

Warfare in a New Epoch: The Return of Big Armies

Vassily B. Kashin, Andrei A. Sushentsov

Vassily B. Kashin, PhD in Political Science

National Research University–Higher School of Economics (HSE), Moscow, Russia
Center for Comprehensive European and International Studies
Director

SPIN-RSCI: 3480-3664

ORCID: 0000-0001-9283-4528

ResearcherID: A-9102-2017

E-mail: vkashin@hse.ru

Andrei A. Sushentsov, PhD in Political Science

MGIMO University, Moscow, Russia
School of International Relations
Dean;
Valdai Discussion Club
Program Director

ORCID: 0000-0003-2076-7332

E-mail: asushentsov@gmail.com

Address: Room 3036, 76 Vernadsky Prospect, Moscow 119454, Russia

This article is an edited and expanded version of the paper originally written for the Valdai Discussion Club: <https://valdaiclub.com/a/reports/warfare-in-a-new-epoch-the-return-of-big-armies/>. It summarizes the results of the research project “Military-Economic Analysis and Political Economy of Military Development and Planning” implemented under a research program of the HSE Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs.

Dr. Andrei Sushentsov’s research contribution to this article was supported by a grant (075-15-2022-327) of the RF Ministry of Science and Higher Education.

DOI: 10.31278/1810-6374-2024-22-1-32-56

Abstract

Comparing the Korean War (1950-1953) and the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, the authors investigate the structural impact of these confrontations on the system of international relations. Similarities in goals, objectives, means of warfare (partly), and the circumstances of the great-power confrontation make it possible to extrapolate the lessons of the Korean War for studying the current conflict in Ukraine, taking into account contemporary changes, especially in the information and technological field. An analysis of the hostilities and their support shows that at least some of the principles of military confrontation, previously considered outdated, appear to be quite relevant today, while some of the modern “smart” warfare tenets have been disproved. In addition, the authors assess the overall impact of the current conflict on the economy and society of the countries involved and the rest of the world.

Keywords: Korean War; the Ukraine conflict, IR structure, structural impact, redistribution of power; warfare; world economy; social consequences

BIG WARS—PAST AND PRESENT

Since the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war, the high-intensity warfare in Ukraine appears to be the largest military conflict in terms of the forces involved, casualties, and duration. Yet the scale of the fighting is the only characteristic that warrants comparison. Politically, the current clash is unique. The Iran-Iraq War was a result of disagreement between two regional powers. The military operations in Iraq in 1991 and 2003 were undertaken by the U.S.-led coalitions against a weaker regional power. Also, by 2003, Iraq had been completely isolated for a decade and lacked the resources to acquire and maintain advanced weapon systems.

The Ukraine conflict emerged as a result of conflicting interests of two great powers—the United States and Russia. Since the 1990s, the U.S. sought to maximize its presence in the post-Soviet space, Russia’s traditional areas of influence. Meanwhile, in the past two decades, Russia augmented its capability and achieved a significant power status that ultimately impacted the balance of power in Eurasia (Nesmeshnyi et al., 2022). The gradual strengthening of Russia and the subsequent

changes in the international structure (Silaev, 2022) conflicted with U.S. interests.

The closest historical precedent for the Ukraine conflict is the Korean War that ended almost 70 years ago. It was vastly different in terms of tactics and military equipment but close to the current conflict in its geopolitical aspects. In the 1950s, the United States sought to counterbalance the increasing influence of the USSR in Asia and assert its hegemony. In his speech on the U.S. Asia policy in January 1950, U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson left Korea outside of America's "defense perimeter" in Asia, designed to oppose what he called "Soviet imperialism" (Acheson, 1950). The American entry into the war had less to do with the fate of Korea than with the fear that the communists' victory on the Korean Peninsula would be a prologue to their victorious march across Asia and the world. After the war, President Dwight Eisenhower conceptualized this view as the "domino theory."

Thus, although the Korean War originated from regional discrepancies, it had far-reaching implications for the evolution of the global system of international relations. The Korean Peninsula turned into a battleground for two superpowers. A great nuclear power had to commit its forces in a protracted military campaign against a non-nuclear regional state that received military support and military equipment from a hostile nuclear power. Thus, the conflict was about the future of the world order, not the fate of the country hosting the theatre of operations.

Similarly, the outcome of the Ukraine conflict will decide the future of the U.S.-led global order. Even before the start of Russia's special military operation (SMO), U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken told the UN Security Council on February 17, 2022: "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 rules-based international order that preserves stability worldwide" (Blinken, 2022).

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 yet highly sophisticated way. Like in Korea, this involvement is designed to minimize the likelihood of a vertical escalation.

As early as the mid-20th century, the nuclear factor emerged as the primary deterrent for nuclear-armed states (Schelling, 1970). Recognizing the catastrophic consequences of the use of nuclear weapons for the whole of humanity, they were compelled to refrain from using them (Kokoshin, 2018). The inability to launch a “disarming” first attack that could annihilate all of the adversary’s forces and therefore prevent a counterstrike made international relations develop along the principle of strategic stability. However, it also generated the so-called “stability/instability paradox” which reflects the idea that as the likelihood of a global nuclear war decreases, the parties involved engage in more active confrontation. Remarkably, this paradox is twofold: while strategic stability deters states from engaging in an all-out nuclear war, it also destabilizes parties and prompts them to engage more actively in confrontations on a smaller scale (see Snyder, 1965; Fomin et al., 2021; Bogdanov, 2023, p. 44). An apt illustration of the “stability/instability paradox” was the Korean War.

Currently, the “stability/instability paradox” remains a fundamental factor in shaping relations between major global powers. Currently, the primary challenge of deterrence is posed by the contradiction between several minor factors within the international order, which is characterized by various forms (Sushentsov, 2020). Each of them is insignificant by itself, but their combination makes the conflict intensify and acquire an unprecedented character, as has been demonstrated by the Ukraine crisis.

The Soviet Union sent fighter aviation and air-defense artillery units and radar troops to Korea. Although based in rear areas, these forces played an important role in the war. During the conflict, the Soviets downed hundreds of U.S. warplanes and killed many 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 U.S.-led UN forces from taking advantage of their air superiority, cutting the Chinese and North Korean supply lines, and isolating the combat area. This resulted in a protracted war with considerable U.S.

losses (36,000 killed and over 100,000 wounded) and an uncertain outcome.

In Ukraine, U.S. 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 U.S. in the 1950s. The same consideration 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 U.S. space 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 fight 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 the consideration of nuclear options. During the Korean War, Gen Douglas MacArthur urged President Harry Truman to authorize the use of nuclear weapons so as to avoid the threat of defeat. Russia has never officially declared its intention to use nuclear weapons in

Ukraine, despite the West's allegations that Moscow is fond of wielding its "nuclear club." Nor did it give any reason 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 harbored 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 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 SMO in Ukraine are examples of confrontations over the right to play a specific role in shaping the future international order. Both emerged during 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 (Jervis, 1980). 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 U.S. failure to score a decisive victory, despite substantial efforts (during the 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 the achievement of 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 evolve 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 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 develop into full-fledged prolonged war, possibly with subsequent nuclear escalation.

The Ukraine Conflict

In the context of the Ukraine crisis, Russia as a great power—while being 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 due to the U.S.'s internal weakening, made evident in the global economy, rapid debt accumulation, 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 center, which, while falling behind the United States in terms of its role in global finance, nominal GDP, and the level of development of certain technologies, by far surpasses it in terms of industrial capacity and is rapidly narrowing the gap in other areas (Kashin, 2022). The development of other non-Western nations may not have progressed at such a dizzying pace but has considerably complicated U.S. positions.

The logic followed by the United States and its partners in these circumstances was made public in statements by Western politicians. They perceive Ukraine as a tool for inflicting a strategic defeat on Russia, which may be not their biggest, but certainly the 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 other potential opponents a lesson (Sushentsov, 2022), and ultimately lead to regime change in Moscow and firmly establish the United States as the undisputed hegemon. The main tools with which 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 destabilize 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 destabilization 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 U.S. marshals all its resources towards 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 protégé, 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 has managed to avoid economic and domestic political destabilization (Kashin, 2023), begun the militarization of its economy, and expanded its army. There is a strong likelihood that after the Ukraine campaign, whatever its outcome, 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 is worth noting that the United States has managed to solidify its control over Europe and certain key allies in the Asia-Pacific region, consolidate its own elite around new strategic objectives, and 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 its economic and demographic potential (due to mass emigration), which reduces the ability of the

U.S. to use Ukraine as a strategic asset against Russia in the future. Considering the scale of economic destruction in Ukraine, it is 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 has become a tool for radical changes in domestic policy, elite nationalization, and a reevaluation of the fundamentals of economic policy. These changes could hardly 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 Ukraine conflict will serve as a prelude to subsequent large-scale military conflicts in other parts of the world.

HOW ARMIES ARE BORN, OR THE USELESSNESS OF EXPERIENCE

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 past decades, major powers were mostly involved in these three types of hostilities which distorted the economics of their defense policies and degraded their military prowess.

At the early stages of the conflict, both the Russian and the Ukrainian armies revealed a lack of the skills needed to wage a full-scale war. Mistakes in their command and supplies resulted in significant losses on 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 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 (Stefanovich and Ermakov, 2023b). 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 inflexible and detesting innovation, even if it is now clear that they were absolutely right.

By early 2023, the partial mobilization in Russia had 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 fell short of their objectives.

Over the past year, both armies have undergone radical changes (Ibid). 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 ground war of the first half of the 21st century.

The Russian and Ukrainian armies have now mastered 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 conflict burdened with the experience of hybrid, counter-terrorism, anti-insurgency, peacekeeping or humanitarian operations is unlikely to succeed in this effort.

The attacks by Hamas on Israel on October 7, 2023 and the ensuing armed conflict illustrate that the Ukraine conflict has established itself as a milestone in the evolution of warfare. Though the causes, the status of the parties involved, and the political importance of these two conflicts differ significantly, they constitute pertinent subjects for analysis and comparison in terms of warfare tactics and nature.

The 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 a large concentration of troops and vehicles in the open, deployment of artillery pieces at a 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.

The ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas illustrates the prevalent use of urban areas as a key defensive strategy in modern high-intensity warfare. Despite achieving an initial victory, Hamas had to retreat to the Gaza Strip and defend itself in an urban environment. In the earlier stages of the Ukraine conflict, the Ukrainian Armed Forces attempted to establish their defenses around sizeable cities such as Mariupol, Bakhmut, and Avdeyevka. However, this proved to be a detrimental experience, causing multiple civilian casualties. Nowadays, urban development is acknowledged to provide a safer refuge compared to forests, mountains, or other natural shelters that have been targeted using “carpet bombing” tactics. The urban population functions as human shields, potentially deterring the advancing party from taking more definitive and aggressive measures. Additionally, the present conflict between Israel and Hamas implements the strategy of “phased” urban cleansing. The completed cleansing operations in the northern and western areas of the Gaza Strip were possible due to the fact that the town was split into separate sectors, and each was methodically purged.

The Gaza conflict has revealed weaknesses in Israel’s previously impenetrable Iron Dome air defense system. These flaws are mainly due to limitations in the air defense’s firepower. When large numbers of the least expensive Kassam rockets are launched in rapid succession, no Iron Dome system can intercept them all. These actions bear similarity to the “swarming” drone tactic, which the Ukrainian army have

extensively employed during the Ukraine conflict. The tactic involves launching numerous strikes using a dispersed array of strike units, and is now a common feature in modern-day conflicts.

This is evident in the recent escalation in the Gaza Strip, further highlighting the need for full commitment in current high-intensity conflicts. Any breaks or one-sided concessions by the advancing side could prolong the conflict, as the defending side may see them as a sign of weakness. This can lead to questioning all the sacrifices made previously. Many predictions that the IDF would face difficulties on the way to Gaza were based on the assumption that Israel would agree to some kind of pause and ceasefire to secure the hostages' release. On the other hand, the IDF is continuously engaging the enemy, preventing any chance of relaxation, thereby enabling Israel to maintain a relatively successful advantage, a crucial aspect in high-intensity conflicts.

It is quite possible that Asian armies, which have not had 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 that have spent these years chasing bearded Muslim men with rusted RPG-7s across hills and deserts, all the while thinking that this is what war is.

INDUSTRIAL POLICY

Back to Basics

The Ukraine conflict has proved yet again the wisdom of Friedrich Engels' words that "warfare became a branch of the *grande industrie*" (1968). But the West seems to have forgotten this truism, having shifted its manufacturing to countries with cheaper labor. 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 had been able to ramp up defense 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 put all its processing and extracting capabilities as well as agriculture at the service of the military 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.

Since the services sector dominates the GDP structure of modern-day economies, it is a poor indicator of national military capabilities. The fact that the services sector accounts for a big chunk of the U.S. and EU economies at about 78% and 73% of their respective GDPs may well point to their relatively limited ability to convert this economic might into a military asset.

This has become apparent considering how developed countries have been struggling to supply weapons to Ukraine, even though the G7 countries account for 44% of the world economy compared to Russia's 3.2%. However, this seemingly small share is offset by highly developed extracting sectors, agriculture, and a fairly well-developed manufacturing sector.

This prompts a new look at the balance of military power across the world. For example, the output of China's industrial production is twice 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 that date back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries and prioritize the ability to scale up military production.

Can Military Production Be Autonomous?

Today, unlike in the first half of the 20th century, there is no country in the world capable of achieving full autonomy in military production,

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 joint military efforts, but also in cooperation in military production. Russia is less dependent on cooperative links in military production, but still it cannot fully 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 that the USSR enjoyed in its heyday, even if Beijing still has to rely on imported components for some of its systems. Other countries are even more vulnerable; in the European nations military production might cease altogether in the event of any major disruption in the international supply chains.

In today's world, dependence on the international division of labor in the production of strategic goods creates a major vulnerability of many countries that seek to capitalize on this factor in a bid to weaken their adversaries.

The U.S. and the EU imposed blanket sanctions on Russia in the hope that they would not only bring its economy to collapse but would also undermine its defense industry (Arapova and Kudinov, 2022). This plan failed, largely due to a misguided understanding of how manufacturing works in Russia and thanks to support from developing countries, which even helped Russia keep some of the delivery channels open.

Disrupting the adversary's production chains became a priority in the unfolding Cold War between the United States and China. Washington has banned the export to China of advanced microchips and equipment required for their production, while Beijing has imposed restrictions on the export of components and materials for the manufacture of solar panels outside the country.

In this turbulent global environment, the great powers have been pressed to reshore the manufacture of their main strategic civilian products and key armaments, and seal off production chains. In fact, aspiring to great power status now entails reliance on own production capability even if it results in poorer quality and higher costs.

INFORMATION INCURSIONS IN MILITARY CONFLICTS

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 (Bezrukov et al, 2021). Still, new reconnaissance and intelligence gathering, communications and command facilities have radically changed the way older weapons are used (Karasev and Stefanovich, 2022).

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 cyber operations centers in these countries. The communications systems used by the Ukrainian Armed Forces rely on U.S. technology and Starlink, which is also a U.S.-made system that has no analogues in Russia. 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.

In the early stages of the conflict, Ukraine seemed to benefit from satellite data it received from the West to deliver its most destructive strikes from the Tochka-U, a 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 performance, since the key factors were the intelligence data received from Western satellites and Russia's countermeasures, including its air defenses, camouflage, dispersal and fortification tactics. The flow of intelligence data remained unchanged, while Russia had improved its air defenses and electronic warfare capabilities, and it had also improved concealment and dispersal of 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 used in the conflict a legitimate target regardless of its original purpose.

What sets the current Ukraine conflict apart from the preceding conflicts is that it is unfolding in a totally new media environment in which the warring parties have little, if any, control over information flows (Rutkevich, 2023).

When major countries confronted poorly armed adversaries in a hybrid conflict, their propaganda machines could easily cope with this new reality. Firstly, the invaders were in control in terms of the way the war advanced and its pace. Facing an enemy that was virtually unarmed, they could minimize public exposure to any traumatizing events like casualties, entire units becoming trapped in an encirclement, or letting the enemy take prisoners. Secondly, 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 and 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 heavy casualties of several thousand people. 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 acknowledge 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 realize 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 mobilize 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, Ukrainian President Vladimir Zelensky talked about people forming long queues at conscription centers and mentioned a civilized mobilization 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 centralized 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 defenses.

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 Russian 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 decentralized 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 on the special military operation in real time to people outside the combat 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 special military operations do not let society "hide" or "shut itself off" from their impact (Stefanovich and Ermakov, 2023a). They tend to cause serious psychological trauma to people, dividing time into "before" and "after" the conflict. The inevitable involvement of a significant number of people in a military campaign through conscription, mobilization, or recruitment of contract soldiers from all population groups turns such events into a national cause.

Ideology

Such endeavors 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 constitution. However, in reality, a consolidating state ideology began to form spontaneously after 2014,

and this process accelerated with the start 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 part 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.

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 reemergence of certain old political priorities (Ibid). This trend should not be seen in an entirely negative light.

For instance, in 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). The initial phase of these trends is 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 the 2010s, when international relations were primarily the domain of a few specialists and did not 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 is a demand for direct, candid, and open communication with the public about the reasons behind decisions, including the acknowledgment of mistakes.

Industrial Base

In terms of economic policy, a strong 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 defense industry 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 prioritize 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 Defense and Civil Defense Systems

The special military operation has shown that the means capable of delivering long-range precision strikes have become increasingly widespread due to a significant decrease in cost. For example, kamikaze drones with ranges of hundreds or even thousands of kilometers are available at prices varying from thousands to tens of thousands of U.S. dollars. Such weaponry is potentially easily accessible even to non-state actors.

So, it is necessary to reconsider approaches to the security of infrastructure, the backing up of critical sites and systems, and the development of air defense systems. A new perspective on civil defense 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 the Navy. It appears that building up space capabilities should be a paramount goal for the state, stemming from the national defense needs and foreign policy requirements.

THE BRAVE NEW WORLD

The redistribution of power and influence in the world, along with the shifting power dynamics among major nations, has catalyzed extremely acute differences between them. As these differences deepen, 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 do not 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 created on a voluntary basis, as demonstrated by the experiences of both Russia and Ukraine. Mass mobilization 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 catalyze the diversification of the global financial system, leading to the gradual emergence of several independent industrial and technological growth centers with different potentials.

Each such center 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 center 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 centers, a deepening of the lines of division, and less room for foreign policy maneuvering 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 for and restrictions on competition.

References

Acheson, D., 1950. Dean Acheson's 'Perimeter Speech' on Asia. *Alpha History* [online]. Available at: <https://alphahistory.com/coldwar/dean-acheson-perimeter-speech-asia-1950/> [Accessed 11 November 2023].

Arapova, E. and Kudinov, A., 2022. International Sanctions Legislation in the US., EU and UK: A Comparative Study. *Polis*, Vol. 6, pp 151-165. <https://doi.org/10.17976/jpps/2022.06.11>.

Bezrukov, A., Mamonov, M., Suchkov, M., and Sushentsov, A., 2021. Russia in the Digital World: International Competition and Leadership. *Russia in Global Affairs*, 19(2), pp. 64-85. DOI: 10.31278/1810-6374-2021-19-2-64-85.

Blinken, A., 2022. Antony J. Blinken on Russia's Threat to Peace and Security at the UN Security Council. *U.S. Department of State*, 17 February. Available at: <https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-on-russias-threat-to-peace-and-security-at-the-un-security-council/> [Accessed 11 November 2023].

Bogdanov, K., 2023. Sderzhivanie v epokhu malykh form [Deterrence in The Age of Small-Scale Conflicts]. *Rossiia v globalnoi politike*, 21(3), pp. 42-52. DOI: 10.31278/1810-6439-2023-21-3-42-52.

Engels, F., 1968. Letter to Nikolai Danielson. September 22, 1892. In: *Marx and Engels Correspondence*. International Publishers.

Fomin, I. et al., 2021. International Studies in an Unpredictable World: Still Avoiding the Difficult Problems? *European Journal of International Relations*, 27(1), pp. 3-28. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066120948124>.

Istomin, I., 2016. Refleksiya mezhdunarodnoi sistemy v ofitsialnom diskurse i nauchnom osmyslenii [Evaluation of the International System in Russian Official Discourse and Academic Analysis]. *MGIMO Review of International Relations*, 2016, 5(50), pp. 20-33. <https://doi.org/10.24833/2071-8160-2016-5-50-20-33>.

Jervis, R., 1980. The Impact of the Korean War on the Cold War. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 24(4), pp. 563-592.

Karasev, P., and Stefanovich, D., 2022. Kiberbezopasnost' kriticheski vazhnoi infrastruktury: novye vyzovy [Critical Infrastructure Cybersecurity: New Challenges]. *Rossiia v globalnoi politike*, 20(6), pp. 147-164. DOI: 10.31278/1810-6439-2022-20-6-147-164.

Kashin, V., 2022. Rossiia, Kitai i ukrainsky krizis [Russia, China and the Ukraine Crisis] *Rossiia v globalnoi politike*, 20(2), pp. 204-212. DOI: 10.31278/1810-6439-2022-20-2-204-212.

Kashin, V., 2023. Pervy god bolshoi voiny [The First Year of the Great War]. *Rossiia v globalnoi politike*, 21(3), pp. 10-21. DOI: 10.31278/1810-6439-2023-21-3-10-21.

Kokoshin, A., 2018. Strategicheskaya stabilnost' v usloviyakh kriticheskogo obostreniya mezhdunarodnoi obstanovki [Strategic Stability in a Deteriorating International Environment]. *Polis*. Vol. 4., pp. 7-21. DOI: 10.17976/jpps/2018.04.02.

Nesmeshnyi, A.D., Zhornist, V.M., and Safranchuk, I.A., 2022. International Hierarchy and Functional Differentiation of States: Results of an Expert Survey. *Vestnik MGIMO-Universiteta*, 15(3), pp. 7-38. <https://doi.org/10.24833/2071-8160-2022-olf2>.

Rutkevich, N., 2023. Rekonstruktsiya obraza Vraga v novykh usloviyakh [A Reconstruction of the Image of the Enemy in the New Conditions]. *Rossiia v globalnoi politike*, 21(4), pp. 160-178. DOI: 10.31278/1810-6439-2023-21-4-160-178.

Schelling, T.C., 1970. The Diplomacy of Violence. In: J. Garnett (ed.) *Theories of Peace and Security*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Silaev, N., 2022. Russia and Its Allies in Three Strategic Environments. *Europe - Asia Studies*, 2022, 74(4), pp. 598-619. DOI: 10.1080/09668136.2021.1887087.

Snyder, G., 1965. The Balance of Power and the Balance of Terror. In: P. Seabury (ed.). *The Balance of Power*. San Francisco: Chandler, pp. 184-201.

Stefanovich, D. and Ermakov, A., 2023a. Politekonomiya konfrontatsii: uroki konflikta na Ukraine [The Political Economy of Confrontation: Lessons of the Ukraine Conflict]. *Valdai Discussion Club*, 17 April [online]. Available at: <https://ru.valdaiclub.com/a/reports/politekonomiya-konfrontatsii-uroki-konflikta/> [Accessed 11 November 2023].

Stefanovich, D. and Ermakov, A., 2023b. Razvorot cherez sploshnyuyu [A U-Turn Crossing the Solid Line]. *Rossiia v globalnoi politike*, 21(3), pp. 22-41 DOI: 10.31278/1810-6439-2023-21-3-22-41.

Sushentsov, A., 2020. Russia's Foreign Policy and Strategic Culture: A Dialogue with William Wohlforth about the Research Paradigm. *Quaestio Rossica*, 8(2), pp. 369-381.

Sushentsov, A., 2022. Strategic Foundations of the Ukraine Crisis. *Russia in Global Affairs*, 20(2), pp. 24-27. DOI: 10.31278/1810-6374-2022-20-2-24-27.

Waltz, K., 1979. *Theory of International Politics*. Reading: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co.