

From “Special” to “Military”

Lessons from Two Years of the Operation in Ukraine

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Abstract

Now that Russia’s Special Military Operation (SMO) in Ukraine has entered its third year, we can conclude that, like any major war of the past several centuries, it has confounded many predictions, theories, and assumptions. Its initiators, participants, and observers, on both sides, have been faced with that which they did not expect or plan for. Two years of fighting have revealed the contours of revolutionary changes in military theory and practice, possibly predetermining the character of war for the entire 21st century.

Keywords: Russia’s Special Military Operation (SMO), Ukraine, large-scale war, positional warfare, peaceful settlement.

FAILED “OPERATION DANUBE”

We can retrospectively conclude that Russia initially planned an operation that was primarily “special” and only secondarily “military,” as it intended to achieve its goals without large-scale hostilities or organized armed resistance. Future historians will have to explain why

Moscow considered this feasible, even though the Ukrainian army had been waging a continuous “minor” war in Donbass since 2014.

The initial SMO plan is actually quite familiar, as it copied Operation Danube, the 1968 Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia. Analogously, the SMO envisaged the capture of Kiev’s airport, the deployment of paratroopers there to seal off the Ukrainian capital, and rapid advances of numerous armored and mechanized units to surround major cities, which would then be quickly pacified by light units, special forces, and intelligence services.

But Operation Danube and the February 2022 campaign differ not only in the strong resistance that the Ukrainian political leadership and armed forces put up. Operation Danube was carried out by a powerful group of Warsaw Pact forces that vastly outnumbered the Czechoslovak army, while the SMO was conducted in a country much larger than Czechoslovakia, using a limited contingent of about 185,000 troops (although this included most of the Russian Ground and Airborne Forces), or about 140 battalion tactical groups (BTG). Even including the Donetsk and Lugansk People’s Militias (about 110,000 more personnel), this force was still outnumbered by the Ukrainians, already partially mobilized. The mobilization of first-category reservists, which began in Ukraine the day before the start of the SMO, summoned—within just several days—150,000 servicemen with combat experience in Donbass and filled the ranks of the key first-line brigades, thus tipping the balance and putting Russia at a complete disadvantage.

In such conditions, the outcome of the first stage of the SMO was determined solely by the balance of forces. The Russian troops, spread over eight different axes of attack, were quickly stopped and forced to fight a numerically superior enemy.

In the north, moving from Belarus through the Pripjat swamps and from Russia through the Sumy and Chernigov Regions of Ukraine, the main assault groups reached Kiev, but could neither surround (let alone occupy) it, nor protect their overstretched lines of communication. The landing at Gostomel Airport, facing fierce resistance and heavy shelling, turned from a bridgehead into a bloodbath. In the Kharkov region, the Russian troops were stopped both at the city’s approaches and on

the nearby border. Attempts, by hastily mobilized and insufficiently equipped DPR and LPR forces, to eject Ukrainian troops from the lines where they had been entrenched since 2014, proved futile. The inability to suppress Ukrainian air defenses dramatically limited the effectiveness of Russian aviation, depriving Russia of one of its key advantages.

Success was achieved only in the south, apparently due to Russia's sleeper-agents and supporters among the local population. Meeting minimal resistance, Russian troops from Crimea seized the Kherson and southern Zaporozhye regions within several days, reached Mariupol in the east, and pressed the advance towards Nikolayev and, bypassing it in the north, towards Odessa. However, the Russian troops failed to take control of these two main cities on the Black Sea. Landing ships manned with marines, brought together from Russia's three European fleets, were stopped by mines and "unexpected" Ukrainian-made Neptune antiship missiles. On land, Ukrainian troops quickly recovered and stopped the Russians (which had owed their success mainly to surprise) at Nikolaev and Voznesensk, and by mid-March pushed them back to the borders of the Kherson and Nikolayev Regions.

Russia found itself in a state of large-scale war on a long front line, facing a quantitatively superior and well-armed enemy that was assisted by all the Western powers, which imposed unprecedented economic sanctions on Russia and began providing massive and ever-greater arms supplies to Ukraine.

From the very beginning, the biggest challenge was Kiev, where Russian troops from two military districts ended up in a wooded and swampy area without clear prospects for their effective employment, but under constant threat to their lines of communication, which ran along forest roads through the Sumy and Chernigov Regions that were functionally controlled by Kiev. There were not enough troops to capture Kiev, or even encircle and besiege it. Overall, it was only the extreme slowness and lack of initiative of Ukraine's commanders and military in general that prevented the situation from turning into a severe crisis for the Russian side. If they had confronted a more energetic adversary, the Russian troops near Kiev would have faced a repeat of the 1920 Battle of Warsaw.

Recognizing the situation, the Russian command ordered a pullout of the troops from around Kiev in mid-March 2022, and by April 5, they were out of the Kiev, Sumy, Chernigov, and northern Kharkov Regions. This was essentially the end of the campaign to achieve decisive victory, since its main goal was obviously the capture of Kiev. Naturally, at the peace talks in Istanbul, the Russian delegation presented the withdrawal of the troops from around Kiev and from the north of Ukraine as an “act of goodwill.” Apparently, it was this “act,” rather than Boris Johnson’s intrigues, that led to the failure of the Istanbul talks. An army’s retreat from the enemy’s capital has never facilitated a compromise peace.

Kiev considered the withdrawal a triumph of its policy of resistance and a turning point, thinking that it could drive the Russian troops completely out of the country.

This was accompanied by massive Western political and military support that reached its peak in the spring of 2022. On May 9, 2022, the U.S. Congress even passed a Lend-Lease act for Ukraine, which theoretically gave Kiev access to unlimited U.S. military aid. The West came to believe that a combination of military and economic measures could inflict a “strategic defeat” on Russia, which, under favorable conditions, could lead to regime change in Moscow.

After an unsuccessful attempt at a compromise to end the war and a number of painful blows (e.g., on April 13-14, the Black Sea Fleet flagship, the missile cruiser Moskva, was sunk), Russia could do nothing but continue the military campaign, rethinking its goals and capabilities. As far as can be judged, the new plan provided for using the troops pulled out from the north of Ukraine to liberate the entire territory of the DPR and LPR and, possibly, partially encircle the enemy in left-bank Ukraine. Presumably, Moscow thought it could attain these goals by May or June. The Russian offensive in the Izyum area, started in mid-March, was stepped up in April. The initial plan was seemingly to reach the rear of the Ukrainian Severodonetsk grouping, via Slavyansk, and then press on with a more ambitious and large-scale offensive towards Zaporozhye, to be met by Russian forces in the south. Subsequently, offensive operations began in several more parts of Kharkov Region and the LPR.

However, the Russian forces faced a severe shortage of manpower and materiel. After the withdrawal of part of the battalion tactical groups for replenishment in Russia, in mid-April 2022, its armed forces had no more than a hundred depleted BTGs on the entire length of the front line, while BTGs were redeployed from the north piecemeal, which could not provide sufficient strength. Meanwhile, Ukraine launched its third wave of mobilization in March 2022 to call up the graduates of reserve-officer training departments at universities and men who had not previously served in the army, thus bringing the overall strength of its armed forces to 400,000 troops by mid-April, not counting those already in training, and to 600,000 by the end of May. Ukrainian forces thus came to substantially outnumber the combined Russian, DPR, LPR, and PMC forces, now carrying out an offensive against an even more numerically superior enemy.

The battle of Mariupol, from 2 March to 16 May 2022, was an important factor in the first stage of hostilities. The siege of the city became a harbinger of the future positional nature of the war and tied up the 30,000-strong group of “allied forces,” largely preventing Russia from building on its success in the south or advancing near Donetsk. The Russian offensive near Izyum was also slow and difficult due to the lack of numerical superiority. Instead of being encircled, the enemy was merely forced to retreat at the tactical level. In early May 2022, the Russian forces ran into serious difficulties and sustained losses as they tried to cross the Seversky Donets near Belogorovka, at which point it became clear that “traditional” methods of massing forces did not work in this war. By July 2022, after the seizure of Lisichansk, the Russian offensive had run out of steam. Almost the entire territory of the LPR and the eastern part of the Kharkov Region were held by the Russian troops, but Ukraine still controlled most of the DPR. The Russian troops could not even reach Slavyansk and Kramatorsk. The campaign had worn out the Russian force, which was basically the same contingent that entered Ukraine in February 2022, while Ukraine had commenced “permanent mobilization,” reinforcing its numerical superiority.

THE PATH TO POSITIONAL WARFARE

By the end of spring and the beginning of summer 2022, the supply of Western weapons and equipment to Ukraine had become a determining factor in the ongoing hostilities. From the very beginning, the West’s immense intelligence capabilities were put to the service of the Ukrainian armed forces, giving them the upper hand in intelligence and targeting, particularly thanks to space reconnaissance conducted by a constellation of Western spy satellites and numerous commercial Western companies providing satellite imagery. This permits monitoring of the combat zone and Russian territory continuously, and almost in real time.

The “universal” Starlink satellite Internet service, launched by Elon Musk’s SpaceX, quickly became a key combat control and data transmission system for the Ukrainian armed forces, propelling them into the 21st century. With the ability to operate anywhere, distribute streaming content to a huge number of individual consumers, maintain Internet communication in motion, and control vehicles at any distance, Starlink has given the Ukrainian army opportunities that even the U.S. military expected to receive no earlier than the mid-2030s. Starlink makes it possible to connect any unit to the network anywhere, exchange streaming videos online, create combat chat rooms and other systems for the exchange of data between thousands of subscribers in real time, ensure communication security due to the use of narrowband channels linked to the satellites, and employ wireless network protocols for tactical communication at each access point.

In fact, every combat unit and every weapon connected to Starlink turns into a network-centric one capable of real-time target designation, guidance, and adjustment, similar to high-precision weapons. Modern 155mm long-range artillery systems, and HIMARS and MLRS rocket launchers firing high-precision GMLRS rockets with a range of up to 90 km (which began to be employed in late June 2022), combined with the aforementioned reconnaissance and targeting systems and with network-centric communications, management, and data transmission capabilities, allowed Ukraine in the second half of 2022 to gain fire

superiority and deliver high-precision long-range strikes, significantly worsening the Russian position.

The use of HIMARS systems and GMLRS rockets in the summer of 2022 targeted not so much military headquarters and ammunition dumps as troops and reserves. The Russian command had to pull its reserves back, even beyond the pre-2022 line of control. Russia's manpower shortage and Ukraine's numerical superiority ensured the success of Ukraine's offensive in the Kharkov Region in September 2022. Unable to quickly and effectively commit withdrawn reserves into battle, Russian troops left the eastern part of the Kharkov Region and built a line of defense on the western border of the LPR, which stopped the Ukrainian foray and formed the main front line in the north that exists to this day.

Ukraine's first real military success made Russia aware of the fact that its forces did not match the enemy's capabilities. As a result, on 21 September 2022, the Russian leadership, for the first time in the post-Soviet period, announced a partial mobilization, calling up more than 300,000 men and authorizing the expansion of Wagner PMC, which became a de facto parallel army with 50,000 fighters by January 2023, partially due to the mass recruitment of prisoners.

All these measures began to have an effect only by the end of 2022. Until then, Russian troops were stretched out along a "thin red line." In the fall of 2022, at the peak of its manpower and materiel advantage, Ukraine had a unique chance to inflict a number of significant defeats on Russia, with potentially massive political consequences.

Ukraine could have either continued its offensive in the LPR, or attempted to make a breakthrough from Zaporozhye to the Sea of Azov in the south, cutting off Russian forces in the Kherson Region and reaching the northern part of Crimea. It is unclear why Kiev discarded such an attractive opportunity. Was it the procrastination of the passive and cautious Ukrainian commander-in-chief, Valery Zaluzhny, or, as some newer reports suggest, the result of pressure from the Americans, who were skeptical about the Ukrainian army's ability to carry out such large-scale operations?

Instead of a decisive offensive, the Ukrainian army opted to pursue the more limited, but politically more rewarding, task of driving

Russian forces from Kherson, the only Ukrainian regional capital that Russia had taken at the beginning of the SMO. Russian troops on the western bank of the lower Dnieper were supplied via several bridges, which were hit with high-precision GMLRS rockets. However, attacks on Russian positions north of Kherson in September-November 2022 turned out to be ineffective, entailing significant Ukrainian casualties and becoming the first large-scale demonstration of the positional impasse that would fully manifest itself the following year.

Nevertheless, the missile strikes on the trans-Dniper bridges had their intended effect. Fearing a crisis of supply, General of the Army Sergei Surovikin, appointed in October as commander of the Combined Russian Force in Ukraine, on 9 November ordered his troops to leave Kherson city and the right bank of the Dnieper. The pullout was highly organized, stealthy, and completed within two days, almost without casualties.

For Ukraine, the retaking of Kherson, without having to engage in urban warfare, was a major military and political success that sharply raised its standing in the West. Western powers decided that if Ukraine were offered large-scale military aid, it would itself be able to expel the Russian troops, at least to the pre-war borders. At the end of 2022, the West ramped up military supplies to Ukraine, for the first time shipping tanks and infantry fighting vehicles. A training program was set up in the West for 12 Ukrainian brigades. Having received major replenishments of manpower and materiel, the Ukrainian command began a large-scale buildup of the military’s capabilities and manpower, including the creation of new units. By the spring of 2023, the Ukrainian Defense Forces (the armed forces and other security agencies) had more than one million personnel and over a hundred brigades.

After partial mobilization and after increasing the flow of contract soldiers, the Russian command also reinforced units at the front and began forming new ones, announcing plans to bring the armed forces to a size of 1.5 million. Apparently, relying on the winter 2022-2023 mobilization, Moscow oscillated between an “optimistic-offensive” and a “cautious-defensive” strategy in Ukraine.

The “optimistic-offensive” strategy was tested during the offensive in the Soledar-Bakhmut axis (since November 2022), with Wagner PMC as the main assault force. On 10 January 2023, Russian troops took Soledar, followed by Bakhmut on 20 May after fierce fighting. The Russian offensive, which stretched over almost six months, entailed heavy fighting, minor territorial gains, and the almost complete destruction of any cities taken. This demonstrated the new nature of the war, which was becoming increasingly positional. In late winter and early spring 2023, Russian troops tried a number of local offensives in Donbass near Donetsk, in Maryinka and Ugledar, but these resulted in stubborn positional fighting with insignificant results or (as in Ugledar) outright failure.

All this led the Russian command to the final and most rational choice in favor of positional defense. In early spring 2023, Russian troops started building a network of field positions and fortifications, dubbed the “Surovikin line,” while at the same time augmenting reserves. Large salaries would help to reinforce the front with 420,000 contract soldiers within a year.

UKRAINE LOSES ITS LAST CHANCE

By the beginning of 2023, Ukraine had, in principle, a high chance of a successful offensive, as Russian forces on the ground were short of not only personnel (mobilization was just beginning to take effect) but also weapons. In the summer and fall of 2022, Russia began utilizing outdated tanks, armored vehicles, and artillery systems—including those made in the 1950-1960s, which had miraculously survived the turmoil of the post-Soviet times and been kept at storage bases—but this did not help much. According to the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency files sensationally leaked through the Discord social network in the middle of last year, as of 28 February 2023, Russia had 419 tanks, 2,928 armored vehicles, and 1,209 artillery systems on the line of engagement. The Ukrainian army had 809 tanks, 3,498 armored vehicles, and 2,331 artillery systems. The Russian troops also experienced a serious shortage of ammunition.

So the first three months of 2023 were the time when the Ukrainian army enjoyed the best possible advantages on the ground, while

the Russian army suffered the greatest decline in combat potential. However, the Ukrainian leadership constantly postponed the start of the offensive, expecting to get as many Western weapons as possible and waiting for new brigades to complete their training in the West. Meanwhile, the other side did not sit idly, and the balance began to shift. But the magic of Western technology and “Western methods” was so strong that it imbued Ukrainians with a sense of self-confidence and disdain for the enemy. March, April, and May passed, and only in June did Ukrainian forces finally start moving.

Although many expected the Ukrainian army (or, rather, its Western planners) to use some non-standard and creative solutions, on 4 June, the Ukrainian command launched an offensive in the most obvious direction that promised the greatest operational-strategic success—from Zaporozhye to the Sea of Azov in the south—where the Russian positions were the strongest. The decision to divide the Ukrainian thrust between two directions—Orekhovo, generally towards Melitopol, and Vremievka, generally towards Temryuk and Berdyansk—is understandable. But at the same time, the Ukrainian army began to advance in a third direction, trying to retake Bakhmut in the north. The onslaught in the north involved some of the most seasoned troops, while the operation in the south was carried out by newly formed brigades trained in the West. Why the forces were dispersed between the main southern front and Bakhmut remained unclear both to observers and, judging by American media reports, Pentagon supervisors. The Ukrainian command had concocted a brew of slow preparation (thus forgoing the possibility of operational or strategic surprise), dispersed forces, and disdain for the enemy. In theory, tactical success on the front line could have compensated for all of this, but that did not work out, either. Positional warfare fully manifested itself, as the attacking columns and formations of Ukrainian armored vehicles hit mines, piled up, and turned into easy targets for ATGMs, artillery, and drones.

Although the Ukrainians had the upper hand due to Western reconnaissance, targeting assistance, and high-precision weapons, they failed to achieve effective fire superiority and suppress Russian artillery where they were advancing. As a result, the Ukrainian offensive in the

south degraded into the slow and bloody nibbling of Russian positions. So in the second half of June, Ukrainian troops no longer relied on the much touted Western armor and switched to infantry assault operations in small units.

In the Orekhovo direction, the village of Rabotino (meant to be taken on the first day of the offensive) was captured only by the end of August. In September, the Ukrainian troops gained another couple kilometers southeast of Rabotino, but this is when their offensive finally ran out of steam.

To the east, in the Vremievka direction, the Ukrainians, in June, were able to eliminate the Vremievsky salient, which protruded several kilometers into their positions, but in the following three months they could move farther south by no more than 2-3 km. By the end of summer, after fierce fighting, the Ukrainian troops pushed the front line several kilometers farther south of Bakhmut, but there was no question of encircling, let alone taking, the city. Contrary to popular belief, the notorious “Surovikin line” played almost no role in repelling the Ukrainian attacks in the south, as these simply did not reach it, except in one stretch southeast of Rabotino.

Internal political turmoil in Russia, long-awaited by Kiev, did not help it either. The Wagner PMC rebellion on 23-24 June, senselessly launched by leaders who apparently did not entirely understand what they wanted to achieve, quickly fizzled out. As usual in such cases, this consolidated and strengthened the position of the Russian authorities. The summer offensive’s failure signified a fundamental military-political crisis for Ukraine, and underscored the absence of real means and resources for military victory over Russia. It is precisely the understanding of this reality that has caused Western hesitation regarding the volume of future military aid. If the 2022 campaign had given Kiev a huge surplus of confidence from the West, then the 2023 campaign largely eliminated that confidence. Even with new large-scale Western military supplies, the correlation of forces that was so uniquely favorable to Ukraine in 2022-2023 will never occur again.

The final operations of Ukraine’s 2023 offensive—seemingly undertaken in pursuit of at least some sort of success to show the West—

involved a number of small groups landing on the left bank of the lower Dnieper in September and October to set up several small bridgeheads. But these bridgeheads (the biggest of which was in Krynki) were dead ends from an operational point of view as they reproduced the trench warfare that had already paralyzed the rest of the front.

AT A DEAD END

Another aspect of the failed Ukrainian offensive in the summer of 2023 was its inability to grind down and exhaust Russian forces. The Russian military retained its main forces and reserves, which permitted a shift to active operations on the front.

In early July 2023, Russian troops started an offensive in the Kupyansk direction in the north, trying to recapture part of the territories lost in September 2022. They did not achieve much, but as the Ukrainian offensive died down, Russian forces launched a series of attacks along almost the entire front line in the fall of 2023, quickly depriving the Ukrainian army of the initiative and forcing it onto the defensive.

The most important Russian offensive operation since the beginning of October 2023 aimed at Avdeyevka, a north-western suburb of Donetsk, which had been firmly held by the Ukrainian troops since 2014. But even the offensive’s success, and the ongoing Russian attacks in various areas, confirm the lack of capabilities to decisively overcome positional warfare. Nevertheless, Russian troops keep pushing against the Ukrainian positions along almost the entire line of contact, creating tactical crises for the Ukrainian army in a number of directions. Apparently, the “multiple cuts” strategy is designed to wear out the Ukrainian troops and create the prerequisites for destabilizing the Ukrainian front and achieving more significant successes. However, this strategy is quite costly for Russia in terms of casualties and resources and could overstrain its army, which would once again allow Ukraine to somewhat regain the initiative, which is probably now what Kiev’s calculations are based on.

Deeply entrenched and lacking strength, both sides are doomed to a positional war in 2024 and perhaps beyond. As the past year showed, they are unable to convert tactical successes into operational ones. Currently, the Russian armed forces hold the initiative along almost

the entire front line, and the Ukrainian army has gone on the strategic defensive. Thus far, the Ukrainian armed forces defensive tactics have been quite effective, preventing Russian troops from achieving anything more than disconnected tactical successes. Ukrainian troops also retain significant reserves of materiel, including the bulk of the Western heavy weapons received in 2023, and are awaiting Western F-16 fighters. At the same time, uncertainty about further volumes of military aid (primarily from the United States) does not allow Kiev to make clear campaign plans for 2024, forcing it into a wait-and-see position. The main problem for the Ukrainian armed forces is not so much the lack of weapons and ammunition, as it is the reluctance of the Ukrainian leadership to start a full-scale mobilization to call up males under the age of 25 (currently persons over 30 years of age are subject to mobilization) for political reasons.

The potential of the Russian armed forces in 2024 will also largely be determined by the readiness of the country's leadership to announce a new mobilization since the flow of contract soldiers is running out.

By the beginning of 2024, both sides apparently had a comparable number of troops on the ground. Russian President Vladimir Putin said more than 600,000 troops were in the SMO zone, but Ukrainian and Western estimates claim that about 400,000-450,000 are stationed directly on the line of engagement. Ukrainian official sources estimated the numerical strength of the so-called Ukrainian defense forces by the end of 2023 at about 1.1 million, including up to 800,000 army personnel. Apparently, the number of Ukrainian fighters on the front line was comparable to those cited for Russia. In general, as far as can be judged, the ground forces on both sides are at a similar or comparable level in terms of organization, armament, training, command staff, culture, morale, etc., reinforcing Vladimir Putin's characterization of Russians and Ukrainians as "one people."

IMMEDIATE PROSPECTS

Both warring parties, and the West, are not ready for a peaceful settlement. The current military-political situation is similar to the positional period in the 1951-1953 Korean War, an outcome that

the Centre for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies predicted in notes and comments on a possible Russian-Ukrainian conflict back in 2021 and early 2022. The positional deadlock can be overcome either through a dramatic military buildup to achieve overwhelming numerical superiority over the enemy, or through a military-technical advantage that can be gained primarily by significantly increasing the number of high-precision weapons and enhancing their effectiveness. Neither seems attainable for both sides in the near future. This makes a protracted war inevitable, with relatively stable fronts as in the Korean or Iran-Iraq war. It will be a war of attrition lasting for years, not with the aim of forcing the enemy to compromise, but in the hope that domestic political change will force the other side to change its goals.

The end of the Korean War in 1953, even on status-quo conditions, became possible only after Joseph Stalin's death. Therefore, for Ukraine and the West, a condition for change is Vladimir Putin's departure from power in one form or another (which is extremely unlikely in the foreseeable future), while the Russian leadership probably pins hopes on a possible change of power in the United States after elections in November 2024. So Moscow most likely intends to continue fighting at least until 2025, and possibly after that, in hope of achieving overwhelming military superiority over Ukraine.

The failure of the Ukrainian offensive in 2023 left Ukraine and the West without a coherent war strategy. The unspoken objective of that offensive was to provoke an internal political crisis or even regime change in Russia. Essentially, in the spring of 2022, Ukraine and the West gambled everything on a jackpot that they did not win, and now they do not know what to do next. For Ukraine and the West, it is essentially a choice between two options: to continue the "war against Putin" for a long time with unclear prospects and the constant threat of escalation, or to conclude a status-quo truce similar to that in Korea. Both options, in fact, imply postponing a real peace settlement until the post-Putin era in hopes of "more realistic leadership in Moscow". In the meantime, Vladimir Zelensky, most of the Ukrainian elites, and the West reject the Korean scenario. This means that the parties intend

to “give war another chance” in 2024, and continue positional warfare’s stress-test of their strength, resources, and political will.

Faced with an impasse on the front lines and seeking to exert political pressure on the enemy, the sides will pay more attention to politically sensitive and propagandistically meaningful attacks on each other’s rears, increasingly sliding into a “war of the cities” as was the case during the Iran-Iraq conflict. This trend is clearly noticeable on the Ukrainian side, with its constant demands for Western long-range weapons. Therefore civilian casualties and damage to civilian infrastructure can be expected to increase.

Russia has significant resources, but merely by escalating the production and repair of obsolete tanks, artillery systems, and shells, Russia will not achieve military success. Rather, it will only drag out the conflict while devouring colossal amounts of national wealth for many years to come, with the eventual negative socioeconomic and domestic political consequences. A breakthrough can be achieved only if Russia supplies its armed forces with modern (primarily high-precision and/or unmanned) weaponry and with reconnaissance, targeting, and electronic warfare systems. This is a non-trivial task from both the technological and military-industrial point of view. Russia is unlikely to succeed using inexpensive and palliative political, military, and industrial solutions. The system will have to complete the radical “stress test” that began on 24 February 2022.