

THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR



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About This Report

This volume summarizes findings from a series of reports that assess how the Russia-Ukraine War is reshaping the international system, integrates supplemental findings, and highlights cross-cutting implications. Although the war is ongoing as of this writing in 2024, this volume provides an early assessment of the changes the war is likely to bring about and initial recommendations for how U.S. policymakers should adapt. The other reports in this series are as follows:

- Mark Hvizda, Bryan Frederick, Alisa Laufer, Alexandra T. Evans, Kristen Gunness, and David A. Ochmanek, *Dispersed, Disguised, and Degradable: The Implications of the Fighting in Ukraine for Future U.S.-Involved Conflicts*, RAND Corporation, RR-A3141-2, 2025
- Alisa Laufer, Howard J. Shatz, and Omar Danaf, *Implications of Russia's War on Ukraine for the U.S. and Allied Defense Industrial Bases*, RAND Corporation, RR-A3141-3, 2025
- Howard Wang and Brett Zakheim, *China's Lessons from the Russia-Ukraine War: Perceived New Strategic Opportunities and an Emerging Model of Hybrid Warfare*, RAND Corporation, RR-A3141-4, 2025
- Alexandra T. Evans, Krystyna Marcinek, and Omar Danaf, *Will Europe Rebuild or Divide? The Strategic Implications of the Russia-Ukraine War for Europe's Future*, RAND Corporation, RR-A3141-5, 2025.

These closely related volumes share some material, including descriptions, figures, and tables.

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This research was completed in November 2024. It has not been subsequently revised.

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The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government. Review of this material does not imply Department of Defense endorsement of factual accuracy or opinion.

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Summary

Issue

The Russia-Ukraine War is the most devastating conflict in Europe since the 1940s. Although Ukraine and Russia are the states most affected by the war, the effects of the conflict have reverberated throughout the international system. Already, the conflict has reshaped patterns of diplomatic and economic engagement, demonstrated new technologies and concepts of operations for warfare, and led major powers to shift resources and revise their investment strategies. As these changes indicate, policymakers do not have the luxury of waiting for the war to conclude before deciding how to react to it. Therefore, a comprehensive assessment of the strategic-level implications of the war is in order.

Approach

This report distills findings from a series of RAND reports examining the Russia-Ukraine War's geopolitical and military consequences, integrates supplemental findings, and identifies cross-cutting implications. In the series of reports and in the present volume, we employed a threefold approach. First, we surveyed historical wars of similar size, duration, and scope to bound expectations for the Russia-Ukraine War's likely effects and aftermath. Second, we drew on government documents and senior leader statements; discussions with subject-matter experts; and prior open-source research to characterize how states have and likely will continue to adapt. Third, because the war is ongoing, we identified factors—plausible future events or changes—that could alter states' responses to the conflict and, in turn, affect our preliminary findings.

Key Findings

- **The war's primary geostrategic effect has been to weaken relationships between Europe and Russia and, to a lesser extent, Europe and China, while providing an opportunity to strengthen the relationship between the United States and its European allies.** If these changes prove to be durable, they will delay the Russian and Chinese goal of a multipolar world with reduced Western influence. Beyond the blood and treasure the delay has expended, this would be the more enduring strategic cost for the Kremlin.
- **Russian and Chinese incentives to undermine the transatlantic alliance have increased.** Although Russia appears to remain open to resuming its prewar transactional relationship with Europe, European decisions to seek out durable alternatives to Russian energy imports and to enact wide-ranging sanctions will not be easily reversed. Beijing, for its part, appears to have developed a stronger interest in diplomatic and information operations designed to weaken the transatlantic alliance.

- **U.S. and allied adaptations are necessary to prepare for future large-scale protracted conflicts and preserve extended deterrence.** U.S. adversaries have observed U.S. challenges in sustaining support for Ukraine and may have new doubts about U.S. ability and will to wage a long war. If adversaries believe that their industrial and political systems are better suited for a protracted conflict than those of the United States and if they perceive that their interests can still be achieved at acceptable cost, the result may be a weakening of U.S. extended deterrence.
- **The U.S. defense community may be neglecting the implications of the war in Ukraine for future contingencies beyond the Indo-Pacific region, including in Europe.** The United States is actively engaged in efforts to identify and apply lessons from Ukraine to the Indo-Pacific and may be doing so more energetically and flexibly than its competitors, but the United States appears to have not launched an equivalent effort to reshape its approach to other theaters. Given the strains that its global commitments are likely to impose on U.S. military and economic resources in the years to come, the search for more cost-effective, asymmetrically advantageous means of deterring adversary aggression will need to be equally robust across theaters.

Recommendations

The reports in this series identify more than 40 specific recommendations for different stakeholders. In the following list, we highlight selected recommendations that stem from the cross-cutting implications summarized previously.

The U.S. government should consider the following:

- **Increase collaboration, information disclosure, and planning with European allies for addressing U.S. global concerns.** The United States should seize the opportunity to build closer, more durable relationships with its European allies by demonstrating the U.S. intent to reliably and consistently consult closely with its European allies and European Union leaders across a range of global strategic issues. This may help cement and expand the expectations and habits of a close partnership at the highest levels of government.
- **Provide greater interagency attention to and resources for protecting U.S. and allied political systems from adversary information operations.** The United States should expect the breadth and frequency of attacks to increase, requiring greater attention and resources to combat them.
- **Continue to refine U.S. and allied economic coercion tools.** The United States and its allies threw the proverbial economic kitchen sink at Moscow in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine—but Russia is continuing to adapt, and China is doubtlessly learning from Russia's experiences. The United States should seek to identify alternatives or modifications to these tools so that they remain effective in the future in the face of adversary efforts to mitigate them.

The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) should consider the following:

- **Focus defense industrial base (DIB) investments on preparing for likely long-term needs.** U.S. and European efforts to build production capacity are prioritizing Ukraine's warfighting needs and the backfill of donor countries. However, the capabilities and munitions required for a conflict involving the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) may be quite different, and production lines may or may not be easily adaptable to service these different needs. Given the time required to build production infrastructure, long-term planning should focus on long-term U.S. and allied requirements for their own forces.
- **Update U.S. and NATO plans for the deterrence of Russia to more fully incorporate lessons learned from the fighting in Ukraine.** The U.S. military has been energetically seeking to apply insights from the fighting in Ukraine to the Indo-Pacific, such as the increased role and capabilities of uncrewed aerial systems (UASs). DoD would likely benefit from a much more robust effort to identify asymmetric and efficient means of deterring Russian aggression, leveraging new technologies and battlefield dynamics, and pushing for these to be incorporated into NATO defense plans.
- **Assess the effects of increasing reliance on UASs on adversary perceptions of U.S. commitment to the defense of NATO allies.** If adversaries perceive that uncrewed systems enhance the U.S. capability to defeat aggression against NATO allies, this assessment would help enhance deterrence. However, adversaries may instead assess that forward-deployed UASs are more easily replaceable assets than crewed aircraft, which may indicate a lower level of U.S. commitment to fight to defend NATO territory. If adversaries come to believe that increasing UAS deployments are being undertaken because of a U.S. unwillingness to take casualties in defense of NATO allies, it could increase the risks of miscalculation. DoD should carefully assess likely adversary perceptions of greater UAS deployments—particularly if these are accompanied by reductions in forward-deployed U.S. personnel—and evaluate whether there may be trade-offs for deterrence.

U.S. Air Forces in Europe–Air Forces Africa, the U.S. Air Force, and the U.S. Space Force should consider the following:

- **Examine opportunities to leverage actual and proposed European DIB and infrastructure improvements to support U.S. distributed air operations.** The Department of the Air Force and U.S. Air Forces in Europe should assess whether and where European enhancements could help improve the prepositioning of supplies; availability of runways; and hardening of relevant critical infrastructure, among other logistical challenges. U.S. Air Forces in Europe should work with partners to incorporate these considerations in security cooperation activities and access, basing, and overflight agreements.
- **Collaborate with Ukrainian and allied air forces to incorporate insights from the war into national, bilateral, and NATO exercises and training.** For example, Ukrainian forces' experience operating in a contested electronic spectrum environment can inform the development of more-realistic training environments. Likewise, Ukrainian armed forces' experience employing hybrid space architectures can help inform the development of U.S. and

NATO tactics, techniques, and procedures and improve the readiness of non-spacefaring allies to leverage space capabilities.

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Introduction

This research was completed in November 2024. It has not been subsequently revised.

The Russia-Ukraine War has been the most devastating conflict in Europe since the 1940s. The United States and its North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies have scrambled to respond to Russia's aggression, imposing far-reaching sanctions on Moscow and providing unprecedented levels of military support to Kyiv while attempting to keep the conflict confined inside Ukraine's borders. In the more than two and a half years since the conflict began, the United States has pursued these twin goals of helping Ukraine avoid defeat while limiting the risk of escalation to a broader war.¹

Although coping with the war's short-term challenges has been paramount for U.S. policymakers, the effects of the conflict are likely to be further reaching. Already, the conflict has reshaped patterns of diplomatic and economic engagement, demonstrated new technologies and concepts of operations for warfare, and led major powers to shift resources and revise their investment strategies. The war's imprint on the international environment likely will deepen as it goes on and as states continue to react to and attempt to learn from the fighting. Ukraine and Russia are the states most affected by the war, but the effects of the conflict are likely to reverberate throughout the international system.

The series of reports summarized in this volume and the supplementary analyses provided represent our attempt at coming to grips with the effects the conflict is likely to have outside of Ukraine. There is an understandable appeal to waiting for the conflict to end before taking stock of its effects. Unfortunately, U.S. policymakers do not have that luxury. We do not know how many months or years remain before the conflict is over, but the longer the war persists, the more its effects are accumulating in ways that can and should inform U.S. policies and planning. Some adaptations to the war are underway in Washington, including expanded investments in the defense industrial base (DIB) and revised plans for the use of uncrewed aerial systems (UASs) in warfare.² But a broader accounting of the likely strategic-level changes wrought by the conflict and how they should inform long-term policies and decisions for the U.S. government, DoD, and the Department of the Air Force (DAF) has yet to be conducted.

This series of reports aims to enhance our understanding of these changes while accounting for inevitable uncertainty about the war's future course and eventual conclusion. Using research conducted between October 2023 and September 2024, we provide an early assessment of the changes the war is likely to bring about and initial recommendations for how U.S. policymakers should adapt.

¹ Joseph R. Biden, Jr., "President Biden: What America Will and Will Not Do in Ukraine," *New York Times*, May 31, 2022.

² U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), "DOD Releases First-Ever National Defense Industrial Strategy," January 11, 2024; Kelley M. Saylor, "DOD Replicator Initiative: Background and Issues for Congress," IF12611, Congressional Research Service, March 22, 2024.

Effects of the War on Ukraine

This series of reports focuses on the effects of the war beyond Ukraine's borders. Our decision to focus our analysis in this manner reflects a need for U.S. policymakers to be informed about the myriad ways in which the war has transformed the world. But the most pronounced effects of the war are concentrated in Ukraine itself. Russia's invasion has led to tens of thousands of civilian casualties, more than 3 million internally-displaced people, and more than 6 million refugees.³ The Ukrainian economy declined sharply following the invasion, by roughly 30 percent in 2022, although it has since made a gradual recovery.⁴ The psychological toll on Ukrainian civilians has been immense; half the population is estimated to be in need of trained mental health support.⁵ The conflict has transformed the country's identity and politics, fundamentally altering its cultural and political relations with Russia and consolidating Ukraine's Western identity and orientation.⁶ Entire volumes could justifiably be written about the effects of Russia's invasion on the people and state of Ukraine, which appear set to constitute the seminal moment in the country's modern history. Our decision to leave this topic for future analysts does not reflect any indication that understanding these changes is not of critical importance, but rather is a necessary concession to the fact that the war has also generated important effects in many other areas of the international system that demand U.S. policymaker attention.

Prior Analyses of the Wider Implications of the Russia-Ukraine War

As the most destructive conflict in Europe since the World War II, the Russia-Ukraine War has been extensively studied. The individual volumes in this report series highlight a wealth of assessments of specific aspects of the conflict, including the effects on future warfighting, European alliance politics, and reactions of China's officials. However, syntheses that attempt to identify the broader, cross-cutting effects of the war have been far fewer in number.

One notable exception is the 2024 publication of *War in Ukraine*, edited by Hal Brands.⁷ The volume contains 17 chapters by prominent scholars on different aspects of the origins of the war, the fighting itself, and the reactions of key global actors. In structure, it therefore has similarities to the efforts summarized in this volume, although the specific topics discussed vary, and our work is not substantially concerned with the debate over origins of the war, other than how they may affect its aftermath. The cross-cutting conclusions noted in Brands' opening chapter likewise find some echoes in our report, including, particularly, the observation that the war appears to have further polarized

³ United Nations (UN) Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner, "Ukraine: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict. May 2024 Update," June 7, 2024; United States of America for United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Ukraine Emergency," February 2024.

⁴ Drazen Rakic, "Two Years of War: The State of the Ukrainian Economy in 10 Charts," European Parliament, Economic Governance, and Economic and Monetary Union Scrutiny Unit, February 2024.

⁵ Agnieszka Pikulicka-Wilczewska, "As Russia's War Rages, Ukraine's Mental Health Crisis Spirals," *Al Jazeera*, April 11, 2024.

⁶ Razumkov Centre, "Identity of Ukrainian Citizens: Trends of Change (May 2023)," webpage, August 24, 2023; Andrew Wilson, "Reformation Nation: Wartime Politics in Ukraine," European Council on Foreign Relations, December 4, 2023.

⁷ Hal Brands, ed., *War in Ukraine: Conflict, Strategy, and the Return of a Fractured World*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2024.

the international system, strengthening cohesion within the West while further distancing it from the autocracies in Russia and China. The efforts also differ in our more structured consideration of how future developments in the conflict could alter our conclusions and in our focus on some issues not discussed at length in the Brands volume, such as allied DIB issues. The Brands volume is well worth reading as a summary of expert opinion on the conflict around its second anniversary in early 2024.

Other efforts to take stock of the larger implications of the war to date were more limited. Anthony Cordesman wrote a July 2023 draft report on the strategic implications of the war, which focused heavily on the uncertainties of the conflict and dependence of future outcomes on the course of the conflict.⁸ A 2023 McKinsey report highlighted 12 disruptive trends accelerated by the war, primarily related to finance and economics.⁹ Belo and Rodriguez, writing to summarize a special issue on the war in the *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal*, highlighted the stresses that the war has placed on international order.¹⁰ Thus, although cross-cutting assessments of this topic do exist, we believe that the reports produced for this project and summarized here represent the most comprehensive, forward-looking analysis of the implications of the war in Ukraine undertaken to date.

Research Approach

This series of reports was designed to identify the broader effects of the Russia-Ukraine War and the resulting implications for U.S. policymakers. Specifically, we set out to answer the following research questions:

- What are the geopolitical and military consequences of the Russian invasion of Ukraine?
- What are their implications for U.S. Air Forces in Europe (USAFE), DoD, and U.S. policymakers?

While answering such open-ended questions necessarily requires a broad scope, the time and resources available to conduct the research still required difficult decisions regarding on which areas of focus we would concentrate our efforts. To make these scoping decisions, we considered the following two main criteria:

- How critical is this area or topic likely to be for affecting future U.S. national security policy decisions?
- How tractable is researching this area or topic likely to be while the war is still going on?

As noted previously, we made the difficult decision to exclude the future trajectory of Ukraine as an area of focus, largely because of the second of these criteria. The future of Ukraine, still under existential threat from Russian invasion, is particularly difficult to assess without greater clarity about how the conflict is likely to end and, in particular, whether the regime in Kyiv ends up surviving.

⁸ Anthony Cordesman, *The Lasting Strategic Impact of the War in the Ukraine*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, July 5, 2023.

⁹ Olivia White, Kevin Buehler, Sven Smit, Ezra Greenberg, Ritesh Jain, Guillaume Dagorret, and Christiana Hollis, *War in Ukraine: Twelve Disruptions Changing the World—Update*, McKinsey and Company, July 28, 2023.

¹⁰ Dani Belo and Federmán Rodríguez, “The Conflict in Ukraine and Its Global Implications,” *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal*, Vol. 29, No. 3, 2023.

While in other areas far-reaching effects can already be seen in ways that are not as susceptible to changes in the course of the war, we concluded that assessments of Ukraine's future trajectory would be premature rather than merely provisional.

We also decided not to focus on a series of topics that are likely to be primarily economic in their effects. The changes that the war has wrought on global patterns of trade, on energy markets, and on food security concerns in the developing world may all prove to be important results of the war, but their linkages to U.S. national security considerations are more indirect.

We identified five topic areas as best meeting our criteria and therefore most productive for research attention. Each of these five topics is the subject of a standalone report in this series and is summarized in the chapters that follow:

1. **warfighting implications:** changes in the character of warfare demonstrated in Ukraine and their relevance for hypothetical future wars involving the United States
2. **DIB implications:** changes in U.S. and European allied defense industrial production policies and likely future trends
3. **Chinese government reactions:** lessons that Chinese Communist Party (CCP) officials are taking from the Russian invasion of Ukraine and how these lessons are influencing China's policy
4. **Russian government reactions:** changes in Russian foreign and security policy that are likely to be durable after the war, with particular attention to Russian attitudes and policy toward the United States, Europe, and China
5. **European government reactions:** changes in European security policy, with a focus on changes in European relations with Russia, European defense policy and relations with the United States and NATO, and European relations with Ukraine.

In addition, we identified three other areas as likely to be significant but less critical for U.S. policy than the preceding five: India's reaction to the conflict and its shifting role in geopolitics, the effects of the war on Law of Armed Conflict issues, and the effects of the conflict on broader international norms. The discussion of how the conflict may affect the Laws of War is covered in Chapter 3, and these more limited assessments of India's role and broader international norms issues are included in Chapter 4.

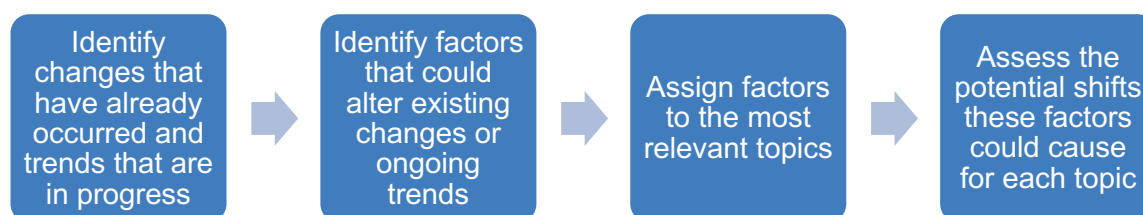
Methodologically, our research employed two main approaches. The first was descriptive. The assumption underlying all our work is that impactful changes from the war are increasingly being felt, absorbed, and acted on throughout the international system and, as a result, are becoming less susceptible to sharp reversal as the conflict drags on. Our research took place between October 2023 and September 2024. By the end of this period, more than two and a half years of fighting had already taken place. Thus, our primary analytic goal was to describe changes underway. The exact approach to doing so varied across the different topics, and the individual volumes provide more detail in this regard—but, in general, we relied on primary sources, such as government policy documents or senior leader statements; discussions with subject-matter experts focused on these topics; and secondary sources, such as other reports that have already been written on these topics. We sought to find evidence of changes in state policies or attitudes in comparison with the pre-February 2022 baseline and then to assess the support available for different explanations for these changes to understand their connection to the war and potential durability.

This descriptive approach allowed us to identify changes underway and likely ongoing trends and resulted in what we refer to throughout this report series as our *preliminary findings*. However, given the substantial uncertainty that remains about how the conflict will end and what other events may still occur over the course of the war that could alter some of our preliminary findings, we also relied on a second approach.

Accounting for Uncertainty Regarding the Future Course of the War

One of the central challenges in assessing the long-term implications of the Russia-Ukraine War is, of course, that the war is still ongoing. Although the two and a half years of fighting thus far have generated many changes throughout the international system, the possibility remains that other events may occur in the course of the fighting that will alter the war's long-term implications.

Figure 1.1. Approach to Managing Uncertainty from the Ongoing War



Our approach to grappling with this uncertainty had four steps (Figure 1.1). First, as noted previously, we identified changes that have occurred or are in progress because of the war, what we refer to as our *preliminary findings*. Second, we identified factors—plausible future events or changes—that we assessed have the potential to alter states' responses to the conflict and lead to changes in trends. For example, a scenario in which Russia ultimately succeeded in conquering the bulk of Ukraine's territory and forced a capitulation of the government in Kyiv would likely lead European leaders to reassess the strategic environment and revise their policies substantially. Although battlefield events represent one category of important factors, we also identified political, economic, and diplomatic events outside Ukraine that could have important effects on states' long-term behavior. For example, extremist electoral victories in key European states could weaken European cohesion and alter how major donor countries or even international organizations, such as the European Union (EU), respond. Such political changes could occur regardless of the battlefield trajectory of the war.

Our survey of potential factors identified 13 for deeper consideration using three criteria: scale, distinguishability, and plausibility. With respect to scale, we prioritized those factors with the potential to be the most consequential. In prioritizing distinguishability, we focused on discrete events that would produce clearly identifiable and measurable changes. In doing so, we intentionally omitted phenomena that might produce more gradual shifts, such as increasing political polarization in Europe or the United States or a long-term erosion of the Chinese government's commitment to Russian leadership. Although such structural trends could prove to be important, their effects are often more diffuse and difficult to identify and, therefore, to respond to. Because our aim is to inform

policymakers’ understanding of the war’s aftermath, we focused on discrete, observable factors that can be monitored. Finally, our focus on plausibility meant that we left out so-called *black swan* (high-consequence, low-probability) events to instead prioritize factors that are plausible though still uncertain. Our resulting list, therefore, accounts for only some of the factors that could alter the long-term effects of the Russia-Ukraine War. However, we felt that these limitations were necessary to make the best use of the space available in these reports and to focus policymaker attention on the most useful potential indicators that our preliminary findings could shift.

Third, we assessed which factors were likely to be most relevant to each of our focus topics, as summarized in Table 1.1. Some factors may be highly relevant for some topics but less relevant for others. For example, a change in Ukrainian policy to acquiesce to Russia’s territorial seizures might have profound implications for European and Russian strategic approaches to the post-war era but would likely have limited implications for our understanding of the warfighting lessons from the conflict. Rather than have every volume in this report series assess every factor, we instead identified the most salient factors for each topic, limiting the number of factors assessed in each report to only those with the most direct relevance to the topic.

Fourth, we assessed whether these factors could alter our preliminary findings. Within each report, we considered the possibility that these factors could either inhibit key actors’ ability to execute policies begun already or drive states and international organizations to reconsider their approaches and alter their behavior. These necessarily brief analyses are summarized in a common section in the concluding chapter for each volume so readers can quickly identify events that could require reexamining our conclusions. We summarize this analysis in Chapter 5.

Table 1.1. Factors that Could Alter Post-War Outcomes and the Topics for Which They Were Assessed to Be Most Relevant

Factor	Warfighting	China’s Reactions	DIB	European Strategy	Russian Strategy
The course of the war					
Russia uses tactical nuclear weapons inside Ukraine	X	X		X	X
Russia or Ukraine achieves cost-effective breakthrough that solves major existing operational challenge	X		X		
Russia uses anti-satellite (ASAT) weapon in low-earth orbit (LEO) against commercial targets that generates massive debris	X				
NATO directly intervenes in Russia-Ukraine War				X	X
China provides lethal military support to Russia		X			
The ending of the war					

Factor	Warfighting	China's Reactions	DIB	European Strategy	Russian Strategy
Ukraine regains internationally recognized prewar borders			X		X
Russian-imposed regime change in Ukraine			X	X	X
Ukrainian government accepts cessation of hostilities without territorial settlement				X	X
Outside events					
Ukraine receives U.S. or NATO security guarantee following the end of the war				X	X
Extremist victories in elections in key EU states			X	X	
Destabilization of Russia		X		X	X
United States withdraws from European alliance commitments			X	X	X
India or multiple key global south states shift to clearly opposing Russia's invasion		X			

Report Organization

This report is organized into four remaining chapters. Chapter 2 provides an overview of several historical case studies we conducted that help set expectations for the types and scale of changes that might be expected from wars with the characteristics of the Russia-Ukraine War. These expectations were not used to shape our analysis of our main topics, but they do provide helpful context in which our preliminary findings may be understood and interpreted.

Chapter 3 summarizes our preliminary findings with greatest relevance to future warfare, drawing primarily from our previous reports on warfighting, DIB, and law of armed conflict issues. Chapter 4 summarizes our preliminary findings with greatest relevance to the international system, relying on our reports on Chinese, Russian, and European reactions to the conflict, and incorporating our more-limited discussion of India and the broader international order. Chapter 5 highlights our analyses of which factors still have the greatest potential to alter our preliminary findings, across all our main topics. Chapter 6 concludes by outlining the implications and policy recommendations for the U.S. government, DoD, and the DAF that stem from our work.

Setting Expectations from Historical Context

Wars are catalysts for change. Conflict frequently arises when states perceive that the existing order is no longer serving to advance their interests—and when they perceive an opportunity and incentive to renegotiate the terms of the regional or international system.¹¹ In fighting to secure new territory, contain or weaken a rival, or claim a relative advantage (among other potential motives), states may redraw boundaries, forge new political coalitions and institutions, and develop or reveal novel technologies and operating concepts. The physical destruction caused by war, including the displacement of populations and the destruction or redistribution of trade networks, can also reshape societies and the international system more broadly.

Yet the magnitude, nature, and duration of these effects varies widely among conflicts. Although the World Wars were transformative events that reshaped the international system and distribution of power, more-limited conflicts have had less profound effects. Regional conflicts often involve fewer countries, endanger fewer people, absorb fewer resources, or capture less global attention compared with systemic conflicts and, therefore, produce different pressures on existing regional or international orders. Historically, the nature, severity, and duration of the resulting regional and international changes also differ across conflicts.

To bound expectations for the likely consequences of the ongoing war in Ukraine, we surveyed 12 historical wars similar in size, duration, and scope to the Russia-Ukraine War and their aftermaths to understand common patterns of regional and international effects. How states weathered the damage and changes wrought by war varied among countries and across time. In general, we found that such wars can have pronounced effects on regional systems and the participants but do not typically lead to widespread changes in the international system.

Which Cases Are Most Relevant?

To identify possible historical points of comparison with the conflict in Ukraine, we considered the following four characteristics of the current conflict that are likely critical in determining its course and consequences:

- **Participants:** Both Russia and Ukraine maintained large, capable, and experienced militaries prior to the conflict. Although partisan militias and nonstate forces, such as the Wagner

¹¹ For a discussion of war as a form of bargaining, see Dan Reiter, “Exploring the Bargaining Model of War,” *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 1, No. 1, March 2003.

Group, have played significant roles in the war, engagements among conventional, organized forces have predominated.

- **Geographic scale:** The conflict has largely been confined to Ukraine, although significant operations have been conducted on Russian territory. To date, however, large-scale fighting has not occurred on the territory of other states.
- **Intensity and casualties:** The war in Ukraine has been characterized by sustained periods of intense fighting on a large scale involving mechanized, air, and missile forces. Two and a half years into the fighting, the war is now the costliest conflict in Europe since 1945.
- **Duration:** The conflict's length has nearly depleted critical military inventories and raised reconstitution and regeneration challenges for both sides.

We hypothesized that these characteristics are likely to be correlated with the scale of systemic effects produced by such conflicts. That is, we assumed that more destructive conflicts involving more states are likely to have greater effects on the international system and that less destructive conflicts involving fewer states are likely to have lesser effects. There will be outlier cases in either direction, and we do not claim that such characteristics are the only way to identify cases with potentially similar effects on the international system. We do, however, believe that looking at cases that are similar to the Russia-Ukraine War on these dimensions provides a reasonable sample to help bound expectations as to the scale and nature of these systemic effects. Our expectations regarding the war's potential effects on the international system would also shift should the war in Ukraine expand dramatically in scope. In effect, this chapter assumes that the war in Ukraine will remain at its current approximate geographic sale and intensity.

Next, we surveyed the Correlates of War dataset to identify cases of high-intensity, high-casualty, geographically limited, inter- and extra-state wars of at least one year in duration since 1815.¹² We also considered whether sufficient literature was available to characterize the course and aftermath of each conflict. The cases that met our criteria are listed in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1. Cases of High-Intensity, High-Casualty, Geographically Limited, Multiyear International Conflicts Since 1815

Historical Case	Time Frame	Major Participants
Crimean War	1853–1856	France, Great Britain, Ottoman Empire, Russia
Lopez War	1864–1870	Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay
Russo-Turkish War	1877–1878	Russia, Ottoman Empire
Boer War	1899–1902	Great Britain, Boers
Russo-Japanese War	1904–1905	Japan, Russia
Russo-Polish War	1919–1921	Poland, Soviet Union
Italo-Ethiopian War	1935–1936	Ethiopia, Italy
Korean War	1950–1953	United States, North Korea, China, South Korea

¹² Meredith Reid Sarkees and Frank Wayman, *Resort to War: 1816—2007*, CQ Press, 2010.

Historical Case	Time Frame	Major Participants
Vietnam War	1965–1975	United States, South Vietnam, North Vietnam
Sino-Vietnamese War	1979–1987	Vietnam, China
Soviet-Afghan War	1979–1989	Soviet Union, Afghanistan
Iran-Iraq War	1980–1988	Iran, Iraq

The resulting list of 12 conflicts has some notable omissions. The criteria exclude the 2008 Georgia war, a relatively short conflict that resulted in fewer than 1,000 battle deaths, and the 2014 Russian attacks on Ukraine, which also produced comparatively limited casualties.¹³ On the other end of the spectrum, we excluded the World Wars because their geographic breadth, intensity, and catastrophic damages far exceed those of the Russia-Ukraine War. Using the four criteria described above, we also excluded civil conflicts but included wars, such as Vietnam and Korea, in which insurgencies and intra-communal conflict occurred alongside substantial interstate fighting. We also excluded the Finnish-Soviet Winter War (1939–1940) because of the difficulty of differentiating the conflict’s regional effects from those caused by World War II. Lastly, we excluded conflicts, such as the international campaign against the Islamic State or the Second Congo War, in which many or most of the major belligerents were extra-state and nonstate militant groups.

Historical analogizing is a fraught process, and each of these cases differs from the current war in Ukraine in substantial ways, including the structure of the international economy and the pattern of global trade, the military technologies available to belligerents, the allies and partners available to support key parties to the conflict, and domestic political conditions in the relevant countries, among other factors. Although these variations limit our ability to derive specific predictions about the course or aftermath of the war in Ukraine, the differences among cases enable consideration of both the range of potential consequences and the relative frequency or rarity of certain post-war effects. Reviewed together, these historical cases provide insight into the underlying factors that can contribute to variation in the type, severity, or timing of such changes—and the factors that could still alter the direction or strength of trends observed since 2022.

Common Trends and Consequences

Our analysis of the historical cases revealed several common effects of prolonged, high-intensity, high-casualty, geographically limited wars comparable with the Russia-Ukraine War.

The Creation of New Regional Security Organizations Is Common, but Strategic Realignments Are Rare

Among the historical cases we surveyed, we identified multiple instances in which warfighting demands—or broader regional concerns generated by the conflict—led countries to formalize

¹³ Louise Richardson, “Strategic and Military Planning, 1815–56,” in Talbot C. Imlay and Monica Duffy Toft, eds., *The Fog of Peace and War Planning: Military and Strategic Planning Under Uncertainty*, Routledge, 2006.

relationships and establish new regional institutions that outlasted the immediate crisis. For example, the stresses of the Iran-Iraq War led the six Gulf monarchies to overcome prior concerns about Saudi dominance to form the Gulf Cooperation Council, expand bilateral cooperation, and solidify previously tentative outreach to Baathist Iraq.¹⁴ Generally, regional conflicts encouraged states to institutionalize existing partnerships or to expand areas of cooperation. For instance, the Crimean War solidified the gradual improvement in relations between France and Great Britain that had begun before the war and opened a protracted period of cooperation.¹⁵ Nearly a century and a half later, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan led the United States to band together with Saudi Arabia and Pakistan to organize support of anti-communist guerillas, establishing a framework for defense cooperation that continued for decades after.¹⁶

Wars can also intensify trends in the relations of third-party countries that are either aligned with or provide support to belligerents. For example, the Korean War hardened U.S. attitudes toward China and contributed to the decision to sever Japan-China trade relations.¹⁷ Conversely, the Russo-Japanese war provided the United States with an opportunity to cooperate with extra-regional powers, such as Great Britain, to legitimize its involvement in Asia-Pacific affairs and eased the expansion of U.S. influence that had begun earlier.¹⁸ Several decades later, the Sino-Vietnamese War strengthened an emerging opposition coalition of Southeast Asian countries that were already suspicious of both Chinese and Vietnamese aims in the region.¹⁹

However, cases of strategic *realignments*, such as the formation of new alliances between rivals or an outbreak of conflict between allies, were less common. We identified only one case in which a regional conflict directly contributed to the collapse of a prewar partnership: Austria's decision not to assist its partner Russia during the Crimean War and its later threat to side with France and the United Kingdom instead. More commonly, regional conflicts reinforced existing trends, although they could accelerate the pace. On the one hand, the Korean War drove the United States to end its occupation of Japan, normalize relations, and establish a security alliance with its former wartime enemy.²⁰ On the other hand, U.S.-Japan relations had already begun to improve prior to 1950, and it is likely other regional security imperatives, including proximity to the Soviet Union, would have driven eventual U.S.-Japan rapprochement. Other instances of realignment proved less durable. For example, Paraguay's attack on Argentina in 1865 spurred Argentina and Brazil to overcome their traditional animosity and, together with Uruguay, form the Treaty of the Triple Alliance in May

¹⁴ Gregory Gause, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf*, Cambridge University Press, 2014.

¹⁵ Trudi Tate, *A Short History of the Crimean War*, I.B. Tauris & Company Ltd., 2019.

¹⁶ Austin Carson, *Secret Wars: Covert Conflict in International Politics*, Princeton University, 2018.

¹⁷ Michael Schaller, "The Korean War: The Economic and Strategic Impact on Japan, 1950–1953," in William Stueck, ed., *The Korean War in World History*, University Press of Kentucky, 2004.

¹⁸ John Steinberg, *Russo-Japanese War in Global Perspective: World War Zero*, Brill, 2005.

¹⁹ Xiaoming Zhang, *Deng Xiaoping's Long War: The Military Conflict Between China and Vietnam, 1979–1991*, University of North Carolina Press, 2015.

²⁰ Jennifer M. Miller, "The Struggle to Rearm Japan: Negotiating the Cold War State in US-Japanese Relations," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 46, No. 1, January 2011.

1865, establishing an alliance that would hold throughout the war.²¹ However, the alliance collapsed when Brazil signed a separate peace with Paraguay following the country's defeat.²²

Similarly, we did not identify instances in which regional conflicts led to the establishment of new international organizations of a scale or influence equivalent to those established following wars between great powers, such as the creation of the Concert of Europe after the Napoleonic Wars or the UN and Bretton Woods institutions after the end of World War II. Notably, one conflict we examined, the Italo-Ethiopian War, did contribute to the ultimate collapse of the League of Nations by revealing the limitations of an institution capable of convening deliberations but not directing unified action.²³ This suggests that even regional conflicts can reduce the international community's confidence in existing organizations and mechanisms for international cooperation but do not generate sufficient incentives or the urgency required to develop coherent alternatives.

States Engaged in Wars Similar to the Russia-Ukraine Conflict Are Often Incentivized to Settle Disputes with Third Parties and to Reduce Other Foreign Engagements

High-intensity wars impose significant industrial, economic, demographic, and political tolls that often drive victors and defeated states to reassess their foreign commitments and to consider new options to reduce security liabilities. Russian and British adaptations following the Crimean War, a long and costly conflict in which neither side claimed a decisive victory, offer illustrative examples. Reversing decades of growing involvement in southern and central Europe, Russia turned inward after the war, concentrating resources on domestic projects, such as the construction of a rail network, the modernization of administrative institutions, and industrialization of its economy.²⁴ Yet Russia did not abandon its imperial ambitions entirely, instead shifting its attention toward Central and East Asia during the 1860s and increasing its involvement in Balkan affairs during the 1870s.²⁵ A similar trend followed the Russo-Polish War nearly seven decades later, albeit for different reasons. The Soviet Union's failure to establish a "red bridge" into Europe invalidated the new communist leadership's assumption that military power could force European cooperation with the Bolshevik regime and reduced their confidence in the idea that popular support for communist ideals was widespread and could be quickly mobilized.²⁶ The Russo-Polish War was a bellwether for the Soviet Union's turn away from more-aggressive policies of international revolution toward policies focused on the consolidation of communist political control and the institutionalization of new economic conditions.

²¹ Randall L. Schweller, "Small-Power Case Studies: Paraguay, Argentina, Brazil, and the War of the Triple Alliance, 1864–1870," in *Unanswered Threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power*, Princeton University Press, 2006.

²² Thomas L. Whigham, *The Paraguayan War: Causes and Early Conduct*, University of Calgary Press, 2018.

²³ David Mackenzie, *A World Beyond Borders: An Introduction to the History of International Organizations*, University of Toronto Press, 2010.

²⁴ Igor' A. Khristoforov, "The Russian Empire and the Crimean War: Conceptualizing Experience and Exploring New Approaches," *Russian Studies in History*, Vol. 51, No. 1, 2012.

²⁵ Orlando Figes, *The Crimean War*, Metropolitan Books, 2010.

²⁶ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 96.

In other cases, regional defeats can lead even major international powers to reconsider the extent of their commitments elsewhere. For the United States, the economic, political, and human costs of the Vietnam War contributed to a perception that its overseas commitments were unsustainable. This shift did not lead to more-sweeping strategic realignments as the United States continued to compete with the Soviet Union and retained its traditional network of allies, but the United States revised its defense commitments to non-European allies and reduced its posture in East Asia. Many of these adjustments began before the war ended. In an early sign of its reduced ambition, the United States moved from a “two-and-a-half” wars to a “one-and-a-half” war construct in 1969—four years before the Paris Peace Accords were finalized.²⁷

Two exceptions are worth noting, however. First, the Korean War, in conjunction with the establishment of the Chinese communist government and the signature of a Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance, persuaded the United States to reconsider its Europe-first posture and to establish a large, permanent U.S. military presence in East Asia.²⁸ Second, Italy’s success in conquering Ethiopia helped persuade its fascist leadership to pursue further conquests, contributing to Italy’s decision to launch a series of aggressive but often covert operations across the Middle East.²⁹

Moreover, states involved in regional wars may also find that they have created new opportunities for existing competitors. Although the U.S.-Soviet détente had already begun to unravel by the time the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, the war marked the end of a period of relaxed tensions between the superpowers. Over the course of the conflict, the United States initiated a program of military assistance to anti-Soviet guerillas to increase the political, materiel, and strategic costs of the conflict.³⁰

Shifts in Regional Trade Patterns to Compensate for Disruptions from the War Are Common, but Systemwide Economic Reorganizations Are Rare

The tremendous economic toll of war is well established. Although the effects may not be felt equally by all parties, the physical destruction and wasted human and economic capital can hinder trade, disrupt or divert industry, and absorb resources, among other effects. The high death toll and protracted nature of the Lopez War led to the complete collapse of Paraguay’s economy.³¹ Both the Paraguayan cattle and yerba industries, major prewar sources of income, were reduced by over 90

²⁷ Richard A. Hunt, *Melvin Laird and the Foundations of the Post-Vietnam Military, 1969–1973*, Historical Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2015, pp. 257–260.

²⁸ For the effect of the Chinese revolution on U.S. attitudes toward Korea, see William Stueck, *The Road to Confrontation: American Policy Toward China and Korea, 1947–1950*, University of North Carolina Press, 1981.

²⁹ A. J. Barker, *The Civilizing Mission: A History of the Italo-Ethiopian War of 1935-1936*, Dial Press, Inc., 1968.

³⁰ Daniel J. Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s*, Oxford University Press, 2015.

³¹ In total, Paraguay may have lost up to 70 percent of its total prewar population and up to 90 percent of its adult men, although these figures remain hotly contested. For discussions about total casualties, see Vera Blinn Reber, “Demographics of Paraguay: A Reinterpretation of the Great War, 1864–1870,” *Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 68, No. 2, 1988; Thomas L. Whigham and Barbara Potthast, “Some Strong Reservations: A Critique of Vera Blinn Reber’s ‘The Demographics of Paraguay: A Reinterpretation of the Great War,’” *Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 70, No. 4, 1990. The controversy encompasses both the total number of military and civilian casualties and the percentage of casualties compared with the prewar population of Paraguay, which is also disputed. In total, however, low estimates put casualties at around 10 percent of the total population, and the highest accepted estimates are around 60 percent to 70 percent.

percent at the end of the war, while large indemnities imposed by the victors inhibited postwar recovery.³² Even more-powerful economies may struggle to recover from war's damages, which may include opportunity costs if a conflict inhibited their ability to access emerging technologies or fully exploit available resources. For example, the British blockade of the Baltic Sea during the Crimean War isolated Russia's industrializing economy and imposed long-term costs by delaying adoption of British-origin machinery.³³ Conversely, third-party countries may benefit from changes in international demand or the decline of traditional competitors. Japan received an infusion of U.S. assistance over the course of the Korean War that revitalized its economy, rebuilt its industrial infrastructure, and accelerated its rise as a major trading nation over subsequent decades.³⁴

We did not identify cases in which wars similar to the Russia-Ukraine War causes lasting, system-wide economic reorganizations, however. Wartime reductions in the production, transport, or accessibility of critical global resources, such as cotton, oil, and natural gas, are historically common, and we noted cases in which wars increased the importance of alternate suppliers or trade routes. However, third-party countries often cooperated to contain or mitigate the damage to the global economy. For instance, Turkish and Saudi pipelines allowed Iraqi oil to reach safe ports in the Mediterranean and Red Seas after its Persian Gulf ports were closed during its war with Iran.³⁵ After an initial dip during the war's first phase, Iran's oil exports recovered over the course of the conflict thanks to continued international demand and the establishment of a shuttle service of tankers to carry Iranian oil to tankers safely located outside the range of Iraqi aircraft.³⁶

Moderate Diffusion of Technologies and Operational Concepts Are Common, but Global Adoption Is Often Uneven and Game-Changing Innovations Are Rare

Wars can reshape how states prepare to fight future conflicts by displaying new technologies, accelerating the development of new techniques or operational concepts, and improving understanding of how previously experimental options perform on a real battlefield.³⁷ For instance, the Crimean War (1853–1856) introduced new military, transportation, and communication technologies to wider audiences and helped to promote their adoption for military and nonmilitary purposes. The war showcased the benefits of such innovations as the telegraph, steam engine, and electrotyping, and it spurred advances in military medicine, logistics, and command and control as foreign militaries sought

³² Vera Blinn Reber, "Commerce and Industry in Nineteenth Century Paraguay: The Example of Yerba Mate," *The Americas*, Vol. 42, No. 1, July 1985.

³³ Tate, 2019.

³⁴ Schaller, 2004.

³⁵ Gause, 2014.

³⁶ Gause, 2014.

³⁷ We discuss how wars can drive military adaption in another volume of this series. See Mark Hvizda, Bryan Frederick, Alisa Laufer, Alexandra T. Evans, Kristen Gunness, and David A. Ochmanek, *Dispersed, Disguised, and Degradable: The Implications of the Fighting in Ukraine for Future U.S.-Involved Conflicts*, RAND Corporation, RR-A3141-2, 2025.

to avoid repeating French, British, and Russian missteps.³⁸ Although their invention and use predated the conflict, steamships and steam gunboats gained greater attention during the Crimean War as strategists realized their utility for transporting men and supplies.³⁹

Our review did not reveal examples of states introducing novel game-changing technologies, however. More common were adaptations and refinements of weapons and tactics deployed in previous conflicts. For example, incremental improvements in small arms warfare and military transportation occurred during the Russo-Turkish (1877–1878), Boer (1899–1902), and Russo-Japanese (1904–1905) Wars, but participants did not develop or demonstrate novel technologies that altered the course or outcome of the conflict. Other conflicts showcased the operational benefits of existing technologies and contributed to their international adoption, as was the case with helicopters in the Korean War (1950–1953), surface-to-air missiles and precision-guided munitions in Vietnam (1964–1973), and advanced man-portable air defense systems in the Soviet-Afghanistan War (1979–1989).

Moreover, states do not consistently learn from prior conflicts and adaptations were often delayed or uneven. Although the Russo-Japanese, Russo-Turkish, and Boer Wars were studied closely by military intellectuals at the time, most observers misinterpreted evidence from the battlefield and failed to foresee how improvements in firepower, transportation, fortifications, and production were generating new challenges for their preferred doctrines of offensive warfare.⁴⁰ Moreover, adoption of technologies showcased in prior conflicts may vary among states. For example, Germany grasped the importance of the machine gun and heavy artillery and incorporated these capabilities into its force structure earlier and more extensively than its British counterparts, even though military intellectuals from both countries had access to similar information from the recent wars in East Asia and the Ottoman periphery.⁴¹

Regional Conflicts Can Shift the Balance of Political Power Within Involved Countries but Do Not Produce Consistent Outcomes

Among the historical conflicts we surveyed, the most significant changes in states' governance structure or ideology occurred as the result of military defeats rather than regime transitions or changes in the internal balance of power. For example, the U.S. decision to withdraw from South Vietnam contributed to the collapse of the state's governance and the creation of a unified Vietnam under communist control.

More commonly, wars accelerated political shifts underway before a conflict began by mobilizing populations beyond emerging ideologies and strengthening the position of new power centers. For example, the Russo-Japanese War fueled discontent within Western Russia that contributed to the

³⁸ Yakup Bektas, "The Crimean War as a Technological Enterprise," *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London*, Vol. 71, 2017.

³⁹ Bektas, 2017.

⁴⁰ David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, "Rewriting the Russo-Japanese War: A Centenary Retrospective," *Russian Review*, Vol. 67, No. 1, January 2008; Jonathan Shimshoni, "Technology, Military Advantage, and World War I: A Case for Military Entrepreneurship," *International Security*, Vol. 15, No. 3, Winter 1990/91, pp. 118, 212.

⁴¹ Shimshoni, 1990/1991, pp. 211–212.

1905 revolution and subsequent limited democratization of the tsarist regime, and the Russo-Polish War positioned the Polish military to launch a successful coup six years later that transformed the young government from a democracy to a military-run dictatorship.⁴² Following its victory in 1905, Japan also experienced a wave of democratization. The war had led to the mass mobilization of civilian sentiments within Japan and wave of nationalism within the country that empowered new parties and decreased the influence of the Meiji restoration oligarchs.⁴³

The exigencies of conflict also can help existing leaders surmount internal political divisions and consolidate their control over nascent state institutions. For example, Argentina overcame deep regional divisions during the Lopez War because the conflict redistributed resources, mobilized regional strongmen behind the central government, and created a greater sense of unity between Buenos Aires and the countryside. The resulting improvements in national cohesion and stability continued after the war.⁴⁴ Similarly, the Russo-Polish War consolidated Bolshevik control over Soviet territory and nascent state institutions. The conflict clarified Soviet ideas about governance and contributed to formalization of the system of ethnic soviet socialist republics within the Soviet Union.⁴⁵ A similar pattern unfolded in Poland, even despite the 1926 coup. The war had the long-term effect of stabilizing the young state by clarifying its borders, ending efforts to create a federalized eastern European state, and galvanizing support for a nation-state model that defined the Polish nation in terms of Polish ethnicity—a model that the military government preserved after 1926.⁴⁶

Baselining Expectations for the Russia-Ukraine War

What scale and type of effects on future diplomatic, military, economic, and political trends should we expect to see following a war like the one ongoing in Ukraine? After more than two years of fighting, the war has already sharpened geopolitical fault lines in Europe and Asia and prompted rethinking of U.S. and NATO posture in Europe, Russian military performance and capabilities, and the drivers and limits of U.S. alliances and partnerships. Yet the full scale and duration of the war's effects remains uncertain. Our historical analysis suggests that similar wars do not typically lead to widespread changes in the international system but generally can have more pronounced effects on regional systems and the participants. Prolonged high-intensity, high-casualty, but geographically limited wars generate both opportunities and pressures for states to adapt their foreign, military, and economic policies and can accelerate changes that preceded the start of fighting. However, such conflicts generally do not absorb the global resources and attention that would lead states to develop

⁴² William C. Fuller, *Civil-Military Conflict in Imperial Russia, 1881–1914*, Princeton University Press, 1985; Joseph Rothschild, "Technology, Military Advantage, and World War I: A Case for Military Entrepreneurship," *International Security*, Vol. 15, No. 3, Winter 1990/1991.

⁴³ Nikolai Ovsyannikov, "The Impact of the War on the Constitutional Government in Japan," in Kent Rotem Kowner, ed., *Rethinking the Russo-Japanese War, 1904–05*, Vol. 1: Centennial Perspectives, BRILL, 2007.

⁴⁴ F. J. McLynn, "Consequences for Argentina of the War of Triple Alliance 1865–1870," *The Americas*, Vol. 41, No. 1, July 1984; Whigham, 1990; Schweller, 2006.

⁴⁵ Jerzy Borzęcki, *The Soviet-Polish Peace of 1921 and the Creation of Interwar Europe*, Yale University Press, 2008, p. 276.

⁴⁶ Borzęcki, 2008, p. 279.

new categories of weapons, and they do not mobilize populations on the scale required to generate new political ideologies.

Our review of historical trends provides a set of parameters to establish expectations for the Russia-Ukraine War's potential consequences. In particular, the war in Ukraine may

- **reinforce existing regional political coalitions and alignments** by creating new opportunities, incentives, and urgency for like-minded states to cooperate and encouraging states to institutionalize bilateral and multilateral relations
- **deepen existing divisions among regional and international factions** by heightening attention to divergent national interests and creating opportunities for competition
- **influence global militaries' adaptation of existing and emerging military technologies** by showcasing the real operational benefits and challenges associated with emerging or previously non-battle tested technologies, operational concepts, and military organizations
- **test existing political regimes and ideologies, but not necessarily to drive revolutionary changes.** This historical record suggests that conflicts can help fragile or nascent regimes consolidate power and strengthen state institutions. Yet wars can also undermine existing governments by heightening popular grievances, underlining the need for internal reform or strengthening and emboldening alternate power centers.

Moreover, our historical analysis suggests that non-battlefield factors can shape the long-term effects of a conflict. The political, territorial, and economic consequences of how wars end are significant. Yet across the historical cases surveyed, we also found evidence that non-battlefield conditions are likely to define the scale, nature, and endurance of any changes wrought by the war. These include the scale and nature of any foreign involvement, the decision to introduce or withhold novel capabilities, the composition of the political leadership before and after a war ends and the ability of existing regimes to maintain control, and the extent to which states seek to punish or reintegrate parties to a conflict after the war. These trends informed our selection of potential future factors that could alter the Russia-Ukraine War's effects, as described in Chapters 1 and 5.

Implications for Future Conflicts

As the most destructive interstate war fought in decades, the Russia-Ukraine War has the potential to demonstrate and signal changes in how other high-intensity interstate wars are likely to be fought in the near future. In this chapter, we summarize findings from our research into three dimensions of the war's military effects. Our research was completed by September 2024. As discussed in Chapter 1, the first two sections are drawn from standalone reports on these topics that are published as additional volumes in this report series, and the third and final section represents a more-limited look at this topic conducted for this summary volume. First, we discuss the tactical and operational implications of the fighting and how these may or may not apply to future U.S.-involved conflicts. Second, we survey DIB issues either created or highlighted by the war. Third, we discuss the main issues raised by the war—and Russia's conduct in particular—for the Laws of War and related international law and norms that may also affect the way future conflicts are fought. Taken together, these three sections highlight the ways in which the prosecution of future high-intensity interstate wars may look different from what would have been anticipated before Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Tactical and Operational Implications for Future U.S.-Involved High-Intensity Wars

The United States has been reorienting its military to prepare for a potential conflict with a near-peer adversary for several years. However, its experience with interstate warfare in recent decades has been limited to short conflicts against technologically inferior adversaries. Preparing for a potential future conflict against China—with its sophisticated, well-resourced, yet inexperienced military—presents a substantial analytic challenge. How should the United States prepare to fight such an adversary? How can it more accurately assess the competence of a force that is highly modernized but has not conducted major combat operations in over 40 years? Many of the capabilities and concepts of operations likely to be essential in this hypothetical clash have not previously been employed at scale in interstate warfare; it may therefore be challenging to shift U.S. planning and resources sufficiently toward new approaches absent clear evidence of the inadequacy of existing efforts.

The Russia-Ukraine War, and the immense human tragedy that it has caused, provides an opportunity and motivation for the United States to learn about the use and interaction of different capabilities in a high-intensity conflict in a way that was not previously possible. However, and despite the novelty of many aspects of the conflict, battlefield dynamics observed in Ukraine may not be easily transferrable. Ukraine itself differs greatly from the United States and its allies in its capabilities, resources, and strategic culture. Russia and China differ substantially in these areas as well, and, even in a conflict with NATO, Russia may choose to fight differently than it has in Ukraine since 2022.

Although the opportunity to learn from this war is important, it is equally important not to mislearn lessons or apply observations that are contingent on specific characteristics of the battlefield in Ukraine to other contexts uncritically. In our standalone report on this topic, we assessed in detail how observations from the fighting in Ukraine may or may not translate to future great power conflicts. Below, we summarize the seven main implications for these potential fights that are likely to be relevant across theaters, building on the detailed analyses in the standalone volume devoted to this topic.⁴⁷

The Changing Delivery of Mass

The fighting in Ukraine highlights the ongoing importance of mass in winning high-intensity conflicts. In Ukraine, this mass has been primarily delivered as artillery, albeit with its effectiveness enhanced because of improvements in surveillance and targeting.⁴⁸ However, in future U.S.-involved conflicts, the delivery may be quite different. UASs have been used as massed attack weapons in Ukraine designed to evade and overwhelm traditional air defenses, but, in future conflicts involving even more-capable and better-resourced combatants, their importance as a tool for delivering mass to targets may increase further.⁴⁹ Large numbers of UASs have the potential to provide an additional solution to operational problems that were previously the domain of long-range precision fires—and to do so more sustainably in a protracted conflict. However, UASs are unlikely to fully supplant artillery, which provides shock and suppression in a way that drones cannot and that will likely remain more cost-effective for many uses.

Blurring the Distinction Between Cruise Missiles and One-Way Attack UASs

Relatedly, Ukrainian and Russian use of one-way attack (OWA) UASs to flexibly deliver payloads at long ranges suggests that the distinction between drones and cruise missiles is likely to blur even more in the future. Cruise missiles retain advantages in speed, payload, and resistance to jamming over most UASs, but UASs allow for the possibility of loitering to enhance targeting options and are

⁴⁷ We arrived at these implications by first identifying novel and notable observations from the fighting in Ukraine and then assessing the likely relevance of those observations for future potential wars against China in the Indo-Pacific in a Taiwan contingency and against Russia in a conflict between Russia and NATO in eastern Europe. For full details on the approach and the analysis, see Hvizda et al., 2025.

⁴⁸ Artillery has played a decisive role throughout war given its attritional character, including in the Battles of Hostomel Airport, Sieverodonetsk and Lysychansk, and Bakhmut. As of summer 2024, artillery and air-delivered glide bombs had also enabled Russian forces to achieve notable gains near Pokrovsk. See, for example, “Russia’s Artillery War in Ukraine: Challenges and Innovations,” Royal United Services Institute, August 9, 2023; Paul Sonne, Isabelle Khurshudyan, Serhiy Morgunov, and Kostiantyn Khudov, “Battle for Kyiv: Ukrainian Valor, Russian Blunders Combined to Save the Capital,” *Washington Post*, August 24, 2022; Franz-Stefan Gady and Michael Kofman, “Making Attrition Work: A Viable Theory of Victory for Ukraine,” *Survival*, Vol. 66, No. 1, February–March 2024; “Russia’s Bloody Summer Offensive is Hurting Ukraine,” *The Economist*, August 6, 2024.

⁴⁹ Jack Watling and Nick Reynolds, *Meatgrinder: Russian Tactics in the Second Year of Its Invasion of Ukraine*, Royal United Services Institute, May 19, 2023; Dmitri Minic, *What Does the Russian Army Think About Its War in Ukraine? Criticisms, Recommendations, Adaptations*, French Institute of International Relations, September 21, 2023; Josh Holder and Constant Méheut, “Facing an Endless Barrage, Ukraine’s Air Defenses Are Withering,” *New York Times*, May 13, 2024.

dramatically cheaper.⁵⁰ Technological advances likely will enable states to develop faster UASs, and both UASs and cruise missiles are likely to be enhanced with greater autonomy, reducing their vulnerability to jamming and improving their agility.⁵¹ Future warfighters may consider different types of OWA UASs and cruise missiles as falling along the same continuum and select specific platforms with specific capabilities as needed for particular missions across an increasingly wide and diverse variety of options.

Enhanced Challenges for Offensive Operations

Offense-defense balances can change quickly, and we should not expect future wars to be attritional stalemates just because that is what has largely been observed in Ukraine. As discussed below, the lack of air superiority for either side has been a critical condition shaping the fighting to date. However, the Russia-Ukraine War does demonstrate a series of enhanced challenges that offensive operations, particularly in the ground domain, must now contend with due to technological changes that are likely to stress attackers on both sides in future U.S.-involved high-intensity conflicts.

First, persistent surveillance and greater battlefield transparency appear to provide increased advantages to defenders in the ground forces because mobile ground forces are generally visible to the adversary while defending ground forces are better able to take advantages of shelters and camouflage, concealment, and deception to reduce their vulnerability, at least temporarily.⁵² It is possible that surveillance will improve to the point where stationary ground forces are equally visible as forces in motion, at which point remaining still may become quite deadly, as it largely is already in the air domain given the greater visibility of runways and associated support infrastructure. But for the time being, persistent surveillance capabilities appear to reinforce the structural advantages that in-place ground defenders enjoy because of their lower vulnerability to fires.

Second, despite efforts to promote multidomain concepts, neither side in Ukraine has been able to establish an advantage in all domains simultaneously, and, as a result, both sides have struggled to translate localized battlefield gains into strategic advantages.⁵³ A similar phenomenon is likely to characterize at least the opening phases of a future conflict involving the United States and Russia or China given all sides' investments in capabilities to disrupt their opponent's command and control, degrade information flows, and reduce ability to combine arms.

Third, the fighting in Ukraine has demonstrated how persistent surveillance and long-range fires can enhance the effectiveness of traditional defensive measures, such as minefields, by threatening

⁵⁰ Peter Graff, "Explainer: Why Drones Pose a Different Challenge for Ukraine than Missiles," Reuters, October 20, 2022.

⁵¹ "Killer Drones Pioneered in Ukraine are the Weapons of the Future," *The Economist*, February 8, 2024; Alistair MacDonald and Heather Somerville, "Drones in Ukraine Get Smarter to Dodge Russia's Jamming Signals," *Wall Street Journal*, June 19, 2024.

⁵² Jack Watling, Oleksandr V. Danylyuk, and Nick Reynolds, *Preliminary Lessons from Ukraine's Offensive Operations, 2022–2023*, Royal United Services Institute, July 18, 2024.

⁵³ Michael Kofman, "The Russia-Ukraine War: Military Operations and Battlefield Dynamics," in Hal Brands, ed., *War in Ukraine: Conflict, Strategy, and the Return of a Fractured World*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2024; Jack Watling, "In Ukraine, Russia Is Beginning to Compound Advantages," Royal United Services Institute, May 14, 2024; "Is Ukraine's Offensive Stalling?" *The Economist*, July 25, 2023.

personnel engaged in clearing operations.⁵⁴ In the Russia-Ukraine War, this has played out on land, but the same dynamics may apply to other domains and geographies should defenders have the time and resources to invest in them and put them in place.

Necessity of Preparing for Protraction

Neither side in the Russia-Ukraine War started the fighting prepared for a protracted high-intensity conflict, but the relative stalemate on the battlefield drove both sides to prepare for and adapt to the reality that the fighting would persist at this intensity for a long period. Fighting such a protracted conflict demands a different set of replaceable, cost-effective capabilities that can be employed quickly as opposed to those that require years of advance preparation. In Ukraine, both sides have had to adapt to protraction on the fly, remaking their DIBs, foreign supply sources, and operational concepts to match the reality of what types of munitions and systems remain available to them.⁵⁵ In a future U.S.-involved conflict, if neither side is able to achieve its objectives quickly, generating mass at low cost will also become vital. Outcomes on the battlefield may then be dictated by production decisions at home, including both those taken in advance and those that both sides scramble to implement during the fighting.

The Need to Seek External Support to Sustain Protracted Conflict Is a Question of How Much, Not If

External support is essential for successfully waging high-intensity wars over a protracted period. Despite its large industrial base, extensive military stockpiles, and emphasis on self-sufficiency, Russia has been compelled to seek out alternative sources for munitions and military equipment as its invasion of Ukraine has dragged on.⁵⁶ Western sanctions that impeded domestic production in some areas are a contributing factor, but Russia's search for foreign assistance has also been driven by the sheer volume of material required and a recognition of the benefits conferred by foreign-made equipment to address challenges that may not have been apparent before the conflict, as seen in the increasing Russian reliance in Ukraine on Iranian Shahed drones.⁵⁷ Any combatant with lesser domestic production capacity would face that need earlier and more acutely, as Ukraine has and as Taiwan certainly would, and a combatant with greater domestic production potential, such as China, may be able to rely on indigenous capabilities for longer. But the incentives to seek out external support to sustain or better adapt to protracted high-intensity conflict using capabilities that could be

⁵⁴ Isabelle Khurshudyan and Kamila Hrabchuk, "The Biggest Obstacle to Ukraine's Counteroffensive? Minefields," *Washington Post*, July 15, 2023; "Is Ukraine's Offensive Stalling?" 2023.

⁵⁵ See, for example, Andrew E. Kramer and David Guttenfelder, "From the Workshop to the War: Creative Use of Drones Lifts Ukraine," *New York Times*, August 10, 2022; and Mick Ryan, "Russia's Adaptation Advantage," *Foreign Affairs*, February 5, 2024.

⁵⁶ Aamer Madhani, "U.S. Says North Korea Delivered 1,000 Containers of Equipment and Munitions to Russia for Ukraine War," *Associated Press*, October 13, 2023.

⁵⁷ Dalton Bennett and Mary Ilyushina, "Inside the Russian Effort to Build 6,000 Attack Drones with Iran's Help," *Washington Post*, August 17, 2023.

provided by allies or partners will remain to greater or lesser degrees for all states, with the value of preventing or interrupting such transfers being proportionately important for their opponents.

Competency Matters as Much, If Not More, than Technology

Purely technical prewar comparisons of Russian and Ukrainian military capabilities could not have forecasted the battlefield circumstances in Ukraine. Indeed, the conflict has underscored the importance of “soft” aspects of military power, such as tactical proficiency, sound operational planning, and coherent strategy.⁵⁸ Because these traits directly influence attrition and territorial control during the initial period of war—and, in turn, set the conditions for subsequent phases of fighting—these intangible qualities bear equal or greater importance than most material capabilities. Military analysts must therefore devise new ways to measure these immaterial aspects of military power for forces untested by battle.

The Challenges of Achieving Air Superiority

Many of the dilemmas highlighted in Ukraine arise from the inability of either side to achieve air superiority given the effectiveness of ground-based air defenses on both sides.⁵⁹ This is historically unusual, although, particularly since the end of the Cold War, few high-intensity interstate wars have matched technologically similar forces. This inability to establish air superiority may be more likely to reoccur in the Indo-Pacific but is less certain in a potential future NATO-Russia fight given the deficiencies in Russian air power demonstrated in Ukraine.⁶⁰ That having been said, even though NATO can expect to achieve superiority in the air in the traditional sense of keeping the enemy’s aircraft out of its airspace and being able to operate its own aircraft over enemy-held territory, this will no longer be a guarantee of protection against observation and attack from the air. Russia will likely remain capable of mounting some operations deep inside NATO territory with large salvos of ballistic and cruise missiles, OWA drones, and small UASs for reconnaissance. This will compel NATO forces either to make substantial investments in missile defenses and a range of counter-UAS capabilities or to adapt to operating even behind the front lines under greater threat of attack.

⁵⁸ For more on the Russian strategic, operational, and tactical incompetence at the outset of the war, see Mykhaylo Zabrodskyi, Jack Watling, Oleksandr V. Danylyuk, and Nick Reynolds, *Preliminary Lessons in Conventional Warfighting from Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine: February–July 2022*, Royal United Services Institute, November 30, 2022; Jack Watling and Nick Reynolds, *Ukraine at War: Paving the Road from Survival to Victory*, Royal United Services Institute, July 4, 2022; and Seth Jones, *Russia’s Ill-Fated Invasion of Ukraine: Lessons in Modern Warfare*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 2022.

⁵⁹ Valerii Zaluzhnyi, “Modern Positional Warfare and How to Win It,” *The Economist*, November 1, 2023; Kofman, 2024.

⁶⁰ The deficiencies of Russian airpower in Ukraine are detailed in Justin Bronk, *Russian Combat Air Strengths and Limitations: Lessons from Ukraine*, Center for Naval Analyses, April 2023; Justin Bronk, Nick Reynolds, and Jack Watling, *The Russian Air War and Ukrainian Requirements for Air Defense*, Royal United Services Institute, November 7, 2022; Minic, 2023; and Kofman, 2024.

Implications for the DIB

In early 2024, analysts expected Russia to be able to produce up to 4.5 million artillery shells for the year.⁶¹ Meanwhile, the Western alliance supporting Ukraine was expected to be able to produce 1.3 million 155-millimeter artillery shells, far short of what Ukraine would need to achieve its—and the West’s—military goals.⁶² Among the many revelations of the aftermath of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 was the understanding that changes would be needed in the productive capacity of the U.S. and Western alliance DIB. These challenges have become apparent in contrast with Russian productive capabilities but would become even more glaring in contrast with China’s capabilities. In our separate report on this topic, we discuss these DIB issues and the steps the United States and allied countries have taken to date to address them.⁶³ Together, these reforms have the potential to influence the future of transatlantic DIB capacity, but the scale of their effect remains to be seen. In the following sections, we highlight five primary implications from our assessments.

Transatlantic Reforms to the DIB Have Been Positive but Modest

The policy changes implemented since February 2022 have been positive but modest given their limited scope, funding, and timespan. The most dramatic changes have taken place in the Ukrainian DIB in terms of both increases in production and in accelerating innovation, but this remains small compared with the overall Western DIB.⁶⁴

The United States and its European allies have expanded production of materiel supplied to Ukraine and have taken steps to reshape procurement and innovation in response to lessons learned from the war, especially focusing on unmanned systems. In response to both Russia’s war on Ukraine and rising concerns about the prospect of a future conflict in the Indo-Pacific, the United States has created a new DIB strategy that may lend momentum to calls to boost U.S. peacetime and surge

⁶¹ Patrick Turner, “The West Is Underestimating Ukraine’s Artillery Needs,” *Defense One*, February 22, 2024. This estimate builds from an earlier assessment released by the government of Estonia (Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Estonia, *Setting Transatlantic Defence Up for Success*, December 2023).

⁶² Turner, 2024. Although there are a variety of munitions sizes, the 155 mm round is the NATO artillery standard and thus is manufactured throughout the alliance and by partners, including South Korea. They are particularly important to Ukraine because of the transfer of large amounts of artillery systems from the West to Ukraine (“Why the 155mm Shell Is One of the World’s Most Wanted Objects Now,” *Wall Street Journal*, January 24, 2024; Tara Copp, “Why the 155mm Round Is So Critical to the War in Ukraine,” Associated Press, April 23, 2023).

⁶³ Alisa Laufer, Howard J. Shatz, and Omar Danaf, *Implications of Russia’s War on Ukraine for the U.S. and Allied Defense Industrial Bases*, RAND Corporation, RR-A3141-3, 2025.

⁶⁴ Lara Jakes, “Ukraine’s Arms Industry Is Growing, but Is It Growing Fast Enough?” *New York Times*, April 2, 2024; Daniel Block, “Can Ukraine Clean Up Its Defense Industry Fast Enough?” *The Atlantic*, December 19, 2023; Frederick W. Kagan, Kateryna Stepanenko, George Barros, Grace Mappes, Nicole Wolkov, Angelica Evans, and Christina Harward, *Ukraine’s Long-Term Path to Success: Jumpstarting a Self-Sufficient Defense Industrial Base with US and EU Support*, Institute for the Study of War and American Enterprise Institute, January 14, 2024.

production capacity.⁶⁵ Yet although U.S. spending has increased, it remains below the amount required to achieve large-scale and sustainable changes to its national defense industrial capacity.⁶⁶

The trend in Europe has been largely similar. European governments have made investments in their production capacities since the war on varying scales, but most are modest.⁶⁷ The proposed European Defence Industrial Strategy could incentivize multinational integration and capacity, but it faces several hurdles to being adopted and properly implemented.⁶⁸

Persistent structural issues continue to pose hurdles for U.S. and European efforts to improve production capacity. Challenges such as workforce recruitment and retention, murky signals from governments on funding and requirements, and supply chain diversification and security continue to plague DIBs in the United States and Europe as they did before Russia's full-scale war on Ukraine. Europe's DIB landscape also remains fragmented among the many countries of the continent.⁶⁹

Key Production Lines Still Face Challenges

Several production lines have been especially slow to respond to demand from Ukraine, including those for 155 mm artillery shells (both unguided and guided), High-Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) launchers, and Javelin anti-tank missiles.⁷⁰ The United States and Europe have both increased funding to support the production of 155 mm ammunition, but neither has been able to surge production quickly enough to sustain Ukraine while maintaining sufficient reserves at home.⁷¹ Although ongoing investments in ammunition production facilities and machinery could help the United States and Europe further increase production rates, the full effects of modernization efforts may not be realized for several more years given the time required to hire and train the required workforce and to construct required infrastructure, as well as manufacturing lead times. As with 155 mm ammunition, the United States has invested in production equipment for HIMARS launchers

⁶⁵ DoD, *National Defense Industrial Strategy*, cleared for public release on November 16, 2023.

⁶⁶ Trevor Taylor, "The US National Defense Industrial Strategy: No Shortage of Ambition," Royal United Services Institute, February 20, 2024; Cynthia Cook, "Understanding the Contributions of the New National Defense Industrial Strategy," Center for Strategic and International Studies, January 17, 2024.

⁶⁷ "Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014–2024)," press release, North Atlantic Treaty Organization Public Diplomacy Division, June 2024.

⁶⁸ Jacopo Barigazzi and Laura Kayali, "EU Heavyweights Warn Against Commission Defense Power Grab," *Politico*, November 28, 2023; Max Bergmann, Maria Snegovaya, Tina Dolbaia, and Nick Fenton, "Collaboration for a Price: Russian Military-Technical Cooperation with China, Iran, and North Korea," Center for Strategic and International Studies, May 22, 2024; Sophia Besch, "Understanding the EU's New Defense Industrial Strategy," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 9, 2024.

⁶⁹ Sebastian Clapp, *Reinforcing the European Defence Industry*, European Parliamentary Research Service, June 2023; Sean Monaghan, *Solving Europe's Defense Dilemma: Overcoming the Challenges to European Defense Cooperation*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, March 2023.

⁷⁰ Mark F. Cancian, *Is the United States Running out of Weapons to Send to Ukraine?* Center for Strategic and International Studies, September 16, 2022; Mark F. Cancian, *Rebuilding U.S. Inventories: Six Critical Systems*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, January 9, 2023; U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Ukraine: Status and Challenges of DOD Weapon Replacement Efforts*, GAO-24-106649, April 30, 2024.

⁷¹ Andrew Gray, Sabine Siebold, and Tassilo Hummel, "EU Will Only Supply Half of Promised Shells to Ukraine by March—Borrell," Reuters, January 31, 2024; Cancian, 2022; Cancian, 2023.

and Javelins (in addition to purchasing new systems), but the slow delivery of these systems to Ukraine to date suggests the production lines still face challenges.⁷²

In sum, funds for production contracts have had modest near-term impacts on the production of 155 mm ammunition, HIMARS launchers, and Javelins. The impacts of capital investments in facilities and equipment may be slower to materialize, but these funds will potentially have more outsized effects on production in the long term. Overall, the response of production lines to these capital investments remains an important area for monitoring by policymakers.

Sustained Funding Is Essential for Long-Term Success but Is Not Guaranteed

For new U.S. and European policies to generate the desired long-term effects, consistent funding is necessary to enable and incentivize industry to make the capital investments required to promote long-term capacity improvements. Funding will need to be extended not just to production lines but also to programs that address structural issues, such as workforce challenges, supply chain vulnerabilities, and poor signaling from governments to industry on their requirements and planned investments. The United States and Europe have already identified these challenges as areas for improvement in their own policy documents.⁷³ The next step will be a perennial policy challenge: how to implement a new vision for sustained DIB growth.

The prospects for consistent funding may be sensitive to changes in political leadership or policymakers' priorities. To convey a consistent demand signal to industry will require consistent action and attention from politicians with budget authority. All NATO countries are democracies, as is the EU as a whole, and therefore all undergo changes in political leadership and changes in defense policy leadership. Commitment mechanisms in the United States, such as multiyear contracts, are only a partial solution, because Congress can choose not to fund a multiyear contract in its second or subsequent year, instead accepting a penalty for not doing so. Although the fiscal year (FY) 2024 National Defense Authorization Act authorized select multiyear procurement contracts, the FY 2024 defense spending bill did not fully fund those additional multiyear contracts.⁷⁴

NATO's renewed focus on Russia could help maintain attention. When NATO member countries committed to raise their defense budgets to 2 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) following Russia's initial invasion and annexation of Crimea in 2014, the alliance's then 28 non-U.S. members spent merely 1.43 percent of GDP on defense; that year, only two non-U.S. member countries met the 2 percent threshold.⁷⁵ By 2023, 29 non-U.S. members collectively spent 1.78 percent of GDP on defense, and nine countries met the 2 percent threshold.⁷⁶ And in 2024, it was

⁷² Cancian, 2022; Cancian, 2023.

⁷³ DoD, 2023; European Commission, "First Ever Defence Industrial Strategy and a New Defence Industry Programme to Enhance Europe's Readiness and Security," press release, March 5, 2024a; Bergmann et al., 2024.

⁷⁴ U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services, "Summary of the Fiscal Year 2024 National Defense Authorization Act," fact sheet, undated; Bryant Harris, "Defense Spending Bill Has Some Ukraine Aid, Multiyear Munitions Buys," *Defense News*, March 21, 2024.

⁷⁵ NATO, "Defence Expenditures and NATO's 2% Guideline," last updated April 5, 2024a.

⁷⁶ NATO, "Defence Expenditures of NATO Countries (2014–2024)," press release, June 17, 2024b.

estimated that the non-U.S. members collectively spent over the 2 percent threshold, hitting 2.02 percent, with 22 of what had become 30 non-U.S. members planning to spend more than 2 percent.⁷⁷ Countries not expected to meet the 2 percent threshold included Albania, Canada, Croatia, Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal, Slovenia, and Spain.⁷⁸

The United States has consistently spent well above 3 percent of GDP on defense.⁷⁹ Although defense spending is not the same as spending on the DIB or procurement, they are related—in 2022, for 27 European countries, the correlation coefficient on a scale of 0 (no correlation) to 1 (perfect correlation) of “total defence expenditure” and “defence investment” was 0.96.⁸⁰ Although longer-term lock-in is difficult, it does appear that NATO countries have been able to consistently increase spending in the face of threats, and NATO’s 2022 Strategic Concept, released after Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, states, “the Russian Federation is the most significant and direct threat to Allies’ security and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area.”⁸¹

If political will to sustain increased spending continues, U.S. and European policymakers will still likely face significant budgetary challenges. Funding large-scale reforms, such as those outlined in U.S. and European strategic guidance, will likely involve some combination of expanding the defense acquisitions budget, cutting other parts of defense budgets, or identifying new production efficiencies. The magnitude of the budget challenge is sizable; one report projected that members of the NATO alliance might need to raise their defense spending to 4 percent of GDP to meet NATO’s goals.⁸² If this were to occur, an estimated \$10 trillion will be needed through 2034.⁸³

In Europe, spending is constrained because of a combination of low economic growth, which limits tax revenues, and high social spending needs, which crowd out other budget items. One study found that over the post–Cold War period, real social spending grew by 2.4 times compared with 1.9 times for GDP.⁸⁴ However, there is evidence that Europe can increase defense spending: government revenues have consistently risen (although so have government expenditures), and ensuring future increases are balanced between defense and other programs could provide at least part of the boost needed to improve European DIBs.⁸⁵

U.S. spending is less constrained because of the U.S. government’s willingness to borrow, but U.S. debt is approaching what may be dangerously high levels. Federal debt held by the public is expected to hit 99 percent of GDP in 2024, tying 2020 as the highest level since 1946, when it was 106 percent

⁷⁷ NATO, 2024b.

⁷⁸ NATO, 2024b.

⁷⁹ NATO, 2024b.

⁸⁰ European Defense Agency, *Defence Data 2022: Key Findings and Analysis*, November 2023.

⁸¹ NATO, *NATO 2022 Strategic Concept*, adopted by Heads of State and Government at the NATO Summit in Madrid, June 29, 2022, p. 4.

⁸² Enda Curran, Natalia Drozdiak, and Bhargavi Sakthivel, “The US and Its Allies Face a \$10 Trillion Reckoning in the Race to Rearm,” *Bloomberg*, April 9, 2024.

⁸³ Curran, Drozdiak, and Sakthivel, 2024.

⁸⁴ Florian Dorn, Niklas Potrafke, and Marcel Schlepper, “European Defence Spending in 2024 and Beyond: How to Provide Security in an Economically Challenged Environment,” *Economic Policy*, Vol. 8, No. 45, January 2024.

⁸⁵ Dorn, Potrafke, and Schlepper, 2024.

from World War II spending; at the current trajectory, it is expected to hit 166 percent in 2054.⁸⁶ A combination of program cuts elsewhere or reduced increases in other programs, increases in taxes, or increased revenues from economic growth would likely be needed to support DIB improvement without increasing debt. U.S. budgeting faces a separate challenge, specifically that the date the budget is approved is highly uncertain, with continuing resolutions substituting for approved budgets. This budget uncertainty has affected defense industrial firms' ability to recruit and maintain a competitive workforce, an important element of improving the DIB, as well as their ability to make capital investments in production lines.

DIB Growth Could Create New Coordination Challenges

If both the United States and Europe make substantial progress on responding to their DIB challenges, they will face the positive challenge of how to coordinate their investments to maximize efficiency, meet NATO and national procurement objectives, and promote interoperability. U.S. and European investments could be duplicative if leaders do not opt to prioritize different capabilities or coordinate production requirements. In the words of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff's publication on multinational operations:

International rationalization, standardization, and interoperability (RSI) with PN[s] [partner nations] is important for achieving practical cooperation; efficient use of research, development, procurement, support, and production resources; and effective multinational capability without sacrificing US capabilities.⁸⁷

However, that last phrase—"without sacrificing US capabilities"—also shows the quandary of DIB cooperation. The United States is loath to give up anything that would sacrifice U.S. capabilities, and no doubt partner nations would want to produce the materiel they need for their individual or multinational missions that might not involve the United States. Furthermore, there is value to duplication. In the first place, multiple producers can more rapidly increase production than can a single producer in a contingency, making supplies more robust. Furthermore, multiple producers might lead to greater innovation because these producers compete to improve their products and operate more efficiently. For the transatlantic DIB, there is no simple answer to this other than ongoing coordination between the defense authorities of the United States, the United Kingdom, the EU, and the EU's member countries.

The 2024 posture statement of the dual-hatted NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe and commander of the U.S. European Command suggests that the United States and its European allies are coordinated on this issue.⁸⁸ GEN Christopher G. Cavoli noted that, with the approval of three NATO regional plans at the NATO Vilnius summit in July 2023, the first such plans in more than 30 years, NATO now has a "comprehensive blueprint for modernizing its system of collective

⁸⁶ Congressional Budget Office, *The Long-Term Budget Outlook: 2024 to 2054*, 59711, March 2024.

⁸⁷ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Multinational Operations*, Joint Publication 3-16, March 1, 2019, validated on February 12, 2021, p. I-8.

⁸⁸ Christopher G. Cavoli, "Statement of General Christopher G. Cavoli, United States Army, United States European Command," United States House Armed Services Committee, April 10, 2024.

defense.”⁸⁹ Specifically related to the DIB, the plans provide a driver for NATO members’ defense planning and procurement. In addition, the plans bind the force to specific tasks and therefore help guide NATO investments.⁹⁰ This in no way guarantees DIB improvement success, but it does create milestones against which efforts can be judged objectively.

A related issue for U.S. defense planners is what to do if the United States succeeds at its efforts to improve the U.S. DIB, but its European allies and partners fall short. This would have one of three consequences for the U.S. armed forces. First, it might require the United States to increase its DIB investments beyond what is now planned if responding to a contingency in Europe remained in the national interest. Second, it might put U.S. forces in a riskier position in any response to such a contingency. And third, it could erode U.S. public and political support for the defense of Europe.

DIB Requirements Are Evolving with the Changing Nature of War

Russia’s full-scale war on Ukraine has demonstrated the value that new and emerging technologies can play on the battlefield. The war has featured large masses of low-cost uncrewed systems and autonomous systems. Space-based communications systems have also enabled Ukrainian forces to access the internet in an otherwise sparse communications environment.⁹¹ Both Ukrainian and Russian forces have not only introduced new technologies to the battlefield, but they have also begun to modify them to suit changing battlefield conditions.

As requirements for warfighting have shifted and evolved throughout the war, so have requirements for U.S. and European DIBs.⁹² To be able to develop and deliver useful warfighting technologies, traditional DIB firms need to maintain a strong understanding of evolving warfighting requirements. Additionally, nontraditional DIB firms could increasingly provide value to militaries looking to incorporate commercial technologies into their warfighting plans.

Implications for the Laws of War

The intensity and brutality of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine have challenged the international legal system developed in the years after 1945 to restrain and regulate warfare to make it less deadly for civilians. In this section, we highlight two key developments that have the greatest potential to have far-reaching effects beyond the present war.

⁸⁹ Cavoli, 2024, p. 11.

⁹⁰ Cavoli, 2024.

⁹¹ Hvizda et al., 2025.

⁹² Heidi Shyu, “Statement by the Honorable Heidi Shyu, Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering Before the United States House of Representatives Armed Services Committee on Outpacing China: Expediting Innovation to the Warfighter,” press release, February 14, 2024; Kathleen H. Hicks and Christopher W. Grady, “Deputy Secretary of Defense Kathleen H. Hicks and Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Christopher W. Grady Opening Remarks on the Department of Defense F.Y. 2025 Budget Request,” transcript, March 11, 2024.

The Scale and Nature of Russia's Violations of the Laws of War in Ukraine Constitute a Broader Challenge to International Law

Virtually all conflicts involve some degree of violation of the laws of war.⁹³ However, particularly egregious Russian violations have been observed since the start of the war in Ukraine.⁹⁴ Rather than the product of carelessness or poor discipline, Russia's violations appear to reflect an intentional decision to target Ukraine's civilian population, a violation of the most fundamental principle of the laws of war: the principle of distinction between civilian and military targets.⁹⁵ Therefore, and particularly given the prominence of Russia's actions, they represent a challenge to the strength and influence of the laws of war on state decisionmaking more generally. Should the Russian leaders who designed and executed this approach to the war evade punishment or accountability for their actions in the aftermath of the war, it would likely have deleterious effects on the willingness of other states, particularly in non-democracies, to adhere to these restraints in future conflicts.⁹⁶ How the international community responds to Russia's behavior both during and after the war will be important to monitor.

To date, there are mixed signs of international willingness to force Russia to pay a price for its conduct. Russia's flagrant, persistent, and widespread violations of the principle of discrimination appear to have been an important factor in driving and sustaining European opposition to its full-scale invasion, as well as European capitals' decisions to provide support to Ukraine and to Ukrainian citizens.⁹⁷ There have also been efforts at individual accountability for Russian leadership. In June 2024, the International Criminal Court (ICC) indicted Russian Defense Minister Shoigu and General Gerasimov for their role in orchestrating the 2022 campaign against Ukraine's civilian infrastructure.⁹⁸ In 2023, Vladimir Putin became almost certainly the most powerful person to ever be indicted for war crimes by the International Criminal Court, for his role in the systematic abduction of children from Ukraine.⁹⁹ Absent a dramatic change in Russian leadership and policy, the odds that any of the three will see the inside of a jail cell in the Hague are low, however.

ICC member states' have responded inconsistently to the indictments, which have the potential to restrict leaders' ability to travel internationally and impose diplomatic costs on states considering

⁹³ For a general discussion of the frequency and patterns of these violations, see James D. Morrow, "When Do States Follow the Laws of War?" *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 101, No. 3, 2007; James D. Morrow, "The Laws of War, Common Conjectures, and Legal Systems in International Politics," *Journal of Legal Studies*, Vol. 31, No. S1, 2002.

⁹⁴ UN General Assembly, "Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine," United Nations Human Rights Council, A/HRC/55/66, March 18, 2024.

⁹⁵ Fredrik Weslau, "There Must Be a Reckoning for Russian War Crimes," *Foreign Policy*, February 20, 2024; Bryan Frederick and David E. Johnson, *The Continued Evolution of U.S. Law of Armed Conflict Implementation: Implications for the U.S. Military*, RAND Corporation, RR-1122-OSD, 2015.

⁹⁶ Morrow, 2007.

⁹⁷ Giselle Bosse, "Values, Rights, and Changing Interests: The EU's response to the War Against Ukraine and the Responsibility to Protect Europeans," *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 43, No. 3, 2022; "Calls for Special Tribunal for Russia's 'War Crimes' in Ukraine," *Al Jazeera*, January 17, 2023.

⁹⁸ Anatoly Kurmanaev and Marc Santora, "I.C.C. Issues Arrest Warrants for 2 Senior Russian Security Officials," *New York Times*, June 25, 2024.

⁹⁹ International Criminal Court, "Situation in Ukraine: ICC Judges Issue Arrest Warrants Against Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin and Maria Alekseyevna Lvova-Belova," March 17, 2023.

hosting them. The ICC indictments appear to have played a role in Putin's cancellation of a 2023 trip to South Africa, shortly after the South African High Court ordered his arrest if he attended the Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) summit in Pretoria.¹⁰⁰ Yet others have questioned their obligations under the Rome Treaty. In 2023, for instance, Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva initially announced there was "no way" Putin would be arrested if he traveled to the country for a G20 summit, comments he later walked back under pressure.¹⁰¹ More recently, Putin visited Mongolia in September 2024; as an ICC member state, Mongolia is legally bound to arrest him.¹⁰² In public statements, Mongolian officials admitted that they were not in a position to arrest Putin because Mongolia is dependent on Russia for its energy supplies.¹⁰³ Should such visits become normalized elsewhere, the precedent would undermine the perception that Putin's violations of international law have met with any real punishment, likely eroding the credibility of efforts to enforce ICC arrest warrants in the future.

These disparate reactions exemplify a broader pattern of ambivalence outside the West toward punishing Russia either for its aggression against Ukraine or its conduct of the war.¹⁰⁴ Amid reports of Russian atrocities in Bucha, 21 countries—including Brazil, India, and South Africa—joined Russia, Belarus, and China in voting against a UN General Assembly resolution to suspend Russia from the UN Human Rights Council.¹⁰⁵ Should Putin be largely rehabilitated outside the West after the war, this has the potential to weaken the ICC and the international legal regime more generally.

Russia's Consideration of Nuclear Use Inside Ukraine Has Weakened the Nuclear Taboo

In the years after the U.S. use of nuclear weapons against Japan in the waning days of the second World War, a so-called nuclear taboo developed that made the use of these weapons in warfare, even when states were suffering substantial losses, an option that was no longer seriously considered.¹⁰⁶ Over the course of the Cold War, this norm against nuclear use appeared to strengthen, as both the United States and the Soviet Union lost costly conflicts in Vietnam and Afghanistan without nuclear use being seriously considered.¹⁰⁷ However, repeated Russian threats and actions in Ukraine indicate

¹⁰⁰ David McKenzie, Catherine Nicholls, and Sana Noor Haq, "Putin Will Not Attend BRICS Summit in South Africa, as ICC Arrest Warrant Overshadows Key Talks," CNN, July 20, 2023.

¹⁰¹ Nidhi Verma, "Lula Rows Back from Comments that Brazil Would Not Arrest Putin," Reuters, September 11, 2023.

¹⁰² Eve Sampson, "Putin Plans First Visit to I.C.C. Member State Since Arrest Warrant," *New York Times*, August 30, 2024.

¹⁰³ Dragan Stavljanin, "Explainer: Putin's Mongolia Visit Shows Limits of International Criminal Court," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, September 5, 2024.

¹⁰⁴ Chris Alden, "The Global South and Russia's Invasion of Ukraine," *London Stock Exchange Public Policy Review*, Vol. 3, No. 1, September 8, 2023.

¹⁰⁵ UN, UN General Assembly Votes to Suspend Russia from the Human Rights Council," press release, April 7, 2022.

¹⁰⁶ Peter Gizewski, "From Winning Weapon to Destroyer of Worlds: The Nuclear Taboo in International Politics," *International Journal*, Vol. 51, No. 3, 1996; Nina Tannenwald, "The Nuclear Taboo: The United States and the Normative Basis of Nuclear Non-Use," *International Organization*, Vol. 53, No. 3, 1999.

¹⁰⁷ Nina Tannenwald, "Nuclear Weapons and the Vietnam War," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 4, 2006.

that, at least inside the Kremlin, this nuclear taboo has been substantially weakened.¹⁰⁸ Particularly in fall 2022, as Russia was suffering its most pronounced reversals on the ground to date, other key states came to believe that Russia was considering nuclear use to stem its losses, apparently leading to widespread international pressure—including most notably from China—not to do so.¹⁰⁹ Whatever the factors that ultimately led Russia not to use nuclear weapons at that time, the fact that this possibility appears to have been seriously debated inside the Kremlin in a conflict that at the time involved no attack on Russian territory and no plausible military threat to Russian leadership or command and control systems suggests that Russian leadership no longer considers nuclear weapons to be a fundamentally different type of weapon, unusable outside the most extreme circumstances. Serious consideration of nuclear use under the circumstances present in fall 2022 also contravenes Russian nuclear doctrine, although the Kremlin has indicated it is in the process of revising that doctrine given the events of the war in Ukraine.¹¹⁰ Should Russia ultimately use nuclear weapons in the war, this will present an even more serious challenge to the nuclear taboo, but even Russia's actions to date may have weakened the taboo and could prompt other states to more carefully consider the nuclear dimensions of any future conflict involving Moscow.

Conclusion

Our consideration of the warfighting, DIB, and Laws of War implications of the fighting in Ukraine has highlighted several key issues likely to bear on future high-intensity conflicts. Perhaps most notable is the increased difficulty of massing forces to conduct offensive operations given the combination of pervasive surveillance technologies, the proliferation of low-cost UASs, and continued technological and tactical improvements in precision targeting. Precisely how this dynamic will unfold in future conflicts will depend on their geography and the capabilities of each side, as discussed in detail in our separate report on this topic.¹¹¹ But at least under certain conditions, the barriers to conducting successful offensive operations may be greater, lengthening conflicts and increasing the resources required to sustain them. At the same time, gaps in allied DIBs revealed by the war in Ukraine highlight the scale of the task ahead of U.S. and European policymakers as they seek to better prepare themselves for prolonged major conflicts that may have more resource requirements than the shorter or less-intense interstate conflicts the United States has fought over the past several decades.

¹⁰⁸ Giles David Arceneaux, "Whether to Worry: Nuclear Weapons in the Russia-Ukraine War," *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 44, No. 4, 2023; Russia-Ukraine War; Anna Clara Arndt, Liviu Horovitz, and Michal Onderco, "Russia's Failed Nuclear Coercion Against Ukraine," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 46, No. 3, 2023; Bryan Frederick, Mark Cozad, and Alexandra Stark, *Escalation in the War in Ukraine: Lessons Learned and Risks for the Future*, RAND Corporation, RR-A2807-1, 2023.

¹⁰⁹ Jim Sciutto, "Exclusive: US Prepared 'Rigorously' for Potential Russian Nuclear Strike in Ukraine in Late 2022, Officials Say," CNN, March 9, 2024; Shannon Bugos, "G-20 Majority Condemns Russian Nuclear Threats," Arms Control Association, December 2022; Helene Cooper, Julian E. Barnes, and Eric Schmitt, "Russian Military Leaders Discussed Use of Nuclear Weapons, U.S. Officials Say," *New York Times*, November 2, 2022; Stuart Lau, "China's Xi Warns Putin Not to Use Nuclear Arms in Ukraine," *Politico*, November 4, 2022.

¹¹⁰ Mark Trevelyan, "Russia Says It Will Change Nuclear Doctrine Because of Western Role in Ukraine," Reuters, September 1, 2024.

¹¹¹ Hvizda et al., 2025.

Implications for the International System

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has already become one of the most consequential geopolitical events of the early 21st century. States have scrambled to respond to Russia's aggression and to the multiyear Western effort to oppose it by punishing Russia and supporting Ukraine. This chapter summarizes our research into the geopolitical changes wrought by the war in five areas: European reactions to the war, changes in Russian foreign policy and strategic outlook that are likely to be durable after the conflict, China's perceptions of and reactions to the conflict, Indian reactions, and the potential effects of the war on the broader international system and norms. Our research was completed by September 2024. The first three of these topics are summaries drawn from standalone reports published as additional volumes in this series, and the final two topics represent more-limited assessments conducted for this summary volume. As discussed in Chapter 1, we do not cover Ukrainian reactions or the effects of the conflict on Ukraine in detail to focus on the war's implications for the international system as a whole. However, no country has had its future policies and opportunities shift more dramatically as a result of the conflict than the country that was itself invaded. Once a country that was politically and economically torn between Russia and Europe, the invasion has solidified Kyiv's European alignment in any plausible future short of Russian victory and forcible regime change. Even within this Western orientation, the speed and nature of Ukraine's postwar reconstruction and its future domestic political developments remain important areas for future research.

European Reactions

The war in Ukraine has moved fundamental questions regarding European security and defense back to the fore. The fighting has compelled European leaders to consider the realities of modern interstate conflict and the tools available to both manage the current emergency and defend against future threats. In the two and half years since the war in Ukraine began, European nations, working collectively through such institutions as the EU and NATO and subregional coalitions have come together in opposition to Russia's invasion and defense of Ukraine's sovereignty. It remains to be seen, however, whether the war in Ukraine will drive broader changes in European understandings of the threats to their collective interests and what will be required to ensure their collective defense.

To assess whether the conflict is likely to drive long-lasting changes in European security priorities, investments, and relations, we examined the conflict's effect on European attitudes toward relations with Russia; European collective security strategies, institutions, and resources; and

prospects for increased integration with Ukraine. In the following sections, we summarize four main implications, building on the detailed analyses in the standalone volume devoted to this topic.¹¹²

The European Shift Away from Engagement with Russia Is Likely Irreversible

The scale and significance of the change in European attitudes toward Russia since 2022 is best understood in comparison with Europe's response to Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 and subsequent involvement in Donbas. Between 2014 and 2022, European attitudes and policies toward Russia varied significantly and by region, leading the EU and NATO to adopt ambiguous policies intended to accommodate member states' differing preferences and preserve the flexibility to tilt toward greater engagement or confrontation as desired.¹¹³ Despite continued concerns over Russian policies toward Crimea and Donbas, European countries generally preferred to continue engagement and cooperation, as reflected in the gradual recovery of trade and public attitudes over time.¹¹⁴

This trend likely would have continued had Russia not launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, a decision that tilted the balance in Europe toward a path of confrontation rather than engagement. Since 2022, the majority of European countries have united behind a new assessment of Russia not as a "strategic challenge," as the EU characterized the country in 2016, but as a "long-term and direct threat for European security," as the new EU *Strategic Compass* approved just a few weeks after the invasion states.¹¹⁵ In contrast to its response to previous crises, EU documents recognized the return of large-scale war to Europe as a "tectonic shift in European history."¹¹⁶ In a new strategic concept approved that summer, NATO member countries similarly designated Russia as "the most significant and direct threat to Allies' security and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area."¹¹⁷ The Washington summit declaration further added that the "all-domain threat Russia poses to NATO will persist into the long term."¹¹⁸

¹¹² Alexandra T. Evans, Krystyna Marcinek, and Omar Danaf, *Will Europe Rebuild or Divide? The Strategic Implications of the Russia-Ukraine War for Europe's Future*, RAND Corporation, RR-A3141-5, 2025.

¹¹³ See, for example, European Parliament, "Special Eurobarometer EB041EP: EP Spring 2022 Survey: Rallying Around the European Flag | Democracy as Anchor Point in Times of Crisis," Eurobarometer 97.3 dataset, June 22, 2022; and European Parliament, "Special Eurobarometer EB045EP: EP Spring 2024 Survey: Use Your Vote—Countdown to the European Elections," Eurobarometer 101.1 dataset, April 17, 2024.

¹¹⁴ Authors' analysis based on Pew Research Center, "Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project 2023 Spring Survey Topline Results," March 22, 2024; United Nations, UN Comtrade Database, undated.

¹¹⁵ Council of the EU, *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe*, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2016, p. 33; Council of the EU, *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defense: For a European Union that Protects Its Citizens, Values and Interests and Contributes to International Peace and Security*, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, March 2022b.

¹¹⁶ Council of the EU, 2022b, p. 14.

¹¹⁷ NATO, 2022, p. 4.

¹¹⁸ NATO, "Washington Summit Declaration," press release, July 10, 2024c.

The significance of this change is apparent in the duration and scale of its trade restrictions and the depth of its reductions in Russian energy use.¹¹⁹ As of July 2024, the EU had adopted 14 major sanction packages and several smaller packages to address disinformation and sanctions evasion. In contrast to the years following Russia's annexation of Crimea, during which the EU periodically updated its list of sanctioned individuals and entities but generally deferred from implementing new packages, the EU has continuously added new restrictive measures over more than two and a half years of fighting. Over 1,700 individuals and 500 entities have been listed for EU sanctions, travel bans, asset freezes, and unavailability of funds measures related to the war in Ukraine.¹²⁰ EU trade restrictions now encompass 60 percent of prewar trade.¹²¹ Real trade with Russia has fallen from \$279 billion in 2021 to \$89 billion in 2023, less than 2 percent of the EU's total foreign trade.¹²²

The EU has led its members in a push to reduce their reliance on Russian fossil fuels. In addition to the restrictions described previously, the EU's REPowerEU plan, adopted in March 2022, aims to accelerate the clean transition and diversify European energy sources.¹²³ The EU has paired changes in existing laws and policies with expanded cooperation with alternate energy suppliers.¹²⁴ Individual countries have also sought to decrease their reliance on Russian fossil fuels including one of the region's greatest prewar consumers of Russian natural gas, Germany, which canceled the Nord Stream 2 project and has invested in liquid natural gas terminals.¹²⁵

By and large, even countries with greater sympathies for Russia have not organized to challenge the EU's approach. In part, this may be because their populations are relatively small and less influential. Although 40 percent of Bulgarians reported in 2023 that they viewed Russia more as an ally or partner than a rival or adversary—the highest share of favorable views in Europe—Bulgaria holds only 17 seats in the 720-seat European Parliament.¹²⁶ Another constraining factor is that many of the countries with more positive views toward Russia, such as Bulgaria and Greece, receive substantial EU funds and may perceive little incentive to go to political war with Brussels over this

¹¹⁹ European Commission, "Achievements of the Von Der Leyen Commission. Solidarity with Ukraine," factsheet, July 2024b.

¹²⁰ European Commission, 2024b.

¹²¹ European Commission, 2024b.

¹²² Authors' analysis based on UN, "UN Comtrade Database," undated.

¹²³ European Commission, "Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of the Regions: REPowerEU Plan," May 18, 2022a.

¹²⁴ See, for example, European Commission, "EU and Azerbaijan Enhance Bilateral Relations, Including Energy Cooperation," press release, July 18, 2022b; Council of the EU, "Directive (EU) 2023/2413 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 October 2023 amending Directive (EU) 2018/2001, Regulation (EU) 2018/1999 and Directive 98/70/EC as regards the promotion of energy from renewable sources, and repealing Council Directive (EU) 2015/652," October 18, 2023; European Commission, "EU Energy Platform: Commission Launches First Call for Companies to Jointly Buy Gas," press release, April 25, 2023a.

¹²⁵ For the overview of liquid natural gas (LNG) investments, see Michał Kędzierski, "At All Costs. Germany Shifts to LNG," Center for Eastern Studies, April 28, 2023.

¹²⁶ Jana Puglierin and Paweł Zerka, "Keeping America Close, Russia Down, and China Far Away: How Europeans Navigate a Competitive World," European Council on Foreign Relations, June 2023.

issue.¹²⁷ In other countries, such as Italy where pro-Russian sentiments are stronger, political leaders have also bucked popular pressure and demonstrated new support for the EU.¹²⁸

Hungary and Slovakia, which have spoken out against the EU's adoption of restrictive measures against Russia, present exceptions to this trend. Even so, most European countries have collaborated to surmount their opposition and sustain a unified confrontational approach. For instance, while Hungary, working with Slovakia, has blocked billions of euros in partial reimbursements to EU member states for military aid sent to Ukraine, it has not succeeded in reducing the flow of weapons; to the contrary, in June 2024, EU foreign ministers completed a deal to bypass Hungary by channeling funds from €210 billion of the Russian Central Bank's paralyzed assets.¹²⁹

The duration of European restrictions, including ongoing efforts to expand and tighten sanctions and progress toward developing alternatives to Russian energy, suggest a return to prewar levels of engagement is unlikely without significant change in Russian behavior. Even such countries as Hungary, Cyprus, Greece, Bulgaria, and Italy, which historically have harbored more favorable views toward Russia, have not organized to restore severed economic and political linkages and have instead submitted to pressure from the European mainstream.¹³⁰ This trend is likely to continue so long as EU countries' political and economic interests lie predominantly in the EU: Even before 2022, most of their foreign trade took place within the EU (above 60 percent, in most cases), whereas the exchange with Russia was counted in low single digits.¹³¹ Although such countries as Hungary may continue to use their bilateral relations with Moscow as leverage in negotiations with Brussels, the European majority has demonstrated a consistent ability and resolve to suppress challenges and maintain their new, more confrontational approach. Although intra-European disputes may increase the political—and, for the EU, budgetary—costs of maintaining or expanding restrictive measures, a wholesale EU or cross-European normalization of relations is unlikely in the middle term.

¹²⁷ More than 60 percent of Bulgaria's foreign exchange occurs within the EU (compared with less than 4 percent with Russia), and it receives 3.4 times more in EU funds than it contributes to the EU budget (European Commission, "EU Spending and Revenue: Data 2000–2022," database, last updated July 31, 2023b; Eurostat, "Intra and Extra-EU Trade by Member State and by Product Group," database, last updated July 16, 2024a).

¹²⁸ Teresa Coratella, "Italy's Challenging Divorce from Russia," European Council on Foreign Affairs, March 9, 2022.

¹²⁹ Jorge Liboreiro, "EU Bypasses Hungary to Send €1.4 Billion in Military and Industrial Aid to Ukraine, Borrell Says," *EuroNews*, June 25, 2024; Nicolas Camut, Hans Von Der Burchard, and Clea Caulcutt, "Orbán's Walkout Was Planned, Macron Says," *Politico*, December 15, 2023.

¹³⁰ Kadri Liik, "The Old Is Dying and the New Cannot Be Born: A Power Audit of EU–Russia Relations," European Council on Foreign Relations, December 2022.

¹³¹ In 2021, foreign trade with Russia exceeded 5 percent of its total foreign trade only for the Baltic States and Finland, which are Russia's neighbors (authors' analysis of Eurostat, "EU Trade Since 1999 by SITC," dataset ds-018995, last updated August 16, 2024b).

Europeans Have Recognized the Need to Improve Their Ability to Act with Reduced U.S. Support, but Given the Scale of Existing Production and Capability, Gaps Are Likely to Still Depend on a U.S. Security Role in the Middle Term

Since 2022, European countries have demonstrated new resolve to rebuild European defenses and cooperate in strengthening collective defense capabilities and institutions. Confronted with the realities of a large-scale, high-intensity conflict in the region, European leaders have committed new attention and resources to bolstering national defenses, enhancing coordination on defense production and procurement, and improving the capacity of existing multinational organizations to manage collective security needs. This shift is exemplified in the surge in defense spending since the start of the war. Within a month of Russia's invasion, seven European countries unveiled plans to increase defense spending; the majority of European countries followed suit by year's end.¹³² Although countries' commitments varied in terms of spending targets and timelines for implementation, data collected by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute shows that regional defense and security outlays have increased by 16 percent from 2022 and 2023, driving the continent's spending to the highest levels observed since the end of the Cold War.¹³³

The shift in European defense spending has been accompanied by a new sense of urgency to improve Europe's ability to act alone by promoting greater cooperation and integration on defense and security. At the Versailles summit in March 2022, European leaders declared their intent to collectively rearm; reduce European defense, energy, and other resource dependencies; and increase the bloc's ability to act autonomously.¹³⁴ To realize this ambition, the EU has adopted a more assertive stance in leveraging existing regulatory and budgetary powers to support defense objectives. This shift is exemplified in the EU's reversal of its "everything-but-arms" policy, its adaption of the European Peace Facility, an off-budget instrument for financing offshore military activities and assistance to EU partners originally designed to support peace operations, and its creation of the EU Military Assistance Mission Ukraine, the EU's first-ever program to provide military training for territorial defense that was built using frameworks developed for counterterrorism training missions in African countries.¹³⁵ Likewise, the EU has taken a more active stance toward directing European defense research, development, production, and procurement (discussed in the following sections).

At the same time, the war has heightened European awareness of the importance of the United States and the transatlantic alliance and raised new skepticism of the prospect that Europe can, in the

¹³² Of the 27 EU member states, a total of 20 increased their defense expenditures in 2022—six of those states by more than 10 percent (European Defense Agency, 2023). For early changes, see Cristina McKenzie, "Seven European Nations Have Increased Defense Budgets in One Month. Who Will Be Next?" *Breaking Defense*, March 22, 2022.

¹³³ Tamsin Paternoster, "Military Spending in Western and Central Europe Higher than End of Cold War, Data Shows," *EuroNews*, April 22, 2024.

¹³⁴ Council of the EU, "Informal Meeting of the Heads of State or Government: Versailles Declaration," March 10–11, 2022c.

¹³⁵ Daniel Fiott, "In Every Crisis an Opportunity? European Union Integration in Defence and the War in Ukraine," *Journal of European Integration*, Vol. 45, No. 3, 2023; Council of the EU, "Council Decision CFSP 2022/338 of 28 February 2022 on an Assistance Measure Under the European Peace Facility for the Supply to the Ukrainian Armed Forces of Military Equipment and Platforms, Designed to Deliver Lethal Force," February 28, 2022a; Elisabeth Johansson-Nogués and Francesca Leso, "Geopolitical EU? The EU's Wartime Assistance to Ukraine," *Journal of Common Market Studies*, April 17, 2024.

near term, build sufficient capability to defend its territory and citizens without U.S. support. Europeans have reached for EU tools to collectively tackle production and procurement challenges, but the war has also demonstrated that the EU is unready to mount a strong military response when external threats arise and is dependent on NATO and members' national capabilities to provide for the protection of its citizens.¹³⁶ European difficulties in equipping Ukrainian armed forces while rebuilding their own stockpiles have also underlined the depth of existing shortfalls, raising doubts about whether even the historic increase in defense spending since 2022 will deliver greater operational autonomy. The result has been a general awareness that even the largest and most capable European militaries likely will continue to struggle to respond to external challenges without significant U.S. assistance.

This constraint is apparent in outstanding questions about European armed forces' ability to recruit sufficient personnel and whether the intra-European priority should be speed or capacity-building.¹³⁷ The EU's emphasis on building and buying European-origin systems requires member states to spend their funds on long-term capacity improvements rather than acquiring foreign-origin (often U.S.) systems that are either already available or are likely to be delivered more quickly. One study suggested that the war in Ukraine has increased member states' reliance on non-EU suppliers that either can provide off-the-shelf solutions or are perceived as faster and more predictable than European producers.¹³⁸ Between February 2022 and June 2023, more than three-quarters of EU member state acquisitions were purchased outside the EU; U.S. equipment represented 63 percent of purchases.¹³⁹ Such countries as Poland, Czechia, and the Baltic states have sought exemptions to allow greater foreign procurement, stressing the importance of building capability quickly over developing long-term continental production capacity.¹⁴⁰ Some EU member countries have also expressed concern that a shift toward European production could harm relations with the United States or weaken the cohesiveness of the transatlantic alliance.¹⁴¹ Indeed, Washington has raised concerns about perceived EU defense protectionism and calls on Brussels to ensure EU efforts are "complementary to and interoperable with NATO."¹⁴²

¹³⁶ Jolyon Howorth, "The EU's Chair Was Missing at the Ukraine Table," *European View*, Vol. 21, No. 1, 2022; Mitchell A. Orenstein, "The European Union's Transformation After Russia's Attack on Ukraine," *Journal of European Integration*, Vol. 45, No. 3, 2023.

¹³⁷ Sophia Besch, "EU Defense and the War in Ukraine," Carnegie Europe, December 21, 2022; Sam Jones and John Paul Rathbone, "Wanted: New Soldiers for Europe's Shrinking Armies," *Financial Times*, June 26, 2024.

¹³⁸ Jonata Anicetti, "EU Arms Collaboration, Procurement, and Offsets: The Impact of the War in Ukraine," *Policy Studies*, Vol. 45, Nos. 3–4, 2024.

¹³⁹ Besch, 2024.

¹⁴⁰ Anicetti, 2024, p. 444.

¹⁴¹ See, for example, "Poland's Foreign-Policy Priorities in the East and in the EU," *Strategic Comments*, Vol. 29, No. 3, 2023.

¹⁴² White House, "U.S.-EU Summit Joint Statement," press release, October 20, 2023. These conditions echo similar concerns raised following the creation of PESCO. See Alexandra Brzozowski, "Question Marks over Third Country Participation in EU Military Projects," *Euroactiv*, November 8, 2019.

The War Has Energized Europeans Allies to Improve Their Operational Flexibility, but Any Movement Toward Strategic Autonomy from the United States Is Likely to Be Limited

Europe's awakening to the Russian threat has created an opportunity for the EU to assert greater influence over European defense and security policy. Within weeks of the Russian invasion, the Council of the EU adopted the *Strategic Compass for Security and Defence*, a joint strategy to strengthen the bloc's defense and security policy that had been under negotiation since 2019.¹⁴³ Quickly rewritten to account for the conflict, the final Strategic Compass omits earlier suggestions for selective engagement with Russia and instead echoes the 2022 Versailles Declaration in noting that a "more hostile security environment requires us to make a quantum leap forward and increase our capacity and willingness to act, strengthen our resilience and ensure solidarity and mutual assistance."¹⁴⁴ Since 2022, the EU has also adopted a more assertive stance in leveraging existing regulatory and budgetary powers to support defense objectives.¹⁴⁵ Likewise, the EU has taken a more active stance toward directing European defense research, development, production, and procurement, including by releasing its first-ever defense industrial strategy and launching new initiatives to facilitate common procurement and incentivize member states to invest in long-term improvements in production capability, capacity, and resilience.¹⁴⁶

But although the EU has sought a greater security role, the substantial reforms that would enable Brussels to direct collective military action are unlikely in the middle term because of national differences and the immaturity of existing proposals. The war has encouraged Europeans to pursue greater cooperation within existing frameworks, but it has not galvanized new defense concepts or the creation of an alternative architecture for the defense of Europe. Instead, European, EU, and NATO leaders have taken steps to strengthen existing institutions by developing new capabilities, institutionalizing procedures and relationships built over the course of the war, and adapting existing funding and coordination mechanisms to support collective defense goals. Such novel organizations as the EU's European Union Military Assistance Mission Ukraine and the NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine represent creative adaptations of existing frameworks and largely operate within existing institutions.

Moreover, there has been a marked shift in discussions of European autonomy away from creating new European alternatives toward building "a more European NATO in Europe," as then-Finnish President Sauli Niinistö put it in a national address.¹⁴⁷ In adopting the Strategic Compass, the

¹⁴³ Council of the EU, 2022b.

¹⁴⁴ Nichole Koenig, "Putin's War and the Strategic Compass: A Quantum Leap for the EU's Security and Defence Policy?" Hertie School, Jacques Delors Centre, April 29, 2022, p. 2.

¹⁴⁵ Fiott, 2023; Johansson-Nogués and Leso, 2024.

¹⁴⁶ Besch, 2024; Sebastian Clapp, *European Defence Industry Reinforcement Through Common Procurement Act (EDIRPA)*, European Parliamentary Research Service, November 2023; EU Defense Industry and Space, "ASAP | Boosting Defence Production," webpage, undated.

¹⁴⁷ "New Year's Speech by President of the Republic of Finland Sauli Niinistö on 1 January 2024," press release, January 1, 2024; Klaus Welle and Alfredo Marini, "NATO and the EU Are Complementary, but the Union Must Have a Common Defence," Wilfried Martin Center for European Studies, November 22, 2023; European Union External Action Service, "Europe in the Interregnum: Our Geopolitical Awakening After Ukraine," March 24, 2023.

European Council sidestepped the debate over strategic autonomy by committing to both “reinforce” cooperation with NATO and “boost” partnerships with the United States and other like-minded nations while recognizing that “wider geopolitical trends call for the EU to shoulder a greater share of responsibility for its own security.”¹⁴⁸ Although the strategy aims to “make the EU a stronger and more capable security provider” and proposed the creation of a new EU Rapid Deployment Capability for rescue, evacuation, and the “initial phase of stabilization operations,” it does not provide clear guidance on when or how the EU could conduct military operations independently and does not provide additional guidance on implementing the EU’s mutual defense assistance clause.¹⁴⁹ EU statements and documents published since 2022 have similarly stressed the importance of developing complementary capabilities and policies with NATO, as well as continued cooperation with the United States.¹⁵⁰ Compared with its prewar rhetoric, even advocates of greater strategic autonomy, such as France, have moderated criticism of NATO and reframed EU security initiatives as complements rather than alternatives to the transatlantic alliance.¹⁵¹

European member support has enabled NATO to reassert its status as the continent’s preeminent security framework. Since 2022, allies have certified the combat readiness of eight forward-deployed battlegroups, strengthened existing air and sea missions, and begun to realize their commitment to exercise emerging capabilities by convening Steadfast Defender, the largest NATO military exercise since the end of the Cold War.¹⁵²

Ukraine’s Formal Integration into the EU or NATO Is Unlikely in the Near Term

The war in Ukraine has compelled European countries to reconsider the region’s boundaries and its relations with former Soviet republics, such as Ukraine, that have not been fully integrated into the political or security architecture. Whereas Ukrainian attitudes toward the EU and NATO have fluctuated since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia’s full-scale invasion has decisively shifted the country in a pro-European and pro-Western direction. Since 2022, Ukrainian leaders have sought to reaffirm Ukraine’s European identity and pushed for rapid accession into the EU and NATO.¹⁵³ At the same time, the conflict has dramatically underscored Russia’s opposition to Ukraine’s integration and elevated the stakes of any European decision.

¹⁴⁸ Council of the EU, 2022b, p. 4.

¹⁴⁹ Council of the EU, 2022b; Koenig, 2022, p. 5.

¹⁵⁰ See, for example Joint Declaration on EU-NATO Cooperation by the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission and the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, January 10, 2023.

¹⁵¹ See, for example, Emmanuel Macron, “Address to the Nation,” March 2, 2022; Maïa De La Baume and Pauline De Saint Remy, “War in Ukraine Is ‘Electroshock’ for NATO, Says Emmanuel Macron,” *Politico*, March 17, 2022; and Ministère de L’Europe et des Affaires Étrangères, “EU-NATO—France Welcomes the Strengthening of EU-NATO Ties (11 January 2023),” press release, January 11, 2023.

¹⁵² Sean Monaghan, Eskil Jakobsen, Sissy Martinez, Mathieu Droin, Greg Sanders, Nicholas Velazquez, Cynthia Cook, Anna Dowd, and Maeve Sockwell, *Is NATO Ready for War? An Assessment of Allies’ Efforts to Strengthen Defense and Deterrence Since the 2022 Madrid Summit*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 2024.

¹⁵³ See, for example, “Ukraine’s Zelenskiy Issues Fresh Plea for Patriots, EU Accession, NATO Entry,” Reuters, April 28, 2024.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine presented the European community with a choice among four potential paths: (1) abandon the prospect of Ukrainian integration, (2) maintain the current approach of engagement without formal integration into collective political and security apparatuses, (3) accelerate Ukraine's integration by building a path to membership within one or both of the region's primary organizations, the EU and NATO, or (4) push for rapid EU or NATO enlargement.

Notwithstanding the EU's decision to open accession negotiations with Ukraine, European rhetoric and policies since 2022 have hewed closer to the third option than the last. In response to Russia's invasion, Europeans have reevaluated the geopolitical implications of enlargement and provided Ukraine access to additional EU resources beyond those typically available to nonmember countries, as exemplified in the EU's relaxation of restrictions on the use of its cohesion policy funds and novel applications of the European Peace Facility, among other measures.¹⁵⁴ Yet despite growing defense cooperation, political, financial, and strategic factors likely will continue to disincentivize EU or NATO expansion to Ukraine. Within the EU, member countries do not agree about whether the bloc should revise or reprioritize its enlargement principles as would be required to fast track Ukrainian accession, and discussions regarding how to resolve outstanding procedural, legal, and budgetary questions are immature.¹⁵⁵ As the war drags on and the costs to Ukraine and donor countries mount, resolving the practical and budgetary realities of integrating may become more challenging.¹⁵⁶ Although the majority of European leaders have voiced support for the principle of Ukrainian membership, actualizing this pledge will require careful diplomacy and sustained political attention to preserve EU unity and identify solutions that bridge members' differing national interests.

The shift in attitudes toward Ukrainian membership in the EU contrasts with the status of debates over its NATO candidacy. The war has highlighted rather than resolved members' differing risk thresholds and escalation concerns.¹⁵⁷ Whether NATO chooses to move forward with membership likely will depend on the outcome of the conflict and the conditions of a postwar settlement. Historically, NATO has been hesitant to grant membership to states with active territorial disputes out of concern for embroiling the alliance immediately in a conflict. In the interim, European states and supranational organizations have used alternative mechanisms to demonstrate support and coordinate policy, even as they have shied from formal integration. For instance, NATO has increased its delivery of nonlethal aid to Ukraine; established a multiyear program to help rebuild the country's security and defense sectors and promote adoption of NATO standards; established a multiyear program to coordinate national training activities; and upgraded the NATO-Ukraine Commission into the NATO-Ukraine Council, in which Ukraine now sits as an equal participant.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴ Council of the EU, "EU Response to Russia's War of Aggression," webpage, last updated June 25, 2024.

¹⁵⁵ Virginie Malingre, "EU Enlargement: France and Germany Attempt to Control Discussion," *Le Monde*, September 19, 2023; Ilke Toygür and Max Bergmann, "The EU Isn't Ready for Ukraine to Join," *Foreign Policy*, July 17, 2023; Sophia Besch and Eric Ciaramella, "Ukraine's Accession Poses a Unique Conundrum for the EU," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 24, 2023.

¹⁵⁶ Howard J. Shatz, Gabrielle Tarini, Charles P. Ries, and James Dobbins, *Reconstructing Ukraine: Creating a Freer, More Prosperous, and Secure Future*, RAND Corporation, RR-A2200-1, 2023.

¹⁵⁷ See, for example, Seb Starcevic, "Kyiv's NATO Membership Would 'Guarantee WW3,' Slovak PM Says," *Politico*, July 11, 2024; President of the Republic of Poland, "Statement by the leaders of the Bucharest Nine," press release, June 6, 2023.

¹⁵⁸ NATO, "Statement of the NATO-Ukraine Council," press release, July 11, 2024d; NATO, "NATO-Ukraine Council," May 13, 2024a; NATO, 2024c.

NATO statements have underlined that the alliance is not changing its stance toward the conflict and will remain a nonparty to the conflict, although it will use the assistance framework to bring Ukrainian procurement in line with NATO best practices, continue to develop joint interoperability requirements, and advance progress toward eventual integration of Ukraine's defense and security forces with NATO's.¹⁵⁹

Russian Reactions

Russia's relations with key states have radically changed since Moscow launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Russia-EU relations went from wary engagement to mutual estrangement nearly overnight. Ties with the United States, including in arms control, the domain traditionally most resilient to exogenous shocks, have been reduced to a bare minimum. Meanwhile, Russia's trade relations with China have expanded significantly, as has Moscow's dependence on Beijing to sustain its war effort. On close examination, it becomes clear that the reactions to Russia's invasion by key states have driven a series of further responses by Moscow, but that Russia had initially not intended for its invasion to alter its relations with other great powers in this manner.

Europe's Reactions to the Invasion Ended a Transactional Relationship with Russia that Moscow Would Likely Have Been Willing to Continue

Russia's relations with the EU and its member states have gone through several phases since the Soviet collapse. After a hopeful period of political rapprochement in the 1990s, there was a drift in relations driven by the increasingly autocratic nature of Russia's political trajectory, as well as the EU's 2004 enlargement when several countries with historically strained relations with Moscow joined the Union and affected the bloc's overall approach.¹⁶⁰ The Russo-Georgian War in 2008 interrupted ties but only temporarily. The relationship became much more tense following Russia's first invasion of Ukraine in 2014, after which several sanctions were imposed.¹⁶¹ However, many ties were preserved through 2021. Russian and EU member state leaders met regularly. The Nord Stream 2 pipeline was set to come online.¹⁶² Both sides kept up people-to-people, educational, and cultural links.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 sparked a dramatic shift in European policy toward Russia. Since then, the EU imposed thirteen rounds of unprecedentedly severe sanctions, affecting the financial, oil, energy, transportation, media, and other sectors. The EU also imposed a large number of individual travel bans and asset freezes.¹⁶³ The EU also quickly froze the assets and reserves of the Central Bank of Russia held in European financial institutions, which was

¹⁵⁹ NATO, 2024c; NATO, 2024d.

¹⁶⁰ Samuel Charap and Timothy J. Colton, *Everyone Loses: The Ukraine Crisis and the Ruinous Contest for Post-Soviet Eurasia*, Routledge, 2018.

¹⁶¹ Ivan Gutterman and Wojtek Grojec, "A Timeline of All Russia-Related Sanctions," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, September 19, 2018.

¹⁶² Arvid Bell, "Nord Stream 2: A Lesson in 3-D Negotiation," Davis Center, August 11, 2021.

¹⁶³ Council of the EU, "EU Sanctions Against Russia Explained," webpage, undated.

the vast majority held globally within the emerging Russia sanctions coalition. Many political ties were also severed, direct flights were banned, visa issuance was reduced, and land borders were closed.

Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine began in February 2022, it has therefore been Europe driving changes in the Europe-Russia relationship, viewing the status quo ante as politically and strategically unsustainable or unwise. The main example of Moscow behaving proactively has been the uptick in its below-the-threshold-of-conflict aggressive behavior in Europe.¹⁶⁴ However, this is a quantitative change since 2022, not a qualitative one—and a move that seems largely targeted at undermining European support for Ukraine.

In its public rhetoric, Russia continues to express interest in reestablishing ties with Europe.¹⁶⁵ This is particularly visible in the economic domain: Russia meticulously frames all actions that could be interpreted as hostile (such as sanctions, bans on EU media outlets, or withdrawals from organizations) as responses it is forced to take.¹⁶⁶ Russian leaders respond positively to approaches from European politicians and welcome those willing to visit or meet elsewhere. However, the continuous barrage of reports of Russian military activities in Ukraine, including atrocities against civilians, has helped to sustain a widespread consensus across the EU against a return to business as usual. The EU therefore continues efforts to further reduce its energy dependence on Russia and implement unprecedented sanctions and restrictions. Russia appears to prefer that its actions in Ukraine be viewed separately from its relationship with the rest of Europe, but most European states have demonstrated that they disagree, and this has in turn forced Russia to confront a change in its relations with Europe that it likely hoped to avoid.

The exception that perhaps proves the rule is the relationship between Budapest and Moscow, which has changed relatively little since 2022.¹⁶⁷ Although the Kremlin has obvious reasons to cultivate Hungary's president Viktor Orbán as an ally within the EU, Russia's willingness to continue with the status quo ante bellum underscores the reactive nature of its policies. Instead of proactively cutting off ties, Moscow has been willing to accommodate Budapest's interest in sustaining the relationship, despite the latter's involvement in every EU and NATO decision since 2022.

Washington's Unwillingness to Compartmentalize Russia's Actions in Ukraine Has Eliminated Most Areas of Previous Engagement in U.S.-Russia Relations

U.S.-Russia relations went through several phases in the post-Cold War period, largely following the same ups and downs as Russia's ties with Europe.¹⁶⁸ However, given the geographic proximity of

¹⁶⁴ Julian E. Barnes, "Russia Steps Up a Covert Sabotage Campaign Aimed at Europe," *New York Times*, May 26, 2024; "Russia Is Ramping Up Sabotage Across Europe," *The Economist*, May 12, 2024.

¹⁶⁵ Office of the President of Russia, "Plenary Session of the St Petersburg International Economic Forum," June 13, 2024b; Office of the President of Russia, "Meeting with Foreign Ministry Senior Officials," June 18, 2024c.

¹⁶⁶ See, for example, "Rhetoric Heats Up Between Russia, West Over Ukraine Involvement," *Radio Free Europe*, May 6, 2024; and Office of the President of Russia, "Meeting with Heads of International News Agencies," June 4, 2024a.

¹⁶⁷ Alexander E. Gale, "Hungary, Russia, the West, and the Rest: Orbán's Hedging Strategy," *Global Policy*, December 5, 2023.

¹⁶⁸ Angela E. Stent, *The Limits of Partnership: U.S.-Russian Relations in the Twenty-First Century*, Princeton University Press, 2015.

the EU to Russia, the economic and humanitarian aspects of the relationship with Washington were never as developed.

The post-2021 period of U.S.-Russian relations has been the most strained in decades, although it did not initially appear that this would be the case. Following the initial Russian buildup along the border with Ukraine in spring 2021, Presidents Joseph Biden and Putin held a summit in June 2021, which appeared to defuse some of the tensions.¹⁶⁹ Washington sought a “stable and predictable” relationship with Moscow as it intensified its focus on the Indo-Pacific region.¹⁷⁰ Until the plans for the full-scale invasion became known later in the year, it appeared that Moscow was prepared to at least give this effort a chance.

The war, of course, changed nearly everything. As with the Russia-Europe relationship, Washington was the key initiator of the changes because it was unwilling to compartmentalize its relations with Moscow from Russia’s actions in Ukraine. Both in the run up to and in the weeks and months following the full-scale invasion in February 2022, the United States undertook a wide range of measures that attenuated the relationship dramatically. These included a wide range of sanctions, similar in scale and scope to those of the EU. Bilateral trade collapsed.¹⁷¹ The United States ended existing dialogues between the governments. However, Russia did continue cooperating on the discrete aspects of the relationship that the United States sought to preserve, including maintenance of the International Space Station and U.S. imports of Russian uranium for its nuclear power plants, which increased in 2023, although the passage of new U.S. legislation in May 2024 prohibiting the purchase of Russian enriched uranium without specific waivers likely will have a dampening effect.¹⁷²

The exception has been arms control implementation and dialogue. Indeed, that was the one channel that Washington sought to continue but Moscow actively dismantled. First, in late 2022, Russia denied U.S. attempts to conduct treaty-mandated nuclear weapons inspections in Russia, and then canceled a meeting of the Bilateral Consultative Commission, another New START mechanism.¹⁷³ In February 2023, Putin announced that Russia would be “suspending” implementation of the New START treaty.¹⁷⁴

Ties with China Became Closer, in Part Because of a Lack of Alternatives

Russia-China relations have steadily improved since the late 1980s. Particularly since the early 2000s, Moscow and Beijing have expanded their strategic cooperation in a range of spheres. This cooperation further intensified after Russia’s first invasion of Ukraine in 2014 and the subsequent downturn in Russian relations with the West. On the eve of the full-scale invasion, Russia and China

¹⁶⁹ White House, “U.S.-Russia Presidential Joint Statement on Strategic Stability,” June 16, 2021b.

¹⁷⁰ White House, “Readout of President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. Call with President Vladimir Putin of Russia,” April 13, 2021a.

¹⁷¹ Paul Sonne, Jeanne Whalen, and Cat Zakrzewski, “A New Iron Curtain Descends on Russia Amid Its Invasion of Ukraine,” *New York Times*, March 9, 2022.

¹⁷² U.S. Energy Information Administration U.S. Energy Information Administration, *2023 Uranium Marketing Annual Report*, June 2024; Max Bearak, “U.S. to Stop Buying Russian Uranium, Cutting Cash to Moscow,” *New York Times*, May 14, 2024.

¹⁷³ U.S. Department of State, “U.S. Countermeasures in Response to Russia’s Violations of the New START Treaty,” June 1, 2023.

¹⁷⁴ Office of the President of Russia, “Presidential Address to Federal Assembly,” February 21, 2023.

declared a “no-limits partnership.”¹⁷⁵ However, there were some remaining limitations in the relationship. Despite a highly institutionalized and politically sanctioned interaction, there have been certain frictions on issues, such as Russia’s energy exports and China’s activities in Central Asia.¹⁷⁶

After Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Russia’s trade with China increased significantly. Imports from China help Russia sustain the living standards of the population, shielding it from the effects of the war. Furthermore, Russia’s trade with China is crucial for sustaining its war effort in Ukraine. China’s increased oil purchases continue to provide much-needed financial resources. China is a key provider of microelectronics, machine tools, and other dual-use technology, enabling Russia to continue to produce weapons and ammunition.¹⁷⁷ Although the economic and material side of the relationship has intensified since the beginning of the war, this largely suggests an evolution, not a revolution, in the relationship. The strategic dependence and anti-Western worldview that is an important aspect of the relationship on both sides predated the 2022 invasion. Certain tensions in bilateral relations also remain, perhaps most notably on energy exports, as seen in Moscow’s inability to secure an agreement to build the Power of Siberia 2 pipeline.¹⁷⁸

Since 2022, however, Western policy decisions to punish Russia for its attack on Ukraine have been the key driver of the changes in Russia-China relations. Once Western markets were closed, Russia had little choice but to turn to China, which, for its part, wished to avoid the potential collapse of its partner. In Moscow, accepting substantially greater reliance on trade with China has largely been a function of necessity. And more broadly, Russia’s decline in relative power since 2022 has driven it to become needier, seeking more from China than the latter is willing to give. Russia likely would have preferred a more balanced set of economic relationships if it had the opportunity.

Western States’ Policy Responses to the War Were the Key Factor in Determining Russia’s Strategic Orientation

Our research underscored the centrality of the international-systemic effects of Russia’s invasion in shaping Moscow’s strategic options and choices since the war began. A coalition of largely Western states, led by the United States and the EU, fundamentally altered their foreign policy toward Moscow in response to the latter’s aggression in Ukraine. This shift established the constraints within which Russia would subsequently have to operate.

Before the war, Russia-West relations were tense, but areas of shared interest were compartmentalized from other areas of intensive competition.¹⁷⁹ This was not the partnership that some on both sides had hoped would materialize after the end of the Cold War, but, nonetheless, certain aspects of interaction continued and even flourished. For example, before the war, several Western European energy firms had plans to expand natural gas imports from Russia, including

¹⁷⁵ Office of the President of Russia, “Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of China on the International Relations Entering a New Era and the Global Sustainable Development,” September 12, 2024d.

¹⁷⁶ Brian Hart, “What Are the Weaknesses of the China-Russia Relationship?” ChinaPower Project, June 29, 2022.

¹⁷⁷ “Russia Semiconductor Imports Dashboard: Pre- and Post-Invasion Trends,” Silverado Policy Accelerator, July 8, 2024.

¹⁷⁸ “Russia-China Gas Pipeline Deal Stalls over Beijing’s Price Demands,” *Financial Times*, June 2, 2024.

¹⁷⁹ Stent, 2015.

through the newly constructed Nord Stream 2 pipeline.¹⁸⁰ The Biden administration lifted sanctions on that project in May 2021 as part of an effort to improve ties with Germany.¹⁸¹

After February 24, 2022, the U.S.-led coalition implemented a series of measures in response to Russia's invasion that effectively severed the Russia-West economic relationship. The trade restrictions, financial sanctions, export controls, and other steps led to a rapid unraveling of economic ties that had been constructed over three decades.¹⁸² The war also had knock-on effects on Russia's relative power in the international system. The damage done to Russia's military was evident within the war's disastrous first weeks, when many elite units were decimated in a poorly planned attempt to seize the capital. The military continued to suffer substantial losses of men and materiel. And although Russia's economy has not tanked as many had predicted, it has taken significant hits from both the sanctions, the inflationary pressures caused by the increase in defense spending, and the economic dislocation caused by the departure of hundreds of thousands of working-age Russians from the labor force, either through emigration or military mobilization.¹⁸³

These knock-on effects of Russia's invasion have been the key driver of the changes in Russia's relations with Europe, the United States, and China. The collapse of ties with the West and the relative increase in economic and strategic engagement with China stemmed largely from this source.

The Reactive Nature of Russian Policy Implies Future Reversals Are Possible

The core drivers of changes in Russia's relations with other key powers since February 2022 are (if we treat the continuing attack on Ukraine as a separate issue, as Moscow would prefer) external to the country: the policies of other states, other states' restrictions on Russia's international economic activities, and the diminution in Russia's relative power. By implication, then, these changes would be subject to at least partial reversal if Western states were willing to do so. In short, our analysis does suggest that Russia's post-2022 strategic shift might be subject to some adjustment were the constraints on Moscow's foreign policy posture imposed by the international system relieved.

However, Reversals Are Unlikely and a Longer War Will Make any Reversals Even Less Likely

However, such a change appears unlikely. Not only would the war have to end, but Western policy would also have to shift dramatically for Russia's strategic orientation to be able to revert to

¹⁸⁰ Steven Pifer, "Nord Stream 2: Background, Objections, and Possible Outcomes," Brookings Institution, April 2021.

¹⁸¹ Andrea Shalal, Timothy Gardner, and Steve Holland, "U.S. Waives Sanctions on Nord Stream 2 as Biden Seeks to Mend Europe Ties," Reuters, May 19, 2021.

¹⁸² Council of the EU, undated. As of September 13, 2024; Tania Babina, Benjamin Hilgenstock, Oleg Itskhoki, Maxim Mironov, and Elina Ribakova, "Assessing the Impact of International Sanctions on Russian Oil Exports," March 1, 2023; Norman Eisen, Aaron Klein, Mario Picon, Robin J. Lewis, Lilly Blumenthal, Scott Johnston, and Charlie Loudon, "The Brookings Sanctions Tracker," Brookings Institution, webpage, last updated July 19, 2023.

¹⁸³ Alexandra Prokopenko, "Is the Kremlin Overconfident About Russia's Economic Stability?" Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, April 10, 2024b; Alexandra Prokopenko, "Putin's Unsustainable Spending Spree: How the War in Ukraine Will Overheat the Russian Economy," *Foreign Affairs*, January 8, 2024a.

something akin to the status quo ante bellum. Such a shift would entail a complete or near-complete reversal of the sanctions and normalization of trade relations and an offer to restore political and humanitarian ties. It is nearly inconceivable as of this writing that this kind of a volte-face would come to pass. If the war were to end and Western policies were to persist, it is unlikely that much of anything would change in the three key relationships, with the possible exception of U.S.-Russia arms control, the suspension of which was driven by Moscow not Washington.

As the war continues into its third year, the prospect of such a reversal grows even more remote. Even though the changes in Russia's strategic orientation were initially driven by external factors, international relations scholarship suggests key dynamics associated with a longer conflict will continue to entrench the changes regardless of whether those factors themselves endure. First, central beliefs (e.g., "the United States is hostile to Russia") have been shown to be more enduring than peripheral ones (e.g., "this Administration is hostile to Russia").¹⁸⁴ The increasingly deeply held view in Moscow does indeed appear to be that the West is irrevocably hostile to Russian interests.¹⁸⁵ This can, particularly over time, become a widely shared central belief among Russian elites, making it possible that Russia might become more hesitant to revive even the largely transactional engagements of the years preceding 2022. Second, history indicates that once an enduring rivalry has been established, the rivalry itself is likely to transform the domestic politics—and hence, foreign policy—of the rivals and make the rivalry intractable.¹⁸⁶ Although Russia-West relations may have constituted an enduring rivalry before the war, they certainly do since 2022—and the longer the wartime levels of tensions persist, the more likely they are to become entrenched. Third, *path dependency*, which in foreign policy generally refers to durability of certain patterns of relations once habits of interaction between states develop, requires time to have a significant effect. Past choices shape the options available in the present and future; once a policy has formally or informally been institutionalized, it is more difficult to change. After a certain period, states perpetuate patterns of behavior as much because of habit as to anything else.¹⁸⁷ This might well become the case for Russia's post-2022 relations with other states if the war continues for multiple years into the future. Finally, the costs that states—particularly in trade relations—incur when they reorient away from one set of partners and toward another make future change less likely.¹⁸⁸ Sanctions and war can disrupt trade patterns years after the triggering event itself comes to an end.¹⁸⁹ In this case, all the Russian firms that have been forced to shift from Western to Asian markets may be loath to shift back even if, in the future, they have the

¹⁸⁴ Jonathan Renshon, "Stability and Change in Belief Systems: The Operational Code of George W. Bush," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 52, No. 6, 2008.

¹⁸⁵ Mikhail Zygar, "How Russian Elites Made Peace with the War," *Foreign Affairs*, June 28, 2024.

¹⁸⁶ Robert O. Keohane and Lisa L. Martin, "The Promise of Institutional Theory," *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 1995; Robert O. Keohane, "After Hegemony: Transatlantic Economic Relations in the Next Decade," *International Spectator*, Vol. 19, No. 1, 1984.

¹⁸⁷ Anika C. Leithner and Kyle M. Libby, "Path Dependency in Foreign Policy," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, 2017.

¹⁸⁸ Martina Lawless, "Firm Export Dynamics and the Geography of Trade," *Journal of International Economics*, Vol. 77, 2009; Hege Medin and Arne Melchior, *Learning, Networks, and Sunk Costs in International Trade: Evidence from Norwegian Seafood Exports*, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2002.

¹⁸⁹ Reuven Glick and Alan M. Taylor, "Collateral Damage: Trade Disruption and the Economic Impact of War," *Review of Economics and Statistics*, Vol. 92, No. 1, 2010.

option to do so. Equally, Western firms will be less likely to reenter the Russian market the longer the war endures.

China's Reactions

China has carefully scrutinized U.S. and European reactions to the war and the way they have attempted to punish Russia for its aggression. Although it has largely filtered information on the war through a set of preexisting ideas and concepts widely held throughout the CCP, limiting the degree of change that China perceives the war as representing, Beijing has reacted to the conflict in several ways. Most notable among these reactions has been the expansion of the China's partnership with Russia, which has helped Russia to continue to prosecute the war, but the conflict has also shifted China's perceptions of and reactions to Western states in ways that may represent long-term areas of concern for the United States.

The People's Liberation Army Is Alarmed over Weakening Deterrence

Given CCP certainty that U.S. intentions are hegemonic, the failure of Russian hybrid warfare in Ukraine is very likely to significantly undermine Chinese perceptions of their ability to deter war with the United States. Russian concepts of hybrid warfare hinged on the idea that precise applications of nonmilitary tools of competition enable a state to achieve victory with only minimal applications of military force.¹⁹⁰ Authoritative People's Liberation Army (PLA) media appeared to embrace this concept through 2021 and considered it a concept that enables competition with the United States without crossing the threshold of major war.¹⁹¹ Following poor Russian battlefield performance in 2022, however, PLA analysts assessed that Russian strategists overestimated the hybrid warfare approach's ability to deter military escalation.¹⁹² Given this failure, the PLA is becoming more doubtful that it can prevent U.S.-China competition from erupting into conflict, and PLA theorists have begun to redefine hybrid warfare as a concept that uses nonmilitary tools of competition as

¹⁹⁰ Xu Shuyue [徐舒悦] and Gao Fei [高飞], "An Analysis of the Theory and Practice of 'Hybrid Warfare' in the Context of the Ukraine Crisis" ["乌克兰危机背景下 '混合战争'理论与践评析"], *Peace and Development* [和平与发展], No. 4, 2023; Ma Jianguang [马建光] and Li Yuanbin [李元斌], "Hybrid War' and Its Characteristics: From the Perspective of Russian Scholars" ["'混合战争'及其特点: 俄罗斯学者视角的解析"], *Russian, Eastern European, and Central Asian Studies* [俄罗斯东欧中亚研究], No. 5, 2020.

¹⁹¹ Xu Sanfei [许三飞], "Why Did Hybrid Warfare Theory Come About?" ["混合战争理论缘何而生?"], *PLA Daily*, August 5, 2021a; Xu Sanfei [许三飞], "Examining and Analyzing the Basic Components of Hybrid Warfare" ["试析混合战争基本构成"], *PLA Daily*, August 12, 2021b.

¹⁹² Zhou An [周安], "Hybrid War' Has Become a Tool for Great Power Games" ["混合战争'成大国博弈工具"], *PLA Daily*, February 11, 2022; Gao Yun [高云], "Looking Back on the First Anniversary of the Russia-Ukraine Conflict" ["俄乌冲突一周年回望"], *PLA Daily*, February 23, 2023; Chen Jianmin [陈建民], "Analysis of the Future Development of the Ukraine Crisis" ["乌克兰危机未来走向分析"], *World Military Review* [外国军事学术], No. 4, 2023; Chu Shaofeng [储召锋] and Zhu Pengjin [朱鹏锦], "Cognitive Domain Confrontation in the Russo-Ukrainian Conflict: Methods, Impact, and Enlightenment" ["俄乌冲突中的认知域对抗: 手段、影响与启示"], *Russian, Eastern European, and Central Asian Studies* [俄罗斯东欧中亚研究], 2024; Dai Xunxun [代勋勋], "Russia's Proposed Military Reform Plan" ["俄罗斯提出军队改革新计划"], *PLA Daily*, January 12, 2023.

prewar preparation of a battlespace rather than reducing the need for military force.¹⁹³ At the same time as the PLA was redefining hybrid warfare, leading PLA researchers sharply criticized U.S. and Russian records of applying nonmilitary tools to resolve political disputes, concluding, “almost all military leaders hope to achieve ‘winning without fighting’ through deterrence rather than going to war, but most of them will fail.”¹⁹⁴ Although these views are primarily found in PLA research, their promulgation across CCP elite opinion could critically weaken CCP leaders’ perceptions of deterrence and incentivize destabilizing actions.

CCP Support for Russia Is Enduring

CCP leaders, including Xi Jinping, are strategically and ideologically committed to supporting Russia as a partner in opposition to what they view as U.S. hegemony. In this view, the world is trending from unipolar to multipolar, and global power is being redistributed away from the United States to other countries, such as China and Russia.¹⁹⁵ Party leaders assessed a coming confrontation between the rising China and Russia and the falling United States is “inevitable”; the Russia-Ukraine War is one example of a U.S. hegemony–maintenance campaign.¹⁹⁶ To that end, CCP leaders see China and Russia as unified in addressing the dominant threat of U.S. hegemony. Although China’s stronger economic and political interests in the United States and EU and its interest in portraying itself as a global peacemaker sometimes soften or limit the extent of China’s support for Russia, CCP ideology ensures its policy toward Russia will remain fundamentally supportive.

¹⁹³ Zhao Xiujuan [赵秀娟] and Zhang Jinjuan [张金娟], “Give Full Play to Advantages: Improving the Quality and Effectiveness of Guiding Public Opinion with Reporting on Military Conflicts—A Preliminary Study on the Continuous Public Opinion Guidance in World Military Magazine Reporting on the Russia-Ukraine Conflict” [“发挥优势：在军事冲突报道中提升舆论引导质效—世界军事杂志在俄乌冲突报道中的持续舆论引导初探”], *Military Correspondent* [军事记者], No. 4, 2022; Wang Haijiang [汪海江], “Hold Fast to the Central Task, Gather Strength to Prepare for War and Battle, Work Hard to Create a New Situation in the Integrated National Strategic System and Capability Development” [“扣牢中心任务 聚力备战打仗 努力开创一体化国家战略体系和能力建设新局面”], *Study Times* [学习时报], May 15, 2023.

¹⁹⁴ Huang Dali [黄大莉], Fu Yong [付勇], and You Guanrong [游光荣], “Characteristics, Practices, and Effects of U.S. ‘Coercive Diplomacy’” [“美国‘胁迫外交’的特点、做法与效果评估”], *China Military Science* [中国军事科学], No. 3, 2022; Yao Lei [姚磊], Qi Lin [戚林], and Wang Lei [王雷], “Analysis of the Russian Military’s Urban Combat Lessons Learned in the Ukraine Crisis” [“乌克兰危机中俄军城市作战经验教训探析”], *World Military Review* [外国军事学术], No. 4, 2023.

¹⁹⁵ People’s Republic of China State Council Information Office, *China and the World in the New Era* [新时代的中国与世界], September 2019.

¹⁹⁶ “Interpretation of the 17th Party Congress Report: Today’s World is Undergoing Major Changes and Adjustments” [“十七大报告解读：当今世界正处在大变革大调整中”], *Xinhua*, January 19, 2008; Bu Chao [步超], “The Historic Trend of Peace and Development Cannot Be Stopped (Diplomatic Thought)” [“和平與發展的歷史潮流不可阻擋(思想縱橫)”], *People’s Daily*, November 2, 2023; People’s Republic of China Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying Holds Routine Press Conference for February 23, 2022” [“2022年2月23日外交部发言人华春莹主持例行记者会”], February 23, 2022.

The PLA Views U.S. Alliances as Vulnerable Targets

CCP analysts insist U.S. alliances persist because the United States manufactures crises to justify their existence, not because the allies share common interests or values.¹⁹⁷ Although PLA researchers recognize the impressive strategic importance of alliances as force multipliers, they also see these alliances as vulnerable to disinformation that targets areas of ideological consensus. Following the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine War, CCP leaders assess China has “new strategic opportunities” to increase China’s global stature and undermine that of the United States, including by targeting U.S. alliance cohesion.¹⁹⁸ CCP efforts to weaken the strength of U.S. allied commitment prominently feature negative messaging or disinformation cognitive domain operations campaigns, which PLA researchers have noted improved battlefield lethality when employed by Ukraine.¹⁹⁹ To this end, the PLA may see their efforts to erode U.S. alliance cohesion as preparation of the battlespace in preparation for a potential future conflict.

The PLA Surmises Protraction Will Blunt U.S. Technology Advantages

PLA studies of the advanced technology employed in the Russia-Ukraine War entail discussions of both U.S. technological advantages and how to mitigate those advantages by protracting a conflict into one whose outcome will be determined by DIB capacity, not technological achievement.²⁰⁰ PLA researchers believe the United States DIB cannot sustain a protracted war, and the margin of U.S. technological superiority will diminish as a war continues.²⁰¹ While acknowledging the significant operational advantages provided by U.S. advanced capabilities, such as Starlink, some leading PLA researchers believe Russia can overcome these advantages through protraction.²⁰² By extension, PLA researchers almost certainly believe China is better postured to overcome the same advantages in a similar conflict with the United States.

¹⁹⁷ “Interpretation of the 17th Party Congress Report: Today’s World is Undergoing Major Changes and Adjustments” [“十七大报告解读：当今世界正处在大变革大调整中”], 2008; Gao Yun [高云], “Looking Back on the First Anniversary of the Russia-Ukraine Conflict” [“俄乌冲突一周年回望”], *PLA Daily*, February 23, 2023; Chen, 2023, p. 6.

¹⁹⁸ People’s Republic of China Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “The Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference Is Held in Beijing, and Xi Jinping Delivers an Important Speech” [“中央外事工作会议在北京举行 习近平发表重要讲话”], December 28, 2023.

¹⁹⁹ Zhu Siyu [朱思宇], Xu Xinhai [徐新海], and Yin Junsong [尹峻松], “New Technologies Generate Innovations in Operational Methods and New Methods of Warfare Bring about Technological Integration: A Study of the Application of New Technologies and New Operational Methods in Recent Armed Conflicts and Its Implications” [“新技术催生战法创新 新战法带动技术融合—近期武装冲突中新技术新战法应用研究与启示”], *China Military Science* [中国军事科学], Vol. 187, 2023; Zhao and Zhang, 2022.

²⁰⁰ Chen, 2023, p. 2.

²⁰¹ Chen, 2023, pp. 2–4; Dai, 2023.

²⁰² Chen, 2023, pp. 2–6; Dai, 2023.

The PLA Considers Proliferated Satellite Constellations a Key Inflection Point in Space Operations

PLA researchers see Starlink as a critical new capability that fully integrates space into U.S. joint operations. Prior to the war, PLA researchers perceived Starlink launching, alongside new developments in U.S. space strategy and doctrine, to mean the United States had “integrated space combat into its joint operations and is eager to give space warfare a try.”²⁰³ After the outbreak of war, PLA researchers were alarmed by their self-assessed inability to undermine Starlink’s resilience through existing counterspace capabilities.²⁰⁴ By providing resilient communications in space, leading PLA researchers assessed Starlink’s impact and the manner in which it provided these capabilities was sufficient to distinguish LEO as an “increasingly important subdomain of space.”²⁰⁵ Chinese policymakers and space experts have publicly called for China to develop a Chinese counterpart to Starlink called Project SatNet [星网工程].²⁰⁶

Indian Reactions

The Russian invasion of Ukraine created a difficult situation for India. Prior to the conflict, New Delhi had comparatively strong relations with both Moscow and Washington, and it has been challenged in its efforts to balance those relations during the ongoing conflict. We identified four key themes in Indian reactions to the conflict with likely implications for shaping India’s foreign policy and relations with the United States, Russia, and China in the future.

India Has Prioritized Maintaining Close Relations with Russia

India’s most notable reaction to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has been a consistent refusal to condemn Moscow’s actions. India has abstained from UN votes on the issue, refused to join Western

²⁰³ Li Meihong [李美红] and Tang Yafeng [汤亚锋], “The United States’ Militarization of Space Has Moved Many Countries to Concern” [“美太空军事化动作引各国担忧”], *PLA Daily*, October 14, 2021; Xie Shanshan [谢珊珊], Wu Ling [吴灵], and Li Yun [李云], “Research and Analysis of the U.S. National Defense Space Strategy” [“美国《国防太空战略》研究分析”], *Aerospace China* [中国航天], No. 9, 2020; Zhao Ganbin [赵肝彬] and Chen Xihuan [陈芝桴], “Trends in U.S. Space Militarization,” [“美国太空军事化趋势”], *China Military Science* [中国军事科学], Vol. 189, 2023.

²⁰⁴ Ren Yuanzhen [任远桢], Jin Sheng [金胜], Lu Yaobing [鲁耀兵], Gao Hongwei [高红卫], and Sun Shuyan [孙树岩], “The Development Status of Starlink and Its Countermeasures” [“星链计划发展现状与对抗思考”], *Modern Defence Technology* [现代防御技术], Vol. 50, No. 2, 2022.

²⁰⁵ Yuan Yi [袁艺], Li Zhifei [李志飞], and Guo Yonghong [郭永宏], “Connotations and Characteristics of Domain Battlefield Structure and Our Countermeasures” [“域战场结构的内涵特点与应对举措”], *China Military Science*, No. 187, 2023.

²⁰⁶ Xie Yujie [谢玉洁], “Why Is China Vigorously Developing Its Aerospace Industry? How Will It Influence Our Livelihoods? A Clear Explanation” [“我国为何要大力发展商业航天？将如何影响你我生活？一文讲清”], CCTV [央视新闻], April 3, 2024; China Science and Technology Network [中国网科学], “Low-Orbit Constellation Ready for Launch! How Can China’s ‘Starlink’ Speed Up?” [“低轨通信星座蓄势待发，中国版‘星链’如何加速？”], September 21, 2023; Sang Jinxin [桑金鑫], “Can ‘Starlink Mode’ Compete with Starlink? Challenges and Opportunities for China’s Satellite Internet Development” [“‘星链模式’能否抗衡星链？我国卫星互联网发展的机遇与挑战”], China Mobile Association for Science and Technology [中国移动科协], September 22, 2023; Zhang Jianlin [张健林], “National People’s Congress Representative Zhong Tao: ‘Starlink’ Pressure Has Struck, Must Encourage Private Enterprise Development of Satellite Internet” [“全国人大代表张涛：‘星链’压力来袭，要鼓励民企发展卫星互联网”], *Beijing News* [新京报], March 9, 2023.

sanctions on Russia, and substantially increased its oil imports from Russia (reducing its energy costs by doing so), while avoiding even public statements placing the blame for the conflict on Moscow.²⁰⁷ This “subtle pro-Moscow position” has created consternation in the West, which has been increasingly unified in opposition to Russian aggression, and underlined that, despite India’s status as the world’s largest democracy, it does not see the world the same way.²⁰⁸ Although there are cultural and historical roots to India’s hesitance to join Western opposition to Russia, geopolitical calculations appear to be the most central factor shaping India’s calculus.²⁰⁹

India’s primary strategic concerns are the threat posed to it by China and China’s growing relations with Pakistan.²¹⁰ India fears that a rupture in relations with Russia could push Moscow into closer alignment with Beijing and Islamabad, leaving New Delhi increasingly isolated within Asia and largely dependent on the United States and its allies for support; support that India further fears may be unreliable.²¹¹ India appears to be wagering that by maintaining its relations with Russia, it will be able to limit the closeness of the Russian-Chinese relationship and limit the risks that Russia may choose to openly support China in a future India-China conflict or crisis.²¹²

As noted previously, however, greater Russian dependence on China is one of the major geopolitical outcomes of the Russia-Ukraine War, driven not by Russian preferences for such an arrangement but by economic and military necessity. Should such trends continue and intensify, leaving Russia as a dependent, junior partner of China, this will represent a major setback for Indian grand strategy. There are signs that India’s approach to Russia may have allowed it to retain some influence over Moscow’s decisions, as seen in U.S. requests to India to use that influence to discourage Russia from taking provocative or escalatory actions.²¹³ To date, there do not appear to be signs that India is fundamentally revisiting its approach toward Russia, despite its apparent lack of success in limiting Russia’s relations with China. But India has sought to mitigate the risks of its reliance on Russia in other areas.

India Has Sought to Further Diversify Its Defense Imports

India remains highly dependent on Russia as a source of military hardware. A legacy of their Cold War relations, an estimated 60 percent to 70 percent of Indian weapon systems come from Russia or the Soviet Union, making India heavily reliant on Russia for maintenance and spare parts.²¹⁴ Even

²⁰⁷ Raj Verma, “India’s Quest for Security and Its Neutrality in the Russia–Ukraine War,” *Round Table*, Vol. 112, No. 1, 2023; Chirayu Thakkar, “Russia-Ukraine War, India, and US Grand Strategy: Punishing or Leveraging Neutrality?” *Policy Studies*, Vol. 45, Nos. 3–4, 2024.

²⁰⁸ Happymon Jacob, “The Anatomy of India’s Ukraine Dilemma,” *The Hindu*, February 28, 2022.

²⁰⁹ Shubhrajeev Konwer, “The Ukraine Crisis and India: Quandaries and Implications,” *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal*, Vol. 29, No. 3, 2023b.

²¹⁰ Ashley J. Tellis, “‘What Is in Our Interest’: India and the Ukraine War,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, April 2022.

²¹¹ Verma, 2023.

²¹² Tellis, 2022.

²¹³ David E. Sanger and Julian E. Barnes, “U.S. Fears Russia Might Put a Nuclear Weapon in Space,” *New York Times*, February 17, 2024; Sciutto, 2024.

²¹⁴ Spenser A. Warren and Sumit Ganguly, “India–Russia Relations after Ukraine,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 62, Nos. 5–6, 2022.

before Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the risks of India's dependence on Russia had become clear to Indian policymakers.²¹⁵ The past two and a half years of war have deepened those concerns, particularly as Russian defense industries will be prioritizing domestic demands for the foreseeable future both to prosecute the current war and to reconstitute the Russian military thereafter.²¹⁶ India's strong preference has been to replace Russian imports with domestic production, as part of its Make in India campaign.²¹⁷ However, Indian defense imports from Western sources have increased in recent years, a trend that is likely to continue.²¹⁸ Such increases likely have clear limits, however. Western military equipment is comparatively expensive and often comes with greater restrictions on its use.²¹⁹

India's Support for U.S. Policies Is Likely to Remain Limited and Conditional

The Biden administration has framed the conflict in Ukraine as one of democracy versus autocracy, which India's notable refusal to condemn Russian aggression certainly complicates.²²⁰ India's motivations for not joining the Western coalition supporting Ukraine may be in large part geopolitical, as discussed previously, but this does not appear to be the whole picture. India's status as the world's largest democracy is an important part of its identity, but it has also shown wariness regarding Western willingness to employ sanctions and other tools to punish democratic backsliding.²²¹ India itself has undergone such backsliding under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, with government suppression of opposition politicians, critical media outlets, and minority groups increasingly prevalent.²²² Most spectacularly, India appears to have attempted to assassinate a U.S. citizen in New York who was active in Sikh separatist groups.²²³ Prioritizing efforts to recruit Modi as an ally to oppose China's influence, the Biden administration has largely downplayed these developments, continuing high-level engagement, including the hosting of Modi for a state dinner in Washington in 2023.²²⁴ Taken together, however, India's disinterest in condemning Russian aggression and its increasingly repressive approach to dissent highlight that India under Modi does

²¹⁵ Ali Emamifar, Bahareh Sazmand, and Maziar Mozaffari Falarti, "Enhancing Neorealism: Lessons from India-Russia Defense Cooperation for Iran in the Aftermath of the 2014 Russo-Ukraine Conflict," *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 2023.

²¹⁶ Shubhrajeev Konwer, "India's Response to the War in Ukraine: Evaluating the Balancing Act," *Royal United Services Institute*, Vol. 168, No. 3, 2023a.

²¹⁷ Krishn Kaushik, "India Pivots Away from Russian Arms, but Will Retain Strong Ties," *Reuters*, January 28, 2024.

²¹⁸ Warren and Ganguly, 2022.

²¹⁹ Tellis, 2022.

²²⁰ Michael Hirsh, "Why Biden's Anti-Putin Democracy Crusade is Failing," *Foreign Policy*, May 11, 2022.

²²¹ Chietigj Bajpae, "How India's Democracy Shapes Its Global Role and Relations with the West," Chatham House, May 9, 2024; Kate Sullivan de Estrada, "India and Order Transition in the Indo-Pacific: Resisting the Quad as a 'Security Community,'" *Pacific Review*, Vol. 36, No. 2, 2023.

²²² Maya Tudor, "Why India's Democracy Is Dying," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 34, No. 3, July 2023; Allison Meakem, "Under Modi, India's Democracy Is on Its Last Legs," *Foreign Policy*, January 2, 2024.

²²³ Greg Miller, Gerry Shih, and Ellen Nakashima, "An Assassination Plot on American Soil Reveals a Darker Side of Modi's India," *Washington Post*, April 29, 2024.

²²⁴ Thomas Carothers and Frances Z. Brown, "Democracy Policy Under Biden: Confronting a Changed World," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, February 2024; Sushant Singh, "Is the U.S.-India Partnership on Shaky Ground?" *Foreign Policy*, December 15, 2023.

not see itself as a supporter of the liberal international order or other values that underlie the cooperation between the United States and its closest allies, but as a state focused more narrowly on the pursuit of its interests and security. This suggests clear limits to future U.S.-Indian relations that had been improving steadily over the past three decades.

Implications for International Norms

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has affected the international system in ways that go well beyond the reactions of the major powers. In the following sections, we highlight two critical normative developments stemming from the war that could have far-reaching implications.

Russia Has Faced Substantial, Sustained Costs for Its Clear Violation of the Normative Prohibition Against Armed Conquest

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has constituted the most blatant challenge to the international normative prohibition against armed conquest since Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait.²²⁵ By themselves, individual challenges to norms do not necessarily provide evidence for whether a norm is weakening, much as individual murders do not mean that societal disapproval of them has declined. The health of the norm against armed conquest will instead be determined by the nature of state responses to Russia's violation.

On this front, international condemnation of Russia's actions has been both widespread and energetic through the first two and a half years of the war. The UN General Assembly has voted overwhelmingly to condemn Russia's invasion on several occasions, after action in the UN Security Council was halted by Russia's veto.²²⁶ Although the strongest actions opposing Russia have been taken by NATO members given the great security implications of the invasion for them, opposition to Russia's action has emerged from parts of the Global South as well.²²⁷ Military support for Ukraine has been widespread, while open military support for Russia's invasion—which could constitute its own violation of international law—has been limited to a handful of international pariah states.²²⁸ China, for its part, has taken pains to claim publicly that it is not supporting Russia militarily, even

²²⁵ Christopher Greenwood, "New World Order or Old: The Invasion of Kuwait and the Rule of Law," *Modern Law Review*, Vol. 55, 1992.

²²⁶ Although direct opposition was rare, some notable abstentions included China and India (Oona A. Hathaway, "How Russia's Invasion of Ukraine Tested the International Legal Order," Brookings Institution, April 3, 2023).

²²⁷ Many sub-Saharan African countries, in particular, view the normative prohibition against armed conquest as central to their own regional stability given the widespread potential for identity-based territorial claims across the continent. For example, see Amy Woodyatt, "Kenya's UN Ambassador Slams Russia and Compares Ukraine Crisis to Africa's Colonial Past," CNN, February 22, 2022. The 2022 Kenyan comments are nearly identical in sentiment to comments expressed by Uganda in 1964 on the necessity for a norm of territorial integrity, highlighting the long-standing nature of African concerns about the regularization of armed invasions (Scott W. Thompson and I. William Zartman, "The Development of Norms in the African System," in *The Organization of African Unity After Ten Years: Comparative Perspectives*, Praeger Publishers, 1975).

²²⁸ Pietro Bomprezzi, Ivan Kharitonov, and Christoph Trebesch, "Ukraine Support Tracker," Kiel Institute for the World Economy, last updated August 6, 2024; Bergmann et al., 2024.

while the actual effects of its economic and industrial support have been of substantial benefit for Russia's war effort.²²⁹

Taken together, these actions highlight the breadth, if not necessarily the depth, of opposition to Russia's violation of the norm against armed conquest, perhaps the most central rule of conduct in the international system.²³⁰ Even when states continue to tacitly provide support to Russia, they are reluctant to do so openly and rarely endorse Russia's decision to invade Ukraine itself. As will be discussed in the following sections, however, the long-term effects of Russia's challenge to this norm will likely depend on the ultimate resolution of the war and how states treat Russia and its leadership thereafter.

Efforts to Impose Economic Costs on Russia Have Been Expansive and Novel

The international efforts to punish Russia for its invasion of Ukraine have pushed the boundaries of the types of economic levers states may consider to be available for such responses. The sanctions regime targeting Russia by restricting trade and investment with individuals, firms, and sectors is extensive but for the most part not in itself novel in comparison with prior efforts to punish such states as Iran, North Korea, or Iraq.²³¹ What may be expanding normative expectations regarding appropriate tools for economic coercion are three additional steps being used or considered against Russia. First, following the invasion, several key Russian banks were gradually cut off from the SWIFT interbank information exchange system, greatly complicating their ability to process transactions with customers in other countries, with serious short-term effects for the Russian financial system.²³² This step was undertaken once before, in the 2012 campaign to pressure Iran over its nuclear program, but taking this action against Russian banks may indicate that the United States and the EU will employ this step with greater frequency in the future.²³³ Second, the United States and its allies, mindful that a complete cutoff of Russia fossil fuel exports would be both infeasible and destructive for the global economy, have attempted to implement a price cap on sales of Russian oil through restrictions on the ability of firms to issue insurance for tankers carrying the oil, an apparently novel attempt to keep Russian oil exports on the market while reducing the economic benefits Russia

²²⁹ Bergmann et al., 2024; Nathaniel Sher, "Behind the Scenes: China's Increasing Role in Russia's Defense Industry," *Carnegie Politika*, May 6, 2024; Finbarr Bermingham, "As China Boosts Ties with Russia, Belarus, Europe Ponders Possible Rising Threat," *South China Morning Post*, July 15, 2024.

²³⁰ Michael J. Kelly, "The Role of International Law in the Russia-Ukraine War," *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law*, Vol. 55, 2023.

²³¹ Jeffrey J. Schott, "Economic Sanctions Against Russia: How Effective? How Durable?" Peterson Institute for International Economics, 2023; T. Clifton Morgan, Constantinos Syropoulos, and Yoto V. Yotov, "Economic Sanctions: Evolution, Consequences, and Challenges," *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol. 37, No. 1, 2023.

²³² Christian Perez, "What Does Russia's Removal from SWIFT Mean for the Future of Global Commerce?" *Foreign Policy Analytics*, March 8, 2022; Russell Hotten, "Ukraine Conflict: What Is Swift and Why Is Banning Russia So Significant?" *BBC News*, May 4, 2022.

²³³ Rick Gladstone and Stephen Castle, "Global Network Expels as Many as 30 of Iran's Banks in Move to Isolate Its Economy," *New York Times*, March 15, 2012.

receives from them.²³⁴ This policy initially did have substantial effects on Russian revenues but has weakened over time.²³⁵ Finally, there have been numerous proposals to seize Russian assets that were frozen in Western countries following Russia's 2022 invasion and then provide those assets to Ukraine.²³⁶ The United States recently passed a law authorizing these seizures, and the EU has authorized redirecting the interest generated by frozen Russian assets for the benefit of Ukraine, for now stopping short of providing the assets themselves.²³⁷ Should large-scale asset seizures actually be carried out, they would essentially constitute forcing Russia to provide reparations to Ukraine, often a contentious element of post-war settlements. Although not entirely novel—the United States seized \$7 billion in assets from Afghanistan after the 2021 Taliban takeover and seized more-limited Iraqi assets in 2003—the scale of the Russian assets at stake, over \$300 billion, with no change in Russia's government would represent a dramatic expansion of U.S. and allied economic coercive action with potentially far-reaching implications across the international economic system.²³⁸

Conclusion

Consistent with the historical trends described in Chapter 2, the war in Ukraine has not fundamentally restructured the international system or driven major changes in the alignment of major or regional powers. Nevertheless, it has shifted the United States' relations with both major allies and adversaries, as well as potential partners in the Global South. In Europe, it has reinforced the transatlantic alliance by highlighting longstanding shortfalls in continental defense capabilities, reaffirming NATO's primacy, and generating a new sense of urgency to rearm and rebuild. At the same time, the war has fundamentally altered the relationship between Europe and Russia by, in the eyes of many European political leaders, discrediting the notion that a strategy that prioritized engagement and economic integration could encourage moderation in Russian policy. Although Russia remains receptive to notions of reestablishing a transactional relationship after the war, it is unlikely to find receptive partners in the major economic centers of Europe.

The Russia-Ukraine War's effects outside Europe are more limited but still consequential. Although Chinese political leaders and military intellectuals appear to view the war as further confirmation of preexisting international trends, the conflict may be contributing to a hardening of the belief that U.S. intervention in a potential Indo-Pacific conflict cannot be deterred through nonmilitary means. Relatedly, CCP leaders remain supportive of Russia given the country's perceived importance in countering the U.S. hegemony. Despite the cohesion NATO has demonstrated since

²³⁴ David Wessel, "The Story Behind the Proposed Price Cap on Russian Oil," Brookings Institution, July 5, 2022.

²³⁵ Lauri Myllyvirta, Vaibhav Raghunandan, Petras Katinas, Panda Rushwood, and Isaac Levi, "One Year of Sanctions: Russia's Oil Export Revenues Cut by EUR 34 Bn," Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air, December 5, 2023.

²³⁶ Alexander Kolyandr, "Russia's Frozen Assets Present a Policy Dilemma," Carnegie Politika, February 5, 2024.

²³⁷ "EU Countries Adopt Plan to Use Profits from Frozen Russian Assets for Ukraine Defence," Reuters, May 21, 2024; Fatima Hussein, "The US Is Now Allowed to Seize Russian State Assets. How Would That Work?" Associated Press, May 10, 2024.

²³⁸ Keith Johnson and Amy Mackinnon, "The U.S. Is Considering Giving Russia's Frozen Assets to Ukraine," *Foreign Policy*, January 30, 2024; Edmund L. Andrews, "A Nation at War: Iraqi Assets; Bush Asks Seizure of \$1.7 Billion Held in U.S.," *New York Times*, March 22, 2003; Catherine Cartier, "A Year on, Billions in Afghan Assets Linger in Switzerland," *The Diplomat*, October 21, 2023.

2022, China also perceives new strategic opportunities, or perhaps new incentives, to target U.S. alliance cohesion and has strengthened Beijing's confidence that China's productive capacity could, in a protracted conflict, blunt U.S. technological advantages.

The war has also highlighted the continued gap between the West and the Global South. India has prioritized close relations with Russia out of a desire to avert a scenario in which Moscow backs Beijing's position in the Sino-India rivalry. India's efforts to diversify its defense imports and reduce its reliance on Russian-origin military technologies bely a broader reticence to back U.S. priorities.

Whether the war in Ukraine will generate broader normative changes across the international system is still unclear. On the one hand, the international community has generally condemned Russia's territorial aggression, and the United States and its allies have imposed costs on Russia because of this aggression, both of which likely help reinforce the norm against armed conquest. On the other hand, should the war conclude in such a manner that Russian territorial aggression is widely perceived to have been successful, with costs that may not be enduring, then the norm against armed conquest would likely be weakened. This part of the story of the war has not yet been fully written.

Managing Uncertainty Regarding Future Events

As of this writing in September 2024, how the war in Ukraine will unfold and ultimately end is still unclear. This uncertainty hampers efforts to assess the war's long-term implications and has discouraged attempts to forecast long-term geopolitical trends or to develop recommendations for long-term U.S. planning and strategy. Yet as the previous chapters have demonstrated, much has already changed over the two and a half years since Russia's full-scale invasion began. The United States cannot wait for the war to end if it wishes to adjust to changes in the operational and strategic environment ahead of its adversaries and rivals.

To assist U.S. policymakers in adapting to the effects of the war before it has concluded, we have identified a set of events, or factors, that we anticipate could still alter existing trend lines and require a reexamination of the major findings presented in this report and the underlying reports from this series.²³⁹ In the concluding chapter of each report in this series, we include an extensive discussion of how these factors could alter the report's findings, offering policymakers a lens to understand and manage uncertainty in their long-term planning.

In this chapter, we present highlights from these analyses while also expanding our analysis to describe how these factors could alter Indian reactions to the war and reshape the war's implications for the laws of war and other international norms. By observing patterns in how the factors may affect ongoing trends across the multiple issue areas and regions surveyed in this series, we identify insights regarding the potential importance of different factors, the conditionality of our findings, and the feasibility of planning for the war's aftermath while the fighting continues.²⁴⁰ Our summaries in this chapter are necessarily limited in their nuance, and we encourage readers to read the full assessments in the other reports in this series for greater detail.

As discussed in Chapter 1, we selected these factors using three criteria: scale (would we expect that such an event would have major consequences beyond the battlefield), distinguishability (could the change be isolated and its implications observed), and plausibility (given what we know about major actors' capabilities, behavior, and incentives, could such an event occur). We divided these factors into three categories: those related to the course of the fighting; the settlement of the war; and external events, such as changes in the policy orientation of major third parties. The following sections

²³⁹ A summary of the full set of factors we identified is provided in Table 1.1. In our analysis, we make no claims as to the relatively likelihood of these potential future events; only that we view each as sufficiently plausible to be worth considering.

²⁴⁰ Our summaries in this chapter of the analyses in the other reports in this series are not exhaustive. We highlight only the most potentially impactful of the relationships between these factors and our findings in this chapter. The more complete discussion is presented in the concluding chapter of each of the individual reports.

summarize our assessments of the possible effects of these factors on our preliminary findings across each of these three categories.

Adjusting to the Future Course of the War

How the fighting in Ukraine has evolved and been conducted on both sides has driven many of our preliminary findings discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. This includes the implications we identify for future warfighting, but the attritional stalemate and resulting resource demands have also led to implications for the DIB and China's and Europe's strategic and political assessments. As the war continues to evolve, additional battlefield events could further alter these and other ongoing trends. In this section, we highlight our assessments of the following five factors related to the potential future course of the war:

- Russia uses tactical nuclear weapons inside Ukraine
- Russia uses a kinetic ASAT weapon in LEO against commercial targets that generates massive debris
- Russia or Ukraine achieves a cost-effective breakthrough that solves a major existing operational challenge
- China provides lethal military support to Russia
- NATO directly intervenes in the Russia-Ukraine War.

Table 5.1 summarizes our assessment of how these factors could potentially shift trends identified across our reports and require reconsideration of our preliminary findings. As discussed in Chapter 1, we determined that these battlefield effects were likely to be most relevant to five of our focus areas, listed in the second column from the left. We then identify the specific preliminary finding this factor has the potential to affect and note the potential effect on the finding that the factor could have, should it occur. As noted previously, more-detailed discussions of these factors and their effects on our findings are contained in the concluding chapters of each individual report in this series.²⁴¹ For reasons of brevity, in this chapter, we confine our discussion to key cross-cutting patterns that emerge when looking at the potential effects of these factors across our research.

Table 5.1. Selected Potential Effects of the Future Course of the War on Preliminary Findings

Factor	Area Affected	Preliminary Finding	Potential Effect on Finding
Russia uses tactical nuclear weapons inside Ukraine	Warfighting	There are enhanced challenges for offensive operations.	The risk to massed forces is greatly enhanced.
		The necessity of preparing for protraction increases.	Protraction may be less likely if nuclear use becomes normalized.

²⁴¹ For example, further discussions of the potential effects on warfighting issues are contained in our standalone report on this topic. See Hvizda et al., 2025. However, some areas of consideration are discussed only in this summary report in Chapters 3 and 4, such as the laws of armed conflict, international norms, Indian reactions, and Russian reactions. For these topics, these tables summarize our assessment of the potential effects of these factors on our findings.

Factor	Area Affected	Preliminary Finding	Potential Effect on Finding
		The need to seek external support increases.	Normalization of nuclear use is likely to raise the bar for states to provide external support.
	Laws of armed conflict	Russia's consideration of nuclear use inside Ukraine has weakened the nuclear taboo.	Actual Russian use of nuclear weapons could undermine the nuclear taboo, with potentially far-reaching consequences for future conflicts.
	China's reactions	CCP support for Russia is enduring.	Russia nuclear use could cause China's leadership to revisit the wisdom of its close support for Russia.
		The PLA believes protraction may help overcome U.S. advantages.	Normalized nuclear use could reduce China's estimates of the viability of protracted wars.
		The PLA sounds the alarm over weakening deterrence.	Nuclear use could heighten China's fears that the international system is unstable, at the risk of larger war.
	Indian reactions	India has prioritized maintaining close relations with Russia.	Russian nuclear use against Ukraine could prompt New Delhi to revisit the value of close associations with Moscow, depending on public and international reactions to Moscow's actions.
	European reactions	The European shift away from engagement with Russia is likely irreversible.	Nuclear use could widen the rift between states inclined to accommodate Russia and more hardline members likely to sever remaining ties, accelerate rearmament, and reconsider nuclear posture.
		Despite steps to improve operational flexibility, movement toward strategic autonomy is likely to be limited.	Nuclear use would reinforce NATO's primacy and decrease support for strategic concepts premised on autonomy from U.S.
		The EU has sought a greater security role, but the substantial reforms required to direct collective military action are unlikely.	Nuclear use would likely encourage greater EU-United Kingdom cooperation but reduce support for building NATO alternatives.
Russia uses ASAT that generates extensive debris	Warfighting	The manner in which mass is delivered changes.	The weakening of persistent surveillance reduces the threat from distributed strikes.
		The need to seek external support increases.	Less-capable states need to rely on others for satellite communications and imagery if commercial capabilities are greatly reduced.
	China's reactions	The PLA considers proliferated satellite constellations a key inflection point in space operations.	This is likely to undermine the rationale for the China's pursuit of SatNet.
Russia or Ukraine achieves cost-effective breakthrough	Warfighting	The manner in which mass is delivered changes.	Development and proliferation of an effective and efficient counter-UAS technology likely would reduce their reliability for decentralized targeting decisions and the collection of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance data.

Factor	Area Affected	Preliminary Finding	Potential Effect on Finding
that solves major operational challenge	DIB	DIB growth could create new coordination challenges.	A Ukrainian technological breakthrough likely would incentivize reductions in regulatory barriers to long-term cooperation between Ukrainian and European producers.
China provides lethal military support to Russia	China's reactions	The PLA believes protraction may help overcome U.S. advantages.	Beijing's decision to provide military support to Russia might indicate U.S. and allied ability to sustain protracted conflict greater than China's leaders had hoped.
		The PLA views U.S. alliances as vulnerable targets.	China's decision to provide military support might make efforts to weaken U.S. alliances less likely or effective.
	Laws of armed conflict	The scale and nature of Russia's violations of the laws of war in Ukraine constitute a broader challenge to international law.	Open military support by China for Russia... would also constitute a clear signal of China's support for Russia's means of prosecuting the conflict, including its widespread intentional targeting of civilians, presenting a clear challenge to international humanitarian law.
	International norms	Russia has faced substantial, sustained costs for its clear violation of the normative prohibition against armed conquest.	Open military support by China for Russia's attempted conquest of Ukraine would call into question whether Beijing will seek to do away with this core international norm as its power within the international system increases
NATO directly intervenes in Russia-Ukraine War	European reactions	The European shift away from engagement with Russia is likely irreversible.	A decision to intervene would require consensus that engagement cannot achieve regional security and stability aims.
		Despite steps to improve operational flexibility, movement toward strategic autonomy is likely to be limited.	Conflict would drive increases in defense production, procurement, cooperation, and integration beyond observed levels and require closer alignment with the U.S.
		The EU has sought a greater security role, but the substantial reforms required to direct collective military action are unlikely.	Russia-NATO conflict would test existing frameworks for EU-NATO complementarity and require organizational and procedural adaptations.
		Ukraine's formal integration into the EU and NATO is unlikely in the near term.	NATO involvement would render many of the political obstacles to Ukrainian integration obsolete, but prospects for EU membership would likely depend on the conflict's course.
	Russian reactions	The reactive nature of Russian policy implies future reversals are possible.	NATO's intervention would entrench Russian enmity toward the U.S. and Europe and remove any remaining stake in maintaining a semblance of normality in the relationship.

Three patterns stand out. First, Russian nuclear use appears to have a broad potential to alter the trends we have identified to date across issue areas. More so than any other event we identified, Russia becoming the first state since 1945 to use nuclear weapons in warfare would likely alter the international response to the conflict, even beyond its serious strategic and military implications. Although we have done our best to identify potential specific consequences of Russian nuclear use, it would be prudent to note that the implications of such a historic event would almost certainly extend far beyond the dynamics we examined. Much would also depend on the circumstances and nature of Russian nuclear use.

Second, direct military support by China for Russia's invasion of Ukraine would also likely be a highly consequential event, potentially signaling a commitment by China's leadership to a much more revisionist approach to the international system than has been observed to date. This would likely have further downstream effects on both European and U.S. relations with Beijing and could sharply increase the risks of wider conflicts.

Third, we did not find that a NATO decision to intervene in the conflict would likely drive substantial deviations from most of the trends we have identified from the course of the war so far. If direct NATO intervention were not followed by immediate Russian capitulation this would mean the beginnings of a direct Russia-NATO war that might or might not remain confined to the territory of Ukraine. We cannot predict the exact course such a conflict would take, but it could easily become an unprecedented historic event with the potential to inflict catastrophic human, economic, and physical damage should it escalate to widespread nuclear use. From the perspective of the issue areas we examined, however, the most immediate strategic effects would be an intensification or acceleration of trends observed since the war began. For example, most European countries have determined since early 2022 that political and economic engagement with Russia is no longer a feasible strategy to manage Russia. A direct war between the two sides would harden these perceptions, while not making future rapprochement with Russia more plausible. A NATO-Russia war would therefore not necessarily alter many of the findings discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, but it would have the potential to introduce new, highly consequential changes in the international system that go well beyond those already outlined.

Adjusting to How the War Concludes

Table 5.2 presents a summary of our assessments of how the war's ending could alter our findings. We focused on the following three factors that reflect different ways in which the Russia-Ukraine War could end:

- Russia succeeds in its initial objective for the invasion by militarily imposing a change of government in Kyiv.
- Ukraine succeeds in rolling back the Russian invasion and regains the territory occupied or contested by Russian forces since 2014.
- Ukraine and Russia agree to a cessation of hostilities, but Ukraine's territory remains divided, and low-level fighting may persist.

Given the substantial uncertainty about the events that could lead to a resolution of the conflict, we did not specify the specific course of events that would lead to these outcomes. We also did not develop detailed scenarios for the composition of a new Ukrainian government should Russia gain the ability to impose one or the precise terms of a negotiated ceasefire. These are potentially important variables, but accounting for such additional variations would substantially multiply the scenarios to be assessed. We therefore focus on how the core aspects of these different endings to the war would affect our findings and leave the potentially important details and specifics for future assessments.

Table 5.2. Selected Potential Effects of How the War Concludes on our Findings

Factor	Area Affected	Preliminary Finding	Potential Effect on Finding
Russian-imposed regime change in Ukraine	International norms	Russia has faced substantial, sustained costs for its clear violation of the normative prohibition against armed conquest.	A clear Russian victory in the war, particularly one achieved due in large part to support from China, would call into question whether non-Western powers may wish to, and be able to, reshape this aspect of the international system.
	DIB	Transatlantic reforms have been positive but modest.	The specter of clear Russian victory in Ukraine would likely lead to the acceleration and intensification of European DIB reform efforts.
	European reactions	The European shift away from engagement with Russia is likely irreversible.	A Russian victory, and attending westward movement of Russian posture, would likely heighten concerns of Russian subversion or direct military threat to NATO territory.
		Despite steps to improve operational flexibility, movement toward strategic autonomy is likely to be limited.	Perception of increased Russian threat would likely drive regional increases in defense spending and expanded cooperation while also encouraging closer alignment with the United States.
		The EU has sought a greater security role, but the substantial reforms	Perception of increased Russian threat would reinforce NATO's primacy

Factor	Area Affected	Preliminary Finding	Potential Effect on Finding
Ukraine regains internationally recognized borders	International norms	required to direct collective military action are unlikely.	but encourage continued EU initiatives to boost European DIBs and defense integration.
		Ukraine's formal integration into the EU and NATO is unlikely in the near term.	A pro-Russian government would almost certainly withdraw applications for membership.
		Russia has faced substantial, sustained costs for its clear violation of the normative prohibition against armed conquest.	The success of Ukraine in repelling the Russian invasion, made possible by sustained, widespread international support, would help reinforce perceptions that violations of this norm are likely to prove costly and that aggression in other cases might be similarly defeated.
	European reactions	The European shift away from engagement with Russia is likely irreversible.	Whether EU members would collectively reengage Russia likely would depend on whether the Kremlin renounces its claim to Ukrainian territory and adheres to the terms of any settlement.
		Despite steps to improve operational flexibility, movement toward strategic autonomy from the United States is likely to be limited.	Momentum for increasing defense capacity could wane as some countries divert resources and political attention to other issues; defense spending is likely to remain high in northern and eastern Europe.
	Russian reactions	The reactive nature of Russian policy implies future reversals are possible.	Barring a regime change in Russia, the Kremlin would be unlikely to accept this state of affairs and would seek to regenerate its forces to reattack. Ukrainian victory would also entrench Russian hostility toward the West, assuming the United

Factor	Area Affected	Preliminary Finding	Potential Effect on Finding
			States and its European allies continue to assist Ukraine.
Ukrainian government accepts cessation of hostilities without territorial settlement	European reactions	Despite steps to improve operational flexibility, movement toward strategic autonomy from the United States is likely to be limited.	Prolonged conflict could revive debates over sustaining aid indefinitely and lead fatigued European publics to press for attention to other economic and social issues, although the extent of change would vary among countries.
		Ukraine's formal integration into the EU and NATO is unlikely in the near term.	Additional costs and legal uncertainty regarding Ukrainian borders would likely prolong EU negotiations.

The war's ultimate outcome would be highly consequential for Ukrainians, for whom questions of the country's regime type, political orientation, and territorial integrity have immense personal, economic, and political ramifications. Our analysis highlights that the way the war ends could also affect the conflict's long-term regional and international consequences by shaping perceptions of future Russian ambitions and intent; the salience of European security concerns; and the potential costs, benefits, and feasibility of advancing Ukraine's integration into Europe.

However, the scale of these changes may vary across scenarios. We found that our findings were the least likely to shift in a scenario in which the Ukrainian government accepted a cessation of hostilities without a territorial settlement, an outcome that would not dramatically change the political orientation of either the Russian or Ukrainian governments. For example, such an event might over time slow the political momentum of changes in U.S. and European defense and industrial policy but is unlikely to cause a change in direction. Of the other, more extreme outcomes, a Russian victory that changes the regime in Kyiv appears more likely to be disruptive of trends than a Ukrainian success in evicting Russia from its territory. The former would likely intensify European interest in isolating Russia and increasing defense expenditures and efforts to oppose future Russian aggression, while the latter could have the opposite effect, depending on Russia's reactions to such a setback. Either of these two more dramatic outcomes would likely also have wider-ranging effects on the international system because of the resulting shift in international expectations regarding attempts to conquer the territory of other states by force, a key norm of the international system.

Adjusting to Outside Events

Events beyond the course of the fighting in Ukraine but closely related to it in political or diplomatic terms could also lead states to change their behavior in ways that would potentially alter the trends identified in Chapters 3 and 4. As noted in Chapter 1, we identified a set of factors representing distinct, plausible outside events that could affect these trends, focusing on the following four in particular:

- India or multiple key Global South states shift their policies to clearly oppose Russia's invasion of Ukraine.
- Elections in key EU states, such as Germany, Poland, or France, empower far-left or far-right parties.
- Ukraine receives greater U.S. security guarantees following the end of the war.
- The United States withdraws from its alliance commitments in Europe.
- Events within Russia destabilize the country.

Table 5.3. Selected Potential Effects of Outside Events on Our Findings

Factor	Area Affected	Preliminary Finding	Potential Effect on Finding
India or multiple key Global South states shift to clear opposition of Russia's invasion	Indian reactions	India has prioritized maintaining close relations with Russia.	An Indian decision to clearly oppose Russia's invasion would likely indicate that New Delhi has made a more fundamental decision to deprioritize its relations with Moscow and instead seek other means of balancing against China.
Extremist election victories in key EU states	DIB	Transatlantic reforms have been positive but modest.	Far-right or far-left electoral victories could fracture the fragile consensus that has supported European DIB reform efforts to date and reduce investments and coordination.
	European reactions	Despite steps to improve operational flexibility, movement toward strategic autonomy from the United States is likely to be limited.	Although far-left parties likely would reduce defense spending and push for reduced EU-NATO cooperation, far-right victories may drive increased defense spending and continued national DIB expansion.
		Ukraine's formal integration through the EU and NATO is unlikely in the near term.	Some far-left and far-right parties would press to reduce aid to Ukraine and oppose its membership in NATO or the EU.
Ukraine receives additional U.S. security guarantees	European reactions	Despite steps to improve operational flexibility, movement toward strategic autonomy from the United States is likely to be limited.	European reactions to visible U.S. commitment to regional security guarantee would represent an expansion in the U.S. security role and could help reduce European anxiety about U.S. commitment to the region.

Factor	Area Affected	Preliminary Finding	Potential Effect on Finding
following the end of the war		Ukraine's formal integration into the EU and NATO is unlikely in the near term.	U.S. security guarantees would lower one obstacle on Ukraine's path to EU membership but would not resolve other contentious issues likely to protract negotiations.
	Russian reactions	Western states' responses to the war were the key factor in determining Russia's strategic orientation.	Russia's reaction would vary depending on the nature and circumstances of such a guarantee. If Moscow received simultaneous assurances that the guarantee does not undermine its interests, it might continue its policies. By contrast, if guarantees are provided despite Russia's objections, Russia might decide to directly attack the alliance.
U.S. withdraws from European alliance commitments	DIB	DIB growth could create new coordination challenges.	A U.S. withdrawal from its European alliances would shift Europe's focus from coordinating complementary investments to a need to consider how to independently secure needed capabilities.
	European reactions	The European shift away from engagement with Russia is likely irreversible.	Although some countries might attempt to reduce insecurity by accommodating Russian demands, frontline NATO members likely would accelerate rearmament to counter perception that U.S. disengagement presents a chance for Russia to settle old scores.
		Despite steps to improve operational flexibility, movement toward strategic autonomy from the United States is likely to be limited.	U.S. withdrawal would validate and intensify calls for Europe to exercise greater strategic autonomy, although countries' differing responses would impede development of a new security architecture or the unity required to assert influence on the global stage.
		The EU has sought a greater security role, but the substantial reforms required to direct collective military action are unlikely.	Intra-EU disagreements over Russia policy likely would lead likeminded countries, such as the United Kingdom, Sweden, and Finland, to establish new multinational frameworks outside EU or NATO auspices.
		Ukraine's formal integration into the EU and NATO is unlikely in the near term.	If Ukraine has withstood the Russian invasion, some EU members may push for rapid enlargement as a demonstration of resolve but would face resistance from other members arguing for Brussels to husband its resources.
	Russian reactions	The reactive nature of Russian policy implies future reversals are possible.	U.S. withdrawal may not shift Russian policy toward Europe because it would not alter

Factor	Area Affected	Preliminary Finding	Potential Effect on Finding
			the materiel factors that have driven its policies.
Russian destabilization	Chinese reactions	CCP support for Russia is enduring.	China's support for Russia is likely to persist through and perhaps even intensify during periods of instability, but this may not be the case if the regime in Moscow changes substantially.
	European reactions	The European shift away from engagement with Russia is likely irreversible.	The nature and extent of change would depend on the composition and political orientation of any new Russian government given EU policy that rapprochement requires evidence of fundamental changes to Russian policy.
		Despite steps to improve operational flexibility, movement toward strategic autonomy from the United States is likely to be limited.	The nature and extent of change likely depends on the composition and political orientation of any new government given EU policy that rapprochement requires evidence of fundamental changes to Russian policy.

Table 5.3 summarizes our assessments of how factors related to outside events that could occur during or immediately after the conflict could affect our preliminary findings. The most disruptive event we assessed would be a potential U.S. withdrawal from or reduction in its alliance commitments in Europe, which could occur because of a U.S. decision to formally withdraw from NATO or through political signals and posture changes that indicated that the United States no longer intended to honor its Article V commitments to other alliance members. Beyond altering the specific findings we highlighted in our research related to the war in Ukraine, such an event would be a geopolitical earthquake, with strategic implications well beyond the scope of this study. It would also entirely undermine the findings we highlight in Chapter 6 of this volume regarding the potential for the United States to cement its relationship with Europe and more fully enlist its European allies in its efforts to ensure stability in other regions.

The destabilization of Russia that could occur as the result of the immense strain that the war has placed on the country's political and economic system could similarly have widespread implications beyond those noted. Its potential to do so would presumably depend heavily on the scale of that destabilization and whether this advances to the point of fundamentally undermining the ability of the state to provide order or altering the nature of the regime in Moscow. A highly unstable Russia in possession of a vast nuclear arsenal would become an immediate source of concern for all of its neighbors, as well as the United States, in ways not highlighted by our findings in Chapters 3 and 4 given the relative stability of Russia to date. Changes in the nature of the Russian regime away from Putin-led authoritarianism would also have the potential to shift its relationships with other states. For example, either a more democratic or a more virulently nationalistic regime in Moscow could shift the calculations in China, Europe, and the United States regarding whether and how best to engage with Russia.

Conclusion

The tables and discussion presented in this report provide a way to understand how potential future events over the remainder of the war or in its immediate aftermath could affect our findings. These factors therefore constitute indicators and warnings of potentially more dramatic changes that could still occur throughout the regional and international system as a result of this already highly consequential conflict. Potentially, the most consequential events would be the following:

- Russia uses tactical nuclear weapons inside Ukraine.
- China provides lethal military support to Russia.
- A Russian-imposed regime change occurs in Ukraine.
- Ukraine regains internationally recognized borders.
- The United States withdraws from its European alliance commitments.
- Russia is destabilized.

Although the ways in which future events could alter our findings are important to assess, this examination of future factors that could alter our analysis suggests that many of the political, economic, and industrial trends observed since the war in Ukraine began may be relatively durable. Because the war has already lasted several years, international actors have had time to study the fighting and begin to adapt, to forge new coalitions, and to develop more coherent interpretations of the conflict and the policy adaptations that it has required. In some cases, what began as emergency, reactive policies—such as the initially disorganized international effort to resupply Ukraine in the weeks following Russia’s invasion—have been institutionalized and, in the process, entrenched in national and multinational organizations. In other cases, previously unexpected behaviors have been normalized or political attitudes have shifted.

Although our assessments of these factors highlight several areas where our findings may be contingent on future events, many other findings discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 are not included in the tables or discussions in this chapter. Furthermore, many of the more impactful factors we identified, such as Russian nuclear use or the United States withdrawing from its European alliance commitments, would be major historical events, so their wide-ranging effects are perhaps to be expected. Other more-limited factors appear likely to have correspondingly more limited effects on our preliminary findings, suggesting that these findings may be comparatively durable. Our efforts to assess the potential contingency of our findings have therefore revealed important factors to watch and areas where rapid changes could still occur, but they have also helped to bound the remaining uncertainty that we face during the remainder of the war and should help enable policymakers to adapt and plan more vigorously for the war’s aftermath. Our recommendations for how best to do so are the focus of our concluding chapter.

Implications and Recommendations

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has contributed to evolutionary changes across the international system. It has not, to date, led to more revolutionary or fundamental shifts—although, as the previous chapter described, future events could still magnify the war's effects. But in more-targeted areas, such as European security, the conflict is likely to prove to be a seminal event with important long-term ramifications. The rupture in Russian-European relations that resulted from the war appears likely to be durable, regardless of how the war ends. The war is likely to leave Russia in a weakened, more isolated position, while reinvigorating the transatlantic alliance with new members and a greater sense of common purpose. The costs of this conflict for Ukraine have been horrifying, but the costs for Russia's strategic position, economy, and diplomatic influence are immense.

From a U.S. perspective, the war has highlighted areas of previously underappreciated strengths and weaknesses, such as the residual strength of the U.S. alliance network and the limitations of its DIB. Going forward, U.S. policymakers will need to safeguard and build on the more favorable strategic situation created by the war while leveraging the opportunity to learn from and adapt to new opportunities and challenges that have been revealed and created by the fighting. This series of reports provides a first relatively comprehensive assessment of the likely implications of the war and the policies that decisionmakers should consider to adapt to it. This concluding chapter highlights cross-cutting implications that may not have been sufficiently emphasized in the other analyses in this report series that were narrower in scope, as well as a fuller set of recommendations for U.S. policymakers with particular attention to those of interest to the DAF and USAFE.

Cross-Cutting Implications

The individual reports written within our research into the broader effects of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and additional analyses in this report have highlighted numerous implications for particular areas of strategic or military affairs, as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. To these, we add nine cross-cutting implications related to the war's more-systemic effects.

A Clear Shift in Europe's Strategic Orientation

The primary geostrategic effect of Russia's invasion of Ukraine has been to weaken the relationships between Europe and Russia, and to a lesser extent Europe and China, while providing an opportunity to strengthen the relationship between the United States and its European allies. If these changes prove to be durable, they will delay indefinitely the Russian and Chinese goal of a multipolar world with reduced Western influence, as taken together the United States and Europe are projected

to retain a predominant share of global power for the foreseeable future.²⁴² Beyond the blood and treasure this delay has expended, this would be the more enduring strategic cost for the Kremlin.

Increased Russian and Chinese Incentives to Undermine the Transatlantic Alliance

Neither Moscow nor Beijing appears to be satisfied with these geostrategic developments. Despite all that has transpired in Ukraine, Russia appears to remain open to resuming its prewar transactional relationship with Europe, as undesirable as this prospect is from a European perspective. Beijing, for its part, appears to have developed a stronger interest in diplomatic and information operations designed to weaken the transatlantic alliance, and Moscow has continued its efforts at election interference in Western states. But European decisions to seek durable alternatives to Russian energy imports, the foundation of the prewar relationship, will not be easily reversed. Compared with the gravity of fossil fuel imports and economic exchange, these subversive efforts are tools of the weak, with more limited chances for success and greater potential to backfire. Nonetheless, preparing for and reacting to both Russian and Chinese efforts at subversion will need to be an increasing area of focus for Western governments.

Long-Term Risks of Closer Russian and Chinese Cooperation

As suboptimal as greater geopolitical isolation may be for Russia and, to a lesser extent, China, the closer relationship between Moscow and Beijing also brings with it potential negative consequences for the United States. The prospects for greater Russo-Chinese cooperation to counter U.S. influence will need to be carefully assessed, both with respect to peacetime subversion efforts and potential wartime collaboration. These risks need not be overstated. China is unwilling to provide lethal assistance to Russia in a conflict against Ukraine, let alone in a conflict involving European NATO allies, and the two Eurasian powers retain substantial security concerns about one another. But the long-term trajectory of the relationship—and the potential for greater information-sharing and cooperation—all bear watching.

The Potential for Closer U.S.-European Alignment to Help Deter Conflict in Asia

On the other hand, the strengthened U.S. bond with its European allies, combined with the renewed European appreciation of the need to invest in defense capabilities, may bring other benefits for wider U.S. goals if it can be sustained. Most directly, improvements in European defense capabilities—should they be realized and targeted effectively—may enable the United States to redirect resources previously required in Europe to the Indo-Pacific. However, given the very different

²⁴² Although power is gradually diffusing to a wider set of states, for the foreseeable future the preponderance of global power will continue to reside with a handful of core powers, with the United States and its allies retaining a dominant position, if they remain closely aligned. See Michael J. Mazarr, Bryan Frederick, and Yvonne K. Crane, *Understanding a New Era of Strategic Competition*, RAND Corporation, RR-A290-4, 2022.

geographies of the two theaters and the fact that most European defense investments have not been in the critical low-density, high-demand capabilities for which NATO relies most heavily on the United States, the actual U.S. military resources that can be shifted to the Indo-Pacific should these trends continue may be limited.

More promising is that the U.S.-European alignment on Ukraine could lead to greater cooperation on other strategic questions, including the risks of aggression by China and support for U.S. allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific. The record of such increased alignment to date remains limited, but geopolitical changes wrought by Russia's invasion of Ukraine have opened greater possibilities for it to increase in the years to come. Renewed European attention to the transatlantic alliance, in conjunction with evidence of China's unwillingness to condemn Russia's war in Ukraine, may make European capitals more receptive to cooperation with the United States on regional issues. Similarly, the war has increased European cooperation with U.S. allies like South Korea, Japan, and Australia. Even if European military contributions to a war in the Indo-Pacific would be relatively limited, clear and credible signals of European commitment to use economic and diplomatic tools to punish and isolate states that commit aggression in that region may still shift adversary calculations about the risks and benefits of such attacks.

The Gap Between the West and the Global South

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has helped to clarify the attitudes and influence of states beyond the traditional centers of global power. The so-called Global South (and its largest power India, in particular) has reacted ambivalently to Russia's invasion. Although most states in the Global South voted at the UN to condemn Russia's aggression, they have mostly been unwilling to bear any substantial costs to punish Moscow. Their hesitance has not prevented the United States and its allies from imposing substantial economic costs on Moscow.²⁴³ But states' willingness to continue to provide economic outlets for Russia has likely helped to blunt the full force of Western-led sanctions.

The speed of the shift in global power away from the United States and its allies and toward other states can easily be overstated. As noted previously, the United States and Europe together are likely to retain a strong position in global politics for years to come. But a gradual shift is underway because of regional differences in economic and population growth rates. The war in Ukraine highlights that it is uncertain whether defining aspects of the international order, including norms against territorial conquest that have undergirded the relative international stability since 1945, would survive a transition to an international system in which the United States and its traditional allies no longer exercise predominant influence.

The Importance of the Response to Russia's Challenge to the International Order

Even in the present day, the war in Ukraine could potentially become a tipping point in the evolution of the international normative system. Both Russia's initial decision to invade Ukraine and

²⁴³ Howard J. Shatz and Clint Reach, *The Cost of the Ukraine War for Russia*, RAND Corporation, RR-A2421-1, 2023.

the brutality of its prosecution of the war are testing the international community's willingness to defend existing rules of behavior. Whether Putin is perceived as having succeeded in his challenge to these rules or punished effectively for his transgressions may have far-reaching implications for the strength and durability of these norms in the future.

The Uncertain Value of Economic Punishment Tools

At the same time, the war is driving the development of new norms regarding the use of economic tools to govern belligerents' behavior. Although Western states have turned to established tools, such as economic sanctions, to punish Russia for its invasion of Ukraine, they have also experimented with new levers to reduce Russia's access to capital and to isolate the country from the international economy. This experimentation is likely to continue through the remainder of the conflict—and increase expectations for the use of such tools in future conflicts. However, their future utility against powerful adversaries remains uncertain. Russia has adapted to better insulate its economy and circumvent restrictions. China, which already has sought to insulate its economy from external pressures, is likely also learning from Russia's experience and the international backlash, and China may improve its own countermeasures.

The Necessity to Prepare for Protracted Conflict

As the first large-scale interstate war of the information age, the Russia-Ukraine War has served as a demonstration and a reminder of adaptations that the United States will need to undertake to prepare for potential future large-scale conflicts. U.S. adversaries have observed the United States' challenges in sustaining support for Ukraine and, as our analysis of China's lessons from the war has noted, may now have new doubts about the United States' ability and willingness to wage a large, protracted interstate conflict. If adversaries perceive that their industrial and political systems are better suited for a protracted conflict than those of the United States and that their interests can still be achieved at acceptable cost through a protracted conflict, the result may be a weakening of U.S. extended deterrence. To avoid misperceptions about U.S. ability to prevail in such a scenario, these shortcomings should be urgently and publicly addressed.

Applying Lessons from the War in Ukraine Across U.S. Defense Commitments

The war in Ukraine has also served as a demonstration of and test site for innovations in operational concepts and emerging technologies that had not previously been applied to large-scale interstate warfare. The United States is actively engaged in efforts to learn from operations in Ukraine and apply these lessons to the Indo-Pacific and may be doing so more energetically and flexibly than its competitors. However, there appears to be less focus on understanding how these lessons could or should reshape the U.S. approach to defending allies in other theaters where operational challenges are less acute—in particular (ironically), in Europe. Given the strains that its global commitments are likely to impose on U.S. military and economic resources in the years to come, the search for more

cost-effective, asymmetrically advantageous means of deterring adversary aggression will need to be equally robust across theaters.

Recommendations

The reports in this series identify more than 40 specific recommendations for different stakeholders, including for the DAF, USAFE, DoD, and the U.S. government more broadly. In Table 6.1, we highlight the most far-reaching of these recommendations, which primarily fall into the following three main categories:

- preparing the U.S. and allied DIBs for protracted conflict
- sustaining allied cohesion and ensuring U.S. and European initiatives are aligned
- increasing investments in priority capabilities, such as more affordable extended-range munitions and counter-UAS systems.

The recommendations for enhancing the DIB are particularly notable because they stem not only from our research into the DIB, specifically, but also from our work on warfighting implications and Chinese and European reactions to the Russia-Ukraine War. Although not themselves cross-cutting, our recommendations to enhance the DIB clearly have broader implications across different areas of focus.

Table 6.1. Highlighted Recommendations from Other Reports in this Series

Recommendation for...	Recommendation	Report
U.S. government	• Sustain and focus DIB investments to build capacity for priority munitions, systems needed for protracted conflict	Warfighting
	• Continue to authorize multiyear procurement contracts for critical systems	DIB
	• Avoid using stop-work orders during government shutdowns	
	• Fund expansion of DIB capacity	
DoD	• Maintain current policy pursuing expanded diplomatic exchange, confidence-building measures with China	China's reactions
	• Prioritize the development and integration of high-volume, kinetic counter-UAS capabilities	Warfighting
	• Accelerate large-scale investments in and integration of one-way attack UASs and uncrewed surface vehicles	DIB
	• Identify priority munitions, systems for scaled-up, rapid production in the event of a protracted conflict	
	• Develop integrated operational concepts for protracted conflict	China's reactions
	• Sustain and focus DIB investments to build capacity for priority munitions, systems needed for protracted conflict	
	• Identify areas where European producers may be best suited to address U.S. capability and stockpile gaps	European reactions
	• Continue to encourage the development of institutional economic and industrial relationships between U.S. allies in Europe and the Pacific and cooperation through non-NATO frameworks	
DAF, U.S. Air Force, USAFE	• Invest in the development of affordable extended-range munitions	Warfighting
	• Continue development of proliferated satellite constellations and hybrid space architectures	
	• Stack munitions requirements by conflict phase	DIB
	• Prepare to operate from degraded environments for longer periods	China's reactions
	• Assess and communicate to European allies potential munitions, maintenance, and spare parts requirements that might differ from demand signals created by the Russia-Ukraine War	European reactions

NOTE: *Warfighting* refers to Hvizda et al., 2025. *DIB* refers to Laufer et al., 2025. *China's reactions* refers to Wang et al., 2025. *European reactions* refers to Evans et al., 2025.

Our individual volumes were not designed to identify cross-cutting recommendations, the need for which only becomes clear when considering the report series as a whole. In the concluding section, we highlight additional recommendations that go beyond those in the individual reports and stem from the cross-cutting implications summarized above.

For the U.S. Government

- **Increase collaboration, information disclosure, and planning with European allies for U.S. global concerns:** The United States should seize the opportunity presented by Russia's invasion of Ukraine to build closer, more-durable relationships with European allies. Although greater coordination on defense investments may be an important part of an improved relationship, as discussed in the following paragraphs, establishing that the United States intends to reliably and consistently consult closely with its European allies and EU leaders across a variety of global strategic issues may also help cement and expand the expectations and habits of close partnership at the highest levels of government.
- **Provide greater interagency attention to and resources for protecting U.S. and allied political systems from adversary information operations:** The flipside to the potential for increased and more impactful U.S. and allied cooperation is a greater adversary incentive to disrupt that cooperation. As discussed in Chapter 4, China likely perceives strong incentives to use information operations to reduce allied cohesion. The United States should expect the breadth and frequency of those attacks to increase, requiring greater attention and resources to combat them until such a time as the political systems of the United States and its allies demonstrate that they are not susceptible to outside destabilization efforts.
- **Continue to communicate to a wide range of international partners the importance for global stability of not rewarding Russia's attempted conquest of Ukraine:** There remains broad international discomfort with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, even as the steps that should be taken to actively punish Russia remain much more contentious. However, even limited actions, such as a refusal to recognize Russian annexations of Ukrainian territory or a refusal to host Putin while he is the subject of an ICC arrest warrant can be helpful for sustaining international perceptions that Russia's actions are unacceptable to most of the international community and would be costly or risky actions to emulate. These more-limited diplomatic requests should remain on the agenda for engagements with states throughout the world indefinitely to emphasize the seriousness with which the United States treats Russia's violations of core aspects of the international order.
- **Consider adversary efforts to mitigate the effectiveness of U.S. and allied economic coercion tools:** The United States and its allies threw the proverbial economic kitchen sink at Moscow in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This has imposed costs on Russia, but Russia and its partners have also adjusted over time in their efforts to blunt these impacts. In part because of these adversary adaptations, the overall effectiveness of these tools in modifying Russian behavior remains unclear. Moreover, China is doubtlessly closely studying the measures imposed on Russia for its own vulnerability in a potential future conflict with the United States. As the United States continues to explore further economic levers to help

coerce Russia into ceasing its invasion of Ukraine, Washington should weigh the use of these measures in the current conflict against the risk that adversaries may gain confidence in their ability to adapt to them after observing how they function over an extended period of time and seek to identify alternatives or modifications to these tools that may be more effective in the face of adversary efforts to mitigate them.

For DoD

- **Update U.S. and NATO plans for the deterrence of Russia to more fully incorporate lessons learned from the fighting in Ukraine:** The U.S. military has been energetically seeking to apply insights from the fighting in Ukraine to the Indo-Pacific, such as the increased role and capabilities of UASs. New capabilities are being developed, and new operational concepts are being explored. NATO's establishment of the Joint Analysis Lessons Learned Centre-Ukraine Initiative in August 2024 marks an important step toward identifying and implementing similar adaptations, but it is unclear whether there is a process to incorporate these insights into NATO's posture, planning, and capabilities development in a timely manner.²⁴⁴ DoD would likely benefit from a much more robust effort to identify asymmetric and efficient means of deterring Russian aggression, leveraging new technologies and battlefield dynamics and to push for these to be incorporated into NATO defense plans.
- **Assess the effects of increasing reliance on UASs on adversary perceptions of U.S. commitment to the defense of NATO allies:** Greater employment of UASs and other uncrewed systems may help enhance the U.S. ability to defeat adversary aggression in Europe. Although such systems may provide clear battlefield advantages, their effect on deterrence may be more complex. On the one hand, if adversaries perceive that UASs and related systems demonstrate a greater capability to defeat aggression against NATO allies when employed, this would help enhance deterrence. On the other hand, however, adversaries may assess that forward-deployed UASs are a less costly, more easily replaceable asset that may not signal as strong a U.S. commitment and willingness to fight to defend NATO territory as U.S. personnel or crewed systems. Indeed, substituting forward-deployed ground forces for long-range fires could have similar effects. Ensuring that adversary aggression against a NATO ally will inevitably result in U.S. military casualties has long been thought to be a critical trigger for guaranteeing a wider U.S. military response because of the political costs for U.S. leaders that such casualties would produce. If adversaries come to believe that increasing UAS deployments are being undertaken because of a U.S. unwillingness to take casualties in defense of NATO allies, it could lead adversaries to miscalculate that, for example, a first strike to destroy U.S. UAS assets may not necessarily trigger a wider war. DoD should carefully assess likely adversary perceptions of greater UAS deployments—particularly if these are accompanied by reductions in forward-deployed U.S. personnel—and evaluate whether there

²⁴⁴ NATO, "The JALLC-UKR Initiative—Supporting NATO's and the Ukrainian Armed Forces' Lessons Learned Efforts," August 9, 2024e.

may be trade-offs for deterrence as part of its efforts to enhance the defense of its European allies.

- **Focus DIB investments on preparing for likely long-term U.S. needs:** The United States and its European allies are at risk of over-learning from the war in Ukraine. For the reasons outlined in the warfighting volume, such a war might look different for reasons that are particularly important for USAFE.²⁴⁵ But U.S. and European efforts to build capacity are prioritizing efforts to build production lines for the current fight to supply Ukraine and backfill inventories in kind. The capabilities and munitions required for a conflict involving NATO may be quite different, and production lines may or may not be easily adaptable to service these different needs. Although the United States and its allies will need to continue to provide needed munitions to Ukraine in the current conflict, long-term planning should remain focused on long-term U.S. and allied requirements for their own forces.
- **Continue to cooperate with the EU and NATO on regional and security issues beyond Russia that preoccupy southern members:** Although the war in Ukraine has galvanized a new unity among European countries, historical disagreements among European countries regarding whether and how much to prioritize relations with Russia over other security and such stability concerns as migration and terrorism remain. These regional fissures present an opportunity for Russia and China to exploit in their attempt to undermine European unity and slow or prevent EU or NATO actions to support Ukraine or U.S. policy priorities. The United States can help preserve European cohesion by continuing to work with both EU and NATO institutions to address other drivers of regional instability and to communicate how investments in collective defense can improve Europe's capability to respond to a variety of security and stability challenges.
- **Evaluate the potential for Russia-China information-sharing to assist PLA capability development or future concepts of operations:** Despite Russian challenges in adapting to conditions in Ukraine, the war has provided valuable information regarding the performance of U.S.- and other allied-origin equipment, as well as lessons regarding the effective use of new and emerging technologies, equipment, and operational concepts. As the House of Representatives' select committee on China noted in a July 2024 letter, Russia has gained insight into potential electronic warfare countermeasures to U.S. precision munitions that could be relevant to future operations.²⁴⁶ DoD should direct the services to examine potential lessons Russia may have derived from the battlefield experience, evaluate the potential implications for U.S. courses of action, and identify indicators to monitor potential PLA efforts to incorporate or adapt to these insights.

²⁴⁵ Hvizda et al., 2025.

²⁴⁶ Michael Martina, "Exclusive: White House Should Disclose Whether Russia Sharing US Weapons Insight with China, Says Congress," Reuters, July 15, 2024.

For the DAF and USAFE

- **Examine opportunities to leverage actual and proposed European DIB and infrastructure improvements to support U.S. distributed air operations:** Since 2022, the EU and key U.S. allies have launched new initiatives to strengthen critical infrastructure resilience; improve military mobility; and increase production capacity, capability, and timeliness. EU-led joint development and procurement efforts also offer an opportunity to promote the compatibility of the next generation of European equipment. The DAF and USAFE should assess whether and where European enhancements could help resolve logistical barriers to operationalizing concepts for distributed air operations, including prepositioning supplies, availability of runways, and hardening relevant critical infrastructure. DoD should communicate U.S. priorities in European forums, and USAFE should work with partners to incorporate these considerations in security cooperation activities and access, basing, and overflight agreements.
- **Convene a working group of European and East Asian allied air forces to share lessons learned from the war in Ukraine and foster cross-regional information-sharing and cooperation:** The war in Ukraine has catalyzed new forms of cooperation between European and East Asian allies, including both coordination of defense assistance to Ukraine and increased European interest in procuring arms and equipment from East Asian defense firms. To foster broader cooperation and highlight areas of common interest, the United States should establish a regular schedule of working-level engagements to identify and share tactical and operational lessons from the conflict and insights from national adaptations and innovations.
- **Collaborate with Ukrainian and allied air forces to incorporate insights from the Russia-Ukraine War into national, bilateral, and NATO exercises and training:** Despite the relatively limited role of the Ukrainian air force in the fighting to date, the conflict has illustrated general changes in the joint operating environment that are relevant to future U.S. and allied air operations. For example, Ukrainian forces' experience operating in a contested electronic spectrum environment can inform the development of more realistic electronic warfare training environments. Likewise, Ukrainian armed forces' experience employing hybrid space architectures can help inform the development of U.S. and NATO tactics, techniques, and procedures and improve the readiness of non-spacefaring allies to incorporate space capabilities into their operations.
- **Assess the potential for Chinese information-sharing to augment Russian capabilities in a crisis or conflict with NATO:** Whether and how China's leadership might choose to support Russian operations in a militarized crisis or war with NATO is uncertain and worthy of additional analysis. However, China's global information capabilities and demonstrated interest in conducting information operations in Europe suggests that it may seek to leverage these advantages to assist Russia. USAFE should assess whether and how Chinese capabilities could augment Russian targeting, introduce new foreign protection considerations, or require changes in U.S. and allied countermeasures.
- **Adjust strategic messaging regarding U.S. posture, exercises, and activities in Europe to account for Chinese counter-messaging:** China has sought to spread misinformation regarding U.S. force movements, activities, and intent in other theaters and is likely to expand

this playbook to reduce host nation support for U.S. and bilateral operations, activities, and investments in Europe going forward. USAFE should direct efforts to identify and track potential Chinese counter-messaging and tailor its messaging accordingly.

Abbreviations

ASAT	anti-satellite
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
DAF	Department of the Air Force
DIB	defense industrial base
DoD	U.S. Department of Defense
EU	European Union
FY	fiscal year
GDP	gross domestic product
HIMARS	High-Mobility Artillery Rocket System
ICC	International Criminal Court
LEO	low-earth orbit
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OWA	one-way attack
PLA	People's Liberation Army
UAS	uncrewed aerial systems
UN	United Nations
USAFE	U.S. Air Forces in Europe

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This volume presents findings from a series of RAND reports examining the Russia-Ukraine War's geopolitical and military consequences and identifies cross-cutting implications for U.S. policymakers. In the series of reports and in the present volume, the authors employed a threefold approach. First, they surveyed historical wars of similar size, duration, and scope to bound expectations for the Russia-Ukraine War's likely effects and aftermath. Second, they identified diplomatic, military, economic, and normative changes that have occurred as a result of the war using government documents and senior leader statements; discussions with subject-matter experts; and prior open-source research. Third, because the war is ongoing, they highlighted plausible future events or changes that could alter states' responses to the conflict and, in turn, affect the report's preliminary findings.

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