

Russia-Ukraine War: Winners and Losers

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(Wolfgang Schwan - Anadolu Agency)

Three weeks have passed since the start of the Russia-Ukraine War. While it is still early days and both escalation or de-escalation can still occur, this policy outlook aspires to highlight some of the opportunities and risks that have emerged in the last few weeks, with a view to drawing up a preliminary balance sheet of the geopolitical ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ thus far. Developing an exhaustive outlook at this juncture is extremely difficult and ultimately beyond the scope of this paper. However, situating developments in a broader context allows us to make some prognoses with regards to the main protagonists.



Firefighters work on a building destroyed by a Russian shell, in Kharkov, Ukraine, 14 March 2022. (Diego Herrera Carcedo - Anadolu Agency)

Introduction

Forecasting the geopolitical impact of wars in their initial phases can be challenging and does not always bring forward all plausible scenarios and outcomes. However, several indicators play a substantial role in determining costs and benefits, which can, in turn, be traced and dissected. Russia's attack on Ukraine was waged with certain assumptions and goals. After the initial "fog of war" had subsided, it was clear that many of these suppositions proved false, and many of the goals unattainable.

Meanwhile, this war had also considerable effects on a global scale, affecting numerous other players, both state actors and non-state actors alike (e.g., Putin's political networks in the West). Countries in Central Asia, Africa, and the Middle East have already suffered dire consequences from this conflict. For instance, Kazakhstan had witnessed its currency go through depreciation of nearly [20 per cent](#). The depleted Russian rouble combined with Western sanctions and Moscow's counter sanctions put Kazakhstan's economy at great risk. In Africa, record high inflation has hit several African countries as the [prices](#) of food, fuel, and fertiliser rise exponentially.

Similarly, the MENA region is set to be among the most affected by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Many governments in the region have tried to position themselves equidistant from Washington and Moscow, only to be obliged to choose a camp. While they have issued some meek condemnations of Moscow, they have not taken any [tangible](#) measures to join the US-led bandwagon against

Russia. The problem, however, is that the main Western capitals are not in the mood to indulge these acrobatic diplomatic exercises any longer. The problem is compiled by existing misalignment issues. Riyadh and Abu Dhabi have had qualms about the lack of Western [support](#) in their war against the [Houthis](#) in Yemen, combined with the Arab Capital's apprehension concerning the JCPOA nuclear deal with Iran, which will give Iran additional power. Saudi and Emirati leaders went to the extent of [declining](#) a phone call with US President Joe Biden. Even the British Prime Minister came back from Riyadh [empty handed](#). While the US and Britain are ramping up pressure on the Saudis to join efforts to isolate Russia and flood the oil market, Saudi Crown Prince Mohamed Bin Salman has shown little interest in these proposals, [threatening](#) to ditch the US currency in its oil sales to China. Many signals indicate that the region is on its way to shifting its alliances and re-charting its energy policies.

While the above dynamics continue to play out, this outlook focuses on the main winners and losers while acknowledging that impacts go beyond these theatres.

Potential Winners

The United States

In today's increasingly multipolar international order, China has emerged as the primary challenger of American leadership at the global level. In this environment, the US needs the support of Europe, namely a united EU, where NATO remains fundamental to Europe's security architecture, which is a key pillar of its ability to project power glob-



Russian President Vladimir Putin is seen during a meeting with US President Joe Biden via videoconference in Moscow, Russia on December 07, 2021. The critical meeting comes as tensions escalate over Ukraine with Russian military's buildup near its neighbor's border. (Kremlin Press Office - Anadolu Agency)

ally. In recent years, cracks in Trans-Atlantic relations have grown, especially under the Presidency of Donald [Trump](#). This has contributed to an environment wherein more serious discussions in European capitals have been taking place regarding the notion of European strategic autonomy. It is in this context, where EU countries rely almost fully on the US-NATO nexus for their security, debates on strategic autonomy and a [European Army](#) point to numerous challenges. However, the strategic situation has been completely upended by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, leading to a reassertion of American power in Europe just as it appeared to be waning.

New life has been breathed into NATO, an alliance whose necessity has been [recently](#) questioned by a number of prominent voices. As France heads to the first round of its presidential elections on April 10th, some of the leading candidates have openly campaigned for France's withdrawal from the Alliance. Last year Macron himself declared NATO to be '[Brain Dead](#)'. Moreover, British forces have withdrawn from Germany, ending a presence on German soil that had been continuous since the end of [World War II](#).

In this context, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has created fertile ground for a buttressing of the trans-Atlantic relationship and represents a uniting force for [the West](#). US President Biden has described Russia's operation against Ukraine as a dangerous development for Europe and the world and has declared that the US would fully support the security of 'every inch' of territory belonging to NATO members and immediately ordered troop deployments to Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Romania, [NATO's](#) eastern flank. In addition, the American president has

called on the world to participate in sanctioning Russia for its invasion of [Ukraine](#).

Putin's war in Ukraine and his push to upend the broader security order in Europe has led to a historic shift in American thinking about the defence of Europe and has affected long-term projections of main EU countries concerning [defence](#).

All these developments have thus far contributed to the advancement of certain US policy interests, some of which have long been sought by US policymakers. These include increased security dependence of Europe on America, pushing aside French-led [EU strategic autonomy](#) discussions, at least in the short-term; apparent acquiescence to long-held US requests for NATO states to commit to defence spending worth [two per cent](#) of GDP; Germany's decision to halt the [Nord Stream 2](#) gas pipeline project, designed to double the flow of Russian gas direct to Germany by bypassing Ukraine; Germany's purchase of [F-35](#) stealth fighter aircraft and other weapons; increased arms sales to [NATO's Eastern flank allies](#) as they seek to increase defence spending in the face of an imminent threat from Russia and possible spillover conflicts from Ukraine. No matter how the rest of the conflict in Ukraine plays out, Russia will likely emerge weakened and isolated for the foreseeable future to the benefit of the US.

Germany

The Morning of 27th February will surely be marked as a milestone development for Europe, and in the long run, potentially for the entire world. In the face of Russian aggression, Olaf Scholz, Germany's chancellor, has done what

was unthinkable not so long ago and announced that his country is going to [rearm](#). Furthermore, within this framework, it would also provide Ukraine with anti-tank missiles and Stinger missiles for air defence, allow German weapons from third countries to be sent to Ukraine, halt the Nord Stream 2 pipeline.

Germany has announced its intention to increase defence spending to above 2 per cent of GDP to more than 100 billion euros for the development of the weapon capacity of the [German army](#). It has also decided to buy at least 35 F-35 stealth fighter [jets](#) from the US and 15 Eurofighters.

"Putin's war" represents nothing less than a "Zeitenwende", a change of times for Germany and Europe, Scholz told a special session of the [Bundestag](#).

Since the end of WWII and throughout the Cold War, Germany has sought to strike a balancing act between Russia and the trans-Atlantic alliance and had maintained a policy of not sending armaments into active conflict zones. The latter ended in the first week of Russia's invasion of Ukraine whereas the former now appears to have been relegated to a former era as Germany now prepares to take a leading military-security role in Europe.

At first, Scholz's government was reluctant to actively support Ukraine in the face of Russian aggression, reflecting its well-known and generally pacifist foreign policy orientation. However, under pressure from NATO allies, especially the US, and after Chancellor Olaf Scholz visited the [White House](#), the rookie Chancellor seems to have been convinced to offer more support for besieged Ukraine. Secondly, the great sympathy of the European public in favour of Ukraine has also seriously increased the public pressure on the Scholz government. Third, Chancellor Scholz's coalition partners, the Greens and the FDP, have [argued](#) for a tougher line on Russia. The scale of the Russian invasion, Ukraine's resistance to this aggression, and the reaction in many countries in Europe and the world have made it easier for the coalition partners to increase pressure on Scholz. In this situation, the effectiveness of the circles advocating a cautious policy towards Russia due to economic and security concerns have decreased. The [Chancellor's speech in the Bundestag](#) opened the door to a major change in Germany's security policy.

The decisions taken by the German government on military aid to Ukraine, sanctions against Russia, and boosting defence spending will have important consequences for both European and international politics. Germany's renewed commitment to increasing its military capabilities is a clear sign it has largely abandoned the burdens of its crimes in the Second World War and is willing to once again step into the realm of great power politics. Berlin's decision to increase its defence expenditures above the level of two per cent of GDP, given Germany's position as the fourth-largest economy in the world, is likely to cause a dramatic shift in balancing power in Europe.

From German unification in 1871 until WWII, history has shown that when Germany has gained sufficient economic and military strength, it has tended to act independently. Germany's hard power potential combined with its economic, financial, and industrial might may raise some concerns among Germany's neighbours. France, in particular, following Brexit, has sought to establish itself as [the EU's pre-eminent military power](#). Given the current German government's political vision and the current nature of the international political system, however, Berlin may be unlikely to take such an independent path in the near future, since it would still be bound to US and European allies. However, the Trump experience, in particular, has shown Germany and other European powers how fragile traditional alliances are and economic partnerships can be.

The challenge for German leadership in the short term will be to emphasise to allies that the increase of defence spending is in the context of European security that Germany is stepping up to the plate as a good partner for Europe. At this stage, it seems that it is a welcomed development from the rest of the EU, particular for those who are hoping for protection from the EU and NATO.

Turkiye

Turkiye is a key player in the crisis in the region due to its geopolitical position, commercial and political relations with both Russia and Ukraine, and its strategic relations with the West as a NATO member. On the one hand, Turkiye has repeatedly reiterated the need to respect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine and has strongly condemned [Russia's aggression](#). On the other, it has sought to play a mediating role by leveraging its relations with both Ukraine and Russia. The war in Ukraine has created certain risks as well as opportunities for Turkiye.

The most significant ramifications of the conflict for Turkiye are expected to be economic. Russia's aggression has triggered harsh sanctions on its economy by the West, including its gas and oil, and due to its geopolitical position as a bridge between the resource rich regions of the Caucasus, Middle East, and Africa to Europe, that could transform Turkiye into an energy transit hub. Europe, which is heavily dependent on Russian natural gas, has fallen short in its response to the US [pressure](#) on halting the import of Russian oil and gas. One of the prominent states in this regard is Germany, which has the highest gas [dependency on Russia](#). In response to the Russian invasion, Germany [cancelled the Nord Stream 2](#) pipeline agreement, which was set to bring Russian gas to the country via the Baltic Sea, bypassing Ukraine, but declined to cancel [Nord Stream 1](#).

Russia's aggression in Ukraine will undoubtedly accelerate Europe's transition to alternative gas sources in the upcoming period. In this context, increasing the share of gas from Azerbaijan, Iraq, Iran and the Eastern Mediterranean [to Europe via Turkiye](#) will certainly be prioritised. Projects,



Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu (L) and his Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba (R) give a joint press conference following talks in Lviv, Ukraine on March 17, 2022. (Fatih Aktaş - Anadolu Agency)

such as [TANAP](#), built over the Southern Gas Corridor project have the potential to significantly increase Türkiye's [geopolitical importance](#).

Another important dimension of the conflict for Türkiye is the prominence of its geopolitical position within the Western alliance and NATO. The EU's defence doctrine is likely to operate from a perspective of projecting Russia as an enemy and threat to the continent's order. Here Türkiye's role as a NATO member would be of utmost importance for European security.

The most important negative effect of Russia's attack on Türkiye would be through the damage to the strategic cooperation Türkiye has developed with both Russia and Ukraine. Trade relations between Russia and Türkiye have gained a strategic dimension in recent years with the S-400 missiles that Türkiye bought from Russia and Russia's construction of the [Akkuyu](#) nuclear power plant. Türkiye, in cooperation with Russia, is tapping into those resources through the construction of [TurkStream](#) – a multi-billion-dollar pipeline that allows Russian natural gas to flow under the Black Sea through Türkiye to reach the European market.

Similarly, cooperation between Türkiye and Ukraine in the defence industry was set to play a significant role in Türkiye's unmanned aerial vehicle [technology](#) in particular. Ukraine which is advanced in military-engine production, from powering drones to jet engines to missiles, a legacy of the time when Ukraine was part of the former Soviet Union, would be an essential alternative to traditional western military suppliers for Türkiye (who has been facing problems procuring technology and components) as it is seeking [engine expertise](#) in developing its own fighter jet and jet-powered drones.

Türkiye is heavily engaged in construction projects in Rus-

sia and increasingly so in Ukraine. In agriculture, Türkiye's major source for grains is Russia and then Ukraine. Türkiye imported 6.7 million tons of wheat from Russia in 2021. Some of this wheat is used for flour exports (Türkiye is the number one flour exporter in the world) and some for local bread production. Shortage of wheat would cause losses in exports and a rise in bread prices. In tourism, in 2021, among countries with the most visitors to Türkiye, Russia took first place with 4.7 million and Ukraine third with 2 million. Taking into account all these complexities of relations between Black Sea neighbours and if this war lasts longer may adversely affect all these sectors in the medium and long term.

As [western companies withdraw](#) en masse from Russia, in the wake of Western sanctions, Türkiye, among other emerging markets, has the potential to attract a significant portion of this [rerouted investment](#). Türkiye's geographical proximity to both Russia and the European market on one hand, and its strong infrastructure, young and growing population and relatively cheap labour force make it among the most suitable places to host the operations of companies [withdrawing from Russia](#).

China

Russia and China share a 4,200 kilometres border, with trade approximating \$150 billion, making China Russia's largest [trading partner](#) buying vast quantities of gas, oil, and grain from its northern neighbour. The two countries, which published a 15-page joint statement in February during the Beijing Winter Olympic Games, called it a "boundless partnership". Although Russia is China's "unlimited partner", it has also been an important trading partner for Ukraine since 2011. Agriculture as well as investments made in the [Black Sea ports](#) within the scope of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) make China a strategic investor



Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations (UN) Zhang Jun speaks during the Security Council meeting at United Nations Headquarters in New York City, United States on February 28, 2022. (Aytaç Ünal - Anadolu Agency)

and source of employment for thousands of Ukrainians. While Russia is waging war on Ukraine, China's approach has so far been cautious.

Since the invasion of Ukraine, Russia has overtaken Iran to become the biggest target of Western sanctions and is now facing more sanctions than Iran, Venezuela, Myanmar, and Cuba [combined](#).

The isolation of Russia as part of the US-led global information warfare campaign has completed the process of driving Russia "into the arms of Beijing". China seems to have all the tools to gain maximum benefit from this conflict.

Financially, as Russia is increasingly cut off from Western financial vehicles, it may turn to the Chinese yuan as well as [cryptocurrency](#) and other alternative means of keeping trade and business alive.

Shutting Russia off from the SWIFT payment system may help China's efforts to advance an already established alternative to SWIFT called The Cross-Border Interbank Payment System, or [CIPS](#). This Chinese option could allow Russia to effectively execute its trade in yuan rather than US dollars. Established in 2015, thus CIPS would cherish this unprecedented boost. If all payments were successfully conducted, SWIFT's entire monopoly could be destroyed, massive migration into CIPS could happen, and financial [sanctions might lose their sting](#).

However, some analysts are more sceptical about this, arguing that CIPS has its [limitations](#): "In practice, because CIPS is limited to payments in yuan, it is only currently

used for transactions with China [...] Banks elsewhere are unlikely to turn to CIPS as a SWIFT workaround while Russia is an international pariah."

In terms of energy, the sanctions have opened the path for China to build an 'energy heaven' with Russia through their recent agreement on greater land-based imports. The German decision to halt the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline is more than welcome news for Beijing, which is seeking to further boost energy imports from Russia after concluding new oil and gas deals worth an astonishing [\\$1175 billion](#) during Russian President Vladimir Putin's Beijing visit last month. Beyond tripling Russian natural gas exports to China by 2025, the new agreements included the lifting of Chinese restrictions on Russian wheat, opening up new export [markets for Moscow](#).

By effectively putting Russia, the world's richest country in natural resources, in Beijing's arms, the sanctions will likely yield major dividends for a resource-hungry China, including allowing it to dictate the terms of the bilateral relationship and secure greater access to Russian [military technology](#).

Closer cooperation with Russia could give China, a resource-hungry country, easier and cheaper access to the world's largest [energy reservoirs](#) it needs for its population of over two billion by allowing it to dictate the terms of the bilateral relationship and secure greater access to Russian military technology.

Furthermore, this may extend to Russia selling China its best military hardware, a development that would certain-

ly raise alarm bells in Washington. For example, Russia could sell China's advanced hypersonic weapons technology and help it to develop [futuristic weapons](#). Moscow could also help Beijing construct advanced nuclear attack and ballistic missile submarines that are ultra-stealth, an area in which China has struggled over the years.

China's technological superiority combined with exclusive access to the world's largest reserves of energy and raw materials of Russia would probably lead towards domination of the whole of Eurasia. Xi would be the most powerful Chinese ruler since Kublai Khan in the 13th century.

Potential Losers

Ukraine

Most countries have expressed their solidarity with Ukraine in the face of the Russian onslaught. Moreover, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has scored the highest points in the war of narratives, defending his country tooth and nail, showing the world how true leadership shines in times of crisis.

While Russia is in a flagrant breach of international law and faces the wrath of the Western world, questions still linger about certain aspects of Ukrainian policies prior to the Russian invasion. It was clear that Russian President Vladimir Putin had serious qualms about NATO enlargement in Russia's vicinity. In 2007, during a session of the Munich Security Conference, Putin expressed his concern about NATO's expansionism and asked whether the alliance aimed to corner his country. While this stance was over-

looked, NATO promised in 2008 that Georgia and Ukraine could, someday, be [invited into the alliance](#). Nevertheless, no timeframe was proposed, and no provisional security guarantees were offered. In any case, this announcement further angered the Kremlin.

The Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008 and Crimea in 2014 were stark reminders that the Russian leadership viewed the inclusion of these two countries in the Western security architecture as a red line. The annexation of Crimea was problematic in many ways. [Article 10](#) of the Washington Alliance specifies that new members can join NATO only if their membership would [enhance the security](#) of the alliance. Since Ukraine has territories that are occupied, its membership in NATO would deteriorate security in the region. Thus, the 2014 Russian aggression was already a poisonous dagger in the back of Ukraine's NATO accession plans. Meanwhile, the Maidan revolution in Ukraine in 2014, which toppled the pro-Russian government in Kyiv, confirmed the Kremlin's worst fears. Russia's proposals for pausing NATO's expansionist drive eastwards were disregarded.

War was only a matter of time. Several US foreign policy experts, such as former US State Secretary [Henry Kissinger](#), US former ambassador to the Soviet Union [George Keegan](#), and Professor [James Goldgeier](#), warned about the irreversible escalation. They underlined that Ukraine is a red line for Russia.

While Putin had warned of war, Zelensky seems to have misread the Western commitment to his country and overestimated the willingness of Western countries to



Ukrainian President Vladimir Zelenskyy visits soldiers wounded by Russian attacks on Ukraine at hospital in Kyiv, Ukraine on March 13, 2022.
(Ukrainian Presidency - Anadolu Agency)

get involved beyond mere economic sanctions. Even the promised weapons shipments have, at times, been disappointing, as when Germany sent [obsolete](#) Strela and Igla missiles (known to NATO as SA-7s and SA-14s) that are no longer in working order. Scores of these weapons are from the Soviet era and have become so corroded in storage that Bundeswehr soldiers had to wear [protective suits](#) to inspect the crates. Sometimes, even Soviet-era arms were the subject of restrictions, as when the Pentagon [dismissed](#) a Polish proposal to transfer Poland's 28 MiG-29 fighters to Ukraine.

In fairness, loads of lethal arms [shipments](#) were still made available to the Ukrainian side, especially MANPADS and anti-tank missiles. The Ukrainian army has put them to good use, and have inflicted serious damage to the invading Russian army (at the time of writing, Russia had [lost](#) 13 aircraft, 32 helicopters, 233 tanks, and 143 armoured fighting vehicles (visually confirmed). More than [7,000](#) Russian troops have died, according to American intelligence estimates). On average, the Russians lose 10 tanks and 22-23 armoured vehicles (including MRAP) every single day.

Still, some Western pundits have given the impression that the West has used this opportunity to [get rid](#) of either outmoded weapon systems (e.g., PzF 3 and [AT4 launchers](#), which first entered service in 1987, are [close range](#) weapons and have no target seekers), or those at the end of their [shelf life](#). In contrast, Turkey [sold](#) the Ukrainians some advanced equipment in its arsenal, such as the Bayraktar TB2 armed drones (the contract was signed in [2019](#)). This situation prompted Turkish President Erdogan to [criticise](#) some other NATO members who have continued to waver when it comes to providing more robust equipment.

The new 800 billion USD [assistance](#) provided by the Biden Administration seeks to remediate this situation. It is a mas-

sive military assistance package, which would make the Russian army's position in Ukraine even less sustainable. However, [questions](#) have been raised about the inventory, which includes loads of weaponry that are most suitable for close-quarters combat, while the Russian military strategy relies primarily on long range bombardment and the systematic [annihilation](#) of civilian infrastructure.

While Ukraine's resistance has astonished most observers, the country itself is unfortunately set to suffer losses in many areas. There are thousands of casualties among the civilian population. Moreover, two and a half million Ukrainians have become refugees in the first three weeks of the war. Cities and critical infrastructure have been reduced to rubble. Even with a stalling Russian advance, Moscow will almost certainly remain in control of a third of the country. Russian-controlled areas include most industrial hubs, fertile agricultural lands, and a sizable chunk of the maritime coast. The situation will worsen if Odessa falls and Ukraine is turned into a [landlocked](#) country. Even if a ceasefire occurs, negotiations will likely be agonisingly slow, and, in the best-case scenario, Ukraine will retrieve some of its territories but will also lose many (e.g., Donbas, Luhansk region). Meanwhile, the Russians are taking the objective of disarming Ukraine literally, [bombing](#) its military-industrial assets to the smithereens.

Russia

Russia's attack on Ukraine is problematic in many ways, not least because this episode has broken the rules that were established since 1949 and the beginning of the Cold War. Over the years, both the Kremlin and the White House established rules of conduct and protocols to follow during crises, which, in turn, ensured fluid communication that prevented any uncontrolled spiral of violence that could



Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov holds a press conference after the Russia-Turkiye-Ukraine tripartite Foreign Ministers meeting at the Antalya Diplomacy Forum in Antalya, Turkiye on March 10, 2022. (Mustafa Çiftçi - Anadolu Agency)

lead to a nuclear confrontation. Washington and Moscow had deep disagreements and engaged in wars via proxy, but they had codes and communication channels that allowed both parties to avoid any direct confrontation and maintain a *modus vivendi*.

The sudden, unwarranted attack on Ukraine shatters the minimum level of stability and predictability. As Cold War historian Mary Elise Sarotte [explains](#), the lack of predictability regarding "Russia's invasion, regardless of its outcome, portends a new era of immense hostility... this new cold war will be far worse than the first." Most arms control treaties inherited from the Cold War era have become redundant, while new lethal arms systems have been deployed unregulated. For instance, hypersonic weapons are [not covered](#) by any existing arms control agreements. Therefore, Sarotte argues that any protracted negotiations on arms control and non-proliferation between Washington and Moscow are [unlikely](#), especially now that the Kremlin has proven it can threaten peace and stability in Europe anytime and use large scale violence.

The million-dollar question is why Russian President Vladimir Putin abandoned his previous policy of waging a sustained campaign of influence in Europe and North America? This low-cost approach brought enormous dividends to Moscow. It divided European allies, many of whom sought [favours](#) from Putin, brought discord to transatlantic relations, and weakened NATO.

Several hypotheses can be formulated to explain the Russian rationale. Western leaders, and especially US President Joe Biden, did not resort to the [deterrence](#) lingo and did not demonstrate a good grip in terms of crisis bargaining and brinkmanship strategy. When the Kremlin amassed sizable troops in the borders with Ukraine, which clearly represented hostile intentions, the US, NATO and various Western leaders repeatedly stated that NATO would not intervene militarily. Some, like Macron, went to the extent of proposing the '[Finlandization](#)' of Ukraine. Such messages were likely interpreted by Moscow that the US (and NATO) would not take any actions that are sufficiently potent to deter the Kremlin from waging this war.

This situation came at a time when most Western leaders faced difficulties internally. Biden is still entangled with internal politics and has had to deal with the ramifications of the calamitous exit from Afghanistan. Meanwhile, the British Prime Minister continued to face multiple internal challenges last year. The German chancellor is new in the job, whereas the French president is facing elections in April 2022. In this context, Putin, who already faced little retribution when he seized Crimea and Donbas in 2014, seems to have believed that this full-scale invasion would take a similar trajectory, and any minor repercussions would be mitigated.

Such miscalculation was combined with denial and self-deception about Ukraine's capabilities and will to fight. The Kremlin adopted an unrealistic military strategy

which was based on a quick decapitation of the Ukrainian government and rapid seizure of Ukraine's main hubs and cities in the East and Southeast within two weeks. Still, Russian strategists did not commit adequate numbers or combat power to reach that very optimistic political-strategic objective. Moreover, there was a tendency for the Kremlin to believe its own propaganda about the might of the Russian army. The truth is Russia has only fought foes beneath its league, and most of the time, these were non-state actors without access to advanced weaponry (Chechnya, Georgia, Syria's opposition groups, Ukraine in 2014), and the Russian army had not fought against a strong opposition since World War Two.

This explains the lacklustre performance of the Russian army, whose elite forces have been battered by a smart and agile Ukrainian army. The Kremlin still has access to an enormous arsenal and manpower. Therefore, it remains well within the realm of the possible for Russia to prevail militarily. It is on its way to link up Crimea and the Donbas while also controlling the Ukrainian coastline.

However, all elements indicate that Moscow will, at best, achieve a [pyrrhic](#) victory. Its attack on Ukraine will come at an enormous cost and will have limited exit strategies. This expectation is based on the following factors: First, the Kremlin did not anticipate the speed, the scope, and the array of Western sanctions. The unprecedented range of financial, trade, economic and technological sanctions from the West will deeply and lastingly compromise the growth of the Russian economy and its capacity for innovation. The cost of the war in Ukraine and the maintenance of the forces involved will further strain Russia's coffers.

Second, because the sanctions were designed to harm the oligarchs and the common people, it is likely that internal opposition to the Kremlin's policies will surge, especially as the casualties continue to increase at a frightening pace within the Russian forces in Ukraine. Many of the young generations have no knowledge of war. Still, because of the sanctions, they must [give up](#) access to information and consumer products that are ubiquitous to modern life.

Third, in its justification for the war, the Kremlin stated that it had launched an offensive on Ukraine to prevent the latter from joining the Western camp and to stop NATO's extension towards the East. However, this war has triggered the [opposite effect](#). It has been decades since NATO and the EU stood in unison as they are now. Moreover, several countries, including Ukraine, have asked to join the European Union (EU), and others are considering joining NATO. Even Moldova, which went to great lengths not to provoke the Kremlin in the past, made a U-Turn and [applied](#) to join the EU.

Finally, protecting the Russian-speaking population figured among the pretexts used to attack Ukraine. However, the updated Russian military strategy is based on demolishing cities mostly inhabited by Russian-speaking populations. Russia's mass bombardments and brutalities tak-

ing place in [Kharkiv](#), [Kherson](#), and [Mariupol](#) are turning the lives of its citizens into hell, thereby weakening the chances that these populations will ever be loyal to Moscow.

In addition to the counterproductive effects of the decision to invade Ukraine, the Kremlin has also a problem with the [exit strategy](#). Let us say that Ukraine's military defeat is achieved. How can Moscow manage the aftermath, especially after resorting to mass bombardments of cities? Russia will face the herculean task of rebuilding or, at the very least, administering a devastated Ukraine. Also, given the high anti-Russian mobilisation in Ukraine and the availability of anti-aircraft MANPADS and anti-tank weapons, the resistance to the Russian army would remain active in the months (and possibly years) to come.

A second possibility could be that in light of its mounting casualties and [high-profile](#) losses, Russia could seek a face-saving off ramp, in which [concessions](#) about the neutral status of Ukraine and some other cosmetic compromises would be reached. This would allow Russia to buy time, lick its wounds, and start reviewing its [disastrous](#) military strategy while controlling many Ukrainian territories.

Another possibility is for Russia to [further](#) its brinkmanship strategy. If the Russian leadership feels endangered by the outcome of the war, or if the concessions sought are not up to the Kremlin's expectations, the [Samson Option](#) could be on the table. This strategy is based on the first 'suicide bomber' in history, namely the Biblical figurehead [Samson](#), who pulled down the pillars of the temple and killed himself and thousands of his enemies. While Putin has already threatened to use battlefield nuclear bombs, Russian military doctrine envisions their use solely in the context of defending Russia. However, if a [false flag](#) operation, for instance, is undertaken successfully, or matches lit the already [tense](#) trans-regional powder keg, then the use of tactical nukes could simply be a matter of time.

France

French leaders thought that Brexit was a godsend opportunity as it made France's position more advantageous in Europe. France became the only nuclear-armed state in the European Union (EU) and its only permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. It also has one of the best-equipped armies in the World. These assets, buttressed by the enduring German economic power, provided France with expanded political clout and diplomatic prestige, allowing France to define the EU's interests and positions internationally.

However, this outlook has now changed following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Germany, which traditionally viewed the European question from an economic prism, has revisited its position. In the past decades, Berlin considered Europe as a vast market and a subcontracting factory serving German export industries, with Eastern Europe serving principally as a source of labour. This economically motivated position was combined with a deeply rooted pac-

ifism, which led Berlin to subcontract the defence of the European Union primarily to the US and to a lesser degree to France (and pre-Brexit Britain).

However, soon after Russia invaded Ukraine, Germany [formulated](#) a new position, as Chancellor Olaf Scholz accused Russian President Vladimir Putin of trying to establish a new 'Russian empire' through military might. Consequently, Berlin abandoned, overnight, decades of reticence to increase its military spending. Scholz announced that his government would establish a special €100 billion fund to promptly upgrade its armed forces and that Germany would adhere to the NATO goal of spending 2 per cent of GDP on defence. In comparison, France's total [defence budget](#) for 2020 was €48.3bn (including pensions). Germany's move means that Berlin will again be a military giant in a few years and will no longer need to be under the French military umbrella. While some French industrialists and politicians thought that the French arms industry [could benefit](#) directly from Berlin's military spending, they were quickly disappointed. Germany announced its intention to buy Israeli drones and the US-made F-35 stealth fighter jets. The latter are [nuclear-capable](#) and are among the few jets that are nuclear coded and have more NATO [interoperability](#) abilities than the French Rafale jets for example.

Germany's military rise will probably cut a swathe in Franco-German relations. In the 1970s, the Franco-German tandem was based on a certain [parity](#) between these two European powerhouses. In the 1980s, West Germany's economy and population were somewhat larger than France's, but not by a wide margin, whereas French economic growth, at times, exceeded its neighbour's. Four decades later, the disparity has become [striking](#). Germany's population is now 22% larger than that of France. The German GDP is 30% more than France and Germany's USD 1.46 trillion export revenues are [three times](#) more than France.

While Germany had more economic clout, France mirrored its military edge. As a result, differences between both parties grew over time on many aspects, especially when it comes to [security and defence](#) matters. These disagreements become acute in relation to European deliberations on fiscal rules. France has called for the EU to take a [lax attitude](#) and ease rules regarding member states' budget deficits and debt-to-GDP levels, whereas Germany has ordinarily opposed any laxation of the rules that are intended to curb deficits and debt.

Moreover, as German sociologist Wolfgang Streeck argues, Franco-German differences are particularly important as it relates to the future of national sovereignty within the Union. [According](#) to him: "Due to its strong dependence on intra-European trade, Germany gives the utmost importance to all member countries following the same economic rules. This presupposes a European legal order overseen by an independent supranational court of justice which limits state intervention in cross-border markets to a minimum. Thus, political decisions must become legal

decisions, and the technocrats of the European Central Bank (ECB) replace national governments as often as possible. It is also necessary to protect the freedoms defined by the Treaties (the free movement of goods, capital, services, and persons), and even, if necessary, to extend them through the action of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU). In short, national sovereignty must give way to a supranational legal and economic technocracy. In contrast, sovereignty in the French conception rests primarily on national military and political power. This translates in the ability to make France's will prevail over that of other States. This sovereignty, Paris does not intend to renounce it. The only European sovereignty to which he can consent must be built on French sovereignty, giving France a hegemonic position within the future integrated Europe". Therefore, Berlin's abrupt update of its strategy and prompt quest to become a military powerhouse puts the French vision completely out of sync with the new realities.

There are also issues pertaining to French President Emmanuel Macron's leadership style. Macron has taken several foreign and security policy decisions that have surprised or [annoyed](#) Berlin. Despite the whitewashing efforts undertaken by Macron's spin doctors, he shares a part of the responsibility in the events that led to the Ukraine war. Many experts think that his [diplomatic gaffes](#) paved the way to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. During the Trump presidency, Macron spent considerable time [wooing](#) Putin. In 2017, Macron deployed the greatest honours while welcoming the Russian President in Versailles. Overall,

Macron has hosted Putin thrice and travelled to Moscow twice. Such diplomatic outreach was designed to bring Russia closer to the EU's orbit and enhance relations so that existing conflicts would dissolve by themselves.

This naïve line of thinking led Macron to give the Kremlin priority over the concerns of some other European countries. Ahead of the 2019 G7 Summit, Macron invited Putin to [discuss](#) a 'new architecture of security' without coordinating with [Germany](#) or the other EU partners. Worse, he criticised his ministry of foreign affairs, accusing officials of representing ['deep-state'](#) resistance to Russia. Furthermore, Macron gave in to the Kremlin's caprices on Ukraine. During the re-negotiation of the Minsk agreements in 2019, Macron was among Putin's most prominent appeasers in Europe, constantly requesting Ukraine to make concessions.

This stance explains why Macron is frantically playing catch up and whitewashing his previous position. He spoke with Putin 11 times in February 2022 — in one instance twice the same day — with very little results. The Kremlin gave little consideration to Macron's diplomatic moves before attacking Ukraine. In fact, Putin [humiliated](#) Macron in his February 20th visit, breaking [protocol](#) rules and [ridiculing](#) him. Professor James Shields [described](#) Macron's style as "an activist, interventionist leadership style which can lead him to behave impetuously and to show a lack of political experience." Shields also linked the French President's determination to play a key role in the Ukraine crisis to a "naivety born of over-optimism about his own powers of persuasion."



Firefighters extinguish fire broke out after a Russian shelling of a shopping mall in the Podilskyi district of Kyiv, Ukraine on March 21, 2022. At least 4 people were killed in the Russian attack on shopping mall, State Emergency Services of Ukraine reported. (State Emergency Services of Ukraine Anadolu Agency)