the Donbas region, in Eastern Ukraine which were controlled by Moscow.<sup>24</sup> The Donbas region, comprising Luhansk and Donetsk, is primarily Russian speaking.<sup>25</sup> However, a poll conducted by Interfax, a Ukrainian news agency,

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<sup>19</sup> "Crimea," Encyclopædia Britannica, December 11, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Crimea>.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Nigel Walker, "Conflict in Ukraine: A Timeline (2014 - Eve of 2022 Invasion)," House of Commons Library, August 22, 2023, <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9476/CBP-9476.pdf>.

<sup>25</sup> "What to Know about the Donetsk and Luhansk Regions," Voice of America, February 21, 2022, <https://www.voanews.com/a/what-to-know-about-the-donetsk-and-luhansk-regions-/6452835.html>.



revealed that 82% of those who have lived in Russian-controlled territory since the invasion have a negative attitude towards Russia and only 6% have a positive attitude.<sup>26</sup>



Figure 1<sup>27</sup>

One view of Russia’s goal during the February 2022 invasion was to strengthen its control in the Donbas region and to establish control in the Kherson region to the West of Crimea and in

<sup>26</sup> “Some 92% of Ukrainians Have Negative Attitude towards Russia - Kiis ...,” Interfax - Ukraine, May 26, 2022, <https://en.interfax.com.ua/news/general/834975.html>.

<sup>27</sup> Al Jazeera, “Russia-Ukraine War in Maps and Charts: Live Tracker,” Al Jazeera, October 25, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/28/russia-ukraine-crisis-in-maps-and-charts-live-news-interactive>.

Zaporizhzhia.<sup>28</sup> This would enable Russia to utilise the Port of Sevastopol to the fullest and to control Europe's biggest Power Plant, Zaporizhzhia.<sup>29</sup> While this is a convincing prediction, we find opposition in the Montreux Convention of 1936, which allows Turkey, a NATO country, to control the Bosphorus, the pathway to the Black Sea from the Mediterranean.<sup>30</sup> Considering the conflict, Turkey is highly unlikely to allow access to Russia. Beyond the Bosphorus region, there exist several such restrictions for Russia such as the Aegean Sea, the Gibraltar Straits, and the Suez Canal.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, inadequacies persist in this perspective. In return, Ukraine is focussing on attacks in Crimea to weaken the epicentre of Russia's supply lines.<sup>32</sup> This not only neutralises the direct threat that is posed by Russia but also is an attempt to re-capture Crimea.<sup>33</sup>

The alternative view that Russia is looking to annex the entire territory as the first step to revive the former Soviet Union, seems to have lost credibility at this point in the conflict.<sup>34</sup> Following Russia's initial objective in the early phases of the invasion, which aimed for a swift capture of Kyiv and the establishment of a new government but encountered unforeseen challenges due to

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<sup>28</sup> Paul Kirby, "Donbas: Why Russia Is Trying to Capture Eastern Ukraine," BBC News, May 26, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-60938544>.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Tim Marshall, *Prisoners of Geography: Ten Maps That Tell You Everything You Need to Know about Global Politics* (London: Elliott & Thompson Limited, 2019), Russia.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> "Ukraine's Strategy to Weaken Russia's Military, Logistics in Crimea | WSJ," YouTube, October 2, 2023, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=su\\_ohET-RLc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=su_ohET-RLc).

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Paul Kirby, "Has Putin's War Failed and What Does Russia Want from Ukraine?," BBC News, February 24, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-56720589>.

Ukraine's robust counter-offensive, the prevailing view now suggests a shift in strategy. The new focus appears to be on the Donbas and Kherson regions.

Moscow lacks transparency in its strategy which makes it difficult for Ukraine and the West to reach settlements because there is fear of an undiscovered threat. Adding to this dubiousness is the ever-changing state of the military affairs of both Russia and Ukraine, as the Ukrainian troops continue to exceed expectations and deficiencies in the Russian military become apparent.<sup>35</sup>

## Military Affairs

The deviation of the conflict from initial expectations can be attributed to Russia's inability to adapt to the newfound strength of the Ukrainian military after aid from the West.<sup>36</sup> The inability of either side to exercise sufficient control militarily to bring a decisive end to the war contributed greatly to the drawn-out conflict we are witnessing.<sup>37</sup>

Ukraine's military gained a distinct advantage over the Russian forces through their adaptability, in stark contrast to Russia's rigid strategy, as the leaders of the Russian military struggled to produce effective solutions in response to changing circumstances.<sup>38</sup> Adding to this flexibility was the contrasting reception of the war in the two countries. As Russia's resources for the conflict were being exhausted, the public grew apprehension over the war whereas in Ukraine, the public

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<sup>35</sup> Christopher Blattman, "The Hard Truth about Long Wars," *Foreign Affairs*, October 4, 2023, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/hard-truth-about-long-wars>.

<sup>36</sup> 1. Thomas Graham, "Ukraine Has Held off Russia's Invasion-so Far. Here's How.," *Council on Foreign Relations*, February 17, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/ukraine-has-held-russias-invasion-so-far-heres-how#:~:text=Ukraine%20has%20withstood%20and%20repelled,the%20country's%20south%20and%20east>.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Christopher Morris, "Ukraine War: Russia's Problems on the Battlefield Stem from Failures at the Top," *The Conversation*, September 14, 2023, <https://theconversation.com/ukraine-war-russias-problems-on-the-battlefield-stem-from-failures-at-the-top-189916>.

displayed substantial unity in dealing with the conflict.<sup>39</sup> The subsequent sections delve into how the conflict unfolded across the domains of land, air, and sea.

## War on Land

Russia's approach to ground operations on the northern front involved significant reliance on the use of roads as opposed to the marshes and forests.<sup>40</sup> While this allowed Russia to advance troops, the information provided by the civilians to the military, on the positions and movements of the Russians posed obstacles.<sup>41</sup> Local civilians also proved to be greatly resourceful in Guerrilla tactics employed by Ukraine such as hit-and-run or ambushes as they required minimal training as opposed to sophisticated military activities.<sup>42</sup>

Further, the troops deployed by Russia were found to be much fewer than necessary to fight a population that was united in its opposition, at 4 Russian soldiers for every 1000 inhabitants while the requirement is estimated at 20 soldiers per 1000 inhabitants.<sup>43</sup> In some conflicts, such as the US invasion of Iraq, a lower ratio of 7 soldiers for 1000 inhabitants, can be successful. However,

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<sup>39</sup> "Why the War in Ukraine May Be a Long One," Crisis Group, July 7, 2023, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/eastern-europe/ukraine/why-war-ukraine-may-be-long-one>.

<sup>40</sup> Seth G. Jones, "Russia's Ill-Fated Invasion of Ukraine: Lessons in Modern Warfare," CSIS, June 1, 2022, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russias-ill-fated-invasion-ukraine-lessons-modern-warfare>.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Vanshika Sirohi, issue brief, *Military Strategy of Ukraine in the Russia-Ukraine War* (Centre for Security Studies, November 2022), [https://www.cssjsia.com/\\_files/ugd/348fae\\_08463555238f424998eaa864574714e3.pdf](https://www.cssjsia.com/_files/ugd/348fae_08463555238f424998eaa864574714e3.pdf).

<sup>43</sup> Seth G. Jones, "Russia's Ill-Fated Invasion of Ukraine: Lessons in Modern Warfare," CSIS, June 1, 2022, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russias-ill-fated-invasion-ukraine-lessons-modern-warfare>.

the nature of the troops in the two conflicts looked different.<sup>44</sup> Russia deployed a large number of conscripts with limited experience in combat which weakened the quality of personnel.<sup>45</sup>

However, the Ukrainian troops face difficulties of their own, the main concern of which is the shortage of troops.<sup>46</sup> This also reflects challenges in the effective deployment of these troops. It is because of this that when Ukraine decided to regroup troops and concentrate on defending the Donbas region, their counter-offence in other regions slowed down.<sup>47</sup> They also face concerns in communications and a lack of artillery and heavy weapon support.<sup>48</sup>

## War in Air

Ukraine possesses an advantage over Russia with the modern air defence system it employs.<sup>49</sup> The Ukrainian Airforce are using drone technology to launch offences on Russia which are not detected by their old radar systems.<sup>50</sup> Old radar systems are not designed to detect small, slow-moving

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Vanshika Sirohi, issue brief, *Military Strategy of Ukraine in the Russia-Ukraine War* (Centre for Security Studies, November 2022), [https://www.cssjsia.com/files/ugd/348fae\\_08463555238f424998eaa864574714e3.pdf](https://www.cssjsia.com/files/ugd/348fae_08463555238f424998eaa864574714e3.pdf).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Sakshi Tiwari, “Powerful, Modern & Effective: Ukraine’s Air Defense Operator Thrilled with ‘kill Rate’ of German Iris-T System,” *The Eurasian Times*, January 23, 2023, <https://www.eurasiatimes.com/powerful-modern-effective-ukraines-air-defense-operator-thrilled/>.

<sup>50</sup> “Why Are Moscow’s Air Defences Performing so Badly?,” *The Economist*, August 14, 2023, <https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2023/08/14/why-are-moscows-air-defences-performing-so-badly>.

objects such as drones which have become relevant in modern warfare.<sup>51</sup> To further weaken Russia's radars, Ukraine have included HARM (High-Speed Anti-Radiation Missiles) technology, provided by the USA, which emits radiation transmissions at 3200 kilometres per hour.<sup>52</sup> This either destroys Russia's radars or forces them to turn them off and has allowed Ukraine to launch air strikes.<sup>53</sup>

The long-range S-300 surface-to-air missile systems, the Stinger man-portable air-defence systems, medium-range SA-11 Gadfly (Buk-M1) and short-range SA-8 Gecko systems employed by Ukraine, with the assistance of Western aid, also deterred the Russian military greatly.<sup>54</sup>

However, Ukraine lacks sufficient supplies of long-range missiles and cruise missiles which the U.S. President, Joe Biden, promised to Ukraine in the coming months.<sup>55</sup> In addition to this, the Neptune Cruise Missiles that Ukraine itself is producing show promise.<sup>56</sup> However, the quantity

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Thomas Harding, "Why Are Moscow's Air Defences Performing so Badly?," *The Economist*, September 30, 2022, <https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2023/08/14/why-are-moscows-air-defences-performing-so-badly>.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Snehash Alex Philip, "Why the Famed Russian Air Force Failed in Ukraine and the Vital Lessons IAF Can Draw from It," *ThePrint*, October 15, 2022, <https://theprint.in/defence/air-denial-over-dominance-democratised-technology-lessons-for-iaf-from-russia-ukraine-war/1167547/>.

<sup>55</sup> "Ukraine's Strategy to Weaken Russia's Military, Logistics in Crimea | WSJ," YouTube, October 2, 2023, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=su\\_ohET-RLc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=su_ohET-RLc).

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

that can be manufactured remains dubious.<sup>57</sup> The prospect of Ukraine exhausting its air defence is a dangerous one as this domain is one of the great advantages they possess over Russia.

## War at Sea

The Black Sea has been the most crucial region of maritime tensions between Ukraine and Russia. The Sevastopol port, situated at the edge of the Black Sea, assumed a central role during the 2014 Russian invasion of Crimea because of the warm waters, which mainland Russia lacked.<sup>58</sup>



Figure 2<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> A. K. Chawla, "The Russia-Ukraine War – A Maritime Perspective," SP's Naval Forces, March 7, 2022, <https://www.spsnavalforces.com/experts-speak/?id=498&h=The-Russia-Ukraine-War-A-Maritime-Perspective>.

<sup>59</sup> John Psaropoulos, *Alleged Attack on Crimea's Sevastopol*, *Al Jazeera* (Al Jazeera, November 3, 2022), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/11/3/russia-backs-out-of-grain-deal-doesnt-attack-ships-rejoins>.

Russia's primary maritime goal for the war was to dominate the Northern part of the Black Sea which was achieved in the first 3 days of the invasion.<sup>60</sup> This served dual objectives – it blocked war supplies from the West to Ukraine by Sea and weakened Ukraine's economy by stopping maritime trade.<sup>61</sup> Though the Montreux Convention allowed Turkey to prohibit Russian Naval units from passing through the Bosphorus Strait, effectively preventing them from entering or exiting the Black Sea, Russia did not face significant obstacles because they had already strengthened their Black Sea Fleet before the invasion.<sup>62</sup>

However, Ukraine has stepped up its attacks on the Russian Fleet in the Black Sea. As mentioned earlier, Crimea has been a major target of Ukraine.<sup>63</sup> If their attacks on the Black Sea Fleet prove successful, they will be able to effectively break down, arguably, by far the most successful element of Russia's military. Russia also lost the Flagship of this Fleet, the Moskva.<sup>64</sup> Ukraine contends that it was a direct effect of a strike by their Neptune anti-ship missile whereas Russia argues that the ship sunk as it was being towed to the port during stormy weather.<sup>65</sup> Additionally,

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<sup>60</sup> A. K. Chawla, "The Russia-Ukraine War – A Maritime Perspective," SP's Naval Forces, March 7, 2022, <https://www.spsnavalforces.com/experts-speak/?id=498&h=The-Russia-Ukraine-War-A-Maritime-Perspective>.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Pavel Polityuk and Oleksandr Kozhukhar, "Russian Warship Sinks; Ukraine Says Its Missile Is Responsible," Reuters, April 15, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-says-flagship-black-sea-fleet-badly-damaged-by-blast-2022-04-14/>.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.



in a strike on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2023, the Ukrainian military utilised long-range missiles to target the Headquarters of Russia's Black Sea Fleet.<sup>66</sup>

Ukraine was facing challenges in the export of its grains since Russia withdrew from the Black Sea Grain Initiative which allowed ships to export essentials like grains and fertilizers from Ukraine through a humanitarian corridor.<sup>67</sup> Thus, unable to use this corridor, Ukraine's shipping was limited through its small ports, which also came under attack in recent weeks.<sup>68</sup> However, the establishment of a new shipping corridor allowed the passage of ships and recovered Ukraine's exports.<sup>69</sup>

The military side of the Russia-Ukraine war shows that the conflict is at a stalemate, where neither country possesses a strong enough military capability to defeat the other decisively. Still, both countries have a substantially powerful defence to deter the enemy from establishing absolute control. Furthermore, the underestimation of the Ukrainian military and the underperformance of the Russian military create a perplexed state where it is difficult to predict the subsequent actions. Hence, we see the protraction of this conflict.

## Predictions for the End of the Conflict

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<sup>66</sup> Matthew Mpoke Bigg, "Amid Black Sea Threats, Ukraine Steps up Use of New Shipping Route," The New York Times, September 24, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/09/24/world/europe/ukraine-russia-news.html>.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

The most recent round of peace talks held in Malta on 28<sup>th</sup> October 2023, saw officials from more than 65 countries.<sup>70</sup> However, Russia chose not to participate in the talks and dismissed the initiative as they deemed it to be biased.<sup>71</sup> The talks focussed on discussing 5 of the 10 points that are a part of President Zelensky's '10-point Peace Plan'<sup>72</sup>

The 10-point Peace Plan, announced during the 2022 G-20 summit, covers the following:

1. Radiation and nuclear safety
2. Food security
3. Energy security
4. Release of all prisoners and deportees
5. Implementation of the UN Charter and restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity and the world order
6. Withdrawal of Russian troops and cessation of hostilities
7. Justice
8. Immediate protection of the environment
9. Prevention of escalation
10. Confirmation of the end of the war

The plan, published on Ukraine's official website, makes it clear that it is unwilling to make any changes for Russia.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> "Talks on Ukraine's Peace Plan Open in Malta with Officials from 65 Countries - but Not Russia," The Economic Times, October 28, 2023, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/talks-on-ukraines-peace-plan-open-in-malta-with-officials-from-65-countries-but-not-russia/articleshow/104786226.cms>.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> "Zelenskyy's Peace Plan: 10 Essential Points - War.Ukraine.Ua," Official Website of Ukraine, August 11, 2023, <https://war.ukraine.ua/faq/zelenskyys-10-point-peace-plan/>.

Russia's demands from Ukraine at the beginning of the conflict involved denazification, demilitarization, neutrality, recognition of Crimea as part of Russia and independent status for the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.<sup>74</sup> While Russia has not participated actively in peace talks, a recent statement by the Foreign Minister clarifies their most crucial demand – Ukraine as a non-aligned country, without membership in any military alliances. However, when Ukraine is still unwilling to part with Crimea, the above compromise still would not satisfy them.<sup>75</sup>

A peaceful end to the conflict would warrant a compromise by both countries. Nonetheless, should Kyiv accede to Russia's ultimatums, it would continue to confront security challenges, with no assurance of its safety. Russia's apparent reluctance to make efforts towards the mere possibility of a settlement is contributing to the lack of progress in resolving the conflict. The prospect of a significant, war-ending strike by either of the countries, though improbable, cannot be negated.

## NATO's Eastward Expansion

The major reason cited by Russia in its invasion of Ukraine is the threat posed by the eastward expansion of NATO.<sup>76</sup> Russia contends that the West made a promise to expand 'not an inch eastward' after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact.<sup>77</sup> Conversely, the West argues that such a promise was never made, and the only agreement made was regarding a reunified Germany.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Steven Pifer, "Russia-Ukraine: A Negotiated Settlement Will Be Difficult," Brookings, April 5, 2022, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/russia-ukraine-a-negotiated-settlement-will-be-difficult/>.

<sup>75</sup> Jackson Jon, "Russia May Have Just given Ukraine Terms for Ending War," Newsweek, September 27, 2023, <https://www.newsweek.com/russia-may-have-just-given-ukraine-terms-ending-war-1829980>.

<sup>76</sup> Becky Sullivan, "How NATO's Expansion Helped Drive Putin to Invade Ukraine," NPR, February 24, 2022, <https://www.npr.org/2022/01/29/1076193616/ukraine-russia-nato-explainer>.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

The West's argument rests on the terms discussed in the meeting between Mikhail Gorbachev, the then leader of the Soviet Union and James Baker, the then U.S. Secretary of State on February 9, 1990.<sup>79</sup> Gorbachev asserts that there was no agreement that NATO would not expand eastward.<sup>80</sup> They also contend that, if an agreement existed, it was only valid as long as Soviet troops remained in Eastern Europe.<sup>81</sup>

Russia's argument rests on the numerous discussions and documents passed between the former Soviet Union and NATO. The absence of these issues in the official document did not negate the existence of an agreement between the two parties.<sup>82</sup>

## Ukraine's Prospects in NATO

Ukraine's potential membership in NATO was first brought to the table at the NATO Summit in Bucharest in 2008.<sup>83</sup> It was decided that Ukraine was not ready for membership at the time but would be given membership later.<sup>84</sup> 2023 marks 15 years since the Bucharest summit and there is still no timeline on when Ukraine can become a member.<sup>85</sup> As Ukraine has started seeking

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<sup>79</sup> Svetlana Savranskaya and Tom Blanton, "NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard," National Security Archive, December 12, 2017, <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/russia-programs/2017-12-12/nato-expansion-what-gorbachev-heard-western-leaders-early>.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Deutsche Welle, "Explained: Why Russia Has a Problem with NATO's Eastward Expansion," Frontline, February 24, 2022, <https://frontline.thehindu.com/dispatches/explained-why-russia-has-a-problem-with-natos-eastward-expansion/article65220258.ece>.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Nato, "Enlargement and Article 10," NATO, November 27, 2023, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_49212.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49212.htm).

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Steven Pifer, "Russia-Ukraine: A Negotiated Settlement Will Be Difficult," Brookings, April 5, 2022, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/russia-ukraine-a-negotiated-settlement-will-be-difficult/>.

membership more vigorously since the invasion, President Zelenskyy shares the same frustration and has expressed the same multiple times.<sup>86</sup> During the early stages of the war, when Russia's demand for Ukraine's neutrality as mentioned earlier was being discussed, President Zelenskyy remarked,

*“We have heard for many years about the open doors, but we also heard that we can't enter those doors.... This is the truth, and we have simply to accept it as it is.”<sup>87</sup>*

Again, in July 2023, Zelenskyy took to social media to voice his concerns.<sup>88</sup> The President claims that Ukraine's NATO membership is used as leverage to bargain with Russia.<sup>89</sup>

The main reason for stalling Ukraine's membership during the conflict is due to Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, the heart of the formation of NATO. Article 5 of the Washington Treaty states,

*“The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently, they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them.... will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith.... action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force....”*

Therefore, if Ukraine joins NATO during the war, NATO will be drawn into an active war with Russia. While Stoltenberg has expressed NATO's willingness to discuss providing security assistance to Ukraine, he remarked that security guarantees can only be given to member

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Toluse Olorunnipa et al., “Zelensky Slams NATO for Omitting a Timeline for Ukraine to Join,” The Washington Post, July 11, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2023/07/11/zelensky-nato-ukraine-membership-timeline/>.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

countries.<sup>90</sup> Further, the U.S. President, Joe Biden has said that Ukraine still needed a series of internal reforms before it could join the alliance.<sup>91</sup>

However, Ukraine's chances of becoming a member after the conflict seem brighter. As discussed earlier, Russia's original goal of establishing control over Kyiv and setting up a government weakens by the day. If, Russia succeeds in controlling certain regions, mainly the Donbas region and Kherson, and retains control of Crimea, Ukraine still retains chances of joining NATO. Additionally, Stoltenberg has confirmed that a Membership Action Plan would not be required to approve Ukraine's membership.<sup>92</sup>

## Conclusion

The President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, in his nightly address on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2023, appealed for the patience of the world and also cautioned against expecting instant success from the war.<sup>93</sup> Zelenskyy's stance aligns with that of the NATO Chief as both anticipate a prolonged conflict. As experts and policymakers disagree with the future of the war, it is important to study the intricacies of the Russia-Ukraine war as it provides insight into the deeply rooted ideological

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<sup>90</sup> Sabine Siebold, "What Would Happen IF Ukraine Joined NATO? | Reuters," ed. Philippa Fletcher, Reuters, July 10, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/what-would-happen-if-ukraine-joined-nato-2023-07-05/>.

<sup>91</sup> Toluse Olorunnipa et al., "Zelensky Slams NATO for Omitting a Timeline for Ukraine to Join," The Washington Post, July 11, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2023/07/11/zelensky-nato-ukraine-membership-timeline/>.

<sup>92</sup> Nato, "Secretary General in Kyiv: Ukraine Is Closer to NATO than Ever Before," NATO, September 28, 2023, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_218847.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_218847.htm).

<sup>93</sup> "Zelenskiy Asks for Patience with Frontline Offensive | Reuters Video," Reuters, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/video/watch/idRW462401112023RP1>.

disparities, the significance of geopolitics, the ever-evolving technologies wielded by major military powers, and the power of international organisations like NATO.

The statement of the Secretary-General of NATO serves as a sobering reminder that the Russia-Ukraine war is a complex and enduring conflict with no end in sight. As the two countries continue to solidify their demands, and their military capabilities grow more unclear, the prospects of a settlement become increasingly dim. Recognizing this reality is imperative for the international community to steer the path towards a constructive and productive resolution. It is in the utmost interest of the international community to contribute to the settlements as the conflict has the potential to escalate into a broader, more far-reaching international crisis that threatens other actors.

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