This section brings excerpts from the Center for Strategic and International Studies report *The Russia-Ukraine War: A Study in Analytic Failure* authored by Eliot Cohen, the Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy at the Center for Strategic and International Studies and the Robert E. Osgood Professor at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), and Phillips O'Brien, chair of strategic studies and head of the School of International Relations at the University of St Andrews. The report discusses assumptions that shaped initial analysis of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and analyzes why experts were wrong in their initial assessment of how Russia's invasion will unfold. Also included in this issue are excerpts are from the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs report, *The future of the US nuclear guarantee* authored by Svein Efjestad. The report analyzes changing international security trends and the role of U.S. nuclear guarantees in European security given these trends.

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Foreword

Reflections on Analytical Surprise

The Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, was a shock but not a surprise. It was a shock because, in a world where the use of aggressive war has been a contravention of international law since 1945, such action must be viewed as such. It was not a surprise because Western intelligence agencies had detected indications of a possible attack from late 2021, and they had made their conclusions public. They did so in part to deter Russia and in part to build "Western resolve."[1] The intelligence was also passed on to Ukraine, even if many in Kyiv struggled to accept that Russia would actually invade. The real surprise for several commentators and for U.S. intelligence itself was not the invasion but its immediate aftermath. The Russian forces failed to achieve a quick success, and Ukraine, in turn, mounted an effective response.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine was not the first time that both participants in a war and their observers on the sidelines have made the wrong calls. It will probably not be the last, although the purpose of this report is to mitigate that danger in one particular case: a

* Select Excerpts published with permission. The full report is available at https://www.csis.org/analysis/russia-ukraine-war-study-analytic-failure.

[1] David V. Gioe and Michael J. Morell, "Spy and Tell: The Promise and Peril of Disclosing Intelligence for Strategic Advantage," *Foreign Affairs* 103, no. 3 (May/June 2024), 140 and 148, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/spy-and-tell-gioe-morell.

possible clash between the United States and the People's Republic of China in the Pacific. No one example will exactly match any other. However, the quality and quantity of information—much of it not the product of leaks from official agencies but from open sources like Bellingcat—make the overestimation of Russia's capacities and the underestimation of Ukraine's particularly egregious.

The Prussian military thinker Carl von Clausewitz considered that "a great part of the information obtained in war is contradictory, a still greater part is false, and by far the greatest part somewhat doubtful." In Clausewitz's day, most tactical intelligence was collected by cavalry patrols, and much of it was dependent on rumors, often inflated, or on reports from illiterate peasants of doubtful loyalty. Because of the inherent unreliability of the intelligence on which planning and operations were based in the Napoleonic era, he observed, "what a dangerous edifice war is, how easily it may fall to pieces and bury us in its ruins."[2] The advent of wireless, the consequent collection of signals intelligence, the development of aerial reconnaissance, and now the use of drones and satellites for persistent surveillance have all transformed the quantity and quality of information available to commanders. Artificial intelligence and its capacity to handle and interpret big data promise to deliver an era of intelligence-led operations.

Recent experience, however, should warn against hubris. Information superiority has not in itself delivered victory in recent wars, despite its capacity to enable stunning individual successes. In the 1990s, the assumption that dominant battlespace knowledge could allow the United States to dictate the tempo and outcomes of armed conflict was a key feature of the "revolution in military affairs,"[3] but it did not prove of much use in preventing the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States or in directing the wars that followed in Iraq and Afghanistan to satisfactory conclusions. It, therefore, behooves states and their organizations to consider why their expectations were not correct and how they might do better next time. For there will be a next time: that is another reason why wars, even if they are shocks, should never be surprises.

The place to begin any such exercise in lesson-learning from the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, is with those assumptions that are so inherent they are the most likely to be left unquestioned by otherwise well-informed analysts, whether they are from Beltway think tanks or government intelligence agencies. This prologue to the report that follows sets out eight such assumptions, several of which have a resonance that goes beyond the specifics of the Ukraine case. They illustrate how easy it is to take shortcuts in some thinking, not least because ideas are taken from others who are presumed to be experts without critical reflection, or—in the case of the United States' allies—because they accept them from the

[2] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. O.J. Matthijs Jolles (Washington, D.C.: Infantry Journal Press, 1950), 51.

[3] Bill Owens with Ed Offley, *Lifting the Fog of War* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000) is an example of this sort of thinking; Frederick W. Kagan, *Finding the Target: the Transformation of American Military Policy* (New York: Encounter, 2006) provides a more balanced retrospective view.

United States without giving them context. In some cases, these ideas may indeed be appropriate in Washington, but they may not travel so well to the capitals of the United States' partners.

The first of these assumptions is the short-war illusion. The expectation of an easy Russian victory in February 2022 began here, with the argument that the war would be short. What is a short war? Historians conventionally describe World War I as a long war because it did not end by Christmas 1914. That was the hope of those who were mobilized and taken from their families and peacetime jobs in late July 1914, but it was not the conclusion of many prewar staff planners who had thought more deeply about the issues. When they looked at the dependencies created by alliance structures and the effects of industrialization on war's conduct, they were not convinced that the war could end so quickly.[4]

The popular expectations, and their rapid disappointment, have led many to see World War I as a "long" war, a point that is sustained when one bears in mind that, after the German armistice of November 11, 1918, bitter fighting continued from the Baltic to the Balkans and across the southern arc of the British and French empires until the last peace treaty was signed in 1923. But on one reading, particularly if one takes 1918 as its traditional end point, World War I was not so long, especially in relation to its scale. At just over four years, it was shorter than World War II (1937–45), and much shorter than the Seven Years' War (1756–63), the Thirty Years' War (1618–48), or the Hundred Years' War (1337–1453). It was also shorter than the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The reality in any war—especially after it has started—is that few of its participants can anticipate the war ending tomorrow, but they will still hope that something will happen to end it in the next six months or so, precipitated perhaps by a surprise attack at the front or by a sudden domestic collapse in the enemy's rear. After three or four months of conflict, when the possibility of a quick victory, or its corollary, the danger of quick defeat, has passed, such speculations look to an event out of the ordinary, one that is not on the immediate horizon but could have an instantaneous effect—such as the addition of a major new ally or the collapse of a coalition. World War I and World War II were transformed in 1917 and 1941, respectively, by the former. Both world wars ended with the victors acting with growing coherence while the soon-to-be defeated powers lost whatever unity they possessed and sought separate ways out of the conflict.

The equivalents by the autumn of 2022 were the hopes that Russia's president, Vladimir Putin, was fatally ill or that Russia would, once again, as in 1905 and 1917, respond to war with revolution. When these hopes are regularly postponed, they are abandoned as fantasies,

[4] Stig Förster, "Der deutsche Generalstab und die Illusion des kurzen Krieges, 1871-1914. Metakritik eines Mythos" [The German General Staff and the illusion of the short war, 1871-1914. Metacriticism of a myth], *Militärgeschichtlichen Mitteilungen* [Military History Information] 54 (1995), 61–95; and Hew Strachan, *The First World War: Volume 1: To Arms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1005–14.

and so the short war expectation becomes a long war in reality. It does so through accumulation: the end never ceases to be somewhere around the next corner. The main point, however, is that neither "short" nor "long" is an adjective endowed with any precision, despite the determination of analysts to use both.

How short or long did analysts think the Russian invasion would be? Three days? Three months? Three years? Any of these would have revealed how devoid of context they were. By February 2022, the war was already into its ninth year and, by most standards, had become a long war even before the Russian invasion. In 2013–14, Ukraine effectively acquiesced in the loss of Crimea and parts of the Donbas. That acquiescence magnified the capabilities of the Russian forces because they were not tested. It locked in the minds of Western observers the apparent threat of "hybrid" war, even if hybrid war was largely fabricated by NATO.[5] It ignored what became, in the jargon, a "frozen conflict"—a misnomer—even a euphemism—given that fighting continued and people were killed. It also led to an underestimation of what Ukraine achieved between 2014 and 2022 as it sought to put its armed forces on a better footing.

Aided by training teams from Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States, Ukraine prepared over eight years for a possible renewal of more active hostilities. From 2014 onward, it enhanced its capacity for national mobilization and popular resistance, prepared plans for territorial defense, and built up both the training and the tactical and operational competence of its battalions and brigades. A striking omission was the failure of those powers charged with advising Ukraine to consolidate the knowledge of its fighting capacity gleaned from their training missions or to integrate the views of those who executed these tasks into any strategic assessments. The reports submitted by the advisers were, at least in the United Kingdom's case, treated as matters of defense engagement and not as an index of the levels of preparedness for the next round of fighting. Effectively, they went into a separate, self-contained file and were not shared at a higher level.

The second assumption that reveals remarkably little about war in reality is that, in order to mount a successful offensive, the attacker requires a 3:1 superiority. Despite its endless repetition, that statement is profoundly misleading.[6] Only very rarely has that margin of superiority been available to any military commander. Unusually, however, the preinvasion analysis of Russia and Ukraine's relative strengths insisted that this was, in fact, the sort of advantage which Russia was alleged to enjoy. As of November 2020, Russia was

[5] Guillaume Lasconjarias and Jeffrey A. Larsen, eds., *NATO's Responses to Hybrid Threats* (Rome: NATO Defense College, 2015); and Chiara Libiseller, "'Hybrid warfare' as an academic fashion," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 46 (2023), 858–80, https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2023.2177987.

[6] The origins of this "rule" are unclear. The online debate suggests that it was a tactical principle for the late nineteenth century Prussian army: see "Force Ratios and the 3:1 Rule Debate," Total War Center, January 15, 2017, https://www.twcenter.net/forums/showthread.php?746807-Force-Ratios-and-the-3-1-Rule-Debate. It seems more likely that it is extrapolated from the calculations of the multiplying effects of smaller margins of superiority in actual combat developed in Frederick W. Lanchester, *Aircraft in Warfare: The Dawn of the Fourth Arm* (London: Constable, 1916).

reported to have 900,000 active-duty troops to Ukraine's 209,000, 2 million reservists to 900,000, and similar ratios in terms of tanks and guns. Its superiority in combat aircraft was even greater.[7]

The reality in most armed forces is that strengths on paper do not convert into actual numbers available for combat. The result, and this was true in February 2022, is that forces are frequently much more evenly balanced and that, if they are not, the inferior force avoids battle and opts for other methods like guerrilla warfare or terrorism. Russia did not manage to create a local superiority of 3:1 and had not even sought to do so. On December 30, 2021, the Financial Times put the total Russian force on the Ukrainian border at 175,000. This was definitely not a 3:1 advantage. Nonetheless, it was enough for some analysts to conclude that "Russia's military superiority would enable it to overrun Ukraine's army in weeks by launching assaults on multiple fronts."[8] That interpretation of Russian intent was right, but it ignored the fact that Russia lacked the manpower to put it into effect.

Third, the assumption about the inherent superiority of Russia was not one just about quantity but also about quality. It reflected a greater faith in the professional soldier than in the conscript or national serviceperson. The Russian forces were portrayed in glowing terms twice over, as professional soldiers and as professionals with extensive combat experience, most recently in Syria.

This calculation rested on three core assumptions. The first was NATO's own rejection of the principles of mass and national service in favor of long-service professionals better adapted for expeditionary warfare than home defense. Even France and Germany, the long-standing exemplars in Europe of the conscript army, went down that route in 1997 and 2011, respectively. The United Kingdom and the United States, territorially more secure because of the sea and with their defenses also underpinned by nuclear deterrence, had done so even earlier, in 1960 and 1973, respectively. Both Russia and Ukraine are continental states with long land frontiers, and neither could afford to make such a choice. Moreover, their immediate western neighbors, the most resilient Eastern European and Scandinavian states—Norway, Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland—either never abandoned conscription after 1991 or have returned to it since.

Second, Ukraine's own combat experience since 2014 was discounted as somehow insignificant because it had been gained in a "frozen" conflict, not in an active, high-tempo war. The one-sidedness of the estimates of relative quality was striking, not so much for their underestimation of the Ukrainian army as for their almost complete lack of attention to it. As a result—and the third attribute of this third assumption—very little attention was given to

[7] Jonathan Masters and Will Merrow, "How Do the Militaries of Russia and Ukraine Stack Up?," Council on Foreign Relations, February 4, 2022, https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/how-do-militaries-russia-and-ukraine-stack.

[8] Max Seddon, "Air strikes or invasion: what are Putin's military options for Ukraine?," *Financial Times*, December 30, 2021, https://www.ft.com/content/7202f007-d7b1-4830-a816-3b975d722761.

what Ukraine's own professional forces had learned from the continuity and depth of their combat experience over a period of eight years.

Fourth, the prewar assessments were conditioned by the Military Balance, the annual publication of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, which counts the equipment and manpower strengths of each state. A standard reference in the think tank community (for good reason), the Military Balance has encouraged generations of analysts to begin any judgments of capability with crude numbers—a process rarely put to the test in the Cold War because it never became hot. That approach in itself is not unreasonable precisely because it is capable of some form of exactness. But that very feature gives it a dominance that overshadows efforts to assess its less quantifiable aspects—will, morale, and intent. These, too, are part of fighting power and its measurement. For those who forgot that, Ukraine's response since February 24, 2022, has reminded them that all three matter.

Two direct consequences emerged from the prewar estimates as a result. First, insufficient account was taken of the fact that Ukraine's soldiers were defending their homeland and that its people were fighting an existential war for national survival. Debates about the motivators for high morale, which focus, for example, on small-group cohesion, pale into insignificance in comparison with the unifying effects of legitimate and passionate national defense. The surprise—not that it should have been—was the fact that the sum of the state's military capabilities did not represent the full sum of Ukraine's defensive strength. If it were true that the number of professional soldiers married to sophisticated technology invariably trumped motivation and self-belief, the United States might have done better in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

The second and related consequence was the mistake of treating prewar measurements as predictors of wartime applications. States may want to match each other before a war, not least to deter their adversaries from attacking, but during a war, they endeavor to exploit differences to establish a relative advantage. They seek ways to exploit enemy vulnerabilities, not just to match strength with strength. Arms races, peacetime military competition, and the Military Balance focus attention on the latter, but, in doing so, fail to reflect war's realities. After the 9/11 attacks, the United States called its enemies' refusal to pitch like against like "asymmetric" warfare, as though they were somehow behaving unfairly by not meeting it on a level playing field in the sort of battle for which the United States had prepared and so reckoned it would win. But by so derogating asymmetric warfare, the United States failed to take sufficient account not just of the resilience and adaptability of Iraqi militias or the Taliban but, ultimately, also of Ukrainian strength in 2022.

Part and parcel of this approach is a continuing fifth assumption that there is a clear division between the "conventional" operations of "major war" and the insurgent and guerrilla warfare historically associated with "small wars." Russia, an analyst from the Institute for the Study of War commented in January 2022, had created "a large-scale

maneuver army to conduct operations against Ukraine."[9] That military capability had been modernized since 2008 and especially since 2014. However, that analyst and another from the Center for Naval Analyses recognized that if the Russian invasion in February 2022 became a protracted conflict, it would also turn into an insurgency. The war in Ukraine would, therefore, become a quagmire for Russia.

For some commentators, this was the gleam on the horizon. Although Kyiv would fall and Russia would win quickly in the opening conventional phase of the war, a national insurgency would follow. The relative insouciance with which some senior politicians accepted this scenario demonstrated a striking ignorance of what an insurgency would do—and had done very recently in Iraq and Afghanistan. It would have divided the Ukrainian people; it would have broken the state; it would have fostered criminality and corruption, both in part legitimized by their necessary role in funding resistance; and it would have made the transfer to peace and the recovery of national unity even more protracted and complex than the war's current shape—that of an interstate conflict—suggests is likely. This sequencing, conventional success for one side followed by that side's exhaustion and possible defeat in a much messier, protracted war, appealed because it was familiar: it did, of course, mirror the experience of the United States in its post-9/11 wars.

In 2001, the United States, aided by the Northern Alliance, took Kabul in short order, but the war in Afghanistan did not end there. Insurgency followed, and two decades later, in 2021, the United States acknowledged defeat. But the lessons of Afghanistan had not sunk in with everyone, however recent and traumatic they were for many U.S. soldiers. One retired U.S. Army major wrote that if Russia took Kyiv in short order, "At that point you've lost the war. Yes, you may start the greatest insurgency in history. But you've [presumably meaning the Russians] won the war."[10] That is an extraordinary statement. This is not just a point about the inherent strength of an insurgency; it is also a point about the presumed sequence of events in Ukraine. It would begin with a high-tempo operation, as in Afghanistan in 2001–2 and in Iraq in 2003, and then would be followed by an insurgency. There was no allowance for the possibility that Ukraine would plan on incorporating some aspects of insurgent warfare from the outset.

The statement of the retired major was not only revealing for what it assumed about sequencing; it also assumed that the conventional operations of major war and the guerrilla operations of an insurgency were opposites and thus to be seen as alternatives. It ignored the fact that in both the world wars of the twentieth century, as well as in the Napoleonic Wars of the nineteenth century, guerrilla operations and partisan warfare had coexisted with

[9] Paul Sonne, Isabelle Khurshudyan, and Mary Ilyushina, "As it weighs action in Ukraine, Russia showcases its new military power," *Washington Post*, January 26, 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/russia-miiitary-advances-ukraine/2022/01/26/25f959b0-7ec4-11ec-a844-86749890616a_story.html.

[10] John Spencer in David Petraeus and Andrew Roberts, *Conflict: The Evolution of Warfare from 1945 to Ukraine* (London: William Collins, 2023), 358.

"major war." The standard narratives of all three of Europe's major wars since the French Revolution, by focusing on conventional operations, omitted or marginalized the contributions and roles of insurgencies on multiple fronts. Nor was this neglect necessarily caused by the perception that insurgencies were somehow lesser forms of war, as the term "low-intensity operations" suggested. Frequently, they were not. Popular resistance to enemy occupation elicited brutal responses and indiscriminate violence. There was plenty of firepower-intensive, face-to-face combat in Afghanistan between 2006 and 2014. The division between the two forms of war is an illusion: over the course of a conflict, especially if it is protracted, war changes its shape and can do so many times.

Between 2014 and 2022, Ukraine had prepared the capabilities for a war of national resistance, and it mobilized them on February 24, 2022. The territorial defense units formed in small groups and the non-attributable sabotage teams operating on Russian lines of communication had the potential to enable an insurgency at the same time that Ukraine also fought major conventional operations.[11] It is worth remembering that in 1941–44, Ukraine was a theater of war characterized both by major conventional operations—using armor, artillery, and airpower—and by partisan warfare, sustained and directed from Moscow. The Soviets claimed that 200,000 partisans were organized into 2,145 groups, and at their peak they tied down 424,000 Germans. These figures may be exaggerated, but the SS and the Wehrmacht were provoked into counterinsurgency operations of extraordinary ferocity.[12] The early Cold War texts on the subject stressed how the Soviet Union placed partisan warfare at the center of its thinking about war. Today, Russia, unlike the United States, makes no distinction between major wars and counterinsurgency. War, whether it is waged in Afghanistan, Chechnya, Syria, or Ukraine, is about the use of force.

Sixth was the way in which the issues of terrain and weather and their effects on the conduct of operations were examined. The Military Balance mentality, which looks at capabilities, can tend to neglect geography—broad, deep rivers; boggy ground and swamps; forests; and mountains. These are the principal concerns of field commanders and key elements in the conduct of land operations. In analyzing Ukraine's case, commentators saw its size and strategic depth as a source of weakness for Kyiv. In the words of two analysts,

[11] For accounts of the responses in 2022 available in English, see Andrew Harding, *A Small, Stubborn Town: Life, Death and Defiance in Ukraine* (London: Ithaka, 2023); and Andrey Kurkov, *Diary of an Invasion* (London: Welbeck, 2022), 71–2.

[12] Raymond L. Garthoff, *How Russia Makes War: Soviet Military Doctrine* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1954), 391–409, 408. For other early Cold War writing on the subject, see N. Galay, "The Partisan Forces" in B. H. Liddell Hart. ed., *The Soviet Army* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1956), 153–71; and Valdis Redelis, Partisanenkrieg. *Entstehung und Bekämpfung der Partisanen- und Untergrundbewgung im Mittelabschnitt der Ostfront 1941 bis 1943* [Partisan war. Establishment and combat of the partisan and underground movement in the central section of the Eastern Front 1941 to 1943] (Heidelberg: Scharnhorst Buchkameradschaft, 1958). For a more recent and scholarly account, see Kenneth Slepyan, *Stalin's Guerrillas: Soviet Partisans in World War II* (Lexington, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2006).

"Ukraine is vast, which makes it impractical for the country's inferior force to mount an effective defence against an invasion."[13]

For Russia in 1812 and the Soviet Union in 1941, strategic depth proved to be not a liability but a major defensive asset. In focusing on the problems for Ukraine of its force-to-space ratio, analysts failed to consider the much greater challenges that Russia would face on the same grounds. An army of 175,000 men was simply insufficient for a front of roughly 1,000 kilometers and a depth that was far greater.

In the two world wars, the Pripet (or Pripyat or Pinsk) marshes were studiously avoided by the armies of both sides as unsuitable for the conduct of major war. Straddling the border of Belarus and Ukraine, they create a natural obstacle north of Kyiv, which in itself makes the city's encirclement a daunting task. Some argued that, by attacking in the winter, Russia would be able to maneuver because the ground would be frozen. By late February 2022, however, it was not. Much of the landscape around Kyiv—thick forests in standing water—was unsuitable for mechanized warfare.

The propositions around terrain took another twist. Pundits said that, if Ukraine had to wage guerrilla warfare, it would do so in the cities, and, if it did that, Russia would find its forces sucked into dense urban spaces. They counseled Ukraine against exercising this option: it would endanger the civilian population and cause major damage to the nation's infrastructure. But if Russian columns could not maneuver across open ground because it was too waterlogged and so were instead forced onto the roads, the towns and cities where these lines of communication converged could be fortified as hubs of resistance. Mariupol was the obvious example in 2022: the Stalingrad of the Russo-Ukrainian war. The fighting here, however, was less urban insurgency and more conventional defense—a fight which, once again, made the distinction between the two much more fluid than the prevailing wisdom suggested was likely. In both world wars, attacking armies avoided cities with good reason: generals lose tactical control of their troops and operational designs are hijacked by house-to-house fighting.[14]

Seventh, there is a further point about the importance of territory, which the preinvasion analysis, and much that has been written since, has failed to address. The United States has encouraged Ukraine and its de facto NATO allies to identify this war, as it encouraged Europe to see both world wars, as a war for the defense of democracy and freedom. The "Western allies" clothe war in the vocabulary of the United States' "manifest

[13] Michael Kofman and Jeffrey Edmonds, "Russia's Shock and Awe: Moscow's Use of Overwhelming Force Against Ukraine," *Foreign Affairs*, February 22, 2022, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2022-02-21/russias-shock-and-awe.

[14] Anthony King, *Urban Warfare in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Polity, 2021); and see also the graphic account in David Bellavia and John R. Bruning, *House to House: A Soldier's Memoir* (New York: Free Press, 2007).

destiny." Ukraine has colluded in that, not least to ensure its leverage with NATO members, and specifically with Congress in Washington and with the American people as a whole.

Of course, there is an underlying truth in this characterization of the war, but the United States' physical distance from Europe also minimizes the fact that for Russia, as Putin has himself described it, the war in Ukraine is designed to recover a lost empire, while for Ukraine it is a war to reestablish its 1991 frontiers. In other words, the control of territory is as much at the heart of this conflict as is the difference between an autocracy and a liberal and democratic government. In that context, possession is nine-tenths of the law. Ukraine has to fight to regain the land it has lost in order to be in a strong negotiating position when the war ends. Russia only has to hold what it has to have won something. That is why maneuvering, especially withdrawal, is so risky, and why counterattacking to regain what has been lost is so important.

The centrality of territory—with small gains counting as significant victories for Ukraine—feeds a narrative that plays badly in the United States. It smacks of attrition. The need for Ukraine to hold what it has elevates trench warfare. U.S. observers doubted that Ukraine could sustain the operational level of warfare. They saw its army as locked in by tactics and battles characterized by exhaustion and heavy casualties. Hence, the surprise created in September 2022 by the thrust on Kherson and then the switch to the counteroffensive at Kharkiv. Ukraine was not meant to be able to maneuver. The doubters argued that the success was due to Russia's relative lack of numbers in the Kharkiv sector. A very similar set of arguments was run in August–September 2024 when the Ukrainian forces advanced into Russian territory to create the "Kursk pocket." The Ukrainian military had used the best of its brigades against the weakest of Russia's.

That emphasis on territorial control and trench warfare became a recurring part of the narrative as summer turned to autumn in 2022. It evoked frequent, but largely unhelpful, comparisons with World War I, not just from the international press but also from many of those fighting at the front.

The World War I analogy played badly in the United States for three reasons. First, the United States, even more than the United Kingdom, sees World War I as a wasteful war, a conflict into which it was lured by a combination of British propaganda and Wilsonian rhetoric. It ended with a peace settlement that unraveled by the 1930s. By contrast, World War II is the "good" war, even if that narrative rests on retrospective myth-building.

Second, attrition became a taboo word after the war in Vietnam, with maneuver being elevated, especially in the U.S. Army's Field Manual 100-5: Operations (1982), as the virtuous form of war, both more decisive in its effects and less costly in lives. That debate, which presented attrition and maneuver as opposites, rested on a false premise. At the tactical level, fire and movement are not competing alternatives but complementary and mutually

dependent forms of fighting. Troops use fire to create the opportunity to move and to improve their position for firing. Moreover, the supposed antithesis between fire and movement, or between attrition and maneuver, is totally redundant in the air, where platforms do both. So, too, do most of today's land platforms.

Much of the fighting of 2022–23 was characterized as attritional: Mariupol became Ukraine's Stalingrad and Bakhmut its Verdun. Attritional battles make sense where terrain matters and where—as a result—the enemy is prepared to commit its forces to patterns of fighting that exhaust them. Bakhmut became symbolic for Ukraine because of the losses it suffered in its defense, just as Verdun did for France in 1916: "Ils ne passeront pas" [They shall not pass], in the words of the French posters that year. But Bakhmut also had significance for Russia's capacity to maneuver: it sits athwart the junction of several roads running westward. The defense of Stalingrad similarly fulfilled two strategic functions in 1942–43. It was a rallying call for Soviet morale, which, in annihilating Friedrich Paulus's 6th Army, inflicted the most obvious direct losses on Germany's order of battle so far in World War II. The siege also blocked Germany's access to the southeast and the Caucasus.

Attrition is, therefore, a means to an end, at the strategic level to exhaust the enemy and at the tactical to enable maneuver. Too many popular interpretations of World War I, not least those peddled in the United States, fail to observe that that major war ended with the successive surrenders of four powers and allied victory, even if the peace was lost. By the same token, the equivalent narratives of World War II, because victory was more successfully translated into a lasting peace, overlook the importance of attrition on the eastern front in 1941–45, in northwestern Europe in 1944–45, and at sea and in the air throughout the conflict.

The eighth and last set of assumptions about the expectations put in place in advance of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, concern the United States' appetite for mirror-imaging its adversaries and their approach to war. In the eyes of both the United States and NATO, Ukraine, it is important to remember, was a potential ally, not an enemy. Then U.S. president George W. Bush raised the possibility of Ukraine's membership in NATO after Russia's war with Georgia in 2008. The enemy was Russia. For that reason, the United States thereafter focused on Russia's military modernization: its move beyond the "little green men" of 2013–14, its development of advanced technologies, its restructuring of combined-arms armies, and its growing presence beyond its borders—in Belarus and Syria, as well as in Crimea and the Donbas. U.S. military intelligence and U.S. military analysis were focused here and not on Ukraine. It is worth remembering, too, that the United Kingdom's 2021 strategic defense review, "Global Britain in a Competitive Age: the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign

Policy," named Russia as its principal adversary.[15] Moreover, so focused was NATO on Russia that its attention, and with it the United States', was concentrated on those members of the alliance that looked most vulnerable to Russia—the Baltic states and Poland. In 2016, a RAND study on reinforcing deterrence on Russia's eastern flank war-gamed the defense of the Baltic states, not of Ukraine.[16]

That attention to Russian capabilities focused on two that the United States expected to have an even greater salience in any expansion of the war in Ukraine than they have had. The first was cyber warfare. Before the invasion of February 24, 2022, much of the Western narrative was disproportionately focused here, as though the war might be so restricted to cyberspace that it would replace more traditional and destructive forms of war. It was anticipated that, at the bare minimum, Russia would precede any invasion with a cyberattack. It did, but Ukraine's cyber defenses proved equal to the task. It provided clear evidence of Russia's intent, but it came so late, in the early hours of February 24, that it neither acted as an early warning of Russia's intentions nor formed a dominant image of the invasion itself. More important, however, is that although cyber has been immensely important to both sides since February 2022, it has been as an enabler, not as a weapon of destruction in its own right. Traditional forms of combat have had as high a salience as activity in cyberspace.

The second capability was "shock and awe," the U.S. phrase coined to cover the establishment of rapid dominance over the enemy, especially through air power in the opening stages of a campaign. One of the reasons for the elevation of Russia's military effectiveness was its massive superiority over Ukraine in the air, particularly in manned aircraft: 1,857 combat aircraft to 160.[17] Because it would be unthinkable for a NATO land force to deploy without significant air assets, Ukraine's weakness in this respect promised to become a besetting sin. The prewar commentary emphasized how Russia would—alongside a cyberattack—embark simultaneously on a "shock and awe" campaign directed at Ukrainian cities.[18] An early air offensive would force Ukraine to choose whether to prioritize its ground forces in the field or its civilian air defenses to protect its population. This is not the place, nor would it be right, to play down the impact of Russian aircraft and missile attacks on Ukrainian cities and civilians in 2022. Nonetheless, the point remains that the consequences of Ukraine's inferiority in the air proved far less significant than first feared. The surprising conclusion from the opening year of the war proved to be the reverse of what was anticipated: Ukraine's aerial defenses, especially over its major cities, were strikingly successful, and the numbers

[15] Cabinet Office, "Global Britain in a Competitive Age: the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy," GOV.UK, March 16, 2021, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/global-britain-in-a-competitive-age-the-integrated-review-of-security-defence-development-and-foreign-policy.

[16] David A. Shlapak and Michael Johnson, "Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank: Wargaming the Defense of the Baltics," RAND Corporation, January 29, 2016, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports?RR2563.html.

[17] Masters and Merrow, "Militaries of Russia and Ukraine."

[18] Sam Cranny-Evans, "The Role of Artillery in the War between Russia and Ukraine," RUSI, February 14, 2022, https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/role-artillery-war-between-russia-and-ukraine.

of civilian deaths lower than forecast. It is important to remember that the title "shock and awe" reflected not Russian doctrine but U.S. doctrine. Its use referred not to what might have happened in Ukraine in 2022, so much as what did happen in Iraq in 2003.

"Shock and awe" especially showed how the United States was using mirror images of its adversary to guide its expectations and doing so in preference to sustained analysis of how to avoid or defend against air threats. Moreover, there was a further problem when the United States looked in the mirror. It confused its image of Russia with its image of itself.

During the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, U.S. commentators regularly cited two injunctions from their reading of Clausewitz's On War. The first was Clausewitz's reminder that the principal task of a state embarking on a war is to recognize the sort of war on which it is embarking and not to mistake it for something else. The second, and the one so often quoted that it is frequently identified simply by the adjective "Clausewitzian," is that war is a continuation of policy by other means. It implies that war has utility as an instrument of state power. In the debate surrounding the post–9/11 wars, both aphorisms became accusations. The United States' use of war over the first two decades of the twenty-first century proved an inadequate deliverer of effective outcomes. Neither in Afghanistan nor in Iraq did operations match their objectives. U.S. statesmen overpromised and underdelivered in both countries—and in Afghanistan catastrophically so.

In February 2022, Putin's record in the same period seemed to be the exact opposite. One analyst described Putin as brilliant in his use of war in the pursuit of policy.[19] Putin had come to power on the back of success in the Second Chechen War, so reversing the result of the First Chechen War; he took "southern Ossetia" from Georgia within days in 2008; he intervened in Syria in 2014–15 and shored up Bashar al-Assad's stumbling regime; and in 2013–14, he took Crimea and a large chunk of eastern Ukraine. In this last instance, NATO was deterred from trying to stop him. Putin's calculations seemed to be spot on and, therefore, war delivered on its political objectives. Putin's record in the use of war was more obviously successful than that of any U.S. president since George H. W. Bush in the First Gulf War of 1990–91.

In 2020, another analyst, who served as an adviser to U.S. governments in the post–9/11 wars, spoke of Putin's "undeniable genius."[20] Commentators constructed the successes against Ukraine in 2014 as the work of this genius, embodied in the use of "little green men" in "hybrid warfare" to achieve objectives in ways that made Russia's role deniable. One analyst called this "liminal warfare."[21] One U.S. general, then the Supreme Allied Commander

[19] Kofman as quoted in Seddon, "Air strikes or invasion."

[20] David Kilcullen, *The Dragons and the Snakes: How the Rest Learned to Fight the West* (London: Hurst, 2020), 164.

[21] Ibid.

Europe, described it as "the most amazing information warfare blitzkrieg we have ever seen."[22]

The effects of U.S. failure and Russia's success in the use of force were threefold. First, NATO credited Russia with developing a new form of warfare—"hybrid war" or, in later versions, "gray-zone warfare." Having created this fantasy, NATO turned it against itself and proceeded to doubt its own internal resilience when confronted by Russia. Second, NATO then emphasized Russia's readiness to use force and politicized it to make the case for improving its own conventional defense. The Russian army, which had been discounted as corrupt and inefficient, was seen as having turned a corner, rooting out its problems and embracing reform and modernization. Although real enough, the evidence to support this interpretation was elevated for reasons that had more to do with the domestic politics of NATO member states. Third, the enhanced conventional capability delivered by Russia's military reforms was reinforced by its apparent readiness to use tactical nuclear weapons, which in turn gave Putin escalation dominance before he invaded Ukraine in February 2022. The more nuanced findings of academic scholars working on the Russian military made little impact on these assessments.[23]

In reality, Putin was unlikely to escalate the war in Ukraine to the nuclear level precisely because that could have provoked NATO to intervene. Russia would have lacked the strength to match NATO in a conventional conflict if that happened. The possibility of "vertical escalation" was further reduced by China's warning to Russia that it would not tolerate the use of nuclear weapons, an approach fully consonant with China's own policy of no first use. Nonetheless, Putin's readiness to use force, reinforced by recurrent rhetoric to that effect, so grips Western imaginations—particularly in the upper reaches of the United States government—that the United States has been self-deterred. Consequently, despite being the weaker power, Russia has appeared to enjoy escalation dominance.

War lies in the realm of contingency and uncertainty. Its course fluctuates, and its outcomes are unpredictable.[24] For this reason, among others, the notion of "applied history" can be a false friend when it is used to analyze war and strategy. Some will say, with justification, that some of the predictions made before February 2022 began to look more sure-footed in 2024 as the war progressed through its third year. That may be true, but it still does not indicate

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[22] John Vandiver, "SACEUR: Allies must prepare for Russia 'hybrid war,'" *Stars and Stripes*, September 4, 2014, https://www.stripes.com/migration/saceur-allies-must-prepare-for-russia-hybrid-war-1.301464.

[23] The English-language literature urging caution in the interpretation of Russian military reform published before 2022 was not insignificant. See Ofer Fridman, *Russian 'Hybrid Warfare': Resurgence and Politicisation* (London: Hurst and Co., 2019); Bettina Renz, *Russia's Military Revival* (Cambridge: Polity, 2018); and Oscar Jonsson, *The Russian Understanding of War: Blurring the Lines between War and Peace* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2019).

[24] Bettina Renz's article makes this point to come to different and more forgiving conclusions surrounding the initial failure to read the Russians and the invasion better. Bettina Renz, "Western Estimates of Russian Military Capabilities and the Invasion of Ukraine," *Problems of Post-Communism* 71, no. 3 (2024), 219–31, https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2023.2253359.

how the war will end. At what proved to be the midpoints of the two world wars, in 1916 and 1941, the eventual victors were on the ropes as plans miscarried and losses mounted. What matters to this analysis is that critical early failings based on false assumptions can tend to have longer-term consequences than missteps later.

Opportunities to avoid the descent into war or to act preemptively could have forestalled war or ended it with the rapidity that gave rise to the short-war expectation in the first place. The result of flawed assessments before February 2022 wrong-footed the United States and its NATO allies and has left them struggling to catch up. The claim that they have been behind the curve of events in their support of Ukraine has persisted. Moreover, if the signals had been better read in advance, going back not just to late 2021 but instead to 2013, Ukraine's supporters might have read them better, enabling an earlier resolution to the war or—even better—deterring the invasion in the first place. Applied history may not work, but that is not a reason for failing to consider the reasons for failure and for not endeavoring to do better next time by learning from experience.

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[…]

Why the Analytic Failure?

Analytic error of some kind is inevitable. But in the case of the Russia-Ukraine military analysis, the errors (a) were well beyond the normal failures expected in any intellectual project, (b) had potentially consequential policy implications, and (c) were not, in most cases, mitigated by any noticeable analytic humility or caution on the part of those committing them. It is also striking that the analysts who were most egregiously wrong in their assessments remained prominent and influential despite these errors.

As erring forecasters often do, the analysts resorted to classic explanations that seemingly obviate the need for searching self-criticism. The guide to such self-exculpation is Philip Tetlock's *Expert Political Judgment*, a powerful study of expert error. The book is particularly interesting in this case because it illuminates some of the retrospective justifications for error. Many of these have indeed been brought to bear in the Russia-Ukraine military analysis problem and take the form of what Tetlock refers to as "belief system defenses," which, as he puts it, "reneg[e] on reputational bets."[25] Of those he lists, the ones most germane to the failures described here are as follows.

[25] Philip E. Tetlock, *Expert Political Judgment: How Good Is It? How Can We Know?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005). See in particular chapter 4, "Honoring Reputational Bets" (129–43), from which most of what follows is derived.

The Exogenous Shock Defense

The exogenous shock defense is the proposition that while the core prediction was correct and solidly based, an unforeseeable event undermined it by deranging the prognosticators' calculations. In the current case, that exogenous shock would be the exquisite degree of warning that the United States provided the world and Ukrainian leadership about the impending attack. This defense may also include the supposition that U.S. and other friendly intelligence agencies provided Ukraine with the details of the Russian plan, allowing them to make essential tactical adjustments (e.g., dispersing aircraft). As a result, Western intelligence stymied the invasion by mitigating Russia's overwhelming advantages.

This defense falls apart, however, given the open menace that President Putin had presented Ukraine in the preceding year, which the Ukrainian military seems to have taken seriously. The Ukrainian government, by contrast, refrained from publicly predicting and preparing for the massive assault for a variety of reasons, including a hope to avert it. Moreover, the Russian army did achieve local successes, particularly in the south, against Ukrainian forces that seem to have been surprised by the attack. None of this would explain the Ukrainian military's tactical effectiveness, innovation, and successful counterattacks around Kyiv and Kharkiv. In any case, even though Western agencies were providing detailed information about the Russian buildup well before February 22, the expert community did not modify its predictions accordingly.

The Close-Call Counterfactual Defense ("I Was Almost Right")

This argument has had a good deal of play because of the close-run defense of Hostomel Airport outside Kyiv. On February 24, Russian airborne troops launched an attack on the airport, less than 10 kilometers from Kyiv. They were held back for a day, in part by Ukrainian national guardsmen, the latter of whom were subsequently reinforced by regular units. Although Russian mechanized units and airborne forces took Hostomel a day later, the airport had been damaged, and the delays, analysts argued, prevented Russian columns from suddenly dashing into Kyiv proper, which might have toppled the Zelensky administration overnight.[26]

But was it fortuitous that Ukrainian mechanized units were available to defend the airport? And for that matter, even if the Russian forces had taken Hostomel on the first day, is it right to assume that a Russian column charging into a dense, hostile urban area like Kyiv, filled with armed civilians and light infantry, would have done better than their counterparts in, say, the city of Mariupol in the south? Other similar "for want of a horseshoe nail" arguments include the possibility of President Zelensky being killed on the first night of the war—but it was not for want of trying by Russian secret services, nor was it a coincidence that the president, well protected by his own efficient bodyguards and secret services, was not killed.

[26] The Wikipedia entry on the Battle of Hostomel provides a good set of links to some of these contentions. Wikipedia, "Battle of Antonov Airport," accessed February 15, 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Antonov_Airport.

Moreover, such arguments can play in the opposite direction: Suppose Putin had a fatal heart attack on February 21. Suppose even more Ukrainian forces had deployed to Hostomel, north of Kyiv, and so on. The analysts were not nearly right; they were simply wrong.

The "Politics Is Hopelessly Cloudlike" and "The Low-Probability Outcome Just Happened to Happen" Defenses

The "Politics Is Hopelessly Cloudlike" and "The Low-Probability Outcome Just Happened to Happen" defenses are two versions of an argument common to defenses of poor predictions of military outcomes. War is an intrinsically uncertain affair, as every theorist notes; no prediction can claim complete accuracy, and a variety of outcomes are always possible. The problem with either version as applied to the analysis of the Russian and Ukrainian militaries before the war is that a serious belief in the unpredictability of war should have moderated analysts' certainty. As demonstrated, it did not. Instead, analysts depicted war as a large engineering operation in which all the heavy equipment and logistical planning argued overwhelmingly for the success of the aggressor nation. There was no more uncertainty in the prediction than there would have been about the completion of a major construction project, which, after all, has a set of uncertainties associated with it—though nothing like those of war.

The "I Made the Right Mistake" Defense

The final justification for analytic failure is that the Russian forces should have accomplished everything that they planned but were thwarted by the unpredictable and foolish intervention of President Putin and his advisers from the Federal Security Service (FSB).[27] In this version, the Russian general staff had the right ideas and the requisite organizations, doctrine, and technology at their disposal but were undermined by the meddling of an ignorant civilian leader and his incompetent intelligence services. The original Russian plan would have involved fewer axes of advance (three rather than five) and would have had more regard for Ukrainian capabilities, some have suggested. In this view, the president, encouraged by FSB advisers who convinced him that Ukraine was ripe for the plucking and that resistance would be minimal, interfered with a competent general staff that would otherwise have conducted the operation with the results the Western analysts expected.

The difficulty here is that early Russian failures were multidimensional, and many had little to do with Putin or the FSB. The logistical challenges and the organization and tactics that left Russian armored columns exposed to light infantry ambushes would all have remained the same. There is no evidence of general staff pushback against the simultaneous attack on multiple vectors or apprehension about it; indeed, the idea of such an attack presenting too many challenges for the Ukrainian military to cope with had a certain plausibility to it. It would be closer to the mark to say that the general staff made its own set of mistakes. The "civilian meddling and incompetence" explanation for the outcome, and hence for the

[27] A senior military officer made this argument to Eliot A. Cohen in the spring of 2023.

analytic failure, is in some ways the most interesting. It represents a seemingly subconscious desire to make the Russian military out to be more formidable than it actually was—perhaps not implausible for those who had devoted their careers to studying it.

Conclusion: Remedies

The analytic failure at the outset of the war rippled beyond the conflict. The initial estimates seem to have influenced the tentativeness with which the West armed Ukraine, holding back on advanced weapons systems in part based on the argument that the primitive Ukrainian military could not operate them successfully. Pessimism about Ukrainian chances, hesitation about reinforcing Ukrainian successes, and difficulty in seeing Russia's true weaknesses were all hangovers from the initial failure, even though many analysts eventually adjusted to the reality of the situation.

The broader implications of the failure are even more important. It is striking how small the analytic community was that made the judgments that shaped public perceptions and, in some measure, government policy. These individuals, for the most part, had similar backgrounds—degrees in political science and experience almost exclusively in think tanks, along with occasional stints in the intelligence community. They were not historians and certainly not military historians. Few had field experience as soldiers. They were overwhelmingly "Russia military analysts" by trade and not experts on Ukraine, often accepting, at a tacit level, deep-seated Russian views about the unreality of Ukrainian nationhood. Their internal system was mutually supportive. They constantly approved citations of one another's work and treated both the underlying uncertainty and commentary of those outside the community with a degree of disdain.

This was a recipe for what the pioneering social psychologist Irving L. Janis referred to as groupthink.[28] Indeed, the analytic community exhibited many of the characteristics Janis noted: underestimation of the group's susceptibility to error, stereotyped views, self-censorship of dissent and commitment to unanimity, and even "self-appointed mindguards" who enforced orthodoxy.[29]

How did this happen? Analysis of the Russian military was a major intellectual field during the Cold War, but it shrank after the war's end and the emergence of new threats in the form of radical Islam and China. The result was a small community dependent on mutual support, operating in the research institution environment. The latter point is important. Academic disciplines, despite all their faults, promote (at least in theory) sharp debates and disagreement, and professors are usually rewarded for challenging and displacing

[28] See Irving L. Janis, *Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Policy Decisions and Fiascos*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982).

[29] Ibid., 174–75.

conventional wisdom rather than elaborating it. Academics can also switch fields of specialization, which can bring in new perspectives.

This is much less the case in research institutions, particularly in small areas where patronage by leading figures is necessary for career advancement. In the case of government-funded research—much of it coming from the U.S. Department of Defense, with its vested interests—in the decades before the war there was considerable disincentive to underplay Russian capabilities. Moreover, the initial failures of Russian operations in the opening phases of the war did not change matters much. If anything, the pathologies were reinforced during crisis and ensuing wars as the small group of acknowledged experts became media stars, repeatedly interviewed and quoted in major outlets, on social media, and even by government officials.

The analysts discussed here did not exhibit moral turpitude, much less stupidity or willful blindness. They were the product of their incentive systems and the intellectual structures that produced them. But the failure is a warning because it can and will happen again in other cases—possibly more consequentially. Luckily, however, potential remedies are available to governments, journalists, and research organizations.

BRING IN THE GENERALISTS

A self-conscious effort by journalists and government consumers of military analysis to critique expert conclusions is a good idea. In the present case, military officers, historians, and Ukraine experts might all have offered useful counters to the analytic orthodoxy. Indeed, research institutions could make contributions in this area by convening reviews of expert consensus in military analysis.

BRING IN DIFFERENT KINDS OF SPECIALISTS

Some of the commentators who were most optimistic about Ukraine's chances came from the ranks of soldiers, particularly those who had served in advisory and training roles in Ukraine since 2014.[30] Diverse intellectual and professional backgrounds might well have changed the weight of expectation.

MAINTAIN ACCOUNTABILITY

Outsiders need to keep book—not with the purpose of banishing or blacklisting analysts but confronting them with their errors and putting them in a position to reflect on why the errors were made. Unfortunately, there are few professional incentives to do this work, reflecting a larger problem in the social sciences, such as the "replication crisis" in psychology and many other disciplines.[31]

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[30] Lieutenant generals Ben Hodges and Mark Hertling were considerably more optimistic than most of the analytic community.

[31] For a thoughtful discussion of this problem, see Stuart Ritchie, *Science Fictions: How Fraud, Bias, Negligence, and Hype Undermine the Search for Truth* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2020).

BROADEN THE EDUCATION OF ANALYSTS

Social sciences and humanities bring different qualities to analysis. Political science and sociology have their strong points, but so does history, which would have been particularly useful in this case. The sensibility of historians—their alertness to contingency, nuance, culture, personality, and much else—differs from that of political scientists. Students of the history of war, in particular, have a much better visceral feel for the imponderables than social scientists usually do. This is, of course, even more true of well-educated soldiers.

ENCOURAGE A CULTURE OF DEBATE

Consensus on analytic forecasts is perilous, as students of intelligence failure have long noted. The problem with the usual solution—an in-house contrarian of some kind—is that it runs the risk of being formulaic. Analysts need venues and incentives to disagree with one another without fearing professional consequences, either for their reputation as oracles or due to retaliation from leaders in the field.

The authors again stress that they do not find deliberate dishonesty or manipulation, much less simplemindedness or stupidity, in the poor analysis of the Russian and Ukrainian militaries before the war. Rather, the structure of the analytic community—its incentive structures and educational formation—makes the failure understandable, if no less disturbing. The authors' concern is that in an era of severe military conflict, this is highly unlikely to be a one-off case, with quite possibly more cases to come. In such cases, consensus and certainty are not only intellectually problematic, but they are also downright dangerous. Consumers of such analysis, as well as those who produce it, must act to prevent another such failure.

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Document No. 2 Svein Efjestad, "The future of the US nuclear guarantee," *Norwegian Institute of International Affairs*, September 2024, Select Excerpts.*

[…]

Introduction

The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 ushered in a new era in European security. The return of expansionist war, large-scale atrocities, and overt nuclear signaling by Russia has plunged relations between Russia and the West to depths not seen

* Select Excerpts published with permission. The full report is available at https://www.nupi.no/content/pdf_preview/29151/file/NUPI_Report_9_2024_Efjestad.pdf?mc_cid=eace07fcc0&mc_eid=6a56106a20.

since the height of the Cold War, with no prospects for normalization apparent. As European powers scramble to re-establish credible conventional forces, the region remains overdependent on US extended deterrence,[32] both conventional and nuclear. At the same time, Washington faces a bloc of autocratic states set on challenging US power all along the Eurasian perimeter.[33] While Russia has become increasingly isolated economically and politically from the West, it has turned to China, Iran, and North Korea for diplomatic and material support. At the same time, the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) remains the world's largest military force and continues to expand and modernize its capabilities, including its nuclear forces.[34] The modernization of the PLA has reinforced the threat against Taiwan, the US, and its allies and partners in the region.[35] Adding to the demand for US political and military support, North Korea has acquired a considerable nuclear inventory and developed a diverse array of capable nuclear delivery systems. Iran continues to develop and deploy long-range missiles that could potentially serve dual-use roles, and maintains a nuclear breakout capability, including steadily increasing stockpiles of highly enriched uranium.

The US remains Europe's principal security guarantor, providing extended deterrence for all NATO members ultimately based on a diverse and capable inventory of nuclear and conventional forces. […]

US nuclear forces require substantial modernization in the coming years while NATO's nuclear policy and posture remain largely shaped by the benign security situation that emerged in Europe after the end of the Cold War. […] Notably, the US withdrew all non-strategic nuclear weapons from Europe, except for a small number of free-fall nuclear bombs which now constitute the entire arsenal included in the nuclear sharing arrangement. While Russia has re-introduced dual-capable medium-range land-based missiles to its arsenal, Chinese and North Korean nuclear expansion is also placing increased demand on US nuclear deterrence in the Indo-Pacific region.

What sets the US apart from all its competitors is its vast network of qualified and reliable allies and partners in Europe and Asia. NATO's new deterrence and defense policy includes regional operational plans, reinforcement planning, and a more ambitious force posture. The US has a decisive role in this policy, and has strengthened its force posture in Europe. The US has also strengthened its cooperation with allies and partners in Asia as a response to the Chinese military build-up in the region. Nonetheless, the partnerships with the UK and France are particularly important in nuclear affairs, as is the cooperation with NATO and

[32] Max Bergmann (2024) 'A More European NATO'. Foreign Affairs, 21 March.

[33] Hal Brands (2024) 'The New Autocratic Alliances'. Foreign Affairs, 29 March.

[34] The Military Balance (2023), International Institute for Strategic Studies ch. 6.

[35] Ragnhild E. Siedler et al (2024), Wargaming Taiwan 2027, Norwegian Defense Research Establishment No. 251.

particularly those states in Europe which host US nuclear weapons on their soil (presumably Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, and Türkiye). […]

What has received less attention is the development of the US extended deterrence policy in the region, and in particular how it ties into overall US strategy and global commitments. Ongoing developments in US nuclear policy and posture have important implications for European security. This includes both the modernization of US nuclear weapons in Europe and the modernization of all legs of the US strategic triad. Improvements in other US military capabilities are also highly relevant for European security. While US air, land, and maritime forces continue to play a crucial role in European security, advances in US ballistic missile defense (BMD) and conventional long-range precision strike capabilities also have fundamental implications for strategic stability and security in Europe. […]

Background: NATO, extended deterrence, and nuclear weapons

NATO's nuclear policy has undoubtedly also contributed to reducing the number of nuclear powers in the West and probably also in Asia. As such, extended nuclear deterrence is also an effective non-proliferation mechanism. But to make extended deterrence credible, this policy need[s] to be supported by modern and effective capabilities, visible exercises, and a strong political solidarity expressed and confirmed at the highest political level. […]

New relevance: Russian aggression in Ukraine; China and Taiwan

[…] While it is impossible to establish any causal link between the Budapest memorandum and the 2014/2022 invasions, the outcome could potentially reinforce the desire of threshold states to acquire nuclear weapons. […]

Unofficial statements have suggested that Western countries could engage directly in combat operations against Russia with conventional weapons if Russia chose to use nuclear weapons. This could lead to a total collapse of Russian conventional forces, and must be seen as a more realistic and likely response than retaliation with nuclear weapons. A scenario like this could, however, easily lead to a widespread international war which again could escalate into nuclear warfare.

The fact that most observers and officials do not believe that Russia would use nuclear weapons in Ukraine could also be seen as an indication that nuclear forces have become less relevant. However, the unwillingness of NATO countries to engage directly in the defense of Ukraine must be seen in light of the nuclear capabilities of Russia. The debate about allowing Ukraine to use weapons received from the West to attack targets on Russian soil is taking place in the shadow of Russian nuclear saber rattling. Long-range precision guided missiles with conventional munitions could be decisive for the outcome of the war. The United States has already deployed such land-based intermediate range missiles in Asia. The demise of the

INF Treaty makes production and deployment of such weapons more attractive also for European states. […]

Russia has a range of nuclear options available. They could resume live testing at their testing range in Novaja Zemlya they could choose a demonstrative use without any tangible effect on the battlefield. Limited battlefield use would send a very strong signal. However, it is still very unlikely that Russia would use nuclear weapons. […]

It seems unlikely that the Western nuclear powers would respond to such scenarios with nuclear weapons. It would be very risky, as it might lead to further escalation once the nuclear threshold has been crossed, and it could cause division and controversy among Western states. Western unity and a resolute response would be essential to deter the opponent and to signal that a nuclear exchange limited to Europe would be totally unacceptable.

Adversaries' expanding and improving capabilities

[…] Russia's conventional strength will suffer for many years to come, whatever the outcome of the war in Ukraine. Economic and demographic decline will have an impact on the Russian armed forces. This makes it more likely that the Kremlin will rely more on its nuclear forces. […]

US nuclear policy and posture

[…] US policymakers are facing significant challenges in developing and maintaining a nuclear posture and policy to effectively deter all the country's potential adversaries and extend credible deterrence to reassure its allies.[36] […]

The total modernization package of the nuclear forces will probably cost approximately $1.5 trillion. It is questionable whether that much money will be made available for this purpose. It is not only a question of financing and priorities. Critics argue that the US cannot and should not carry this enormous burden on behalf of the free world, and there is also political and moral opposition to the current concept of nuclear deterrence. […]

Coordinated response to threats and challenges by the US and its Allies are thus a requirement for effective deterrence.

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[36] Brad Roberts, 'The Next Chapter in US Nuclear Policy' (2024), The Washington Quarterly, Summer. House Armed Services Committee, "America's Strategic Posture, the Final Report of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States," October 2023, 5, 3, https://armedservices.house.gov/sites/republicans.armedservices.house.gov/files/Strategic-Posture-Committee-Report-Final.pdf.

The US will soon face two adversaries with extensive nuclear arsenals: Russia and China. The policy and posture must be designed so that both of these countries will be deterred, which is very demanding. The proliferation of nuclear weapons to new states is also a complicating factor. North Korea's nuclear capability, and the possibility that Iran may acquire nuclear weapons, are particularly worrisome. In light of thes[e] developments there is also a risk that US allies develop an independent nuclear deterrent.

The US needs a robust nuclear posture in order to maintain its security interests and support its Allies. The current plans seem adequate in terms of numbers and categories although there could be a case for reintroducing nuclear tipped Sea Launched Cruise Missiles. This could add to the credibility of the US deterrent. A complicated issue is the survivability and effectiveness of the nuclear force in a hostile situation. The dependence on space-based systems for navigation and intelligence is an obvious vulnerability. Missile defense could complicate the planning and execution of a nuclear attack on the US but could not provide an effective defense against a peer adversary. And while the submarine-based force is still considered highly survivable, new developments in autonomous and space technologies might change this in the longer term.

Despite these challenges, the future US posture consisting of ICBMs, SLBMs and strategic air forces, in addition to a smaller number of free-fall nuclear bombs on US and Allied multirole fighters, should suffice to stop any rational state from contemplating a nuclear attack on the US. Any employment against US Allies carries with it a substantial risk for a comprehensive conventional or nuclear response, which in turn could trigger an extensive nuclear war. Effective deterrence depends on the mindset and rationale that the employment of nuclear forces carries with it a far greater risk and burden than any conceivable gain.

Nuclear policy and posture in Europe

No states can launch an attack on NATO countries knowing that a nuclear response is out of the question. […] The forward deployment of nuclear weapons contributes to deterrence primarily by providing a linkage to the strategic nuclear forces. […] However, should deterrence fail, and nuclear forces are used against Western targets, this will fundamentally change the nature of the conflict. The old question of whether the United States would risk a response on its own territory remains. […]

Any use of nuclear weapons is a strategic issue. The distinction between tactical and strategic weapons originates from a time when the world political situation was totally different and arms control agreements required distinguishing between different classes of weapons. […]

The importance of European-based nuclear weapons is political in nature. Their military utility and relevance is less important. […] It is still important to demonstrate solidarity and agreement on the role of nuclear weapons in Europe. The public strategic concepts and

summit declarations serve this purpose. It is also important that as many member states as possible participate in planning through the Nuclear Planning Group, in procedural exercises, and by giving support to those states which provide aircraft for the nuclear role in Europe. Other kinds of support for nuclear operations in terms of providing escort, intelligence, electronic warfare, refueling, and SNOWCAT are also important.

There are those who argue that deployment of nuclear forces on the territory of new members will strengthen deterrence. […] But it could also be argued that such deployments will increase tension in Europe without improving the Western position. Such a basing arrangement would also be in violation of the NATO-Russia Founding Act of 1997, which is still in effect although Russia has violated the agreement. There is also the danger that Western opinion would be even more negative to NATO's deterrence policy if Western moves were seen to be provocative.

None of the Nordic states have indicated support for the permanent deployment of nuclear forces on their territories in peacetime. […] Upon entering NATO, Sweden and Finland have not declared any similar reservations regarding nuclear weapons, but there are no indications that they wish to host nuclear weapons on their territory in peacetime. Most likely therefore, all Nordic countries will probably end up with very similar nuclear weapons policies. There is, however, the question of the extent to which Nordic countries will provide support to nuclear operations through the SNOWCAT concept. […] Perhaps the Nordic countries could also coordinate their nuclear policies through the Nordic Defense Cooperation (NORDEFCO) – for instance by common support for the nuclear modernization underway in the Alliance. However, skeptisism regarding NATO's nuclear policy exists in all Nordic countries. In Norway, this is reflected in the fact that the Norwegian Pension Fund Global is prohibited from investing in all companies involved in nuclear weapons programs, despite the fact that all Norwegian governments have supported NATO's nuclear policies. After some hesitation, Sweden decided not to support the Treaty on the prohibition of nuclear weapons. Norway has decided to be an observer to the meetings in the treaty body, but has declared it will not sign the treaty.

Should extended deterrence lose its credibility, there could be a danger that some European nations will develop their own independent nuclear capability. […] Moving US warheads closer to the East-West divide is a more probable development. Such deployment could enhance the deterrent, but deployment close to Russia could also increase the vulnerability of the nuclear weapons during hostilities.

During the Cold War, NATO might have felt compelled to resort to nuclear weapons by deliberate escalation in order to avoid military defeat. In the future, NATO and the West will be in a much better situation regarding the balance of conventional forces. Given the state of Russian capabilities, NATO should be able to deter by denial and thus not face the dilemma of deliberate nuclear escalation. European Allies must make a more fair and stronger

contribution to the collective defense to achieve this. Current plans indicate that European Allies will strengthen their defense forces substantially.

Future US extended deterrence and Europe

Politicians and experts need to communicate the implications of extended nuclear deterrence. Transatlantic cohesion is based on extended deterrence, and this is underlined in NATO's strategic concept and thus agreed by all member states. However, despite the fact that this is the backbone of deterrence, there is not much evidence that this – and the political and economic burden that the United States carries – is understood and valued by European Allies. […]

The political climate in the United States is becoming more and more dysfunctional. Major changes in US policies, notably a new administration and a higher priority given to Asia, might weaken US involvement in, and support for, security in Europe. This could also have implications for the credibility of the extended deterrence policy of the United States.

The modernization of the strategic forces of the United States is a huge endeavor. The cost of the proposed modernization is enormous, and the political support for the US nuclear umbrella is challenged both from the radical circles in the Democratic party and from right wing Republicans. US federal debt is high and increasing. These facts underline the need for a new burden-sharing between the US and its NATO Allies.

In this situation, it is important that European Allies give full support to the US efforts to maintain a credible and effective nuclear posture. The strategic modernization and the maintenance of the sub-strategic nuclear forces in Europe are necessary elements in a strategy of integrated deterrence. Furthermore, Europeans must contribute more significantly to collective defense. By creating a solid conventional defense, NATO can establish a more credible deterrence based on denial, which is necessary in order to avoid undue reliance on nuclear forces by deliberate escalation. Such an option seem more and more unacceptable as the Russian advantage in number and types of sub-strategic nuclear weapons is increasing.

In conclusion, Allies of the United States should therefore be more vocal in supporting the modernization of the strategic forces. They should also be more active in promoting operational cooperation with strategic forces when opportunities arise. One should have in mind that the sub-strategic weapons deployed in Europe are only a small fraction of the nuclear capabilities in the US arsenal. […]