

BEYOND THE HORIZON: EASTERN EUROPE AFTER THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR



BELARUS SECURITY BLOG

**BEYOND THE HORIZON:
EASTERN EUROPE AFTER
THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR**

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Only one
will remain

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February 24, 2022 forever changed not only the region of Eastern Europe, but also the system of interstate relations that developed after 1991 in Northern Eurasia. We are witnessing a geopolitical transformation that will have long-term consequences not only for our region, but perhaps on a global scale.

This transformation will take place over a long period of time. Even the end of the Russian-Ukrainian war will not automatically lead to a new stable system of interstate relations. The organization of the post-war order will take a long time. Its outlines can now be guessed only approximately. But some, albeit vague, ideas about the future are already there.

We present to your attention a collection of articles by Belarus Security Blog contributors from Belarus and Ukraine, dedicated to the post-war geopolitical structure of Eastern Europe. In their materials, our authors tried to look beyond the horizon of current events and describe how they see both the results of the war and its long-term consequences.

These views are very different. Which reflects the difference in the perception of what is happening. War is always a multilayered and multifaceted phenomenon.

We did not aim to give clear forecasts. Especially with reference to time. Under the current circumstances, this is simply not possible. The main objective of this collection of visionary materials is to identify long-term trends that have and will have an impact on the situation in our region. And based on them, try to construct a possible picture of the geopolitical future in Eastern Europe.

Only one will remain

Evhen MAHDA

Ukraine / iSANS



The nature of hostilities, the volume of war crimes of the aggressor in the occupied territory of Ukraine and the sentiment in the societies of the warring states suggest that the outcome of the Russian-Ukrainian war may be unexpected for the world community. Within NATO there is a consensus on the issue that Ukraine will not lose the war. However, this is contrary to numerous forecasts that sounded up to February 24, 2022. The disintegration of Russia in the current situation looks more and more likely.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine launched the largest military conflict in the 21st century. But this is far from the only characteristic of the confrontation between the two largest republics of the former USSR taking place on the territory of Ukraine. In fact, we are in the process of completing the collapse of the Soviet Union, which can give impetus to the process of Russia's disintegration. There was already a «parade of sovereignties» in the early 90s of the twentieth century¹, so it is not worth excluding its repetition in the event of a military defeat of Russia.

Since Russia is speculating on the theme of the «Third World War», it is necessary to indicate the parameters of its defeat in the confrontation with Ukraine. In my opinion, it is the complete restoration of the territorial integrity of Ukraine, which can lead to crisis processes within the Russian Federation itself. This means the liberation not only of Kharkiv, Kherson, Donetsk and Luhansk regions, but also of the Crimea seized by Russia in 2014. The occupied peninsula is an important part of the Russian imperial narrative² and its return to Ukrainian control can be called one of the key moments of the confrontation. It is obvious that any analogies with the First and Second World Wars will be strained, since Russia does not have the public support of the leading states of the world.

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The key characteristics of the Russian-Ukrainian war following the results of 9 months of confrontation are:

- War for the Independence of Ukraine. There is no mistake in this statement, since yesterday's colony and metropolis are fighting, and the long history of Russian-Ukrainian relations proves that Moscow has succeeded primarily in «active measures», regardless of the nature of the hostilities. Kyiv will have to act offensively, relying not only on military successes, but also on diplomatic moves and the support of allies. The military victory of Ukraine can also seriously change the situation in the post-Soviet space, in particular, in Belarus.
- The biggest war in Europe since 1945, bearing consequences for the entire continent. Actually, the very fact of the war between the largest state in the world and the largest country in Europe, even according to the laws of physics, causes a significant resonance. None of the major international players can stand aside, and the European Commission, through its President Ursula von der Leyen, has already expressed its readiness to become the operator of the restoration of Ukraine in the future¹. This fact can be interpreted as a tectonic change in approaches in relations between the EU and Russia.
- The biggest migrant crisis: millions of citizens of Ukraine were forced to leave their homes². The demographic problems for Ukraine will become more pronounced, and the states of the Old World will try to keep Ukrainian refugees on their territory. We are talking about the «delayed effect» of Russian aggression, the negative consequences of which for Ukraine will become painful after the end of hostilities.
- Russia is a nuclear state, Ukraine, together with Belarus and Kazakhstan, abandoned the Soviet

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nuclear arsenal inherited in the 1990s. The Budapest Memorandum, signed in December 1994, turned out to be an extremely ineffective document¹. I note that the Russian Federation uses a variety of tools of nuclear blackmail: from discussing the use of tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine to a planned influence operation with the participation of top officials of the state under the conditional name «Ukraine’s Dirty Bomb»².

- Although in Ukraine and Russia the church is separated from the state, the religious factor is important for both states. The Orthodox communities of these states are the largest in the Orthodox world³, despite the existing dualism in Ukrainian Orthodoxy. Since the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) is the most important component of the Russian Orthodox Church, after the end of the Russian-Ukrainian war, significant changes in world Orthodoxy may occur. The desire of the Ukrainian authorities to reduce the current influence of the Russian Orthodox Church confirms this assumption.
- An important aspect of the confrontation between Russia and Ukraine was its concentration in the Black Sea basin. A number of events, formally unrelated to each other, follow from this. These are the destruction by the Ukrainian Defense Forces of the flagship of the Russian Black Sea Fleet, the missile cruiser Moskva (the very fact of its destruction by anti-ship missiles from the shore is unprecedented)⁴ and the attack by naval drones of the RF Black Sea Fleet base in Sevastopol

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² At the end of October, Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu told his colleagues from the states of the “nuclear club” about the possibility of Ukraine using a “dirty bomb”. This topic was several times raised by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, Chairman of the State Duma Vyacheslav Volodin and Russia’s representative to the UN Vasily Nebenzya. Vladimir Putin spoke about the possibility of Ukraine using a «dirty bomb» as well.

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(obviously, the first in naval history)¹. Of course, this is also the «grain agreement», which was the result of the mediation efforts of the UN and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan² [10]. The latter, as is known, is the most consistent in its desire to put Russia and Ukraine at the negotiating table, while pursuing his own interests.

The Russian-Ukrainian war has become the first military conflict in Europe in the past 75 years, during which the ground forces, aviation and navy of both opposing sides are used. At the same time, contrary to the forecasts of military analysts who shaped the Western establishment's perception of the consequences of Russia's future aggression against Ukraine, the Russian-Ukrainian war did not become a confrontation between a «large former Soviet army» and a «smaller former Soviet army». The Armed Forces of Ukraine have demonstrated a number of advantages created by the regular conduct of low-intensity hostilities since the spring of 2014.

However, in the emotional background of the Russian-Ukrainian war not the reports of direct hostilities, but «accompanying moments» are more important. These include extrajudicial executions of civilians and prisoners of war in the occupied territories of Ukraine, the destruction of the critical infrastructure of Ukraine by Russian missile attacks (a phenomenon largely unprecedented for modern military operations, because Ukraine is a state with a high level of industrial development), forced mobilisation in the occupied territories of Ukraine, which can be classified as a war crime. No less indicative is the fact that the «limited mobilisation» announced in Russia in the third decade of September led to the outflow of hundreds of thousands of Russian citizens from the country.

Russia's large-scale aggression against Ukraine not only destroyed the myth of Russian-Ukrainian friendship,

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it undermined the foundations of the post-September 11, 2001, world order. The multipolar world turned out to be by no means capable of ensuring the condemnation of the aggressor state, which is a permanent member of the UN Security Council. Therefore, the United Nations General Assembly turned out to be more principled than the Security Council¹. The situation inside the OSCE looks no less depressing; the mandate of the special monitoring mission was not extended due to Russia's veto². At the same time, its Ukrainian counterparts could not remove the Russian delegation from the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. An unpleasant discovery of the Russian-Ukrainian war was the rapid decline in the authority of the International Red Cross, which failed to effectively carry out humanitarian functions in the conditions of a large-scale war.

Speaking about the consequences of the Russian-Ukrainian war, it is necessary to note the scenarios for the development of events not only for the direct participants, but also for the leading actors.

The United States got a real opportunity to «pull the bear's paws», because the provision of financial and military-technical assistance to Ukraine for Washington is an important component of foreign policy. The adoption of the lend-lease law³, which revived this concept after the Second World War, obviously has not only a practical, but an ideological character. The Russian-Ukrainian War became a prominent factor during the mid-terms that took place on November 8, 2022. With Republicans gaining control of the House of Representatives and maintaining Democratic dominance in the Senate, it will be interesting to see the persistence of bipartisan support for Ukraine and its practical implementation. I will note an important point: the American military-industrial complex has received the opportunity to test its products in the conditions of large-scale military operations. At the same time, the Biden administration

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remains cautious about providing Ukraine with offensive weapons.

The PRC learned an unexpected lesson: the tactics of the Ukrainian military in the battles near Kyiv demonstrated to Beijing that its own military strategy may not work in the event of aggression against the Republic of China (Taiwan). In addition, economic ties destroyed by Russian aggression have deprived China of the opportunity to become the number one economy in the short term. Keeping Xi Jinping at the helm of the state for a third term indicates that he intends to achieve Chinese leadership. There is an important moment here: in the model of a bipolar world, which Xi Jinping spoke about during the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of China, Russia is not seen as a pole¹. This fact, of course, should alert the Kremlin.

United Kingdom. The Brexit procedure, finally completed during the premiership of Boris Johnson, allowed the UK to play more actively in the foreign policy arena. It seemed that leaving the European Union reminded London about its own nuclear status and the place of a permanent member of the UN Security Council. Britain began an active political game, acting in the vanguard of support for Ukraine on the eve of large-scale Russian aggression. London continues to play this game, although the idea of a geopolitical axis Britain-Poland-Ukraine² faded into the background, at least, after Liz Truss left the post of head of the foreign affairs agency. Interestingly, the intensification of British foreign policy has led to noticeable turbulence at 10 Downing Street: the eccentric and consistent supporter of Ukraine Boris Johnson has been replaced by Liz Truss, who has been in office for only 44 days. The current Prime Minister of Great Britain, Rishi Sunak, is called upon to resolve the accumulated social problems and prevent early parliamentary elections that could bring victory to the Labour Party.

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The European Union, faced with the greatest military-political test during its existence, completed it with honour. In the European structures of Brussels, they worked on the mistakes compared to the Balkan wars and Russia's invasion of Georgia, taking a more active position. Perhaps the fact is that the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, once held the post of Minister of Defense of Germany. The humiliation of the head of European diplomacy Josep Borrell during his visit to Moscow in 2021 should not be discounted either¹. Supporting Ukraine, the European Union not only for the first time made allocations for direct military support to Ukraine² and granted Ukraine and Moldova the status of candidates for joining the European Union³. At the same time, the EU managed to avoid the shortage of energy resources that Russia tried to create, which may change the nature of relations with the Russian Federation in the energy sector in the near future. The aforementioned readiness to become the operator of the restoration of Ukraine is important as well.

NATO. The most powerful military-political alliance in the world is not a direct participant in the Russian-Ukrainian war, no matter how Russian propaganda claims otherwise. However, after February 24, 2022, a number of influential NATO members (Germany, France, Italy) changed their positions and began supplying weapons to Ukraine. Poland and the Baltic countries were also active in this matter. At the same time, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg noted in November 2022 that Ukraine will become a NATO member only after the end of the war with Russia⁴. This looks logical, because most of the Alliance states are not ready to extend the provisions of Article 5 of the Washington Collective Defense Treaty to Ukraine. At the same time, it should be noted (as the missile incident in Przewodów (Poland)⁵ showed) that NATO countries are not ready for a reckless

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escalation of tension in relations with Russia. At the same time, the desire of Sweden and Finland to become members of the Alliance, which is currently being implemented, testifies to the stability of NATO's positions¹. Let me remind you that these states maintained their neutrality during the Cold War.

Visegrad Four. The group of post-socialist states of Central Europe, which at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries became members of NATO and the European Union, has become a model of the attitude of the Old World to the Russian-Ukrainian war. While Poland, the Czech Republic and, to a lesser extent, Slovakia are active in supporting Ukraine, Hungary is playing its own game with Russia, one of the results of which was the preservation of Viktor Orban in power following the results of the parliamentary elections in April 2022. So far, it seems unlikely that the Visegrad Four will become a more active foreign policy player or expand its membership at the expense of Ukraine.

Russia. In the third decade of September 2022, there was an event that could affect the development of the Russian Federation in the foreseeable future. We are talking about the decree of President Vladimir Putin on partial mobilisation², which significantly changed the mood in Russian society. The conscription of several hundred thousand Russians into the ranks of the warring army increased the feeling of anxiety within Russian society, while support for Putin's actions in Ukraine remained at a high level³. The Kremlin is operating in the ways of the 20th century in the most technologically advanced century, which does not give it the chance to count on victory.

The defeat in the war against Ukraine, the parameters of which are indicated at the beginning of the article, will force Russia to either introduce a martial law (state of emergency) to limit political and protest activity. Russian propaganda, despite the total nature of the impact, fails to

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advance the idea of the inevitability of victory in the public mind. The statements about the «immutability of the goals of the special military operation» are becoming more and more distant from reality. Russia has managed to adapt to the largest sanctions in world history, but some of them are of a prolonged nature, and are capable of hitting the economic foundations of states, and not the well-being of citizens, which has never been a priority for the Kremlin. The strengthening of the position of the head of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov, and the «Kremlin chef» Yevgeny Prigozhin, whom Putin uses as a «whip» for doubters inside the country and a bogeyman for the West, looks indicative. The key to stopping Russia's aggressive policy today is its disintegration, but this idea has not yet found sufficient support among the masses. It is worth noting the effectiveness of the protective information measures of the Russian authorities and the change of locomotives of Russian propaganda abroad from Russia Today and Sputnik Media to RIA Novosti and TASS. I assume that Russia will continue to look for ways to get out of the war with Ukraine and preserve the seat of Vladimir Putin, playing on the disunity of the Western elite. At the same time, the destruction of the myth of Russian-Ukrainian friendship and good neighbourly relations with Ukraine can be considered a fact.

Ukraine managed to withstand the blow of the aggressor, contrary to the general opinion about the weakness of the Ukrainian state, problems with corruption and public administration. The West seriously underestimated (perhaps out of ignorance) the motives of the citizens of Ukraine, for whom their own state is a value. However, this does not mean that victory in the war with Russia will be the solution to all problems for Ukraine. Unfortunately, after the end of the hostilities, the country will face a period of problems and disappointments. Perhaps the first of these will be the nature of the negotiations with Russia, although today the authorities of Ukraine emphasise that they intend to achieve the full restoration of the country's territorial integrity.

The losses of Ukraine – both human and material ones – in the war with Russia are great. Ukraine will not be able to

independently restore the economy and infrastructure. Authoritarian tendencies in public administration, which are acceptable in wartime conditions, after the end of the war with Russia, may retain their presence in the internal politics of Ukraine. The issue of Ukraine's accession to the EU and NATO may not be resolved as quickly as the representatives of the establishment would like. Relying on the military component, the achievements of the Ukrainian Defense Forces can hardly be used in future discussions. It is worth paying attention to the completion of the process of formation of the Ukrainian political nation, for which the war with Russia will have a decisive effect. Defeating Russia and not turning into Russia is how Ukraine's short-term task can be formulated today.

Belarus turned out to be the only state publicly supporting Russia in the war against Ukraine, which provided its territory for the deployment of Russian troops. Aliaksandr Lukashenka continues to use the rhetoric of the so-called «Union State of Russia and Belarus» in this matter, and Belarus itself has largely become a donor of Russia's military interests. For now, this saves Belarus from direct occupation by Russian troops, but this situation will not continue forever. I note that the statements of the Belarusian opposition about the internal occupation within Ukraine are perceived poorly, due to the difference in the nature of the occupation in Belarus and in the occupied territories of Ukraine. It should be recognized that the protests in Belarus against the Russian military presence and the use of the country's territory for aggression against Ukraine failed to create confidence in the world that Belarusians are categorically against Russia. Such an assumption is not true.

An unfavourable scenario for Russia may include a compensatory effect in the desire to annex the territory of Belarus (and possibly Armenia, but in a different scenario) to the Russian Federation in order to demonstrate Putin's ability to be a «collector of lands». In this matter, there is no need to look for links with the centenary of the creation of the USSR; rather, it will be a matter of purely political expediency. The occupation of Belarus will allow Russia to indulge its pride by

entering the «Belarusian balcony» with constant psychological pressure on the Baltic countries and Poland. This option reduces the urgency of the problem of using the Belarusian army as part of the invasion forces in Ukraine.

In the presence of a time lag, one should not exclude the option of holding presidential elections in Belarus without the direct participation of Lukashenka in them. In a certain scenario, he may be offered the post of head of the so-called «All-Belarusian People's Assembly». The appearance of the second president in the history of the country (his pro-Russian position in this situation looks obvious) may nullify the political weight of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, who will not be able to take part in the presidential race.

Instead of an afterword. The Russian-Ukrainian war today looks like the main international event of the 21st century. It did not become a world war, although this would flatter Russia's pride, but it does not correspond to the degree of involvement of key world players and the distribution of support between the warring parties. Its lessons have yet to be analysed by historians of the future, obviously, this will happen after the end of hostilities, the date of which is difficult to predict today. At the same time, it is already clear today that the cessation of hostilities will not mean stability on the European continent and in its Baltic-Black Sea part, which again regained the status of «bloody lands», albeit on the territory of only one country.

Belarus after the Russian-Ukrainian war in the context of regional development

Taking into account the current political situation in Belarus, the author prefers to remain incognito



The Russian-Ukrainian war will end with a serious weakening of Russia, but will not be able to completely reformat the political map of Eastern Europe. Belarus is highly likely to remain in Russia's sphere of influence, not only sharing Moscow's problems and hardships of global isolation (including economic stagnation, technological degradation, etc.), but also incurring additional losses as a potential zone of tension between the two sides of the conflict.

Current trends

The status of Belarus as a co-aggressor country has been fixed, Aliaksandr Lukashenka's policy is seen as a manifestation of his complete dependence on Russia in conditions of low domestic support and the impossibility of even simulating the electoral process.

Belarus is trying to avoid direct involvement in hostilities, but cannot refuse to provide Russia with its territory for the deployment and training of Russian military personnel, as well as for delivering strikes from its territory and conducting other unfriendly activities.

Attempts by the official Minsk to promote peacekeeping rhetoric on the external track (and the idea of its own mediation in Russian-Ukrainian negotiations) remain fruitless. The high level of anti-Ukrainian rhetoric within the Belarusian information space strengthens the confidence of external actors in the complete dependence of the Lukashenka regime on the Kremlin.

The negative effects from the sanctions imposed against Belarus and, in general, from the actual severance of relations with the West are intensifying. The survival of the Belarusian economy is increasingly directly dependent on Russian resource support.

Attempts by certain political forces to present Belarus as an occupied state (by Russia or the Lukashenka regime) also remain unsuccessful, which leaves the issue of Belarus' responsibility relevant.

In the context of the ongoing crisis in relations with the West and without prospects for its improvement, Belarus risks facing even more serious consequences from other dubious decisions of its current ruler: mass repressions against its own citizens and foreigners; forced landing of a Ryanair aircraft on May 23, 2021, interpreted by many as an act of state air piracy; a crisis with migrants, appreciated, among other things, as the participation of official Minsk in human trafficking.

Belarus in the context of post-war regional development

Various think tanks offer various scenarios for the end of the Russian-Ukrainian war, which, accordingly, will affect the postwar situation of all countries in the region.

Thus, the Atlantic Council in July 2022 considered four possible scenarios¹:

The first scenario. A successful Ukrainian counter-offensive in all directions, leading in the foreseeable future to the de-occupation of all Ukrainian territories, except for Crimea. An attack on Crimea is seen in this scenario as a «red line» for Russia to use nuclear weapons. Ukraine undertakes not to join NATO.

The second scenario. Russia retains control over part of the Ukrainian territories in addition to Crimea, the conflict continues in varying degrees of «frozenness», draining the resources of Russia, Ukraine and the West. From a resource point of view, Russia is in a more vulnerable position, especially if Europe's dependence on Russian energy resources is reduced.

The third scenario is «The New Iron Curtain». Russia will be able to achieve a relative cessation of hostilities with Ukraine (while maintaining control over part of the Ukrainian

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territories) and more or less successfully fence itself off from the West on the model of the Iron Curtain and the Cold War. In this scenario Belarus will be on the Russian side of the Iron Curtain, but will remain a potential source of crisis for Russia. The region itself is waiting for serious militarization (military budgets will be at least doubled).

The fourth scenario. War between Russia and NATO (the likelihood of this scenario is considered extremely low).

In an October 23 forecast (no specific scenarios highlighted), Atlantic Council analysts see a protracted stalemate and some variation in a negotiated deal as a much more likely scenario, while the prospects for a Russian victory look highly dubious¹. As part of this work, we are already talking about three scenarios:

The first scenario – maintaining the current pace of the war, which is seen as the most likely scenario. Hostilities in their current form may continue for several years.

The second scenario is the achievement of some kind of agreement between Russia and Ukraine. The scenario is viewed as unlikely due to the lack of negative impact of sanctions on Russia and the mood prevailing in Ukrainian society.

The third scenario is a limited victory for Ukraine and the restoration of its borders as of February 24, 2022. This scenario is considered as the least probable within 3-6 months, but as quite possible in the perspective of 1-3 years, while maintaining the level of Western support.

Economic damage to Ukraine is estimated at the amount from 349 billion to 1 trillion US dollars.

Futurity, an aggregator of predictive studies from the world's largest universities, offers the following scenarios for

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the end of the war: the war will continue for 1-2 years with a serious overall deterioration in Russia both due to military losses and significant economic damage¹. The most obvious seems to be the restoration of the borders as of February 24, 2022. The forecast emphasizes that it is real, provided that Western support for Ukraine is maintained, despite the negative effect for the economies of Western states as well.

Foreign Policy experts also believe that the war tends to become a frozen conflict².

An interesting Iranian view of possible scenarios was presented in an article by Professor Mohammad Reza Hafeznia³. Unlike the Western forecasts, Hafeznia starts with a Russian victory scenario. The second scenario according to him is the defeat of Russia within the borders of Ukraine. The third one is a ceasefire and a truce. The fourth one is the expansion of the war. The fifth one is the spread of war to the whole world.

Thus, among the various forecasts, one can single out the following most probable one: the restoration of Ukrainian borders with the exception of Crimea (the status of which may be the subject of consideration in the future) as well as the actual isolation of Russia from the most developed part of the world.

In this context, forecasts regarding the future of Russia look even more uncertain. As can be seen from the review, the variant of the disintegration of the country, which is popular on certain information resources, is not considered. The domestic political situation in Russia will apparently develop in the direction of further strengthening of authoritarianism, although the opinion of experts on this issue is not unanimous⁴.

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One reason for the improbability of a Russian collapse scenario is the need to deter China. As one of the reports notes, «... Europe and the United States will not be able to choose between the challenge from China in the long term and the threat from Russia, the alliance will have to deal with both at the same time»¹. As Minsk Dialogue expert Paul Hansbury notes, «Rather, the war in Ukraine is facilitating the transfer of institutional power from the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) to the Chinese-led Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)»².

However, the negative impact of sanctions and international isolation on the Russian economy and its technological development is beyond doubt. Russia will significantly reduce its presence in the European energy market (which will objectively help reduce the influence of the pro-Russian lobby), and the overall influence of the United States on European politics will increase. There is no doubt about the growing militarization of the region.

The outlook for Belarus does not look positive under any scenario. Of course, Russian resources will be enough to maintain a certain standard of living in a state dependent on the Kremlin, but the prospects for any economic growth will have to be forgotten. The transit importance of Belarus will significantly decrease, and its role as one of the key suppliers of potash fertilisers to the world market will be limited by sanctions and the need to constantly look for some grey schemes (which will negatively affect the profitability of this business).

A decrease in the transit importance of Belarus will also reduce its opportunities for foreign policy manoeuvring, including due to a drop in interest from China. In general, the very possibility of any geopolitical manoeuvring of Belarus has already been reduced to a minimum even now, and the country will be more and more perceived as a territory

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dependent on Russia, losing economic and institutional resources for independent development.

A serious issue is the attitude towards Belarus on the part of other neighbouring countries, which, of course, are interested in distancing the official Minsk from Russia. For Lithuania, Poland, Latvia, and especially Ukraine, this is one of the key aspects of national security. Especially since the territory of Belarus can continue to be used by the Kremlin, if not as a springboard for invasion, then to create some kind of hotbed of tension, like migration crisis of 2021.

The reverse situation is also true – neighbouring countries, especially Ukraine, will also try to exert some influence on the regime in Minsk. Of course, there is a possibility of restoring the well-developed business before the war, which mutually enriched the elites of the two states. However, in post-war conditions, against the background of Belarus' status as a co-aggressor country and the discussion of reparations in favour of Ukraine, such business contacts and business schemes will be politically extremely dangerous. The Ukrainian authorities themselves, referring to the topic of reparations and the lack of a wide choice for Belarus, will clearly seek to seriously reconsider the nature of these business relations in their favour.

Another actively discussed subject is the question of the participation of military formations consisting of Belarusians in the Armed Forces of Ukraine in the possible overthrow of the Lukashenka regime by force. This scenario looks dubious – at present, the Lukashenka regime relies not on internal legitimacy, but on external support from Russia. The direct participation of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (albeit consisting of Belarusians) in any forceful activities on the territory of Belarus (where Russian troops are also stationed) will cause a corresponding reaction from the Kremlin. However, the Belarusian armed formations may be used as a tool to maintain constant tension in Belarus.

Thus, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- According to almost all forecasts, the war in Ukraine will end with a significant reduction in the territory oc-

cupied by Russia (perhaps Russia will retain control only over Crimea) and will lead to a significant drop in the economic, military and political influence of the Kremlin, not only as a world power (Russia, of course, will no longer be one), but even as a regional one.

- In Russia itself, with a high degree of probability, authoritarian tendencies will intensify, as well as the growth of the influence of various semi-criminal and ethnic groups against the background of an economic downturn and a deepening technological gap with the most developed countries of the world. Under these conditions, in Belarus, whose dependence on Russia will only increase until the disappearance of sufficient economic and institutional resources to maintain sovereignty, similar trends will be observed.
- At the same time, Belarus will turn into a kind of «half-grey» territory, a zone for creating and maintaining tension both from Russia (against the EU and Ukraine) and from the EU and Ukraine (against Russia).
- In connection with the growing influence of the United States on European politics, the importance of Poland and the Baltic countries in the region will also increase. This will make it difficult to soften relations with Russia. The level of militarization of the region will increase.
- The influence and involvement of China in Belarus will decrease significantly. The reduction of the transit potential of Belarus, the possibility of entering the European market and the general decline in subjectivity make our country less significant in Chinese politics. The only factor to counteract these trends will be China's dependence on potash supplies from Belarus.
- The issue of reparations, responsibility for co-aggression in the war, the forced landing of a Ryanair aircraft, the migration crisis will remain serious points of pressure on any Belarusian regime, strengthening its dependence on Russia, as well as general bleak prospects for socio-economic development.

Post-war prospects

Olga KANASHEVICH
Independent researcher



Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine is the main topic of discussion in the field of global security, military policy and international relations. After nine months of war, there are some prospects for its end. Every war ends sooner or later, if not with peace, then with negotiations.

In theory, everything is simple: the parties to the conflict sign a certain document: a peace treaty, a ceasefire agreement, an act of surrender. As one of the options for the development of events, a freeze of the conflict without formal agreements is also possible. The war in Ukraine today has already entered a protracted phase, and it is difficult to say how long it will last. Both sides demonstrate confidence that they can achieve if not a complete victory, then at least a better negotiating position. Consequently, none of them is ready to stop hostilities yet. Ultimately, the end of the war will depend not on the form in which it takes place, but on the situation at the front.

For more than nine months, the Russian Federation has been fighting in Ukraine, but despite loud statements, it was not possible to take Kyiv in three days. The planned blitzkrieg failed, the war became protracted, and in recent months it was unsuccessful for the Russian Federation. Experts note the military successes of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the courage and will of the Ukrainian people in confronting Russian aggression. The loss of the right bank of the Dnieper, previously captured by the Russian army; the failed, including informationally, «partial» mobilisation; sanctions that are not at all useful for the economy; the collapse of diplomacy. The Russian authorities are suffering colossal reputational losses in the international arena, and recently also within the country.

As a result, the Kremlin literally demands negotiations. There are calls to do so on every possible platform. Moscow signals willingness through intermediaries it influences or positions as partners. Both Erdogan and Lukashenka, and even President of Guinea-Bissau Umaru Shisoku Embalo, whose intermediary functions the Kremlin denies after the fact, acted as heralds of the negotiations. In June, Indonesian

President Joko Widodo, after meeting with Vladimir Putin in Moscow, said that he had conveyed a message to the Russian leader from Volodymyr Zelensky, and expressed his readiness to establish communication between the presidents. The talks between Russia and Ukraine in March were more of a deceptive manoeuvre by Putin, an imitation for the West to lose its vigilance and, hoping for peace, not even consider the possibility of supplying modern weapons to Ukraine. In addition, the Kremlin was trying to buy time for a new attack after the failure of the first offensive attempt.

The head of European diplomacy, Josep Borrell, unequivocally stated that «Putin is not capable of conquering Ukraine». But the inability to win and even defeat in the war give a wide range of possible scenarios for agreements. The main question today is which of the scenarios for the coexistence of Ukraine and Russia after the war are most likely.

But at the present stage, experts offer various scenarios for the end of the war in Ukraine. Three options seem to be the most likely.

Russia's setbacks in Ukraine, coupled with serious military casualties, mean that Putin desperately needs an operational pause in order to adjust his military strategy, recuperate, replenish stockpiles of weapons and ammunition, and regroup troops. This could freeze the conflict for a while, and this is one of the most negative scenarios, since it cannot bring stable peace to Europe and will only exacerbate long-term security and economic problems. Despite failed plans for a lightning-quick takeover of Ukraine, Putin has declared a desire not just to destroy Ukraine as an independent state, but also to restore Russian influence in the former Soviet space and, ideally, to annex the territories of former Soviet republics. To prevent a new war, Russia must be defeated and forced to abandon its imperial ambitions.

Analysts Mats Markusson and Elena Stavrunova of the *Vox Ukraine project* note that the Russian Federation is involved in «most frozen conflicts» in the post-Soviet countries, in which it fomented «separatist conflicts... and established

puppet regimes» not recognized in the world¹. These are Transnistria, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and the so-called «people's republics» in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine. The regularly escalating conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh is also an example of such a policy of the Russian Federation.

Today, it is beneficial for the Kremlin, which literally imposes negotiations on Kyiv, to «freeze» the conflict by establishing a truce and involving Ukraine in another hopeless peace talks similar to those in Minsk. It must be understood that if Putin manages to achieve a frozen conflict in Ukraine, he will «sell» it to the Russians, who exist in an alternative informational reality, as a victory. On the one hand, this will provide him with political support in Russia, and on the other hand, it will increase the likelihood of a new war in the future. And not only in relation to Ukraine. Moreover, such a «victory» will encourage and activate other authoritarian aggressors and make life in the world even less safe.

Any end to the war without the defeat of Russia is a postponed war not only for Ukraine, but for Europe as a whole. This defeat can be complete or partial, which is a prerequisite for the manifestation of another scenario in several variations. At the same time, it should be noted that the complete defeat of Russia is not a complete victory for Ukraine. In the event of a partial loss by the Russian Federation, the Ukrainian military manages to push the Russians out to the border as of February 23, 2022. And in this case, Putin can still announce victory in the media. And most Russians will believe this, because they not only expect victory, but, without realising it, they are afraid of defeat. This latent fear appeared against the backdrop of Ukraine's unsuccessful «partial» mobilisation and de-occupation of part of its territories, which makes a breach even in the monolithic Russian information space. Putin gets the opportunity to claim that his «special military operation» has achieved its goals: the Kremlin-backed separatists in the so-called L/DPR

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are reliably protected, and Russia's position in Crimea is strengthened.

Quite recently, the consumer of Russian media information existed in a situation where what happened on TV was more important than what happened in reality. Against the backdrop of mobilisation, the Russians began to worry about the outcome of the war, and Kremlin propaganda is forced to invent excuses for the retreat of Russian troops, to which Putin responds only with loud propaganda statements. Today, reality is beginning to take on more importance than television, and this is eroding public support for Putin. Even within the Kremlin-controlled media, divisions can be seen emerging, not only in public opinion but also among the elites. But, with a partial defeat, Putin has a great chance to feed the Russians a fairy tale of victory and retain power.

In turn, the complete defeat of the Russian Federation in Ukraine, apparently, develops into a struggle for power in the Kremlin, which, in turn, will not make it possible to maintain an «active» army presence in Ukraine. Moreover, a complete defeat implies any of the options: either if the Armed Forces of Ukraine de-occupies the entire Ukrainian territory, or if it manages to push the Russian army beyond the line of demarcation as of February 23. This will catalyse, if not the beginning of a split in the elites, then competition for a place in the sun: the struggle for resources, influence and possible control over a new political project, the creation of which the Kremlin is already looking at. The project can become a kind of analogue of the Rodina party of the mid-00s or LDPR 2.0.

If the Russian elites admit defeat at the front, then the classic question «Who is to blame?» arises. At the first stage, there will be a search for a scapegoat, an attempt to get Putin out of the blow. This means the intensification of «wars» between the «Kremlin towers» and the canalization of protest moods among the radicals (who will primarily enjoy the support of those who went through the war). The result of the implementation of the new project will be a chance for the emergence of a new «Kremlin tower». Potential stakeholders have already begun to demonstrate activity that

was not characteristic of them before. With some margin of error, three prospective groups can be named:

- 1.** Ramzan Kadyrov and Yevgeny Prigozhin, who, by no coincidence, control something like private military forces¹. Both of them have a power component and will try to gain strength through influence in the existing group of security forces (Patrushev's group). Prigozhin will rely on the army (the creation of a parallel structure), while Kadyrov will work with Zolotov. But both are «not the format» to form a party around them, and they need one.
- 2.** Infamous propagandists Vladimir Solovyov, Margarita Simonyan, Olga Skabeeva, Tigran Keosayan, who have a resource of «central channels» and a name. For them, the ideal option is a purely political structure, a complete analogue of a political party. This means the ability to jump into a new project and get several regions under their control.
- 3.** Military correspondents – owners of Telegram channels of a radical orientation. Their resource is information noise and possible support for veterans. They will work in the information field, but this is a heterogeneous company, where publicity is primarily with the channel, and not the author, with very dubious prospects for institutionalisation.

For each of them, the war of the Russian Federation in Ukraine is a kind of springboard into politics. In a situation where Putin is stabilising, the Kremlin needs a controlled leader. If stabilisation fails, then each interested party starts its own personal political war for the future. Logically, in any case, they will strive to preserve all the combat-ready forces and resources they have, either to protect their personal interests in the near future, or to fight for power in Moscow. At the same time, in the occupied part (if it remains) of Ukraine resources (military, informational and other them)

¹ [Link](#) 

will be at a minimum. Kadyrov and Prigozhin will withdraw the combat-ready core of their forces to the Russian Federation because they will understand that it is not profitable to keep the armed forces in Ukraine and spend them on war. The propagandists will work informationally first and foremost for themselves. Military correspondents will promote «heroes» who defend the remnants of «Russian acquisitions». But the main efforts and resources of all will be concentrated within the Russian Federation.

The third likely scenario is a long war of attrition. Steven Pifer, former US Ambassador to Ukraine, a fellow at the William Perry Center for International Security and Cooperation at Stanford University, argues that «everything is heading towards a long war of attrition in which neither side can make a decisive breakthrough»¹. Steven Pifer believes that the US Intelligence Committee also sees this scenario as possible. Under such a scenario, negotiations are possible only when there is mutual readiness. However, this requires changes in the negotiation requirements, primarily Russian ones. Today, Putin is not yet ready to look for a way out, and this is primarily a solution to the territorial issue. Such a war could continue for months, or even years, while Ukrainian and Russian troops suffer tactical defeats or achieve success. In this situation, Putin is betting that the West will «get tired» of helping Ukraine and focus on its own problems and on the Chinese threat.

For its part, the West has shown determination so far and continues to supply Ukraine with weapons. In this context, the war gradually develops into a positional «endless war». At the same time, the threat of Russian strikes against Ukrainian infrastructure does not disappear, and the use of tactical nuclear weapons becomes unlikely, but not impossible.

Each of the three scenarios has its own beneficiary or beneficiaries. Freezing the conflict is a scenario beneficial primarily to Russia. After nine months of fighting, the Russian

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Federation is feeling the heavy consequences of the war. Western sanctions not only destroy the Russian economy, but also hinder the production of weapons. Moreover, it is getting harder and harder to hide serious losses in manpower. That is why Putin seeks to draw Ukraine into a senseless negotiation process and restore the combat capability of his troops, replenish stocks of weapons and ammunition. However, such a scenario is extremely unfavourable not only for Ukraine, but also for the rest of the world, since it will only exacerbate long-term problems in the field of global and European security.

In turn, in the case of the implementation of the third scenario, despite its high probability, no one wins.

Both Ukraine and the West are interested in the development of events according to the second scenario. Regardless of whether Russia loses the war completely or partially, would-be leaders claiming their share of power will want to capitalise on instability. This will force them to place their resources, including the military, as close as possible to the Kremlin. If a power struggle breaks out, the Russian elites will have other concerns, and the war will give way to far more utilitarian concerns.

While Russia is busy resolving its internal problems, it is necessary to form a new European security architecture, primarily with guarantees for Ukraine. In parallel, Ukraine gets the opportunity to achieve a complete victory and solve the problem of the fake Donetsk and Luhansk «republics» and Crimea.

New “frozen conflict” in Eastern Europe and its consequences

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In the short term, the transition of the «hot phase» of the Russian-Ukrainian war to the state of «frozen conflict» is predicted. After that, there will be a period of gradual degradation of the economy, social sphere, and infrastructure of the Russian Federation, as a result of economic sanctions from the West, which may, in the medium term, lead to a crisis of power and a change of the political regime in the Russian Federation, but not to the formal end of the war. Other countries in the region will experience a period of relative stability, including Ukraine, which will be able to regain control over all of its internationally recognized territory, but with the exception of Belarus, whose situation will mirror the situation in Russia.

The undeclared Russian-Ukrainian war, which began in 2014 with Russia's occupation of Crimea and parts of the Luhansk and Donetsk regions of Ukraine, is unlikely to end in the coming years, if the moment of the war end is considered to be the signing of a peace agreement or an act of surrender by one of the parties. However, approximately in the spring of 2023, we can expect its transition to a new phase – the phase of «frozen conflict», and, in fact, a return to the military situation that existed after the signing of the Minsk agreements until February 24, 2022.

This transition will be recorded by the signing of an agreement on the cessation of hostilities, the specific form of which cannot be predicted yet. With a high degree of probability, this agreement will be signed with the mediation of Turkey and under the auspices of the UN, following the example of the well-known «grain deal». Each party to the conflict will retain control over the territory that de facto belongs to it at the time of signing the agreement. There are reasons to believe that as a result of the winter offensive of Armed Forces of Ukraine 2022/2023 will be the complete liberation of the territories of the Kherson and Zaporizhzhya regions and the exit of this part of the front to the positions occupied until February 24, 2022. At the same time, it can be expected that during this period the Russian troops will advance further to the northwest in the Donetsk region, and almost all of it will be under the control of Russia.

The mentioned territorial «exchange» will allow both sides to talk about the achievement of certain «intermediate goals» of the war at this stage. In addition to the huge losses of the parties in manpower and equipment during the winter campaign, which will not be quickly restored, and the onset of spring slush, which will significantly hinder the further advance of the troops, this will contribute to the conclusion of an armistice agreement.

At the same time, the political situation surrounding the conflict will be radically different from the one that existed until February 2022. The block of states that provide military, economic, and political support to Ukraine, which was formed in recent months (its most formalised embodiment is the Contact Group for the Defence of Ukraine in the Rammstein format), will expand. At the same time, the Russian Federation will be increasingly isolated internationally, at least until the change of the political regime in the country.

In the conditions of more or less stable peace in the region, Ukraine can count on significant financial and economic assistance from its allies, among which the USA and the EU will play the main role, as well as on the massive attraction of foreign investments under the guarantees of the same allies. This will allow it to restore the destroyed industrial and energy infrastructure, as well as housing and communal services in a fairly short period of time. An important part of the mentioned aid will be to help Ukraine to finish the already started process of rearming and retraining the personnel of the Ukrainian Armed Forces in accordance with NATO standards as soon as possible.

At the same time, it can be predicted that the process of Ukraine joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union as a full member will not be completed either in the short or medium term. A formal obstacle to this will be the absence of a peace treaty and territorial disputes with Russia.

Russia will exit the active phase of the war, retaining control over the territories it occupied until 02/24/2022,

and expanding its zone of occupation in the Luhansk and Donetsk regions. In the conditions of international political and economic isolation, which will continue to increase after the cessation of active hostilities, it will face a steady deterioration of the socio-economic situation, the collapse of the infrastructure, which will eventually lead to a political crisis. The attempt of the Russian military-political leadership to start the «hot phase» of the war again with an attempt to «return» all the territories of the Russian Federation fixed in its constitution is seen as a possible catalyst for the political crisis. The result of this attempt will be the loss of all occupied Ukrainian territories by a weakened Russia. The speed of onset of this crisis can be estimated in 3-5 years (assuming today's trends). Its result should be a change in the political regime in the Russian Federation to a more liberal one, but the continued preservation of Russian territorial claims to Ukraine in the absence of a signed peace treaty. In the future, this state of affairs can be maintained for decades, for example Arab-Israeli (hard version) or Soviet/Russian-Japanese (soft version) conflicts.

The situation in the Republic of Belarus will mirror the situation in Russia. The socio-economic situation will invariably deteriorate, but a political crisis and a change of power will be possible only after the fall of the current regime in Russia, that is, in 3-5 years. After that, the country will be on the path of transformation in domestic political life (toward democracy) and in the economy (to denationalisation and oligarchization). In the field of foreign policy, Belarus is expected to return to the Council of Europe and submit applications for joining the EU and NATO, while there is a high probability of obtaining the status of a candidate country soon enough. Poland will be the «protector» of Belarus in Europe. In the economy, we should expect a sharp increase in the role of Polish and Ukrainian capital at the expense of a maximum reduction in the role of Russian capital.

The situation in Poland and the Baltic states will remain stable. We can predict the strengthening of the military and political power of the Polish state and a sharp increase in the economic influence of Poland in Ukraine and Belarus.

The invasion of the troops of the Russian Federation into Ukraine on February 24, 2022, which started the next phase of the current Russian-Ukrainian war, was aimed at the quick final victory of Russia in this war. Its main result should have been the establishment of puppet pro-Russian authorities in Kyiv, which would be ready to recognize the Russian annexation of Crimea and the independence of the «LPR» and «DPR» (within the Luhansk and Donetsk regions), and in the future – to initiate the annexation of Ukraine to the so-called «Union State» of Russia and Belarus. In this way, the hegemony of the Russian Federation in Eastern Europe was to be consolidated, and another step was taken to restore its role as a «world power» in the foreign policy context, and the role of Putin as the «collector of Russian lands» in the domestic political context.

The failure of the Russian «blitzkrieg» in the Kiev (first of all), Chernihiv, Sumy and Kharkiv directions, the absence of signs of the «collapse» of the military and political leadership of Ukraine in the first days of aggression, the degree of treachery of Ukrainian politicians, officials and security forces, which is much lower than expected by the Russians, and the degree of «pro-Russian» sentiments of ordinary citizens (especially in the North-Eastern region), increasing military and technical assistance to Ukraine from the West forced Russia to adjust its initial goals. At first, it was forced to abandon its plans to establish a pro-Russian «state authority» in Kyiv and to enter into negotiations with the effective Ukrainian authorities. The result of the negotiations in Belarus and Istanbul was the evacuation of Russian troops from Kyiv, Chernihiv, Sumy regions, most of Kharkiv region, and the rejection of the possibility of creating any «parallel Kyiv» government that could claim the status of «All-Ukrainian» (for example, in Kharkiv, the first capital of the USSR). Now the bet was made on the annexation of the Ukrainian regions partially occupied by Russia (Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhya and Kherson regions) according to the «Crimean model». The annexation was announced on September 30, 2022. But even after that, the area of the occupied territory continued to decrease, and on November 11, 2022, Russian troops were forced to leave Kherson – the only regional centre of Ukraine

that they managed to capture during this year's invasion. And Russia's retreat in this region continues.

Since the beginning of the 2022 invasion, the Russian Federation has found itself in almost complete international isolation. As shown by the results of the vote on UN General Assembly resolution ES-11/1 «Aggression against Ukraine» dated March 2, 2022, only 4 countries (Belarus, North Korea, Syria and Eritrea) out of 193 UN members openly supported the aggressor¹. At the same time, by March 7, 2022, the Russian Federation has become the world leader in terms of the number of sanctions imposed on it, surpassing Iran and North Korea² [2]. Today, 60 states, led by the USA, Great Britain and EU countries, are conducting a campaign of sanctions against it³. According to the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borel, «sanctions have a huge impact on the Russian economy in four areas: semiconductors, artificial intelligence, oil and aeronautics»⁴. As can be understood from this list, in the medium term, the cumulative effect of these sanctions will directly affect Russia's ability to stockpile weapons (especially complex ones) and finance the conduct of hostilities. In addition to the sanctions themselves, other factors should be taken into account: the loss of access of the Russian economy to financial markets, the mass departure of foreign companies from the Russian Federation, its detachment from large global research networks, and a massive «brain drain». And the cessation of these trends, even after the appeasement, seems very unlikely.

At the same time, the financial support of Ukraine from the West since February 2022 continues to grow. In May, the US Congress approved a package of aid to the country until the end of 2022 in the amount of 40 billion dollars, of which half is military aid, and the other part is determined to help

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refugees, economic support, diplomatic programs, etc¹. In addition, the G7 countries promised to allocate about 33 billion dollars to Ukraine in 2022 (as of October, two-thirds of this amount had already been paid)². In 2023, the EU alone is ready to allocate about one and a half billion monthly (18 billion per year). To date, several drafts of the plan for the post-war recovery of Ukraine (the so-called «new Marshall Plan») have been developed. In September, the World Bank, the European Commission and Ukraine estimated the losses from the war at about 350 billion dollars. According to their estimates, the lion's share of funds will go to the construction of new housing instead of the destroyed one (about 100 billion). At the same time, however, attention is drawn to the fact that with each day of the war, these losses increase and at the time of the end of hostilities, they can amount to a much larger amount (up to 750 billion). On November 14, 2022, the UN General Assembly approved a resolution on covering Ukraine's losses from the Russian invasion³. Taking into account that the EU alone has frozen about 19 billion euros of assets of Russian individuals and about 300 billion euros of reserves of the Central Bank of Russia, the prospects of financing the reconstruction of Ukraine at the expense of the funds of the aggressor country (as was already the case with Kuwait and Iraq) look certain enough⁴.

As for Belarus, its status as an accomplice of Russian aggression, recognized by the majority of the world community, has a serious impact on its prospects until the change of political leadership. Being in complete political and economic dependence on Russia, Belarus fully shares the consequences of this war for the Russian Federation. In the economic sphere, these consequences are manifested, for example, in the decrease of GDP for the first 9 months of 2022 by 4.7% (with a planned 2.9% growth of GDP compared to 2021)⁵, the fall of the manufacturing industry

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for 8 months by 7.5%, reduction of investment in fixed capital by 18.5%¹.

At the same time, for the 3rd quarter of 2022, the annual GDP growth rates of Belarus' neighbouring countries were: 3.6% in Poland², 2% in Lithuania³. Poland's plans to allocate up to 27.6 billion dollars in 2023 for the modernisation of the army and bringing military spending to 4% of GDP are also seen as an important trend⁴.

Thus, in the near term, it is possible to predict the cessation of active hostilities on the Russian-Ukrainian front in the absence of a signed peace treaty (or an act of surrender). In the medium term (3-5 years), this will lead to an increase in crisis phenomena in the economy of Russia and Belarus, rapid processes of rebuilding the destroyed infrastructure of Ukraine and modernization of the Ukrainian army, the growth of the economic and military power of Poland, and the strengthening of the influence of the United States and Great Britain in the region. In the future, the change of political regimes in the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus and the restoration of the territorial integrity of Ukraine are predicted. At the same time, the state of «frozen conflict» will continue for many decades to come.

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After the war: Yalta-2 or a new life

Taking into account the current political situation in Belarus, the author prefers to remain incognito



The Russian-Ukrainian war clearly demonstrated the need to reformat the system of at least Euro-Atlantic security. Both for Ukraine and Belarus, this crisis will be of essential importance.

Despite the impressive successes of the Ukrainian armed forces, predicting the long-term consequences of the war is still not possible. The degree of influence of most external and internal factors on its outcome is still unclear. Some of these factors, like the true motives of the behaviour of the Russian leadership, are not known at all. As a result, it is possible to draw conclusions about the post-war development of events only on the basis of the most general assumptions.

It is clear that the outcome of the confrontation depends mainly on the ratio of the potentials of the parties. It would seem that a huge number of logistical, organisational and moral problems that clearly manifested themselves in the Russian army from the very beginning of the «special military operation», coupled with the enormous capabilities of the collective West supporting Ukraine, would inevitably lead Russia to defeat.

However, for a number of reasons, Kyiv's allies in terms of supplying it with weapons, especially offensive ones, took a rather cautious position. A very significant deterrent effect, especially at first, was Moscow's possession of weapons of mass destruction.

It also turned out that, having been convinced over the past decades of the impossibility of a major war in Europe, the Allies did not pay due attention to maintaining their armed forces in proper condition¹. This led to the depletion of stocks of a number of types of military equipment.

On the other hand, Russia showed its trump cards in the form of large stocks of weapons (albeit not the most modern ones) and a huge human resource, which its authorities could freely use simply as «cannon fodder».

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At the current stage, these circumstances largely equalise the possibilities of the parties, which does not allow even the most approximate quantification of the likelihood of this or that scenario.

Although it is unjustified to categorically exclude the exchange of strategic nuclear strikes against the background of Moscow's constantly demonstrated inadequacy, we won't discuss this option. Due to the complete uncertainty of the consequences, neither the change of the existing regime in Russia nor its collapse will be discussed as well.

As a result, in the most general form, one can expect the following main developments of events:

- Russia's victory in the form of a complete or almost complete occupation of Ukraine, depriving it of statehood (it does not matter, formally or really). Another option that is quite acceptable for Moscow is if the Ukrainian-Russian border is fixed at the current frontline.
- Ukraine's victory with the restoration of full control over its entire internationally recognized territory, including the eastern regions and Crimea. However, if only the regions captured during the current war can be liberated, then such a victory will be limited.

Victory of Russia

At the moment, there are no convincing signs of such a perspective, but this does not mean that in the future the situation will not be able to change radically.

It is obvious that the main prerequisite for such a change will be the cessation or significant reduction in the provision of Western support to Ukraine, primarily military one. Since it is difficult to assume that the United States and a united Europe will not find a way to replenish their resources, such a turnaround will be explained by only an agreement to meet Moscow's demands.

This will be due to the emergence of internal problems in Western countries, including the accumulation of political and economic discontent in society as well as the use by Russia of various types of blackmail, primarily energy, etc.

This step will be the capitulation of the West. It will be clear evidence of its leaders' lack of strategic thinking combined with the naive hope that Moscow will stop there.

Meanwhile, by showing such weakness, Washington and Brussels will only push the Kremlin to continue aggression immediately after a minimal respite for the restoration and regrouping of forces.

At the same time, it is completely possible that Moscow will choose the eastern members of NATO – the Baltic countries, Poland, Romania or Slovakia as the next target. Moreover, such behaviour of the Alliance may deprive them of confidence that the constant promises to protect «every inch of its territory» will certainly be fulfilled.

This will certainly undermine the unity of NATO, which does not seem to be indestructible due to Ankara's defiantly wayward behaviour or Budapest's half-concealed opposition.

After Russia's victory, order in Europe will be based on military rather than economic power, which will be an additional blow to the European Union. Along with the deterioration of the overall image of the organisation, several of its members will receive a common border with Russia, which will in no way stabilise the internal political situation there.

This will make it much more difficult, if not impossible, for the West to find responses to Russian challenges. And if the United States again falls into isolationism, which some internal forces are calling for, then a divided Europe will become an easy prey for Russia, encouraged by the previous success.

In this situation, not only Ukraine will be doomed to occupation. Belarus will also have no chance even for formal sovereignty. In the eyes of the West, its value is not too great even now, and in the assumed situation of Russian military

victory this value will generally be reduced to zero. Which, in fact, will give Moscow carte blanche for any actions, including annexation of Belarus.

Another prerequisite for Russia's victory may be the loss by Ukrainian citizens of their readiness for resistance and moral stamina, which they have so vividly demonstrated so far. Then the future of Ukraine, and, of course, of Belarus, does not cause optimism in the same way.

In this case, the intention of the West to resist Russian aggression already on its own may remain unshaken and even intensify, which ultimately will allow it to defeat Russia. As a result, the situation will be similar to that which took place during the Cold War, with the line of confrontation running along the former western border of the USSR.

A truce concluded in a position where the border will roughly coincide with the current front line will most likely satisfy neither Russian nor Ukraine, so it is doubtful that it will be sustainable for a long time. For a period of such instability, it seems most realistic to maintain the current situation in the region, including in Belarus.

If, contrary to forecasts, peace is established for a long time, then Europe will again find itself in a state reminiscent of the Cold War. Russian threats will remain, although they will be delayed for some time, depending on the speed with which the Kremlin restores the capacity needed for new aggression.

Under these conditions, Ukraine is likely to remain independent, but in a very truncated form. Of course, without any Euro-Atlantic integration. The fate of Belarus will be completely in the hands of Moscow.

Victory of Ukraine

A return to the dividing lines that existed on February 23 will not necessarily mean the restoration of the whole state of affairs at that time. After what the Russian troops have done on the territory of Ukraine, neither the leadership of

the country, nor the vast majority of its citizens, will surely be satisfied with a return to the initial state.

Against this background, the difference between partial and complete victory will be unimportant for Kyiv: it will continue to strive to fully restore territorial integrity. There is hardly any doubt that with unlimited Western assistance in all aspects, a complete victory for Ukraine is achievable, after which a direct road to the civilised world will be opened for it.

In this situation Russia will clearly not care about its neighbouring states, the Lukashenka regime, which by its nature is not able to exist without constant political and economic support from outside, will hardly be able to survive. As a result, Belarus will get a more or less real chance to carry out all kinds of transformations in order to become not an object, but a subject of regional politics.

However, the strategic plans of the West and Ukraine will not necessarily always coincide in all positions. In particular, some European countries, for their own mercantile reasons, may not welcome Kyiv's intention to go beyond the February 23, 2022 borders.

Washington has its own concerns. Even American experts who are sympathetic to Ukraine express fears that too significant successes of Ukrainian armed forces will lead to the risk of a clash between Russia and NATO¹. Therefore, it is necessary to intervene in the formation of Kyiv's strategic goals for a diplomatic settlement, which does not necessarily provide for the return of Donbass, and even more so Crimea. In addition, the West does not want at all the excessive Ukrainian achievements on the fronts to lead Russia with its stocks of nuclear weapons into a civil war.

Therefore, the issue of the amount of assistance provided to Ukraine will remain open, and its accession to the Euro-Atlantic community may be postponed indefinitely. As for the

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Lukashenka regime in Belarus, it will not be easy for it to hold on to power, especially if it cannot evade the insistent calls of the «main ally» to send the troops to Ukraine to fight for Russia. Nevertheless, if Moscow has some resources left to support Lukashenka and Belarus remains on the periphery of Western attention, then the situation may be frozen.

New security system?

It can be assumed that at this stage, the general Western understanding of the post-war European order roughly coincides with the opinion voiced by the head of the German Foreign Ministry Annalena Berbock: «We are helping to ensure that further military operations by Russian forces in other regions in the next few years are impossible»¹.

With the right concentration of effort, this task can be accomplished. But since the goal of changing the regime in Russia, as already noted, is not directly set by the West, the retention of power by the modern Kremlin looks much more likely than the democratic transformation of the country, which will sooner or later lead to history repeating itself. To avoid this, the West will have to create a new security system with a permanent structure capable of stopping armed aggression by force.

China, being one of the main actors in world politics, will not enter the new system: by remaining above the conflict, it has nothing to lose, but it can gain a lot. After all, even if Moscow wins, it will be greatly weakened economically, and if it loses, it will also be politically weakened, which will make it even more dependent on Beijing in all important aspects. Washington, if it loses, will be politically weak, and if it wins, it will not receive additional advantages in the confrontation with China.

Therefore, the system will be predominantly Euro-Atlantic and still based on NATO. But with a serious reform of the

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latter – for example, by abandoning the principle of consensus and, perhaps, even the exclusion of some members who have not confirmed their loyalty to the fundamental principles. But it is real to strengthen the role of those who, from the very beginning of the war, took the most active position – primarily Poland and the Baltic countries. Ukraine will also become an important player.

It is noteworthy that such a prospect is already troubling the minds of individual Russian political scientists. According to them, the «Anglo-Saxons» allegedly intend to create under their auspices a kind of «league of European states», a politically homogeneous structure with about four dozen participants and a potential sufficient to achieve decisive influence on the continent¹ [4]. No information has yet been found to justify these assumptions, but the very fact of their occurrence shows that such ideas are by no means untimely.

* * *

A healthy mind cannot perceive this war otherwise than as completely senseless. In the light of this, there is a semi-fantastic assumption: perhaps the deep meaning of this war lies precisely in the fact that the Euro-Atlantic world will get a real chance to finally put an end to the long-exhausted legacy of Yalta and Potsdam, where today's Russia with its inescapable «Weimar syndrome» plays an overly important role?

To achieve this, the «collective West» will have to take serious risks. But otherwise, in the relatively near future, it will face even more serious threats.

¹ [Link](#) 

The era of instability

Taking into account the current political situation in Belarus, the author prefers to remain incognito



The defeat of Russia in the war with Ukraine will not lead to sustainable peace in Eastern Europe. Moscow will continue to be a permanent military threat to neighbouring countries. Against the background of the West's inability to impose on Russia a transformation alike to Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and militaristic Japan after their defeat in World War II, one will have to wait for Russia to weaken due to internal contradictions to the point where it will no longer be able to threaten its neighbours.

Until that moment, Russian borders with the former Soviet republics will be a zone of permanent or potential border war.

Assumptions

Russia does not have the potential to defeat Ukraine militarily as long as Kyiv relies on Western support.

Russia will make every effort to force Ukraine and the West to an honourable (for Kremlin) peace in the foreseeable future. In order to do that it will go to the escalation of the war. It is not only about attempts of a large-scale offensive. But also about the use of tactical nuclear weapons on the battlefield in Ukraine. Or limited armed clashes with NATO countries.

In response to Russian escalation, the West and Kyiv will escalate military efforts to defeat the Kremlin on the battlefield. They will sharply increase the political, economic and technological isolation of Russia.

As a result of the war, there will be no democratic transformation of Russia. The domestic situation in Russia will be characterised by growing contradictions between the centre and the regions. The federal centre will be forced to give more powers to the regions. But separatist tendencies will remain marginal.

Revanchist forces in Russia will be noticeable on the political field. But they will not be able to come to power.

Russia will be excluded from the system of European politics.

Current trends

Direct and indirect support for Ukraine from the West is growing. The latter has a clear understanding that Ukraine's loss in this war will destabilise the entire system of international relations. Which will lead to unpredictable consequences. Therefore, there is a transition from the position «Russia cannot win» to «Russia must lose».

There is an understanding that Russia could remain a threat for many decades.

At the same time, the opinion is growing in the West that if internal democratic transformations do not begin in Russia after the war, its isolation from Europe remains the only option. Including the formation of a buffer zone.

The first year of the war showed the groundlessness of the expectation that a defeat in the war would spark a mass popular democratic movement in Russia. As there are no grounds to expect that this will lead to the revanchists coming to power. The Russian society has a demand neither for democracy nor for war to a victorious end. Otherwise, in the latter case, mobilisation would not have been necessary – there would have been enough volunteers for a contract in the Russian army. On the contrary, there was a trend of mass dismissals of the ranks of the belligerent Russian army¹.

The economic and technological sanctions of the West against Moscow result in a significant reduction in the financial resources of the Kremlin². This will lead to a transition from the policy of buying the loyalty of large groups of the population to the purchase by the federal centre of the loyalty of regional elites. Following the example

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of Chechnya. Including the possibility of forming regional armed structures. This process is already observed in the regions of Russia bordering Ukraine, where local authorities form thousands of armed units to protect against attacks by the Ukrainian army¹. Prior to this, the practice of forming volunteer units by local authorities in the Russian regions to be sent to the war against Ukraine had a massive character. Moreover, it was the national republics within Russia that showed the greatest activity in this.

Ukraine continues to rapidly build up its military potential both quantitatively and qualitatively. But there are no qualitative changes in the system of Ukrainian public administration and political elites. At the same time, the level of damage to the Ukrainian economy and infrastructure due to hostilities is growing. Ukrainian refugees in Europe began to settle down, socialise and take root in new places².

Contrary to expectations, an anti-Western alliance between Moscow and Beijing did not emerge. In general, major Asian countries are being cautious about conflict. Having an effort to gain benefits at the expense of Russia, but not enter into conflict with the West. Of the Asian industrialised countries, only Iran openly supported the Kremlin. At the same time, the region of Eastern Europe (Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova) as a whole has lost its investment attractiveness for external investments.

Official Minsk links its current survival to Russian successes on the battlefield. But in the absence of such and with a decrease in the ability / desire of Moscow to provide support to the Lukashenka regime in Belarus at the current level, the latter will start looking for a new patron. And only the West can be one. The inevitable transit of power in Belarus and the absence of an ideology from the ruling regime that could be passed on as a «sacred heritage» to the future president will play in favour of the West³.

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Vision of the future

Russia. The process of technological degradation, the exhaustion of economic and military potential and Moscow's falling into economic dependence on large Asian countries is becoming irreversible.

Defeat in the war will not lead to the collapse of Russia or the coming to power of extremist forces there. The ruling Russian bureaucracy will retain its positions. But there will be a serious weakening of the federal centre in relation to the regional elites. In particular, the Kremlin's monopoly on violence will be eliminated. Russian regions that have the necessary resource potential and mature elites that distinguish their own interests from Moscow will begin to successfully raise their status in relations with the federal centre to the level that Chechnya has. Including military autonomy from the centre, the ability to pursue its own policy towards neighbouring Russian regions and partly their own foreign policy. There will be a «loosening» of the Russian Federation.

Russian domestic politics will become more complicated due to bilateral relations «centre-region», «coalition of regions-centre» and «region-region». The strongest regional elites will try to consolidate their special status at the level of the Russian constitution. We can expect a revival of the practice of the Kremlin concluding agreements on the delimitation of powers with each specific region.

At the same time, we can expect the formation and activation of ultra-imperial forces. Which, on the contrary, will demand hyper-centralization and mobilisation of Russia with the aim of revenge. They will attack the federal centre, accusing it of weakness and betrayal. By themselves, the revanchists will represent a media rather than a political force. However, they will be actively used by the Russian political elites in intraspecific competition.

Thus, not only the complexity, but also the conflict nature of the Russian political «ecosystem» will increase. It will

manifest itself along the lines: centre-regions, region-region, centre-revanchists, regions-revanchists.

As a result, Russia will be a highly decentralised, asymmetric federation. Many of its members have military autonomy and build their relations with the Kremlin on a bilateral contractual basis. As well as have a privileged status within this Federation. Such a system will be characterised by great complexity, competition between government institutions, and high political conflict. The latter, in its extreme manifestations, will find manifestation through an armed clash. Moreover, not only along the lines centre-region, region-region. But also with neighbouring countries that do not have a reliable system of military security or external guarantees of such.

The federal centre will actively exploit the external threat in order to maintain its powers in relation to the Russian regions striving for greater independence. And at the same time trying to attract the attention of the West through the threat of a new military destabilisation in the post-Soviet space. Including direct armed clashes of a limited scale with neighbouring countries. At the same time, the ambitions of the Russian regions may be fraught with armed interstate and domestic excesses.

Ukraine. It will pay a heavy price for victory. It will be relatively easy to overcome economic and infrastructural losses with external support. Undermining the demographic potential of Ukraine will be a heavy blow: because of both the death of its citizens as a result of hostilities, and of emigration.

It can be expected that as a result of the war, the population of Ukraine will fall below 30 million people. The country during the long post-war period will be largely dependent on external financial assistance. Consequently, its foreign policy will be forced to take into account the positions of donor countries.

The problem will be the efficiency of the public administration system in Ukraine. First of all it is connected

with corruption. It can be expected that Western financial support in the post-war period will be conditioned by the direct control of the West not only over the aid provided. But to a large extent over the system of public administration of the Ukrainian state in whole.

The high militarization of the Ukrainian state will continue. On the one hand, this will be caused by the impossibility of finding a job for a large number of military personnel in the conditions of the post-war economic downturn during their mass demobilisation. On the other hand, the continued danger of a resumption of hostilities by Russia. The West will be interested in maintaining the high military potential of Ukraine to deter Russia. So, one of the conditions for the future post-war Western financial support for Kyiv will be precisely the preservation of the militarised nature of the Ukrainian state.

Ukraine will not join either the European Union or NATO. Promises of the membership are nothing more than gestures of political solidarity with Kyiv.

Belarus. The complicity of the Lukashenka regime in Russian military adventures will probably be limited to providing its territory and infrastructure. Which means that in the extreme case, Belarus risks receiving retaliatory strikes from Ukraine on objects used by Russian troops. Which will cause noisy diplomatic demarches and loud statements from the official Minsk. But not more. The Lukashenka regime is not ready for a direct military clash with either Ukraine or the West.

The subsequent defeat of Moscow, its concentration on its own problems will deprive Minsk of «integration rent». That is, financial support and economic privileges provided by the special nature of the Belarusian-Russian political relations. Which will lead to the deepest socio-economic crisis in Belarus. It will force Minsk to turn to the West (in a broad sense, including international financial institutions in which the West has a decisive voice) for support as the only available source of financial assistance.

In turn, the West will be interested in having Belarus as a buffer zone between the EU/NATO and Russia.

Western support for Minsk will be conditioned, as in the case of Ukraine, by a number of political conditions. Associated with domestic politics, full transparency of Belarusian-Russian relations in the military sphere and minimization of the Russian military presence in Belarus.

Thus, Belarus will compete with Ukraine for Western financial assistance. In cases of its more effective use by the Belarusian side, this will become an irritant factor for Kyiv. But Ukraine's policy towards Belarus will be limited by the desire of the West to provide a stable and predictable buffer between itself and Russia. So one should not expect an open Belarusian-Russian confrontation after the war. Although one should not expect special friendship between the two countries.

Belarusian-Russian relations will gradually start to become marginalised for both sides. At the same time, both sides will maintain positive rhetoric regarding them. Serbian-Russian relations can be cited as an analogy here.

NATO and EU. They will remain uncontested guarantors of the military security and stability of their member states. They will remain the most important / main partners for their neighbours in the field of security. Attempts to build military-political blocs autonomous from NATO and the EU are untenable due to the insufficient potential of their possible participants in the light of current and future tasks and threats.

At the same time, coalitions of «good will» between NATO and non-NATO countries to solve specific problems cannot be excluded.

«Old Europe» will buy for money what it cannot «buy» for tanks.

Maintaining the leading role of NATO and the EU in Eastern Europe is the most preferable from the point of view of ensuring stability in the region.

Turkey, China, Iran. While these countries will continue as important economic and political partners for Minsk, Moscow, and Kyiv, their post-war presence in the region will decline. Firstly, they do not have sufficient economic potential to provide financial support to the countries of the region. Secondly, internal challenges and contradictions will continue to grow in these states. The nature of which is beyond the scope of this material. Thirdly, the «loosening» of Russia will open up new opportunities for Turkey, China and Iran and bring new challenges. This will require their more active involvement in Russian and near-Russian affairs.

Thus, one should not expect that Asian countries will be able to replace the West for Minsk and Kyiv.

One of the consequences of Ankara's, Tehran's and Beijing's activity will be the transfer of the remnants of technologies and competencies in the military sphere from Russia to them. Including in terms of the production of weapons of mass destruction. It is highly probable that within 15 years after the war, Turkey and Iran will achieve the technological capability of producing nuclear weapons. When an appropriate political decision is made, they will join the club of nuclear powers.

Conclusions

Summing up, we can say that the post-war world will be determined by the following factors:

- Preservation of the EU and NATO as non-alternative and «bearing structures» of economic development and security in Europe as a whole. The isolation of Russia from the West, the complete exclusion of Moscow from European politics as a participant.
- Weakening of Russian statehood, fragmentation and loosening of Russian federalism.
- Moscow's falling into economic, technological, political dependence on Asian countries (including Iran).

- The spread of technology for the production of weapons of mass destruction, which is unlikely to cause destabilisation of international security.
- Long-term militarization of Ukraine supported by the West.
- Getting Minsk and Kyiv in a high degree of dependence on the West.
- Preservation of tense relations between Belarus and Ukraine due to their competition for the support of the West.

Ukraine-Rus: executioner of the empire

Dmitry GROMAKOV

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the Armed Forces of Ukraine**



The victory of Ukraine in the war with Russia – the restoration of its territorial integrity within internationally recognized borders, predetermines the formation of Ukraine as a regional security centre.

Kyiv will have to ensure stability in the Azov-Black Sea region and the European part of the post-Soviet space, both in the case of revanchist forces coming to power in Moscow, and in the case of regime liberalisation and the formation of new national states from the national territories of the Russian Federation. In addition, Kyiv can become a mediator in the process of defragmentation of Russia, the formation of new national states in «post-Putin» Russia and a guarantor of security for residents of the European part and the south of the Russian Federation.

Ukraine: a factor of stability and a guarantor of security in the context of Russia's transformation.

Ukraine is reaching its internationally recognized borders of 1991 and is on the defensive, starting to develop a diplomatic track for ending the war and signing a peace treaty. This situation itself suggests that Kyiv has the most efficient and combat-ready army in the region. A well-established system of personnel training, logistics, experience in restoring control and management of de-occupied, and possibly occupied territories, which will be exchanged during negotiations for security guarantees for the border territories of Ukraine.

It is almost impossible to demilitarise Ukraine with the continuing threat. The need to channel the accumulated potential into creative projects will grow. The formation of a regional zone of responsibility for Kyiv, humanitarian intervention in new territories is a return to Kyiv's historical mission in the region, a worthy channel for releasing the social energy accumulated by Ukrainians.

Here it should be noted that Kyiv has always been a spiritual and intellectual source for Russia, through which

it has joined civilization since the time of the baptism of Rus. Thus, the acquisition of the Tomos by the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), the return of the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra to OCU, the restoration of the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, the creation of the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv, are small steps towards the restoration of Ukraine as a regional spiritual and intellectual centre. Which in the conditions of the post-war world can become a centre of attraction and a factor of stability for the Slavic population of Russia.

Russia: the agony of the «prison of nations»

Every next wave of mobilisation in Russia will create internal social tension, exacerbating the contradictions between the Kremlin and the population, especially in national regions. The pressure of sanctions and the impoverishment of remote territories will create conditions for the fragmentation of regional elites, some of which can receive financial support from foreign businesses in exchange for the development of national-patriotic sentiments in their regions. Against the background of the Kremlin's inability to redistribute resources, Moscow's influence in the national territories will fall, which entails their greater autonomy. Against the background of demographic problems and the decline in the presence of Slavic personnel at critical and military infrastructure, needs and opportunities will be created for the participation of regional elites in Western educational programs and the attraction of foreign personnel to work at these facilities, which will weaken the control of the Kremlin.

Over time, the Kremlin will be forced to either move the military infrastructure closer to its Slavic area, or exchange it for a reduction in sanctions pressure.

A «soft» defeat in the war against Ukraine is unlikely to lead to a serious crisis for the Putin regime, which will seize the opportunity for internal consolidation and the formation of a revanchist trend in politics.

Territorial claims to Ukraine, which are already embedded in the Russian legal field, will not allow Kyiv to finally become part of the Western project, to fully integrate into NATO or the EU. Consequently, the conflict will go into a frozen state and enter Cold War 2.0, where intelligence services and diplomacy will play a key role.

Belarus: the forge of «Russians with a quality mark»

The defeat of the «northern group», the backbone of which will be the Belarusian army, will put Lukashenka's life and his political regime in total dependence on the Kremlin and dissolve Belarusian sovereignty to the status of «Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic 2.0». The presence of Belarusian statehood and its presence on the map will be determined only by its status as a member of the UN, and then on condition that the Russian Federation remains there as a member of the UN Security Council, as well as the commitment of the Western world to the basic principles of international law: the inviolability of borders and the right of peoples to self-determination.

For Lukashenka, the participation of Belarus in the aggression against Ukraine and the nullification of Belarusian sovereignty opens up opportunities to become a full member of the «Ozero cooperative». This status also implies the full rights of his descendants' claims to the Kremlin throne in the event of a transit of power in the Russian Federation. Any of the sons of Lukashenka, against the background of the current rating of the Kremlin «hawks» in the person of Prigozhin or Kadyrov, will look much more respectable. And the shed blood of the Belarusian army will equalise them in the right to lay claim to the Kremlin. The presence of a full-fledged army and special services gives good chances for the representatives of the Lukashenka regime to protect their possible victory. Its clarity and transparency for the special services of the Russian Federation enables them to enlist their support in this fight. In addition, the victory of such a coalition gives the Russian Federation a nice bonus in the form of 9 million carriers of Slavic genes capable of correcting

the demographic balance of Russians against the background of national minorities.

Current trends

Ukraine. Since the full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation, the resilience of the Ukrainian army and people has led to a rethinking by the Western world of the current status quo regarding the validity of the geopolitical claims of the Russian Federation. On the other hand, the role of Kyiv in the future of Russia is also being rethought.

Ukraine receives modern weapons systems and quickly integrates into the European security system as an integral part of it, mastering in practice the principles and rules of modern warfare.

The formation of an anti-Russian coalition, which includes more than 50 countries that control about 40% of the entire world economy, suggests that the issue of the future of the Russian Federation is being discussed, but the issue of Russia's defeat in the war is already a foregone conclusion. The world will not allow the Russians to reshape international law and replace its basic principles with the «right of force».

Ukraine today has received the full right to use all the necessary resources to restore its territorial integrity and protect sovereignty.

Projects have been launched to create an «Anti-Authoritarian Union», with the participation of the opposition leaders of Russia, Chechnya and the countries of Central Asia.

The military components of the Belarusian opposition movement (the Kalinouski Regiment, etc.) are actively preparing against the background of the West's disappointment in the Belarusian oppositionists abroad.

The issue of the liquidation of the Russian invaders in Transnistria and the transfer of this territory under the control of the Moldovan authorities was discussed.

All these actions indicate that a steady trend is being formed towards the creation of a regional stabilisation potential in Kyiv. The essence of which is to form in Ukraine a centre of power for all post-Soviet countries and European regions of Russia. Which will be able to ensure stability in the post-Soviet space in the process of Russian post-war transformation.

However, there are also a number of challenges and threats for Ukraine:

1. The main challenge that Kyiv will have to face is the understanding that Europe sees Ukraine and the entire post-Soviet space as a separate macro-region. The same as she saw the countries of Eastern Europe, giving them the opportunity to realise their ambitions in an environment of equals. This is how the projects of the Visegrad Group or the Eastern Partnership appeared.

Thus, Kyiv will have to self-determine its ambitions and form its own regional policy towards not only the friendly countries of Moldova or loyal Georgia, but also build relations with openly hostile Belarus and aggressive Russia.

Can Kyiv become an alternative to Moscow in the region?

2. Ukrainian sovereignty has been tested by the «fire» of war. We have preserved our statehood and our sovereign course enshrined in the Constitution. However, we still have another very important test. The test of «VICTORY».

When Russian money runs out of a toxic country and becomes more accessible than Western capital with a strict control system.

Russia. It is losing its main and most important markets. But most importantly, the Kremlin is losing its place in the global economic system. Today, Moscow is eating up and burning in the furnace of war everything that it has earned on the path to democracy. There are no sources of replenishment of these resources.

By flooding the Ukrainian positions with corpses of men of reproductive age, the Kremlin aggravates the demographic situation. Which will lead to a crisis in critical infrastructure in remote areas.

The increasing number of losses in manpower and the second wave of mobilisation are transferring the war from the TV screens of Russians to their yards, homes, families. This also increases the level of social tension within Russia itself and, most importantly, among the national regions that are suffering the main losses today. However, with the use of propaganda their hatred is channelled towards the Ukrainians and not the current Putin regime. An analysis of the recruiting social advertising of the war shows that it is aimed at the most vulnerable social groups, the unemployed, those who failed in life. Who are invited to exchange their lives for the well-being of their loved ones. This makes this war existential for the perception of Western experts, and most importantly – «internal» in terms of regional localization.

Therefore, today any elite transit of power in the Russian Federation can only be in favour of revanchists like Igor Girkin (Strelkov). Who will come to power on the thirst for revenge of the «deep nation». They will start with the massacre of today's elite, the very «Kremlin gnomes», and those who sit in offices.

At the same time, the intensity of hostilities does not correspond in any way to the capabilities of the Russian military-industrial complex to maintain such a pace of war in the long term. Consequently, the chances of Ukraine's victory, even with the current support of Western partners, are quite high, and the Russian side already has an understanding of this.

Belarus. The «existential» collapse of the Belarusian project declared by Lukashenka and his propaganda in the event of an open conflict with the Russian Federation led to the degradation of the Belarusian statehood.

According to the «Union Treaty», the Republic of Belarus has lost its sovereign foreign policy and is forced to move exclusively in the wake of Russian diplomacy.

The actual usurpation of power by Lukashenka and his family is presented by propaganda as the «development of an internal political system», which actually deprives ordinary Belarusians of the right to vote.

The rejection of market mechanisms of economic regulation makes the Belarusian economy totally dependent on the goodwill of the Russian Federation and its sales market. As a result, today the leading Belarusian propagandists admit that «the defeat of the Russian Federation will lead to the inevitable collapse of the «current Belarusian model»¹ [1].

In fact, the main point of this thesis is the following: for 25 years, Lukashenka has not been able to create a competitive state. The sublimation of his pathological thirst for power and nomenklatura thinking (the ultimate dream of which was a place in the Kremlin) resulted in the exchange of Belarusian sovereignty for personal career growth in the Kremlin crowd. Where the degree of influence is directly proportional to the ability to talk with Putin personally.

Physically, this resulted in the creation of the financial-industrial group «Belarus», which compensated for its financial and economic insolvency in comparison with Russian giants such as Gazprom or Rosneft with Lukashenka's presidential status and the state «monopoly on violence».

However, with all the efforts of Lukashenka to play with the Kremlin on an equal footing and «strangle Putin in his arms», Minsk will not be able to become part of the political system in the Russian Federation without losing sovereignty. Lukashenka is ready to make this sacrifice for the sake of the Kremlin future of his children.

Against the background of the joint military exercises with the Russians, the build-up of the «regional grouping of troops» and the publication in the propaganda of the dates of the attack on Ukraine from the territory of the Republic of

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Belarus, Lukashenka's announcement of 2023 «the year of peace and cooperation» looks like a phantasmagoric farce.

Eastern Europe in the post-war world. The architecture of Eastern Europe will be determined by the speed and level of «volatility» of social processes in the Russian Federation. The lower the volatility, the greater the risks of Russia's revanchist actions. The high «volatility» of social processes reduces the possibility for the Russian Federation to initially form a «revanchist» political regime with an economy built on the principles of «war communism».

Russian society, faced with the dilemma of choosing «war with the whole world» or «liberalisation» of the political regime, will rather choose a new «Gorbachev», and not an outright hawk «Girkin», capable of bringing Russia to The Hague and occupation.

The results of the political, economic and military defeat of Russia will demonstrate to the whole world that the era of geographical expansionism and imperialism is gone forever. Playing «Counter-Strike» with chess pieces is not possible and does not make sense.

China. Against this background, Beijing has come to realise the need to de-escalate the situation, the perniciousness of the imbalance in the global economy, the division of the world and the creation of rigid «zones of influence».

China, whose economic rise was due to globalisation, will never side with Russia and its desire to defragment the world. Because in this case, it will either have to abandon his main project «One Belt, One Road», or start military expansion, which obviously will not bring a positive economic effect in the medium term.

Most likely, Beijing's aspirations will be aimed at stabilising the situation in the region and forming a regional centre of power capable of guaranteeing security in the Azov-Black Sea region and capable of opening the gates to Europe for Beijing.

Russian aggression against Ukraine has effectively closed the «European gates», which has effectively deprived Russia of logistical value for China. Economic sanctions against the Russian Federation and the «great turn of Russia to the East» make the Russian Federation a competitor to China and a threat to Beijing's plans for the economic development of Asia.

Exactly because of this, Beijing will join the game to weaken Russia and restore the territorial integrity of Ukraine. This guarantees China free entry to European markets through the sea gates of the Black Sea, the air gates of the Crimean peninsula, which was supposed to become the largest logistics hub in the region, the railway gates of the north-south (Black-Baltic Sea) and west-east corridors.

At the same time, Beijing will be interested in controlling Ukraine and the southern regions of the Russian Federation (Kuban, Rostov), bordering the Caucasian countries. This control will allow developing the logistics infrastructure of the Caucasus and land logistics corridors for the Central Asian states.

Anglo-Saxon world (USA, Great Britain). Interested in restoring the pre-war status quo in the region. Which gave them the opportunity to create competition between countries, building optimal logistics and creating conditions for their integration into the global distribution of labour. From the point of view of expansion, they could act as a mediator for setting up and stabilising the political regimes of the frontier countries of Eastern Europe (Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, the Baltic countries).

Ukraine's victory opens Washington and London the possibility of stabilising the region and bringing the Russian Federation to the periphery, until it returns to an adequate state for establishing relations and integrating into a common civilizational space.

Poland. Given Belarus's slide into the Russian space, we can expect the strengthening of Poland's military base and its role in ensuring regional security. If, as a result of the war,

Ukraine does not receive a full-fledged membership in NATO, then it is quite likely that a new regional defence alliance will be born, the total potential of which will be comparable to Russia's capabilities. Within the framework of this alliance, Poland will play the role of a logistics hub that will supply the Ukrainian troops.

In addition, Poland can become a centre for the relocation of Ukrainian production facilities, which will become the basis for the new Ukrainian economy.

Lithuania. It will continue to claim a leading role in resolving the «Belarusian issue», playing historical cards, trying to build relations with Minsk, and most likely will become the guardian and architect of a new political model for Belarus. Under the sanctions, Russian seaports will not solve the problems of the Belarusian logistics impasse. After all, the key problem for the Belarusian economy is the drop out of the Chinese One Belt, One Road project, which hinders the flow of Chinese investments and the development of joint projects, so Minsk will be forced to agree with Lithuania and, under pressure from China, look for ways to resolve the situation.

Thus, the post-war situation in the region will be determined by several factors:

1. The victory of Ukraine and its strengthening as a guarantor of security in the post-Soviet space for the countries of the former USSR.
2. The level of «volatility» of social processes in Russia. How stable will the «Putin» regime be and how popular will revanchist sentiments be in Russian society. Regarding the development of the internal political situation in Russia, the architecture of regional security will also be built.
3. Will «Belarusian balcony» become a «European loggia»? The Belarusian people have yet to make a geopolitical choice. On which not only the future of the state, but also the attitude towards the

Belarusians themselves will depend. Will Europeans look at Belarusians as «victims of an authoritarian regime», where the dictator exchanged the country's sovereignty for personal power, or as «war criminals» who supported aggression against a sovereign state?

At the same time, the role of Kyiv in the region will increase with the growth of centrifugal processes in Russia. After all, the West will not have people who are closer and understand the nature of the processes taking place in Russia than the Ukrainians. Nor will there be a state more motivated and prepared to deter the Russian threat in the event of the formation of a revanchist regime in Moscow.