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With Brenthurst he has directed numerous reform projects in African heads of government, including Rwanda (2007-8), Mozambique (2005-11), Swaziland (2010-11), Malawi (2012-14, and again 2020/1), Kenya (2012 and 2020), Lesotho (2008; 2019-20), Liberia (2006/7), Zambia (2010; 2016), Zimbabwe (2009-13), Ghana (2017), Ethiopia (2019-20), Nigeria (2017-18), and almost continuously at various levels of government in South Africa from the Foundation's outset. He also sat on the Danish Africa Commission and on the African Development Bank's high-level panel on fragile states, and served four deployments to Afghanistan with the British Army as the adviser to the commander. He has also worked extensively in Colombia, and with a variety of African governments in both improving the conditions for peacebuilding and investment, including through the Zambezi Protocol on the natural resource sector.

A member of the advisory board of the Royal United Services Institute, he is the author of the best-selling books *Why Africa Is Poor* and *Africa's Third Liberation*, and together with President Olusegun Obasanjo *Making Africa Work: A Handbook for Economic Success*. In 2018 he completed a second stint as a visiting fellow at Cambridge University, in producing a book on the state of African democracy, which was published as *Democracy Works* in 2019. *The Asian Aspiration: Why and How Africa Should Emulate Asia* followed in 2020, which identifies the relevant lessons from Asia's development and growth story. His writings won him the Recht Malan Prize for Non-Fiction Work in South Africa.

His latest books – *Expensive Poverty* – which details the failings of aid, and suggests several ways to improve development outcomes, is published by Pan Macmillan in October 2021; while *The Ledger: Accounting for Failure in Afghanistan* has been published by Hurst/Oxford University Press at the start of 2022. An edited compendium on *Better Choices* for the South African economy was also published by Panmacmillan in March 2022. He has just completed a book length study on where and why reforms work, *Rich State, Poor State* (Penguin 2023) and is busy writing another (with David Kilcullen) on how to win wars and the peace.

He was appointed to the Advisory Panel of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in 2022.

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He served in Iraq as senior counterinsurgency advisor to General David Petraeus and as senior counterterrorism advisor to U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. He has also worked in conflict zones like Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, Libya, and Colombia. Kilcullen has authored five award-winning books and numerous scholarly papers on terrorism, insurgency, and future warfare. In 2015, he received the Walkley Award for war reporting on the rise of ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

Kilcullen leads the Future Operations Research Group at UNSW and teaches Masters courses on strategy, urban warfare, and military innovation. He works with U.S. and allied governments on risk prediction, urban development, resilience, and counterterrorism. He has also contributed to projects for DARPA and other advanced research agencies, focusing on technology, AI, and future conflict. Additionally, he serves as a special adviser to the Brenthurst Foundation.

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Abstract

The world has suddenly become a very dangerous place. Horrific new wars with major international consequences are erupting with greater frequency. As Russia's imperial machine pursued its war of conquest in Ukraine and Ethiopia struggled to end a murderous civil war, the Israel-Palestine conflict entered a brutal phase dominated by horrific new terror tactics and brutal reprisals.

In Africa's Sahel, coups threatened a new era of continental conflict.

Growing instability results from an era of serial mistakes by policy makers. The victory of the Taliban over internationally-sponsored government forces in Afghanistan and the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation in the space of less than six months between August 2021 and February 2022 highlights contemporary failings.

How then to win a modern war? The answer, of course, depends on what type of war it is.

Low intensity conflict in Afghanistan or Africa fought by people in slip-slops armed with cell-phones, Kalashnikovs, and RPG7s and transported on pick-up trucks offers different answers to that fought between industrialised nations with high-tech Intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance systems and guided-missile technology.

Even when the military struggle is settled, why is it that we often fail to win the peace, with more than half of all post-conflict countries returning to war within a decade?

These questions are particularly relevant for poorer countries, most of which are in Africa, a continent that is increasingly the site of coups d'etat and failed states. The toxic intersection of failing economies, booming populations and dashed expectations produces chronic instability and insurrection. Donors have not turned the tide of social insecurity, migration and poverty as many leave in search of a better life in other African countries or across the Mediterranean. More than two-thirds of extreme poor worldwide are living in conflict-affected areas.

The burning question of today is: On the basis of past lessons, and predictions about the future, what qualities of leadership, intelligence, diplomacy, economic assistance, and war-fighting will be required to ensure security?

Two of the world's foremost security specialists look at trends in AI, cyber security, private security, and between multilateral and unilateral agency, and offer solutions to both winning the war and winning the peace.

Key words: Technological innovation, information warfare, industrialised warfare, transition from war to peace

‘1938 echoes today of a world poised,’ warns the Ukrainian Nobel Peace Laureate Oleksandra Matviichuk, ‘on the brink of a devasting war’.[1] The pieces are there. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, tensions across the Taiwan Strait, America divided, the Middle East in flames, rising populism in Latin America, and an Africa sliding off the map of global concern into state failure, military juntas and regional wars.

These developments foreshadow a return to the carnage of the 20th century, the most violent in human history. More than 230 million people were killed or ‘allowed to die by human decision’ in what was termed a ‘Beastly Century’.[2] We risk similar bloodshed today absent decisive leadership. There is need for governance which seeks to employ political agency rather than entrench perceptions of victimhood.

During the Second World War, warfare reached previously unimaginable extremes, where the rules of war were rewritten in an increasingly ruthless struggle, bringing mass destruction, widespread civilian casualties and systematic crimes against humanity. Mass mobilisation, industrialisation, and total war reflected the entwining of ideology, warfare and perceptions of national survival, and the balance of casualties shifted to civilians – from a 1:1 ratio of civilian to military deaths in 1914–18 to 2:1 in 1939–45 and in the Korean and Vietnam conflicts. Economies and society at large became part of an expanded battlespace, with all aspects of society being targeted from the air through strategic bombing, by economic warfare via blockade, the weaponisation of hunger, and psychological intimidation. The tenacity of civilian populations to not only withstand this targeting but to actively play their part in supporting the total war effort was critical. By 1970, Marshall McLuhan could write that ‘World War III is a guerrilla information war with no division between military and civilian participation’.[3]

The future, in 1938 as today, is not preordained. It will be decided by how citizens respond, whether their governments act to re-establish defensive capacity and thereby deterrence, and whether they are prepared to act boldly and decisively when standards and laws governing international behaviour are flouted.

Certain social and economic changes have confused the clarity of response.

Unlike the 1930s, when the costs of war were fresh in living memory, spurring rapid industrialisation and rearmament, today at least for most in the West, war is a distant concept, mostly fought by others, by professional armies in distant lands, with the public conscience only occasionally disturbed when particularly horrific combat scenes make it through the media filter. The last generation to fight in a world war – the youngest soldiers of the Second World War are turning 97 in 2024 – is vanishing. With that generation, the vigilance inspired by direct knowledge of what real war means is fading too. It is easy and not a little convenient to dismiss war as someone else’s problem, to subsume its grim realities into a debate about faceless value chains, technology, theories of inclusion and exclusion, a confusion of acronyms, commercial interests, ideological differences, and geography. It is common, too, that war, its causes and challenges, is subjected to topical interest group debates in the West, reflecting a streak of self-referentialism as much as denialism and self-interest.

Yet this state of affairs cannot be someone else’s business. Critical choices about defence, foreign policy, national resilience, and spending priorities belong to everyone, to elected leaders and the public alike, and will determine a future either of war or peace. We are not, after all, spectators in this unfolding drama. Moreover, while there may be a tendency to look at everything as new and unprecedented, disruptive changes to conflict are as old as war itself.

Technological innovation, for example, is one constant. The modern iteration is in information technology, digitisation and integration through electronic media and other networks. The democratisation of information has removed traditional editorial filters to information content, while algorithms and artificial intelligence constantly reinforce certain world views among recipients. Certainly, the scale is different, with seven billion smartphones today in circulation, distributing information first-hand, and constantly re-emphasising narratives. And yet human operations are still key to the management of information and influence operations, intangibles from cyber to ‘lawfare’, and the ability to work through multilateral organisations.

Other changes are in the manner of the integration of technology itself, with AI and human-machine teaming, along with the proliferation of autonomous systems creating new patterns of warfare,

1 WhatsApp Correspondence with Dr Mills, April 2024.

2 Eric Hobsbawm and Margaret Drabble cited in Milton Lietenberg’s Deaths in Wars and Conflicts in the 20th Century at https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/20060800_cdsp_occ_leitenberg.pdf

3 Marshall Mcluhan, Culture is Our Business. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970, p.66.

revolutionising the application of tactical concepts across time, space, command and control, and risk. As robotics and autonomous systems warfare becomes a 'normal' phenomenon, it seems unlikely that constraints on war – cultural, legal or military – can remain unchanged, especially at the interface of non-state actors, technology and weak governance. But this should not make the world more dangerous, even if it is more complex, with a greater number of actors, state and non-state, and a faster pace of events. Nor should the reality of complexity undercut the importance and impact of choice.

Victory in war has long required more than tactical prowess. As the historian and author James Holland observes, during the Second World War, this placed greater emphasis on the operational connection between the strategic (high-level aims) to the tactical (the coalface where the actual fighting is done) aspects of war, concerning the war supply chain from raw materials through production and delivery via logistics.[4] The mobilisation and meshing of economic, political and military stamina along with technological innovation, organisation and logistics, mass production and global co-operation are required. Technology is key to success, but by itself is not enough to win wars, a realisation that became familiar to the great powers in the decolonisation struggle and more recently in Iraq and Afghanistan, when it was turned to the asymmetrical advantage of insurgents. Technology has to be closely integrated with operational concepts, people, and organisations.

Other constants remain. There is a need for sound leadership at all these levels: tactical through the operational to strategic. War is a profoundly human act, best told through the stories of individuals and their choices. Such stories often centre on sacrifice, tragedy and quiet heroism. It's a drama in which leadership has a disproportionate impact, for good and bad, as these pages will illustrate.

For those on the periphery of the global economy, or at the margins of international public opinion and media coverage, this carries even greater possible costs. In a social-media age the establishment of a clear, coherent and convincing narrative – laying out policy aims and the path and means pursued to achieve these – is key to shaping fact and understandings of reality.

Strategies to end intervene to end conflict have to mesh and match short-term actions with longer-term aims. To do so, there is a need to think beyond political, electoral cycles, and to pursue strategies which will reinforce the practices that led to conflict in the first instance. For instance among the 'Global South', states are overwhelmingly characterised by extractive political economies, where access to decision making power and privilege determines patterns of wealth. Outsiders have been especially poor at understanding this operating system and how to transform to ensure greater inclusiveness and a wide local stake in stability and success. A failure to undo the corruption permeating the political economy of Afghanistan, for example, lies at the heart of Western failure in the twenty-year mission to bring peace to that country, one compounded by a failure to synch Western stamina with political ambition and develop a military approach to defeat the Taliban which ultimately outlasted, outmatched and outmanoeuvred its rival.

That the West never fundamentally altered but simply amplified the Afghan political economy and this operating system through increasing financial flows only worsened the practices of corruption and undid any efforts to improve governance. While there is a need to see the world the way it is, not the way you would like it to be, 'do no harm' must also be a key operating principle, one that is frequently neglected. Within the Arg, the Afghan presidential palace, key individuals were constantly on the take, their greed worsening as the government system crumbled. These inflows were not only from the West, of course, but from supposed Middle Eastern allies as well as the usual range of opponents. Without undoing this political economy, the relationships between insiders and outsiders was simply transactional.

How a war ends determines how the peace is won.

Various levels of analysis – from grand-strategic and military-strategic to operational and tactical – should link policy with strategy and campaigning with the conduct of battle. These are sometimes called levels of war, and are discussed further in detail, but they apply equally in preserving or making peace, and in the transition from war to peace – an important subset of strategy, known as 'war termination', that has been sadly ineffective in Western practice.

There is a premium on leadership to not only prepare properly for war but also to make peace. For conflicts to end peacefully, there is usually a need for equal pressure on the belligerent parties, from the outside, to get them to the negotiating table. The parties also need to see that there is more to be gained

4 Discussion, Lake Como, August 2023.

from ending the fighting than continuing with it, and they need a clear methodology for making peace, a sense of timing and leadership. The last component is critical but elusive, not least in the endless wars of the Middle East.

We will show that the circumstances for peace-making involve an acceptance that the warring parties have more to gain by ending the conflict than continuing it; that they are being pressured by regional and international actors to the negotiating table; that there is an agreed process and timeline, and that the right people drive this. If a peace process is only to allow enough time to recover between bouts of conflict, for one party or another to exit from the conflict, or as a means of legal or diplomatic subterfuge, or if one party or another still is more interested in war than peace, then war will likely resume. Once a peace process has been concluded then other strategic aspects come into play, including economic and legal redress, as well as safeguards to prevent the resumption of conflict.

Making agreements stick has proven another challenge entirely. Paul Collier reminds us that nearly half the countries that have ended a civil war are likely to resort to conflict soon afterwards.[5] There were more than 5,000 conflict mediation efforts between 1945 and 2000, in which some type of agreement was reached in 45.5% of interstate and an almost identical 44.3% of intrastate disputes.Yet just one in four interstate dispute settlements during this period held longer than eight weeks, and only 17.2% of intrastate disputes.[6] Finding ways to lower this risk is imperative, particularly in Africa given the prevalence of conflict on the continent: of 33 conflicts globally in 2022, half were in Africa,[7] with nine in Asia, five in the Middle East, two in Europe and just one in the Americas. In an inversion of Carl von Clausewitz's observation on the primacy of politics in war, peace can be misused, to be viewed by its participants as war by other means. The need for vigilance over irrational exuberance is clear from those peace processes where early optimism has been replaced by failure, including in southern Africa and parts of Latin America.

The division of labour – and the balance of focus – between insiders and outsiders in ensuring stability is a source of ongoing debate among practitioners, and one that both of us have examined in detail in previous books. The question is what leverage, aside from moral suasion, outsiders can bring to bear. Outside parties – both non-governmental and international – can help both to pressure and facilitate peace efforts, mobilising communities and creating awareness. They can also help build trust and consensus, offer a neutral arbiter on difficult and sensitive issues, and create alternatives to violence. While attention is often on high-profile diplomatic efforts to end a conflict, local actors have a critical role to play in establishing the conditions for peace. When it was suggested to Stalin that the Pope might appreciate his ceasing to oppress Catholics in Russia, he scoffed, 'The Pope? How many divisions has he got?' Stalin's lack of respect for moral authority may have been extreme, but it is far from unique.

In his work on the Thirty Years' War, written in 1805, Clausewitz criticised those scholars who treated war only with a sense of horror and superiority as a formless, brutish struggle, which some would have preferred to ignore altogether.[8] The centrality of motives – interests and values – has historically found expression in Just War Theory, comprising *jus ad bellum* (the 'right to [go to] war') and *jus in bello* ('right [conduct] in war'). Several criteria exist for a just war: its declaration by a lawful sovereign, a just and righteous cause, possessing rightful intentions in seeking to advance good and curtail evil, a reasonable chance of success, war as a last resort, and goals proportional to the means being used. Proportionality also applies in the conduct of war, regarding how much force is necessary and morally appropriate to the ends being sought and the injustice suffered. All these principles, which have formed the basis of the work of the United Nations and the rules of the international system since 1945, are at stake in today's conflicts – notably including Ukraine and Gaza. The fact that Western countries, during the war on terror

5 Cited in https://www.economist.com/international/2018/01/18/how-to-stop-countries-sliding-back-into-civil-war

6 See Scott Sigmund Gartner, 'Third-Party Mediation of Interstate Conflicts: Actors, Strategies, Selection, and Bias', Arbitration Law Review 2014, at https://elibrary.law.psu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1063&context=arbitrationlawreview

7 Researchers at the Universitat Autonoma de Barcelona listed among them: Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Re public (CAR), Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, the Lake Chad region, Libya, Mali, Mozambique, Soma lia, South Sudan, Sudan (Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile) and the western Sahel region. See https://www.defenceweb.co.za/joint/diplomacy-a-peace/spanish-university-research-shows-africa-leads-in-armed-conflict/?referrer=newsletter

8 See Peter Paret, 'The History of War', Daedalus, Vol. 100, No. 2, Spring, 1971, pp. 376-396 at https://www.jstor.org/stable/20024009

and before, arguably breached these just-war criteria themselves, reduces their moral legitimacy in seeking to hold adversaries to account.

But this is a criticism of Western hypocrisy, not an argument against others' right of self-defence.

There are other constants in history. Motive matters. So does fighting will. Mass (whether achieved physically or by massing effects) remains critical to battle, as does logistics capacity. Properly harnessed and supported, technology can be an enabler. How all these aspects mesh with each other is critical in determining deterrence – the business of avoiding conflict – and in determining how wars end and whether peace ensues.

We are not alone in seeking answers to this pressing challenge of conflict.

In *Conflict: The Evolution of Warfare from 1945 to Ukraine*, published in 2023, David Petraeus and Andrew Roberts highlight the critical mistakes made by leaders in applying new weapon systems, theories and strategies to contemporary conflict. Mike Martin's *How to Fight a War* (2024) covers much of the same ground in understanding why wars seldom go to plan, from over-ambitious goals to disregarding intelligence, terrain, or enemy capabilities. In covering conflict from the 19th century until today, Sir Lawrence Freedman's *The Future of War* (2017) describes how wars are not always a rational response to political pressures, and to appreciate the fallacies of believing in short wars and conflicts of choice. In *The Arms of the Future*, published in 2023, Jack Watling analyses how technology is shaping the risks and opportunities on the battlefield, and how armies might be structured to overcome them. War remains a driver of technological development and can be a catalyst for social change. The sociologist Michael Mann's 2023 *On Wars* delves into the role and make-up of individuals in opting for war or peace.

In *The Art of War and Peace*, we add, we hope, to this recent, fine literature, though it is different in three important respects:

First, it is structured only around case studies of wars in which we have had direct personal experience, including in Africa, a continent so often neglected in war studies even though it is the site of the majority of the world's conflicts. The book has deliberately not been written from a high-level perspective, but rather from among the dust and detritus of places where war is fought, and in the company of those that fight them. While we don't pretend or seek to cover every contemporary conflict, we dig down into the personal in endeavouring to draw out lessons and guidelines from which others might learn and on which they might, hopefully, act.

Second, this is thus a book about human dynamics and tactical action as much as the need for strategy. Admiral Jackie Fisher's succinct and poetic phrase 'Think in oceans; shoot at sight!' makes this connection between the strategic and the tactical, and of the need for big conceptions, quick decisions, and local actions. Tactical reality therefore lies at the heart of this book in the journey from peace to war and, sadly often, back again.

Finally, the book is designed to provoke thinking about solutions, drawing inspiration from Eisenhower's phrase: 'Whenever I run into a problem I can't solve, I always make it bigger. I can never solve it by trying to make it smaller, but if I make it big enough, I can begin to see the outlines of a solution.' Perhaps this is less about enlarging the problem, but increasingly, in this instance, and through the use of detailed case studies, in placing these problems – and solutions – under intense scrutiny.

Benjamin Franklin may have said 'There never was a good war or a bad peace'. But peace does not always prevent war, sometimes with devastating consequences. Deterrence, defined as the ability to decisively affect an adversary's decision calculus by altering their perception of the costs and benefits of pursuing a given course of action versus those of restraint, does not alone centre on diplomacy: rather, it involves all elements of national power.[9] Just as aggression is not founded alone on opportunism but also on fears about security or a lack of alternatives, deterrence has to be flexible but also firm in being backed up by a credible threat of force as much as leaving space to defuse the crisis.[10]

All this is important since global security challenges are likely to worsen and not wane over the next generation.

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9 See United States Government, Department of Defense, Joint Chiefs of Staff (2006), Deterrence Operations Joint Operating Concept Version 2.0, Washington DC: December 2006, at https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/concepts/joc_deterrence.pdf?ver=2017-12-28-162015-337

10 See the November 2018 Study, 'What deters and why?', at https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2451.html

If we want to ensure that today does not turn out like 1938, or even like 1940 after the fall of France, a lull during which it was uncertain whether the appetite of Hitler's Germany was sated or merely whetted, we should act with alacrity. The twin threats of ignorance and inaction could otherwise – as those who misread the signs of global war during the previous century discovered – engulf a way of life that, whatever its failings, has brought greater global prosperity and inclusion than ever before. And the costs of any global conflagration, as the last century vividly shows, are likely to be painfully high.

When atomic weapons were used at the end of the Second World War, some observers initially thought they would make war obsolete. Instead, the presence of a nuclear threshold – beyond which lay national and, perhaps, planetary annihilation – forced adversaries to find alternate channels for competition. The focus of great-power competition shifted from the central front (in a divided Europe) to the global periphery, and a combination of conventional, asymmetric and guerrilla warfare. It played out through interstate wars (in Korea, the Middle East, India-Pakistan, Iran-Iraq, and Eritrea-Ethiopia, for example), intrastate conflicts including insurgencies and civil wars (Malaya, Kenya, Nigeria, Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Angola and Vietnam), and through what Nikita Khrushchev labelled 'wars of national liberation'. The latter category exposed the impotence of regular militaries from developed economies, in fighting self-determination from Vietnam to Afghanistan. While supposedly 'limited' in that they did not involve direct combat between the superpowers, the impacts of these wars were far from limited, highlighting the danger of viewing warfare through the lens only of great-power protagonists.

With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union two years later, the great struggle of the 20th century between liberty and totalitarianism seemed to have ended in a decisive victory for individual freedoms, democracy and free enterprise. As George W. Bush put it in 2002, it seemed that in the century to follow, 'only nations that share a commitment to protecting basic human rights and guaranteeing political and economic freedom will be able to unleash the potential of their people and assure their future prosperity.' And, he added, 'the duty of protecting these values against their enemies is the common calling of freedom-loving people across the globe and the ages.'[11]

If these words seem quaint today, an echo from a vanished past, that may be because the intervening two decades of the inconclusive, brutal *War on Terror*, have seen a reversion of great-power competition. Representative government is in retreat in the face of resurgent authoritarianism. Global liberty declined for the 17th consecutive year in 2023 according to Freedom House, which has been charting these trends for half a century.[12] Freedom of trade is increasingly constrained, as economic decoupling between China and the United States takes hold, and with the widespread imposition of sanctions against Russia following its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Democracies now inhabit a world, as Tom Tugenhat has noted, 'where multilateral institutions can no longer provide the stability or security they once promised.'[13] This weakness of course does not only apply to Western democracies. Or as Hanna Maliar, then Ukraine's deputy minister of defence, told us, 'the main lesson between 2014 and 2022 is that all the instruments elaborated since World War II are not working anymore.'[14]

This may help to explain why, for instance, despite unprecedented levels overall of global prosperity today conflict rages in parts of sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, and Central Europe.[15] There are other, worrying longer-term trends. Anthony Cordesman writes of 'winter wars' which include nuclearisation, the arms race, terrorism, population pressures and threats from 'fragile, divided, authoritarian, and undeveloped states', along with regional areas of tension including the Koreas and North Africa in addition to those already mentioned.[16] The contemporary simultaneous nature of the threats is unusual, perhaps unique. One senior European intelligence official of a southern Mediterranean country summarised the 'threat vectors' facing Europe from the Sahel as the combination of jihadism, weak domestic governance and widespread corruption, economic collapse worsened by climate change, ethnic division and its corollary in nationalist struggles, and an exploding demography coupled with an external spark in the form of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict along with foreign interference, both directly and indirectly through influence operations and contestation over supra-national structures including

11 On his unveiling of The US National Security Strategy, 17 September 2002. At https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/nsc/nssall.html
12 At https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2023/marking-50-years
13 At https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-kingdom/tom-tugendhat-britain-after-ukraine
14 Interview with Drs Mills and Kilcullen, Kyiv, 1 August 2023.
15 'Ten conflicts to watch in 2023', at https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/10-conflicts-watch-2023
16 Go to https://www.csis.org/analysis/world-crisis-winter-wars-2022–2023

the United Nations. As a consequence, he said, the Sahel region, which will hold by 2050, a population of 330 million across its 12 nations, double what it is today,[17] 'is on the brink of becoming a failed macro-state'.[18]

This setting demands a hard look at how we got to this point, and how the failure of external policies has contributed.

Sun Tzu wrote that 'He will win who knows when to fight and when not to fight.' The same rule applies to making peace as much as making war. To understand and apply the essence of war – and its corollary, the essence of peace – implies making sense of a rapidly changing, complex environment. Good intentions are not enough to manage this environment and the interlocking crises present. As Oleksandra Matviichuk notes, instead we require 'a rational perspective and clear-eyed strategy'.

Russia's War in Ukraine: Some Lessons

In contrast to Ashraf Ghani's hapless final months as Afghanistan's president before the takeover by the Taliban in 2021, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, at the outset of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, portrayed the image of a man in charge.

On the threshold of Russian invasion, any deterrence offered by Ukraine's international supporters was undermined by President Biden's statement that putting US troops in Ukraine was 'not on the table'.[19] By removing this option from consideration, and not saying clearly that the United States would supply Ukraine with funding and modern equipment as it has since done, Biden massively undermined the deterrent effect that he was (in theory, at least) seeking to achieve. His decision, also, to withdraw American special warfare advisers and move the US embassy from Kyiv to the western city of Lviv further signalled weakness to Russian analysts, who clearly (and correctly) interpreted this as an indication that Washington was preparing itself for a rapid Ukrainian defeat. Unsurprisingly, Vladimir Putin reacted by failing to take Biden or his administration seriously. Zelenskyy for his part brushed off Biden's offer of evacuation with the now famous reply, 'I need ammunition, not a ride.'

Zelenskyy's leadership – at this early stage of the conflict – seemed to stiffen the spine of the international effort. Not only did the international media have a hero in the Churchillian model, but Zelenskyy managed, as retired general (and former CIA director) David Petraeus notes, to get all the major tasks of strategic leadership correct – in, first, getting the big ideas right; second, in communicating them effectively inside Ukraine and around the world; thirdly, in relentlessly overseeing their implementation; and, finally, in continuously refining these ideas.[20]

Leadership by itself is not enough, of course. Even though there are many cases of superior forces and numbers being defeated by a smaller, motivated foe, leadership is useful only alongside a viable strategy, an executable plan and sufficient resources.

If Afghanistan was a case where a 20th-century adversary, armed with little more than rifles, bombs, cell phones and RPGs and moving on foot, by motorcycle and in Toyota pick-ups, overwhelmed a government equipped with 21st-century weaponry, Ukraine was the opposite: a smaller, less well-equipped defender facing a seemingly overwhelming enemy, and dependent on a combination of stoicism and innovation.

By 2022, Ukraine had learned many lessons since Russia's seizure of Crimea and parts of the Donbas region eight years before, and from the continuous (and often quite intense) warfare along the subsequent line of contact, not least about the impossibility of making peace with the Russians. Between 2014 and 2022 the two sides met directly, and indirectly through various Russian separatist groups, more than two hundred times to negotiate and implement the Minsk agreements in an attempt to end the fighting. The Minsk Protocol, drafted in 2014, failed to stop the fighting, and was followed with a revised agreement (Minsk 2) signed in February 2015, which included a ceasefire, withdrawal of heavy weapons, release of

17 At https://www.prb.org/resources/demographic-challenges-of-the-sahel/#:~:text=With%20total%20fertility%20rates%20between,to%20670%20million%20in%202100
18 Zoom Conference. 7 February 2024.
19 At https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sVYQdGwMe6g
20 See Petraeus' interview with Niall Ferguson in The Spectator, 16 April 2022.

prisoners, granting by Ukraine of self-government to areas of the Donbas, and restoration of Ukrainian government control over the country's borders. Again, Minsk 2's provisions were never fully implemented. As Ukraine's then foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba observed: 'Our partners pressed Moscow to be constructive, and when they ran into the Kremlin's diplomatic wall, they insisted that Ukraine had to take the "first step", if only to demonstrate that Russia was the problem. Following this flawed logic, Ukraine made some painful concessions. It only led to Russia's full-scale attack on February 24, 2022.' 'It all failed', says Kuleba, 'because the endgame of Russia was war, not peace.'[21]

At the outset of the full-scale invasion in 2022, it seemed, to borrow the phrase variously attributed to Lenin, Stalin and others, that 'quantity would have a quality all of its own'. Ukraine possessed a military that was, on paper, at least eleven times smaller than Russia's, with five times less funding, a far smaller defence industrial base, a population just one-third of Russia's 144 million, and an economy eight times smaller. Yet Ukraine was able not only to withstand the initial Russian onslaught, but to push Russian forces back. Russia's conventional capabilities – including advanced combat aircraft, tanks and other armoured forces, enormous numbers of artillery pieces, rockets and missiles, nuclear weapons, and a much-feared cyber capability – did not deliver the swift victory anticipated. Applying a 'mosquito' – or 'porcupine' – strategy, Ukraine employed smaller formations and lighter, stealthier, more mobile weaponry such as anti-tank guided missiles, and exploited the urban and wooded terrain of northern Ukraine. In so doing, Ukrainians played to their strengths, among them knowledge of the terrain and fighting among their own population. This strategy was complemented by Western enablers, including intelligence support and weapons.

The Ukrainian experience – both good and bad – offers lessons for other countries, such as Taiwan, facing far larger adversaries. By achieving unexpected success in the early days of the invasion, and by exploiting Zelenskyy's theatrical leadership style to create a global celebrity underdog effect, Ukraine brought about greater flows of assistance from Western countries that were otherwise jaundiced by the Afghan experience. But at the same time, Kyiv cemented its strategic centre of gravity – the element from which Ukraine draws its strength and freedom of action in the war with Russia – as Western support, the preservation of which in turn required Ukraine to fight a post-modern war of political influence and international reputation, even as Russia fought an industrial-age campaign of kinetic destruction and territorial conquest.

Without Western equipment and munitions, including armoured vehicles and precision-guided rockets along with air defence systems, artillery, aircraft, munitions and spares, Ukraine would have been unable to withstand Russian pressure, let alone compel Russian forces to retreat. And yet, as in Afghanistan, by defeating the initial Russian onslaught and thus turning the conflict into a protracted war of attrition, Ukraine ensured that the Western supply role would have to be sustained for some time if Ukraine was to have any chance of prevailing.

Of course, compared with Afghanistan, there were altogether different issues at stake for the West in Ukraine. A narrow majority of Ukrainians – mostly in the country's western regions – had, since the 2004 Orange Revolution and through the Euromaidan protests and Revolution of Dignity in 2014, signalled their interest in being part of the European community rather than slipping back into the Russian fold. At the same time, a substantial part of the population (and, seemingly, a majority in key parts of the industrialised, Russian-speaking eastern region) looked to Moscow.

The conflict from 2014 to 2022 thus became a low-intensity war fuelled by Russia's direct intervention on behalf of pro-Russian separatists in the east and by the West's indirect intervention to support the pro-European government in Kyiv. The outcome of this conflict – part intra-state conflict, part regional proxy war, and part inter-state invasion – had implications for Europe and the wider world. As the second-largest country by landmass in Europe, the world's largest sunflower oil exporter and a top-ten producer of barley, wheat, corn, soya and rapeseed, with large oil and gas reserves, and a major producer of ammonia and nitrate fertiliser, Ukraine was in a different category from Afghanistan in terms of strategic impact.

The role of outside support does not diminish the performance of Ukraine's military and civilian efforts against an adversary with a huge advantage in manpower and materiel. This performance was assisted by flexibility in command and control, and continual innovation, not least in Ukraine's domestic deployment and, increasingly, production and adaptation of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) in part to substitute for its lack of airpower.

21 WhatsApp exchange, 21 December 2023.

At the same time, there are limits to external assistance, especially when such assistance may be seen as encouraging escalation of the conflict against a foe possessing weapons of mass destruction. Though the Russian advance had been blunted and then pushed back in the campaigns of spring 2022, Moscow's forces were still occupying one-fifth of Ukrainian territory at the start of 2023. The Russians learned their lessons, reconstituted their forces, and reverted to their strengths. Arguably, sometime around April 2022, following the failure of their initial multi-axis invasion, Russian leaders made the single most critical strategic decision of the war: to recognise that this would be a protracted war of attrition, and therefore to begin mobilising their manpower base, manufacturing capacity and defence industry for a long-term, large-scale effort. While these measures were being put in place, instead of continuing to disperse and dissipate their forces across multiple axes of advance, they withdrew in the north (around Kharkiv) and consolidated what was now a continuous static front. Pulling back from Kherson in the far south to focus on the south-east, they created a formidable multilayer defensive belt, the so-called Surovikin Line, named for Sergey Surovikin, the Russian general commanding in Ukraine at the time of its construction.

The war changed as it went on. Despite the use of new technology, the conflict quickly became a war of numbers, with human, equipment and financial costs on a scale unimaginable to most Western populations. With Russian military casualties estimated (by Western sources) at around 355,000 and (by the Ukrainians) at 416,000 by March 2024,[22] and Ukrainian dead admitted by Zelenskyy – almost certainly a significant underestimate – at 31,000, this was an order of magnitude higher than Western casualties in Iraq, Afghanistan or Vietnam. Indeed, the costs to Ukraine are now approaching those suffered by the United States in the entire Second World War (407,000 military deaths).

As Clausewitz reminds us, it is a mistake to believe that there is 'a skilful method of disarming and overcoming an enemy without causing great bloodshed'.[23] The conduct of the war in Kherson offers a stark illustration of this enduring truth.

In February 2022, several Russian combined-arms columns invaded Kherson Oblast from Crimea, which had been annexed by Moscow exactly eight years prior. Despite the Ukrainians demolishing the main access route across the river Dnieper, the Antoniv'skyy Bridge, by 2 March the city was under Russian military control, the first major Ukrainian city to fall, and the only regional capital Russia managed to capture. Most of the rest of Kherson Oblast quickly fell to Russian forces, though they were stopped at Mykolaiv 100 km away.

Fifteen months later, driving through the area on our way to the front line, we paused at the outskirts of the village of Shevchenkove, halfway between Mykolaiv and Kherson. Two Ukrainian flags flapped above freshly turned mounds, signalling that three more young men had been added to Ukraine's losses since the full-scale invasion.[24] Such memorials are a common sight in even the smallest Ukrainian communities. They are a constant reminder of the sacrifices Ukrainians are making to repel the invaders.

The area is bucolic. A winding 15 km deviation to avoid a blown-up bridge takes us down a deserted dirt road pocked with the occasional shell hole, through waves of sunflowers, fields of which continue to the horizon. According to Kherson's military administrator, Roman Mrochko, after the Russian withdrawal from this area in November 2022 an estimated 90% of Kherson Oblast's lands had been mined, making them impossible to cultivate, though farmers are taking mine clearance into their own hands.

As we neared Kherson city at the end of a 670 km road journey from Kyiv – flying was impossible due to Russian dominance of the air – the damage to farmhouses, plant and warehouses became more noticeable. By the time we reached the village of Posad-Pokrovs'ke, formerly in the no man's land that both sides in Ukraine call the 'grey zone', it was no longer just bullet holes and exterior damage but wholesale destruction. Houses with roofs were the exception; most were covered with blue sheeting supplied by Samaritan's Purse, an American Christian NGO. Flags and signs warned of unexploded ordnance and landmines along the road edges. Petrol stations seemed to have been a particularly tempting target for the invaders, their burned and blackened, rusting carcasses twisted by heat in a grotesque death drill.

Once, 300,000 people lived in the city of Kherson. Eighteen months after the invasion, according to Deputy Mayor Vitaliy Belabrov in his Instagram, just 93,000 remained. More than 2,500 houses

22 At https://kyivindependent.com/uk-defense-ministry-average-number-of-daily-russian-losses-reaches-new-high-in-february/

23 At https://clausewitzstudies.org/readings/OnWar1873/BK1ch01.html

24 This is based on a visit to Kyiv, Lviv and Kherson by Drs Mills and Kilcullen in July-August 2023 in the company of Richard Harper and Andriy Marasin.

had been destroyed by artillery and rockets, according to the City Council. Hospitals and schools have not been spared: every single one in Kherson was damaged in the conflict. All school classes were being held online when we visited the front line in August 2023.

The cost of war can be counted in other ways. In the city cemetery there were more than 70 military graves, more than two-thirds of which had been dug since the beginning of 2023. They were bedecked with Ukrainian flags and bright garlands of flowers and embroidered cloths, with each grave recording a name, date of birth and date of death. Attached to each wooden cross was a photograph of the soldier buried there, some giving unit details and some with flags.

Kherson bears the scars of war in all its forms, modern and ancient. It has been both a target of conventional warfare and the source of resistance warfare, the former by the Russian and Ukrainian armed forces, and the latter by Ukrainian popular resistance and partisans opposing the occupation.

By late April 2022, responsibility for administration and security of that occupation shifted from the combat units which had captured Kherson to the Russian National Guard (Rosgvardiya) and Federal Security Service (FSB), though the authorities worked through Ukrainian interlocutors where possible, exploiting the presence of the so-called Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) separatist militia. Moscow attempted annexation in stages, first introducing the rouble as currency, then removing the Ukrainian hryvnia from circulation, disconnecting Ukrainian cell phone service in May 2022, and holding a disputed (and widely condemned) referendum in September, after which Russia declared it had annexed the province.

The Ukrainian response to occupation was a reminder that asymmetric warfare works against any occupier, not only against the West, and that denial of control to an occupying force is possible for a national resistance movement, at least for a period of time, even in the absence of a neighbouring safe haven and sponsor. Resistance to occupation took two forms: direct attacks by the Ukrainian armed forces, including notably the 2022 Chornobaivka air and artillery attacks that destroyed Russian supplies, aircraft and equipment based at Kherson International Airport – including what became known as the 'Good evening, we are from Ukraine' raid in which dozens of Russian helicopters and stores of ammunition were destroyed, and two generals killed. The second form was a nascent Ukrainian armed resistance which staged multiple attacks, acts of sabotage, and assassinations of prominent collaborators and government figures, including the vice president of the occupation administration, Alexei Kovalev, who was killed with his wife in his apartment in August 2022. As ever, the divide between partisan and participant became blurred, with active resisters relying inevitably on a wide network of passive sympathisers and active supporters.

As General Petraeus noted of the US mission in Iraq: 'Even after all the missteps we made early on – firing the army without telling them what their future was and firing the Ba'ath party without an agreed reconciliation process – people still wanted to support what it was we were trying to achieve.' As for Russia in Ukraine, 'The idea of fighting in a country where everyone hates you and will do anything they can to frustrate what you're trying to achieve is mind-boggling to me.'[25]

Some Russian representatives tried to treat locals with respect at the start of the occupation. One woman, wearing a yellow T-shirt emblazoned with the words 'Believe in yourself' tells us that 'they wanted to make an impression that they were good people, and would hand out food'. But this changed as the Russians searched for signs of military activity and partisan support. As a generation of Western soldiers discovered during Washington's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Moscow was caught between the desire to appear as a liberator and the reality that as occupiers, its troops were automatically seen as oppressors. And, again as in Iraq, resistance acts of violence against occupiers and collaborators pushed the occupation forces behind the walls of their bases, separated them from the people they were trying to win over, and provoked them – through fear and rage – into increasingly violent and oppressive behaviour that soon killed any chance that the occupation would be accepted by the bulk of the population. This was true even in a town like Kherson, with a strongly Russian history and population base.

In October 2022, under pressure from Ukraine's counter-offensive and seeking to straighten their line and make it more defensible, the Russian administration evacuated to the opposite (eastern) bank of the Dnieper, and Ukrainian forces entered the city on 11 November. Russia continues to assert its claim to the entire oblast, and shelling continued throughout our visit. The aim appeared to be to harass and endanger Kherson's citizens, rather than to inflict meaningful damage on any military target.

25 The Spectator, op cit.

We found Kherson a city operating within the schizophrenia of governance and war, divided between two warring parties, one trying to rebuild and the other to destroy. It is probably the only place you could see garbage men and gardeners wearing flak jackets in the streets, an all too sensible precaution: several were killed or wounded while we were in Kherson.

Not only has Kherson had to survive Russian occupation, but it has also suffered from the breach of the Nova Kakhovka dam, which flooded parts of the city in June 2023.[26] According to locals, Russia destroyed the dam to slow the anticipated Ukrainian counter-offensive, causing death and destruction for communities along the riverbank – and for Russia's forces, who were not forewarned. Russia, for its part, blames Ukraine for the dam's destruction.

Nearly four times smaller in number, Ukrainians are also, on average, five times poorer than Russians – with a $2,030 per capita income, as compared with $10,030 in 2022, according to the World Bank.[27] The immediate effect of the war has been to make poor people struggle more. 'Our two strengths as a country were metallurgy and farming,' says a local entrepreneur and farmer from the region. 'Now with the occupation of the East and Mariupol, we have only farming.' The secret to Ukraine's agricultural success is not just its rich soil and high yields, he adds, but the Black Sea route to international markets. The price per tonne that he can earn for wheat has fallen by more than one-third since the start of the war given the higher cost of truck and rail transport.

The scale of destruction of lives and equipment in Ukraine is a reminder also of the limitations of looking at any conflict from the narrow perspective of an external supporter or sponsor, given the scale of local casualties. Statistics, as the journalist Anne Applebaum has noted, 'can never fully describe what happened'. They do suggest, however, the depth to which leaders are prepared to descend, to defend their regimes and interests. And they do describe, at least in Ukraine's case, how history rewrites the present.[28] Stalin's crimes include the terror famine of the Holodomor in Ukraine, which cost around five million lives, something that never lies far below the surface and drives Ukrainians' sense of purpose, expressed in the extraordinary sacrifices made in the recent war.

The failure of the Minsk agreements and the scale of today's destruction 'explains for us', says one senior Ukrainian officer, 'how the Russians understand force only'. His words echo those of Churchill in 1946, who warned in his Iron Curtain speech that 'from what I have seen of our Russian friends and Allies during the war, I am convinced that there is nothing they admire so much as strength, and there is nothing for which they have less respect than for weakness, especially military weakness'. 'For that reason,' he added, 'the old doctrine of a balance of power is unsound.'[29] This, for what it's worth, tracks closely with our impression: one of us (Kilcullen) was teaching a class at the NATO War College in 2013 that included Russian students, whose swaggering disdain for what they perceived as NATO weakness foreshadowed the attitudes shown by Russian commanders during the seizure of Crimea only four months later, and by Russian politicians (as noted earlier) after the fall of Kabul in 2021, months before the invasion of Ukraine.

'Any negotiations', says the Ukrainian officer, 'especially in the current situation, will lead to a victory for Russia and a loss for Ukraine and the West. During the negotiations, the Russians will not stop on the line they are on now, but will demand capitulation, demilitarisation and control of most of Ukrainian territory [and of the] domestic and foreign policy of Ukraine.' For Kyiv, negotiations contain the seeds of future conflict. 'And at the end of the day we will receive an even larger-scale war in the medium term with Russia, which is more prepared for a war, and possibly its allies.'[30]

Hence the central Ukrainian narrative in the West that 'we're fighting Russia so that you don't have to' reflects a real Ukrainian perception – not simply the recognition, as noted earlier, that preservation of Western support is Kyiv's strategic centre of gravity. Indeed, Ukrainians seem sincere when they argue that without 'the willpower of Ukrainians resisting Vladimir Putin's invasion and defending their country, Western capitals would likely be deploying even more forces to the eastern flank of NATO than they are already'.[31]

26 At https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-65818705
27 At https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.KD?locations=RU-UA
28 See Applebaum at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-niKH75c80
29 Given on 5 March 1946, at https://www.nationalchurchillmuseum.org/sinews-of-peace-iron-curtain-speech.html
30 WhatsApp correspondence, December 2023.
31 Jahara Matisek, Will Reno and Sam Rosenberg, 'The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: Assessing a Year of Military Aid to Ukraine', RUSI Commentary, 22 February 2023, at https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/good-bad-and-ugly-assessing-year-military-aid-ukraine

Based on the devastation we witnessed first-hand in Kherson and elsewhere in Ukraine, it is unsurprising that in our discussions with Ukrainian fighters two fundamental questions kept coming up: how do we win the war, and how do we then secure the peace? While almost all appreciate the outside assistance that has 'given them a chance, at least, to stop the Russians', as several put it, they are under no illusion that outside interests can change the ultimate outcome. Moreover, attempts to cobble together peace agreements that serve the interests of outsiders rarely work in settling conflicts. Any solution must be rooted in local, not external, realities. In this respect, external mediators often bring the wrong incentives, putting together peace settlements that very rarely succeed.[32] Ukrainians are well aware of this too.

All of this suggests the need for realism in assessing the conditions necessary to ensure peace. For example, if the overarching goal for Ukraine is its emergence from conflict as a democratic, independent and prosperous country within internationally recognised borders that can defend itself through military means and alliances, what strategy (and thus what military tools) will help it to achieve these ends?[33] A war of attrition – a numbers game – inevitably favours Russia, especially given Vladimir Putin's appetite for casualties and the absence of an effective domestic political opposition. Does it follow that victory for Ukraine is to be defined only as the removal of all Russian forces from its territory? Or does victory require the restoration of full territorial integrity within its 1991 borders including Crimea? Does the preservation of enough territory, however 'enough' may be defined in terms of areas or percentage, suffice? Or is it the restoration of the status quo before 24 February 2022? Alternatively, is victory assured only when Russia no longer has the capacity and resources to wage war? We heard some version of all these goals from various Ukrainians. These different goals require different volumes and types of resources over vastly different timescales, as well as different diplomatic approaches to keep Ukraine's international supporters onside.

As Gregory Nemyria, deputy chair of the Ukrainian parliamentary foreign affairs committee, notes, this is not just a war for territory. Rather, it is an attempt by Russia to disarm Ukraine by force, remake Ukraine's constitutional order, dictate its internal and external relations, redefine the nature of what it means to be Ukrainian, return it to Russia's claimed sphere of influence, deny the existence of a separate Ukrainian identity, and limit the country's sovereignty forever. As a consequence, there is no way to end this war through a simple formula of land for peace. Even if Ukrainians were willing to accept such a trade, it would be no solution, since it would undermine core principles on which international relations have been based since 1945, as embodied in the Charter of the United Nations, of which Ukraine was a founding member.

Such a deal would, in effect, ratify Russia's violation of the 1975 Helsinki Accords – a wide-ranging diplomatic agreement signed by the United States, Canada, the Soviet Union and all European countries except Albania – involving sovereign equality, respect for the rights inherent in sovereignty, refraining from the threat or use of force, inviolability of frontiers, territorial integrity of states, peaceful settlement of disputes, non-intervention in internal affairs, and a host of other commitments. And it would reward Russia's violation of the 1994 Budapest Memorandum in which Russia, the United States and the United Kingdom undertook (among other things) to respect Ukraine's sovereignty and independence within its existing borders and reiterated their commitment to the 1975 Helsinki Accords, and on the basis of which Ukraine surrendered what was then the third-largest nuclear arsenal on the planet, placing its security and sovereignty in the hands of the memorandum's signatories. A betrayal of such magnitude, coming after similar betrayals elsewhere, would fatally undermine any remaining deterrent credibility on the part of Western countries, and might very well signal a degree of weakness that could serve as a green light for aggression by authoritarian powers all over the world.

For the international community, and especially the United States, Ukraine therefore, once again, exposes the limits of political imagination and courage. Should we expect better from external powers claiming to support international law and freedom in Ukraine? What do the limits of assistance to Ukraine tell us about the limited liability of the so-called free world in choosing to support – or not support – a particular democracy? For the Global South, what are the implications of Russia's actions for the balance of legitimate authority – rather than simple power – on issues of colonialism, empire, and the treatment of Ukrainians as second-class citizens? For both developed and developing nations, Ukraine poses the questions of how to deter an aggressive neighbour in a world with a declining rules-based order, when (and whether) to sue for peace, and how outsiders can help.

32 We are grateful to Christopher Clapham for reminding us of this point.

33 See 'A New Strategy Can Save Ukraine', at https://www.wsj.com/articles/a-new-strategy-can-save-ukraine-war-with-russia-c46a7abe

The contrast between coloniser and liberator, between total and limited war, is highlighted by the all-in nature of war in Ukraine. Ukraine's commitment is absolute; the costs of its defeat are measured in national survival. The stream of ambulances ferrying casualties from Kyiv Station to hospitals in the capital, something we saw every night during our stay there, emphasises that there is no second prize in this conflict. 'This war is not about territory,' says former prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko, echoing Gregory Nemyria. 'For Ukraine, it is to be, or not to be. It is existential.'

Avoiding the Same Mistakes

By the start of 2024, it had become clear that the military power of Ukraine, augmented by erratic and often delayed Western supplies of money and materiel, could not defeat Russia or force it out of Ukrainian territories. Instead, for Ukraine to stave off defeat and remain an independent sovereign state, both Ukraine's Western backers and its civilian and military leaders in Kyiv needed a fresh approach.

While it might have been desirable, at some point in the past, for the West to draw a red line for Moscow, signalling the limits of acceptable Russian territorial expansion (such as by establishing a clear trigger to automatically include Ukraine in NATO) and thus threatening direct conflict beyond a certain point of advance, this option got caught up in Western political ambivalence. President Biden's formulation immediately prior the invasion – that if Russia mounted anything more than a minor incursion, there would have to be a 'discussion about consequences' – hardly suggests a willingness to accept such risks.

If Ukraine loses the war – that is, if Russia once more exercises control over Ukraine's political, economic and social life, even in the absence of physical occupation of Ukrainian territory – the long-term, strategic implications for the democratic world would be both profound and negative. Ukraine under those circumstances would become a 'non-independent state', like the Republic of Karelia inside the Russian Federation, or a Russian-dominated neighbour like Belarus or, at best, it would be subject to Russian control of its foreign, defence and internal policy. The current leadership of Ukraine would be killed, jailed or forced into exile.

In so doing, they and 'NATO' (as the proxy for the West) would be blamed for the war, and the United States and its allies would see a further catastrophic degradation of their deterrent capability, thereby encouraging adventurism among every adversary on the planet. Moscow, for its part, would probably seek to install a puppet president heading a government made up of Ukrainians loyal to Russia. Ukraine's independent media would be silenced, with no political opposition permitted. A systematic campaign against pro-independence Ukrainians would ensue, almost certainly leading to a civil war within unoccupied areas of Ukraine, and a guerrilla resistance war against Russia in areas occupied by Russian troops. Ukraine's economy would again be dependent on Russia, with Ukraine and Russia together dominating the global export of grain, weaponising the commodity with severe implications for import-dependent economies.

Inside Russia, instead of Putin having to deal with the impact of a Russian defeat in Ukraine, Russian society would take a further step towards authoritarianism. Buoyed by success in Ukraine, Russia would continue its war preparations and transformation into a war economy, Soviet-style. The next target for Russian influence, in the assessment of the Finnish regionalist Kari Liuhto,[34] would likely be Moldova (Transnistria), followed by the Caucasus (Armenia and Georgia), and thereafter the Balkans. It would not necessarily stop with Putin. In this environment, any successor would very likely need a regional conflict, if not an open war, to strengthen his image among the Russian *siloviki* (literally, strongmen).[35]

The European Union would have to prepare for millions of new war refugees from Ukraine. EU countries would need to increase military budgets, diverting donor assistance away from other areas, an effect potentially worsened by floods of Sahelian refugees encouraged by Russian actions in Africa. EU unity is already weakening as some seek accommodation (and profit) with a resurgent Russia; it would only weaken further in the event of a defeat, as the search for European culpability for the 'loss' of Ukraine began. Such stresses would be intensified by the loss of US deterrence, which would be likely to result in a crumbling of the transatlantic relationship as the era of extended US deterrence in respect of European security ended.

34 WhatsApp correspondence with Dr Mills, 28 February 2024.

35 In Russian political lexicon, a person who works for any state organisation that is authorised to use force.

What this War Reveals About Future War

What do recent wars reveal about the changing character of war, the use of technology, and contemporary tactics, equipment and strategy. Why do we so often fail to turn battlefield victory into sustainable peace? And what are the best ways to prevent, fight and resolve future conflict?

In exploring these questions, *The Art of War and Peace* draws on several key threads. The first was the changing character of war, in which new methods of asymmetric warfare are emerging, and in which the news media play a disproportionately central role, not only as propaganda tools but in shaping democratic outcomes. At the operational level, the inability to campaign effectively – seen repeatedly in failures across multiple theatres in recent years – represents in our view the effect of adaptive adversaries catching up to, and in many ways invalidating, a way of war that once dominated the conventional battlefield. At the tactical level, that battlefield is currently characterised by paralysis, with new technologies and means of operation rendering obsolete traditional forms of manoeuvre, as long-range strike assets, dense intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, small stealthy teams operating in a dispersed manner, and an explosion of robotic and autonomous systems make it virtually impossible to mass forces in the open, lest they be destroyed in detail at long range before ever encountering a human enemy. Urban and subterranean war have been recognised once more as key features of the asymmetric battlefield, with conflict increasingly occurring in crowded, cluttered, connected and heavily urbanised spaces, often within striking distance of coastlines. In this new tactical landscape, traditional norms of state behaviour are often observed only in the breach, and yet these norms are crucial foundations for the credibility and moral legitimacy on which success depends.

Fresh threats are emerging faster as new technologies proliferate, notably through the adaptation of civilian technologies for military purposes. Robotic and autonomous systems – drones – are the most recent and obvious development in the air, land and sea domains, but cyberwarfare and advanced manufacturing techniques are bringing similar new threats in other areas.

Non-military tools have not kept pace with the rapidly changing character of conflict. Despite considerable efforts to expand economic sanctions and target them better, the efficacy of the economic dimension is subject to political will, more specifically the willingness of populations to accept higher prices, on the one hand, and of public opinion to accept the humanitarian costs that invariably accompany their application in the target state, on the other.

This relates to the second thread identified in *The Art of War and Peace*: how to garner and harness all elements of national power simultaneously across every domain, to re-establish deterrence against an increasingly united and emboldened group of adversaries. This places a premium on leadership. One approach to re-establishing deterrence is through creating resilience; deterrence by denial, through credibly communicated resilience and resistance capabilities, is particularly appropriate for smaller powers facing a deadly combination of external threats and unreliable allies. Recent conflicts have seen the emergence of powers with an appetite for regional expeditions – including Iran, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates. In contrast, for the West, recent history suggests both the declining authority and increasing unreliability of the United States, long the Western security guarantor. Dependence on the United States has already been a risky proposition for junior alliance partners – today, it is radically more so, indicating the need for far greater self-reliance and resilience. Paradoxically, efforts to become more self-reliant are not anti-alliance, let alone anti-American: on the contrary, such efforts can only make smaller countries better allies, while simultaneously reducing their dependence on great and powerful, yet increasingly unreliable, friends.

The third thread is that of the re-establishment of deterrence under the nuclear threshold, where wars can be won by major powers but never in a manner that threatens their sovereignty. Again, this suggests the need for greater self-reliance on the part of smaller states, not only to make up for the absence of larger powers as they pursue their own interests but also to make smaller powers better allies and give others a stronger stake in their defence. Ukraine teaches that every Western nation has to be its own first responder, suggesting the need for military modernisation, closer alignment within government, and, crucially, giving people something genuine and credible to get behind and fight for.

A clear and persuasive narrative is the ultimate tool of asymmetric warfare, seeking to subdue the enemy, in Sun Tzu's words, without fighting. This requires a media that is committed to the values of democracy and freedom. While technology has amplified this dimension, personalities and competencies still matter. A convincing tale presented by a talented communicator can help.

In Ukraine a comedian and television executive, a man known originally as 'the television President',[36] Volodymyr Zelenskyy, with a 40% approval rating immediately before the invasion, emerged in global perception as a Churchillian figure, with a 91% approval rating by the end of the second week of the conflict. This transformation – short-lived though it was – reminds us how important information (and its shaping and manipulation) has now become in times of war. Zelenskyy seemed perfectly suited for this role, with aspects of his appearance, actions and words calibrated for maximum public effect: the combat T-shirt, the unshaven sleepless look of a man working round the clock, the terse soundbites. Zelenskyy's approach contrasted, in those early days of the invasion, with that of Vladimir Putin, seated at a long table to keep him free of Covid contamination, dressed in a dark suit. Whatever its subsequent track record, the narrative dominance shown by Zelenskyy quickly convinced Western countries (and, perhaps more importantly, Western media audiences) that Ukraine was in the fight and that, if not confronted, Russia would be emboldened to apply the same coercion across Europe and elsewhere.

While propaganda – whether in the form of armed propaganda or its less lethal media variant – has long been important in preparing, justifying and sustaining war, contemporary narrative manipulation reached new highs – or lows – with the wars in Ukraine and Gaza. As regards the former, the Russian state has been active not only in the mis/disinformation space, creating false narratives, but also in more open provision of material and funding to friendly journalists in Africa and elsewhere. This includes the role of the English-language Russian news channel RT, for instance, and Sputnik television in making deals with national media designed to pressure Western actors and their local supporters. The US State Department has identified several strands to Russia's developing specialist 'Africa Initiative', which has employed former Wagner operatives and uses 'African journalists, bloggers, and members of local publics to support and amplify the organisation's work of bolstering Russia's image and denigrating that of other countries'. One of the Initiative's 'first major campaigns' has been to target Western health assistance in Africa with 'dangerous health-related disinformation' which seeks to undermine public health projects.[37]

The failure of Russia's hybrid campaign before the full-scale invasion, at least in satisfying Putin's timetable and need for theatre, offers the first of several information warfare lessons from this war. It's not that the Russians did not try to run such a hybrid campaign in Ukraine: the initial assault on Hostomel (and, through Hostomel, Kyiv) was an attempt to implement, at a much larger scale, the same approach that had worked in Crimea eight years before. What started as an information warfare assault to change 'the reality in Europe', says Marek Madej of the University of Warsaw, soon became – as a direct result of the failure at Hostomel – a war to occupy Kyiv.[38]

The battle of narratives has raged ever since, demanding considerable dedication of resources on all sides. Contending with the Russian version of the war is challenging for Ukrainian information warfare teams given Moscow's comparative strength of resources and news outlets. It includes countering disinformation, on which a Ukrainian government unit works full-time, and promoting a positive image of Ukraine based, says Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser in Zelenskyy's office, on 'its internal core strength, its rapid transformation, sincerity, and its ability to understand and manage complexity'. In this, he notes, 'leadership allows us to have a global role and to be the subject'.[39] Ukraine thus epitomises the scale and speed of changes across Europe at the end of the Cold War, as the continent shook off the effects of totalitarian political and economic rule and gained freedoms denied to generations of Europeans – freedoms that are at stake in Ukraine.

For Ukraine and its supporters, the way out of the current crisis may not necessarily emerge spontaneously: rather, it may need to be engineered. As Walter Lippmann wrote in 1961, at the height of the Cold War: 'This being the nuclear age, it is the paramount rule of international politics that a great nuclear power should not put another great nuclear power in a position where it must choose between suicide and surrender.'[40] There is a real danger that flexibility may be interpreted – by Russians and others, including China and Iran – as appeasement rather than statesmanship, and also that, having witnessed the death and destruction Putin has visited upon their country, Ukrainians now feel such a visceral hatred that they will reject any peace deal that saves Putin's skin, even though they may realise that at some point a formula will be required to end the fighting, however unpalatable it may be.

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36 See David Remnick, 'The Weakness of the Despot: An expert on Stalin discusses Putin, Russia, and the West', at www.newyorker.com

37 At https://www.state.gov/the-kremlins-efforts-to-spread-deadly-disinformation-in-africa/

38 The interviews in Poland were conducted by Dr Mills in February-March 2022.

39 Interview with Dr Mills, Kyiv, June 2023.

40 Cited in https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/giving-putin-no-way-out-is-suicidal-folly-n2ck6qdhn

Narratives, however, shift. By the start of the third year of the war, the strategic circumstances had changed in one major respect. Until the Ukrainian 2023 counter-offensive, if Russia was not winning, it was perceived as losing. After the failure of this counter-offensive, it was the other way round. This may have to do with the increasingly isolationist trend in the West and especially in the United States,[41] itself linked to broader societal changes. As Francis Fukuyama puts it, 'one of the biggest transformations that has occurred in US society over the past decade has been a revolution in the moral evaluation of the country itself. For most of the country's history, its people believed in some version of American exceptionalism according to which the country would be an inspiration to oppressed peoples around the world.' But moral questions of struggle are less valued in an age of increasing self-concern. In this era the Ukrainians, the Taiwanese and perhaps even the South Koreans should be prepared, like the South Vietnamese and Afghans before them, for a farrago of half-truths, wishful thinking and blatant deceptions in excusing a lack of US commitment to their cause, of actions and inactions swathed in misleading and sometimes delusional statements, of comforting talking points, less to do with values abroad than interests at home.[42]

One question is how to maintain the interest of societies high on the sugar rush of a diet of constant drama fed to their smartphones. The answer, many governments seem to think, rests in part in playing to their (real) fears. During the Cold War, Western allies (even leaving aside the United States) were able to maintain defence expenditure of more than 3% of GDP. This was based on people's fear of Soviet military power, especially of nuclear weapons. In the post-Cold War era, there was a significant drop in the early 1990s and a further 20% decrease two decades after the 2008 global financial crisis, when spending fell to little more than 1% of GDP.[43] Recognising and addressing a complacent, dopamine nation is key to building up defence capability, and yet any citizen of a democratic society who wants to retain the basic freedoms that make such societies worth living in must maintain constant vigilance against the acquisition of unwarranted influence by a militarised media-intelligence complex.

Another lesson to be learnt from Ukraine's international narrative battle is to shift from seeing the world as a saviour to viewing it as a partner. This involves spelling out less the benefits of victory than the costs of failure. It also demands siding with democrats everywhere and treating the struggle of others as important given the basis of shared values. If the West and Ukraine want, for instance, Africans to side with them, given that Russia's invasion is an assault on the rules-based international order that underpins democratic freedoms and international peace, then the West and Ukraine need to stand with African democrats (and citizens) who are fighting for the same freedoms and values in their contexts. These values have to matter equally for African lives, not just Ukrainian (or European) lives. This demands also even-handedness in dealing with violations of international law (for instance, by Russia, by African dictators and oppressors, or in the Middle East) without fear, favour or hypocrisy.

The dangers for the Western alliance that arise from Ukraine should be clear too. If the West is to continue its 'day late, dollar short' assistance to Kyiv, Russia's overwhelming size advantage will continue to tell, and Ukrainians will remain at risk of a change of Western heart, just as the Afghan government was defeated less by its internal contradictions than by the fecklessness of presidents Trump and Biden. The United States usually supports a war if it is going well, and if it progresses quickly to its end goals. While Europe (at least Eastern Europe) may maintain the will to continue to support Ukraine, it could lack the means to do so without Washington. Diplomacy may be needed to end the fighting, but it is also critical to get to the point – through military action – where such discussions are possible.

Information and its corollary, disinformation, are not the only non-military tools of coercion available. Sanctions are, as we have seen, another. But this method is in danger of becoming damaged by a combination of overuse, economic competition and avarice, an absence of the necessary levels and uniformity of political will, and a lack of oversight and implementation mechanisms. There are also strategic dangers, not least in the weaponisation of the US dollar and the development of financial alternatives, including the use of certain banking jurisdictions less concerned about money-laundering niceties, and through the development of crypto- and other possible reserve currencies.

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41 See Fukuyama in the Financial Times, at https://www.ft.com/content/2b204c19-4050-4316-852c-9b0dbfdf23a1

42 See Rich Lowry on the Afghan withdrawal, at https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2021/08/18/biden-truth-afghanistan-credibility-506192

43 At https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2023/07/03/defence-spending-sustaining-the-effort-in-the-long-term/index.html#:~:text=During%20the%20Cold%20War%2C%20defence,but%20rarely%20falling%20below%202%25

This raises the question, inevitably, as to how non-violent tools such sanctions might be strengthened. The answer lies in the need for a comprehensive, integrated approach.[44]

The military concept of 'deep operations' or 'deep battle' provides a useful analogue. Deep battle was developed in the Soviet Union during the 1920s and 1930s in response to the costly attrition of the First World War. Serving as a bridge between strategy and tactics, the deep battle concept transformed military doctrine. In so doing it seeded the notion of contemporary hybrid and combined-arms operations in emphasising the need to destroy, disrupt and dislocate the enemy behind the contact line, throughout the entire depth and breadth of the battlefield. As a result, by the mid-1930s the deep battle centred not only on tactically breaching enemy defences, but on the next phase in employing mobile strength within the depth of the enemy's logistical, reserve and other rear structures. A modern version can be seen in the hybrid war successfully used by Russia to gain control over Crimea and parts of eastern Ukraine in 2014. Here Russia used a combination of subversion and propaganda, and a carefully crafted liminal approach riding the threshold of detectability, to achieve its objectives without triggering an adversary response. In so doing, Russia succeeded in taking advantage of ethnic grievance and a weak civil society to take over the territories.

There is today, as David Katz has convincingly argued, a need to learn from this concept in devising a 'strategic and operational art that frames and guides campaigns to manoeuvre political economies in and out of engagements, in depth, in a nuclear age'. This new art of political economy would seek to institute systemic failure, 'including contagions and cascades'. The Great Depression with its systemic banking failure is an example of the former, and the collapse of downstream entities as a result of supply chain collapse an illustration of the latter. For this new art, sanctions would have to be integrated into a scheme of economic manoeuvre, rather than viewed as singular actions dotted across a linear spectrum. This requires a degree of strategic understanding, competence and management across different levels and time frames, and more than repetition and extension of measures or simple economic attrition. To do so, the means of narrative and overarching legal aspects have to be carefully integrated with tactical measures. There has to be a political willingness to target sons and daughters as beneficiaries in widening the understanding of the relationship between the political class and its means with the economy, and unstitching the seams of capital, technology, people, governance and public support. It requires assiduous tracking, not just of financial flows and the use of existing measures against transgressors, but of technologies in use in productive capacities, from agriculture to arms manufacturing. All this suggests dollops of political will, not least in embargoing companies engaging in third-party subsidiary transactions with the targeted regimes. And it requires continuous adaptation as the target state itself devises workarounds. Above all else, it requires a campaign plan for manoeuvre within this area of strategic depth, with dedicated resources if there is to be a solution to today's 'grinding, repetitive, and ineffectual sanction regimes'.[45]

Conclusion: The Need for Friends

Although not a member of NATO or the EU, Ukraine is a de facto member of the broader group of democracies that now finds itself facing an increasingly aligned group of autocracies. War with Russia has made Ukraine a NATO partner, or at least a partner of individual nations within the alliance, in all but name. Despite the well-known complications of coalition warfare, the historical pattern is clear: alliances usually win wars, notable exceptions being the Arab alliances against Israel in 1948, 1967 and 1973, and the Western alliance in Afghanistan.

The necessity of alliances has been heightened by constant reminders of the value of logistics, the return of industrialised warfare, and thus the need for resilient (and often multinational) supply chains and a robust manufacturing base. The hollowing-out of the West's industrial base, and the impact of long-term cuts in defence expenditure, have been exposed by the Ukraine war. Western countries find themselves today with military establishments that produce exquisitely complex and outrageously expensive weapon systems in the tiny numbers needed for small-scale expeditionary wars of choice. As Ukraine demonstrates, when you fight a peer or beyond-peer adversary in a large-scale, high-intensity war of necessity, wonder weapons are less important than the ability to produce, and keep producing,

44 See, for instance, David J Katz, 'Toward a Strategic Art for Sanctions' Parameters, Vol 54, No. 1, Spring 2024.
45 Katz, op cit.

large numbers of adequate systems at scale.[46] Moreover, usage and attrition rates are so high in large-scale conventional warfare that dissimilar replacement is likely to be a characteristic of any peer-on-peer conflict.

Technology remains critical, especially for Western powers, which have become all too used to operating with a technological edge that enables them to minimise force sizes and avoid casualties (both their own and civilian). Technology was crucial to overwhelming the armed forces of second-class states such as Saddam's Iraq or to the destruction of the ISIS caliphate. But not all wars are, or will be, wars of choice against second-rate opponents. In any case, technological superiority proved incapable of overcoming the combination of intelligent insurgents and enduring support from neighbouring powers in Afghanistan. On the contrary, the diffusion of commercial off-the-shelf technology has democratised lethality through the relatively easy development of sophisticated IEDs (improvised explosive devices), drones, missiles and so on. As one of us noted in a previous book, a key trend in contemporary warfare is that non-state actors and irregular forces are increasingly acquiring levels of lethality previously available only to nation-states, while nation-states themselves are adopting the unconventional techniques that traditionally characterised irregular actors.[47]

Technology is especially critical in the air, maritime, space and cyber domains, where integration of command and control with intelligence and special operations on the ground can offer a dramatic advantage. The cost and complexity of high-tech systems have, however, been taken for granted in an era of weak state opponents equipped with 1970s-era Soviet air defences, or non-state opponents with no air defence capability at all. Doing airpower well is expensive – suppression of enemy air defences, even rudimentary ones, requires a range of capabilities only really possessed by the United States and its allies. As Russians discovered during the early stages of the war in 2022, and Ukrainians experienced during their failed counter-offensive of 2023, lacking the capability to destroy, disrupt and suppress even limited air defences severely constrains the ability to operate in contested airspace.

Airpower is also not all about air strikes. One of the most significant examples of strategic effect delivered by airpower, as noted earlier, was the Berlin Airlift, while the rapid evolution of drone technology has offered alternatives for poorer states and non-state actors alike.

Motivation and morale still matter. The more existential the issue, the stronger the motivation, as with the Taliban versus the United States, the Kurds versus Islamic State, Israel versus the Arab states or, now, Ukraine versus Russia. In wars of choice – the United States in Vietnam and Iraq, for example – different criteria apply. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine was, at the outset, characterised by poor planning, logistical problems, low combat readiness, a slew of tactical errors and miscalculations and, more than anything, a misjudgement of Ukrainian will and ability to resist.[48]

Another challenge lies in calibrating military assistance by outside actors, and either constraining the recipient through what is given (or via the intelligence on which operations are based) or restraining recipients through advice and diplomacy. Assistance must be sufficient not to ensure either catastrophic defeat or a victory that might produce further conflict or, in the case of Russia, trigger a nuclear response. A related pitfall here is that middling assistance can lead to a middling outcome – doing enough to lose slowly and at great cost, but not enough to win.

Related to the above, while military strategy must be located within a broader grand-strategic or national-strategic framework, there is a risk of constraining operations out of fear of the consequences of victory. Leaders must balance ends, ways and means constantly, assess the consequences of failure or the perception of failure, and manage the narrative.

In this vein, Ukrainians have understood the imperative that their war with Russia must not be seen as 'frozen', given the fickleness of international support. Here, again, though, there is a paradox, given the need for perceived momentum and success, since it is easier to justify support for a winning nation. The decision to withhold certain weapon types (in the Ukrainian case, long-range missiles, F-16 aircraft and sea mines) or advise against actions that might accelerate a favourable conclusion to the war runs

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46 For an excellent summary of this key issue, see Alex Vershinin, The Return of Industrial Warfare, Royal United Services Institute, 17 June 2022, at https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/return-industrial-warfare

47 See David Kilcullen, The Dragons and the Snakes: How the Rest Learned to Fight the West, New York: Oxford University Press, 2020.

48 At https://globalnews.ca/news/9491396/ukraine-hostomel-battle-antonov-airport/

counter to this imperative. If the timing of offensives is determined by political rather than military factors (as happened in 2023) there is a risk of rushing to failure with too few resources and too little resilience in the face of losses; on the other hand, a solely military-driven timetable risks delays that allow an enemy to deepen its defences (as also happened in 2023). Ukraine's counter-offensive, launched for reasons of international credibility (and under pressure from Ukraine's allies to demonstrate progress), achieved virtually no territorial gains, despite enormous cost.

Domestic actors also need to invest enough to win while managing uncomfortable casualty and resource-cost levels, rather than simply doing enough to maintain a given operational tempo. This problem particularly besets the Ukrainians, who lacked the manpower for frontal assaults on Russian defences. It also reflects caution among older troops, a consequence of Ukraine's decision not to call up men between the ages of 18 and 27. Even troops in their twenties are cautious after their first firefight, men in their forties even more so, with results that can slow an offensive and ultimately cost even more lives.

Technological advantage is also a factor driving the 'avoidance behaviour' that has led adversaries to adapt away from direct conventional confrontation and towards irregular and unconventional warfare.[49] One effect of American technical and material advantage since 1991 has been to drive opponents to seek to nullify technology by fighting asymmetrically through insurgency and terrorism, irregular and unconventional warfare, or the acquisition of emerging and disruptive technologies. Iran has attempted to deter and challenge the United States by building a network of proxies and equipping them with cheap but effective weapons, including surface-to-surface missiles, SAMs, UAVs, advanced IEDs and fast attack boats.

There is a danger of fixating on troop levels (the besetting sin of non-specialist discussions of 'strategy' during the War on Terrorism, with the surges in Iraq and Afghanistan being cases in point). But there is also a danger in fixating on weapon systems, of becoming followers of the 'cult' of technology – Abrams or Challenger tanks, Javelin or NLAW missiles, HIMARS or F-16s. These *wunderwaffen* are enablers at best, and no substitute for actual strategy. Rather, as we have repeatedly emphasised in this book, what matters is how troops and weapons are employed at the tactical level within a campaign, how operations are sequenced and orchestrated at the operational level to support a military strategy, and how battlefield successes at the military-strategic level are translated into enduring political outcomes. For that, there must be shared goals: for example, in the case of Ukraine, policymakers across the wider Western alliance need to decide whether the goal is to defend Ukraine, to weaken Russia, to get Europe to spend more on its defence, to maintain economic stability and primacy, to bolster markets (including those for weapons), or – our recommendation – to ensure that this can never happen again.

Charles de Gaulle said of peace in Algeria that 'in politics, it is necessary either to betray one's country or the electorate. I prefer to betray the electorate.' This applies also to the making of peace, whether in Vietnam in 1973, with the Taliban in Doha in 2020, or in the Russo-Ukraine war. Moreover, actions that bring an end to the fighting may not provide the basis for a permanent settlement. To end the Ukrainian war, not just postpone it, the terms for peace will have to remove the Russian threat, once and for all. But that might not suit all international partners.

Ukraine's peace terms, spelled out by President Zelenskyy, include the demand that Russian troops leave all of Ukraine's territory.[50] That is the easiest way for the war to end, albeit an extraordinarily unrealistic one given current battlefield realities. Still, the fact is that Ukraine is highly unlikely to ever permanently give up its legitimate, internationally recognised borders. 'A victory for Ukraine', says Nobel Peace laureate Oleksandra Matviichuk, 'means to succeed with the democratic transition, to build a system where the rights of all people are protected.'

Much as Russians are unlikely to consider negotiating with Ukraine on the terms outlined by Zelenskyy, the Russian terms for peace, as enunciated by its deputy foreign minister Mikhail Galuzin on 27 May 2022, were equally unacceptable to Ukrainians, because they freeze the conflict in place.[51] They also impose conditions on Ukrainian membership of the European Union and NATO.

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49 David Kilcullen, 'The Evolution of Unconventional Warfare', Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies, 2:1 (2019).

50 See 'President Zelenskyy's 10-point peace formula, full text of speech to G20 in Bali', The New Voice of Ukraine, November 15, 2022, at https://news.yahoo.com/president-zelenskyy-10-point-peace-094800133.html

51 At https://rubryka.com/en/2023/05/27/rosijske-bachennya-myru-u-rf-znovu-hochut-vyznannya-terytorialnyh-realij-u-zelenskogo-vidreaguvaly/

A peace plan must also include a plan for reconstruction and integration to provide security guarantees for the Ukrainians. This is best explained by the Ukrainian formulation, 'If Russia stops fighting, the war will end; if Ukraine stops fighting, Ukraine will end.' There is a difference between restoring Ukraine's territorial integrity and ensuring its security from a future Russian invasion.

Estonia's former prime minister (and now EU foreign policy chief) Kaja Kallas says that one should not ask Ukraine when this war will end but rather 'ask why Putin is still able to continue it'.[52] Russia, she says, won't win so long as the West supports Ukraine, the Russians remain under economic sanctions, and they cannot break the will of the Ukrainians. In these circumstances, she says, Russia will withdraw when it realises it cannot win, just as it did in Afghanistan in 1989.

Once the fighting has stopped, other tensions will arise, including the nature of the settlement, between an inclusive or competitive political system, and the choice between justice for victims and perpetrators alike, which must often be balanced against the need for stability. Matviichuk says that 'to live without the fear of violence you need a sustainable peace. And to do this, you need to punish the perpetrators and assist the victims in breaking the cycle of impunity.'[53]

While the Ukraine conflict has catalysed action within NATO and the EU to ensure Ukraine has at least a fighting chance, this contrasts with the impotence of the United Nations, which has largely been dysfunctional in the absence of Security Council consensus, given that one of its permanent five members is the aggressor here. Similarly, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) has emerged from the conflict weaker, while bilateral peace agreements such as the Minsk Protocol and Minsk 2, which sought to end the Donbas war before Russia's full-scale invasion, have been exposed as being as frail as the circumstances under which they were made, the result of a threat that turned into an invasion, a land grab and then a peace agreement. The Minsk agreements failed because they focused on the alleged ethnic aspect (the Russian narrative) of the war in an effort to make peace, rather than the core issue, which was, in the words of Wolfgang Sporrer, OSCE's negotiator, 'Russia wanting to exert influence over the domestic and foreign policy orientation of the government in Kyiv. In the Minsk agreement, however, this fiction of an ethnic conflict was constructed instead, although Russia had no particular interest in obtaining any autonomy rights for eastern Ukraine, for Russian-speaking or ethnically Russian Ukrainian citizens.'[54]

These differences in the way Ukrainians, Russians and others see the war will inevitably shape the appetite for a peace settlement and the likely outcome of any negotiated settlement. Hence the preference of Ukrainian officials to see the war not in terms of territory but rather the 'destruction of Putin's inner circle. This is not just an issue about Ukraine and Russia,' emphasises Mykhailo Podolyak, 'but a global issue.' [55] A further paradox of this war, as Hanna Maliar noted in 2023, is that Russia's actions, while intended to destroy Ukraine, are strengthening Ukrainian resolve and pose a risk to Moscow's cohesion.[56]

Finally, there is a related tension between seeing this war as simply one between individual political leaders or factions and seeing it as a confrontation between incompatible blocs or systems. As Maliar puts it, 'This war is not just Putin's war. It is a war of the Russian nation, of a social contract between Putin and the Russian people based on the so-called "Glory of Russia" notion. The only way to change this is to defeat them in Ukraine to allow democracy to take root in Russia.'

52 Discussion, Parliament of Tallinn, 24 February 2024.
53 Discussion with Drs Mills and Kilcullen, Kyiv, 1 August 2023.
54 At https://jacobin.com
55 Interview with Drs Mills and Kilcullen, Kyiv, 1 August 2023.
56 Ibid.

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