



## One year of Russia's war against Ukraine: Ukrainians fighting for survival, the West adapting its strategy, centres of gravity shifting

Most of us remember vividly the 11th September, 2001 – it was the day that changed many peoples' lives and forced countries and international institutions to adapt their way of life, their priorities and strategies. While the scourge of terrorism is by no means eradicated, the start of the Russian aggression on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2023 has redrawn the contours and altered the substance of international security even more fundamentally. It is a truly transformational conflict, with long-term consequences.

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*Unity, the amazing Ukrainian sacrifices made for their and our defense, the US leadership, collective ability to contain Russian capacity for aggression through a variety of means, including sanctions, greater synergy between NATO and EU – those will ensure that the West prevails in a confrontation it did not want*

### Confrontation imposed on us by Russia – but we have to win it

The war is waged by an autocratic regime feeding a myth of an international plot against Russia. Putin's regime is controlling the resources of a huge country (a former superpower no less) and it does not care a bit about international law, stability of the world, human decency and in its quest to destroy a sovereign country pays scant attention to the losses of its own population (on the battlefield, economically, socially and in terms of moral standing). These factors alone (apart from the open intent voiced by the Kremlin for challenging the West) justify seeing the war as part of a confrontation facing not only Ukraine but the rest of the Western world. If chaos is not to become a norm in international relations and if democratic community does not want to become a hostage to Russian military blackmail (and potentially to similar behaviour of those autocracies who watch the events as a pointer to their own potential use of force) Ukraine must be helped to success. And this means defeating the aggressor.

Achieving this is hard and requires sacrifices. But it is perfectly achievable due to the preponderance of potential tools which the West and Ukraine possess. We know however, that it will take time and require paradigm shifts that many countries and societies still find difficult. Here is a scorecard of the security assets held by the West and tasks facing it.

### Ukrainians are our genuine heroes

Let's start with the best story: the Ukrainians. They have proven, beyond any doubt, for all those 12 tragic months, that they have guts, courage, tenacity, motivation, able political leadership, as well as military and organisational skills to get the better of the ruthless opponent. But fatigue is a human condition. Every week of destruction of basic infrastructure (especially in the energy sector) takes its toll. Casualties and atrocities mount, including through the barbaric practice of war crimes/crimes against humanity, Russian indiscriminate attacks on civilians, kidnapping of children, torture, rape, pillage, and wanton destruction of everything that is Ukrainian. Russian military will remain corrupt and inefficient because they are an intrinsic part of the deeply mismanaged state but they are able to learn from at least some of their mistakes.<sup>1</sup> And in the conflict of this nature where the war of attrition is what the invader practices, the sheer size of human resources matters – the population statistics pit Ukraine against a country more than 3-4 times its size. So do financial resources available to respectively the aggressor and the victim.

Which is why the availability of military equipment, backed by necessary supplies of spare parts, ammunition and repair services, and training opportunities, is so indispensable for successful military operations (defensive and offensive). Weapons for Ukraine save lives – when the rate of destroying incoming missiles and drones reaches 90% (as it has in many cases) people and key infrastructure survive. If it is below that rate – the invader has a chance to grind Ukrainian defences down.

Ukrainians have shown amazing improvisation skills. They have somehow kept part of their inferior air force intact. Russia has been prevented from using the Black Sea for the bulk of its offensive operations. They have developed cyber, electronic and UAV capabilities without clear blueprints, often through the ingenuity of civilians and volunteers, that beat theoretically more professional and specialised Russian military units. The concept of integrated warfare – long the staple of courses and trials among advanced NATO countries' armed forces - has been applied by Ukrainians in such an impressive way that the roles of mentors and students have almost been reversed. Not to mention incredible creativity in winning the duel in the information domain – regardless of billions spent by the Kremlin on disinformation and psychological warfare techniques. Just comparing the quality and reach of Ukrainian memes in social media (in Ukrainian, Russian, and English) tells you straight away which side knows the enemy better and can hit harder where it really hurts<sup>2</sup>.

### Limits to self-defence

But there are limits to improvisation. The military attrition and inevitable losses, combined with a growing degradation of Ukrainian defence production capacity, obviously mean that stocks of domestically produced gear (especially of the Soviet era design provenance) are precariously low – despite manifold increase in Ukrainian domestic defence production in 2022. The same goes for

essential supplies of POL (petrol, oil, lubricants). Ukrainian defence capacity is thus heavily dependent on external provisions. No need to explain (especially as news of a major Russian offensive top the headlines) therefore why the speed with which the international coalition provides assistance to Ukraine in a timely and optimal manner is the number one priority right now.

### Those who hesitated are now (almost fully) onboard

Here the story gets complicated. Initially of course many capitals were simply expecting that Kyiv would yield to Russia in a matter of days or weeks at best. All changed when it did not happen and contrary to general wisdom Ukraine has given Russia a bloody nose, including by successful counteroffensive, liberating much of territory lost in February. But then much time has been lost due to various false arguments. They included a wrong assumption that Ukrainians will need many months of training on the use of every new equipment, undue attention paid to the so called "escalation risk" (played up by the Kremlin's crude but partially effective use of the nuclear blackmail) and ingrained habits of procrastination when it comes to hard decisions on hard defence. All this gradually brought to the surface the biggest problem of them all – low stocks of military equipment and ammunition in the western countries, ensuing from years of neglect.

Month after month a new taboo had to be broken – first it was about anti-tank weapons such as Javelins following turgid debates on "offensive vs defensive" weapons, then about major weapon systems (including air defence and artillery), followed by hesitation about Patriots and most recently a long saga of indecision on supplies of Leopard tanks. The situation is very different now, with a "virtuous cycle" of many countries trying to compete with each other on offering most attractive support, rather than looking for excuses for not doing so. At the time of writing, Denmark for example has announced sending to Ukraine all of its self-propelled Caesar artillery systems, UK Challenger tanks are about to reach Ukraine, Norway has pledged assistance that over few years will be worth more than 7 billion dollars and so on. However, two essential items on the Ukraine's priority list remain – long-range missile systems and fighter planes. The debate on providing them is in full swing now.

All the above described delays concerned primarily various Western European countries because Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) has stepped up straight away. Countries like Estonia have spent more than 1% of their GDP on military assistance (and handing over e.g. all howitzers calibre 155 mm in the process). Polish military, according to its Chief of Defence were given political orders to give to Ukraine whatever was needed – and they did, starting with 250 tanks already in March 2022. UK, Scandinavian states were in the vanguard too. And US has led the way with unprecedented packages, totalling now almost 30 billion \$ worth of military/security assistance.

### Logistical weaknesses undermining Western help

Crucially, Washington has also taken the lead in coordinating supplies by chairing the so called Ramstein group (Ukraine Defense Contact Group). Though outside the NATO framework for political reasons – NATO is reluctant to play a direct role in order to blunt absurd Russian claims that it is at war with the Alliance<sup>3</sup> – the group is now composed of more than 50 participating states, including many outside EU/NATO framework. The most recent meeting (held on 14 February, just before the NATO Defence Ministers' sessions in Brussels), resulted in a variety of pledges and announcements of supplies and training packages (some of them not made public) which systematically beef up Ukraine's defence capabilities. This is good news. But structurally the coalition helping Ukraine is facing a logistic problem.<sup>4</sup> Western military stockpiles are running low and, in the words of the NATO's Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, the plain truth is that "the current rate of Ukraine's ammunition expenditure is many times higher than our current rate of production".<sup>5</sup>

An extraordinary survey of Allied stockpiles completed in time for the ministers of defence meeting has clearly confirmed an urgent need to invest in increased production capacity, which can only happen when countries start placing large, multi-year orders with the industry. This process has begun but the pace must be accelerated. Years of neglect must be redressed fast – but it will not happen overnight. Squeezing more from existing capacity (weekend shifts etc.) can help, but some orders may have to be placed outside the NATO circle (vide Poland's case regarding large tank imports from South Korea). As many analysts have noted, the challenge is compounded by three factors.

One – for too long defence spending in Europe has remained at record low levels. While progress has been registered, still many affluent NATO member states have not managed to reach the minimum of 2% of GDP spent on defence, a goal set in Newport In 2014. A new NATO pledge, to be adopted at the Vilnius summit in July, should help to achieve a truly focused increase in spending, concentrating on new investments and capabilities, and move the goalposts by redefining 2% as a floor and not a ceiling as seen in many capitals.

Two – logistically it is not easy to switch from peacetime arrangements to "war economy" posture as was the case decades ago. De-industrialisation and outsourcing of production to countries outside the Euro-Atlantic area has taken its toll – leading companies operate on "just-in-time" supply chain basis, which does not fit defence requirements.<sup>6</sup>

Three – western community is still struggling with dangerous reliance on products controlled by authoritarian regimes or companies which seem to have their own views on geopolitics (vide Elon Musk's decision to restrict the use of Starlinks on the battlefield in Ukraine). Even if energy

relationship with Russia is in the process of being dismantled reliance on sensitive components and technology made in China remains a strategic risk.<sup>7</sup>

## No capabilities, no defence

Next policy requiring a quick adaptation concerns capabilities. At present, the available capabilities of majority of European countries (and Canada for that matter) are simply insufficient for the tasks of today. No flowery language on "European strategic autonomy in the field of defence" can obscure this reality. US is the indispensable game in (European) town. The burden sharing gap across the Atlantic has not narrowed sufficiently – If anything, the war in Ukraine has only exposed it more starkly.

This matters hugely for collective defence, not only for aid to Ukraine. As succinctly put by a former NATO official, Camille Grand: "The equation is simple: no capabilities, no defence."<sup>8</sup> Not surprisingly, the same economic/financial constraints that plague defence production have a severe impact on availability of large number of needed military units, appropriately equipped, trained and kept at high state of readiness demanded by the current security threat assessment. At the time when strategic challenges exist in more than one location (Europe and South East Asia are key areas of course) prioritising is not just a recommended approach, it is a must.

## Russian threat recognised, but policy implementation must be more comprehensive

It is not as if countries do not see the main threat. They do. Both NATO's Strategic Concept and US National Security Strategy (adopted in 2022) describe Russia as "the most significant and direct threat to Allies' security"<sup>9</sup> or "immediate threat to the free and open international system."<sup>10</sup> The heroic and effective defence of Ukraine has severely degraded Russia's offensive capabilities. In many respects this has bought Allies some precious time to shift their defence posture to more credible posture, no longer ruling out a large scale war.

The shift is happening, it is being enshrined in NATO's defence planning goals, it is reflected in the military exercises' schedule and doctrines. But the rule of prioritising should clearly lead the Alliance to augment its forward presence on the Eastern Flank. Brigades should replace battalions as the standard size units deployed in the east, ideally backed up by additional US troops stationed in Poland and the Baltic states. Prepositioned equipment needs to be stored closer to the Suwalki corridor (not the old Fulda Gap), NATO Pipeline System should be extended to the east of the continent. Finland and Sweden should be integrated fully as members into NATO's collective defence system. Especially as Lukashenka's green light for a creeping integration of his country (against the wishes of its people) with Russia, demands treating Belarus as an extended Russian military territory.

We cannot predict how the war against Ukraine will end, even less so when it will. But as naked force has become the real choice of the progressively totalitarian regime led by Putin, only strong military arguments will provide essential guarantees that "deterrence by denial" will minimise the risk of a direct conflict with NATO. It is the only language which Kremlin understands and takes seriously. Policy of containment towards Russia is the sole realistic approach right now and the most credible way to implement it is to combine powerful force packages, accelerated innovation technology with substantial non-military tools, including sanctions, and building resilience and home defence projects.

### Sanctions have an impact

The sanctions in particular constitute an unjustly underestimated dimension where the West still has untapped resources and tools. They are more impactful than many decision-makers are ready to admit. An assumption that they would force the Putin regime to stop its aggression was of course unfounded. But – judging by technological problems besetting Russian industry and a growing mountain of a budget deficit experienced by Moscow – they have an impact, severely restricting an ability to prosecute a war effort. And this impact will only grow, increasing pressure on the regime – especially if the categories of sanctions are widened, existing loopholes are closed and whole groups in the Kremlin system are declared pariahs. The latest, 10<sup>th</sup> EU sanctions package, is expected to go in that direction. Frozen Russian assets could, once the legal experts set the minds of hesitant politicians at rest, be of direct help for Ukraine and donor countries, as they would start easing its financial burden.

Sanctions are also part of another virtuous cycle – between NATO and EU. Brussels bubble still exists, but it is actually producing welcome results. Peace Facility Mechanism, European Military Training Mission, new energy policy, targeted diplomacy and support offered to many vulnerable neighbours (vide Moldova, Balkans, the Caucasus) implemented by the European institutions all supplement NATO's hard defence capabilities. Even without an agreed threat analysis and dubious loyalties to the cause from such countries as Hungary or Austria, the EU is becoming an indispensable partner in the security field, broadly defined.

What is lacking is a much firmer commitment to welcoming countries like Ukraine in the European institutional midst, and most of all – a genuine and sustainable realisation that their stability and well-being is not a "periphery problem" but an intrinsic element of the prosperity and dynamism of the community including existing and future members. A new, this time European, Marshall Plan, is required. In a strategic sense, it should consist of clear membership road-maps, recovery grants (not loans) and creative ideas for intermediary security status for vulnerable neighbours (while membership in NATO and EU should remain the main goals). Recent trip of President Zelensky to

Paris and Brussels highlighted the problem of compensating the lack of such vision with lofty words and symbolic gestures. One had (perhaps an unfair) impression that many Western European leaders were more interested in a celebrity selfie with the Ukrainian president (which looks good in national media) than in gathering political courage to argue at home for some sacrifices to help the aggressor nation.

### CEE still not considered as an equal

The reason why one can paint somewhat pessimistic impression is that another key take-away from the biggest war in Europe since 1945 (which started in 2014 and became a fully blown aggression in 2022) is an emergence of a visible new burden sharing gap. This time it divides CEE, UK and Scandinavians from many other NATO/EU members in Europe. It is evident if one compares per capita support to Ukraine. But politically this gap is not only about Ukraine. It stems from a harmful habit of paternalism and second-best treatment of CEE members (and the wider region in the east) which refuses to die.

The geopolitical point of gravity has moved east. But this move is not reflected in the institutional, political or decision-making distribution of influence and presence in Europe. A few examples.

It remains extremely difficult to find nationals from CEE member states in key international posts in NATO, EU or other international organisations. Tellingly, many opinion makers in "old member countries" react with evident alarm when a case is presented that the time has finally come for a CEE citizen to become the next Secretary General of NATO. The geographic distribution of NATO command structure elements (with the sole exception of the Joint Force Training Centre in Bydgoszcz) shows their complete absence in the countries which joined after 1999. It still looks more like a map of NATO at 16 not at 30. Following a departure of Donald Tusk as the European Council President the situation in EU institutions is just as outdated. On the broader political scene, we see a similar pattern. For instance, when an issue of such existential importance for CEE's security as the end of resistance to the provision of Leopard tanks was finalised, the instinctive follow-up was a series of exclusive phone calls between the US president with his German, French, British and Italian counterparts (members of informal Quint grouping). Plenty of other examples are available but the picture is clearly what it is.

Politically it is simply impossible for CEE countries to accept a situation where the same countries in Western Europe, which for years forced on others policies endangering military and energy security in Europe, now (after some meek forms of contrition) insist to be right again on the war in Ukraine. The existence of "peace" vs "justice" camps dichotomy<sup>11</sup> in European capitals is a somewhat misleading description. But the fact remains that the degree of conviction in the policy aimed to restrict strategically Russia's ability to threaten security of others varies substantially in Europe. One



sees this divergence in the debates on mobilising public opinion for preventing Russians from participating in Olympic Games in Paris in 2024, in the worrying fact that a multitude of Western companies continues to do business in Russia or in reactions to logical decisions taken by frontier states to freeze issuing of tourist visas for Russians.

### Biden visit as a game-changer?

That is why the visit of President Biden to Poland starting on 20 February is of such huge political importance and may help to break the existing perception gap in Europe. Biden will be back in Poland after less than a year, which is quite unprecedented. The visit is meant to show the appreciation for the role of Poland as an informal regional leader when it comes to support to Ukraine (military, political, humanitarian, acting as the hub for logistic assistance). Enormous defence orders placed in US and dramatic increase of the Polish defence budget (projected to total around 4% of GDP this year) make Warsaw a natural destination too.

Moreover, the scheduled meeting of Biden with the so called B9 grouping of CEE countries (NATO's Secretary General will attend too, and Ukrainian high-level presence is very likely) also confirms how much the whole region matters to collective security in Europe – both as a bulwark against potential Russian aggression and supporter of US defence leadership. Let's hope that POTUS will use his meetings in Poland to announce a solid backing of the US for a political transformation in Europe, which many leaders still seem reluctant to accept.

Biden's public speech looks likely to coincide with an address of Putin in Moscow, which will add interest to the strategic communications aspect of the trip. The expectations are that Biden will lay out a strategy (the outline elements of which he presented in Warsaw in March 2022) that can unite the West in countering successfully current and future security challenges from autocratic countries. Deeds are key, but words that explain their political rationale, including for a paradigm shift in security policy have to precede them. The elements of that strategy are de facto enjoying much consensus. Doing everything to ensure that Ukraine remains victorious is the lynchpin of this strategy. But its long-term success depends on implementation, on urgent and concrete progress in key areas "outlined above: defence budgeting, a new defence and deterrence posture, minimising strategic dependence on products" generated by adversarial powers, reinvigoration of the defence industry capacities, as well as on finding inclusive solutions to security challenges facing all democratic countries, irrespective of their membership status in NATO or EU.<sup>12</sup> Tall order? Yes. But it can be done. It must be done. And there is no time to lose. Even if the former US ambassador to NATO, Ivo Daalder, is right writing about "a grand strategic failure for Russia,"<sup>13</sup> this failure has to be secured in consequential manner.



In the coming months international experts gathered by the Pulaski Foundation will be busy offering their contribution to a public debate. It will include analysis and recommendations as to what problems must be addressed and, potentially, how they could be addressed and resolved. Watch this space.

## Conclusions

1. One year after the Russian invasion of Ukraine the key challenges and problems include some outdated thinking, resistance to a greater influence of CEE, logistic problems stemming from long-term underinvestment in defence, and urgent need to implement fully agreed goals on forward defence and deterrence.
2. The positive news is that the bag of Western tricks is loaded with goodies. Unity, the amazing Ukrainian sacrifices made for their and our defence, the US leadership, collective ability to contain Russian capacity for aggression through a variety of means, including sanctions, greater synergy between NATO and EU – those will ensure that the West prevails in a confrontation it did not want. But we must use those advantages in a determined way.

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<sup>1</sup> Point made by Pentagon officials, vide 'Significantly degraded' Russian force is adapting after losses (defensenews.com)

<sup>2</sup> The topic is well covered in an analysis published by Brookings: Lessons from the meme war in Ukraine (brookings.edu)

<sup>3</sup> Ukrainians still have a problem in accepting this agreed policy of NATO. Lobbying to change it is one thing, but at times they risk alienating their closest partners by pushing too hard (vide their persistent claims that an incident of November 2022 in Przewodow in Poland resulted from a deliberate attack on Poland by Russia – something which NATO refuted early on).

<sup>4</sup> See U.S. tells Ukraine it won't send long-range missiles because it has few to spare - POLITICO

<sup>5</sup> Quote from the press briefing on 13/2/23 NATO - Opinion: Pre-ministerial press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg ahead of the meetings of NATO Defence Ministers, 13-Feb.-2023

<sup>6</sup> Well explained in the piece by Andrew Michta: Ukraine Can Achieve a Strategic Win over Russia. The West Must Step Up - 19FortyFive

<sup>7</sup> (A report by Politico published on 13/2/23 illustrates this perfectly: Chinese mobile masts loom over the Munich Security Conference – POLITICO)

<sup>8</sup> Strategy, capabilities, technology: A manifesto for new European defence – European Council on Foreign Relations (ecfr.eu)

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<sup>9</sup> See par.8 of the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, 29/6/22 290622-strategic-concept.pdf (nato.int)

<sup>10</sup> (Page 8 of US National Security Strategy, October 2022 Biden-Harris Administration's National Security Strategy.pdf (whitehouse.gov)

<sup>11</sup> (See Russia's long game A civil-military relations expert explains why the Kremlin may be prepared to wage war in Ukraine for years to come — Meduza

<sup>12</sup> (Many useful ideas on this and other topics covered in my text can be found in Dominik Jankowski's analysis to be found in "Assessing the 2022 National Security Strategy: A view from NATO's Eastern Flank" published in "Expert Commentary on the 2022 National Security Strategy", Edited By Michaela Dodge and Matthew R. Costlow , National Institute Press, February 2023.

<sup>13</sup> (Published on 15/2/23: Consequences of Putin's war go beyond its implications for Russia – POLITICO

The **Casimir Pulaski Foundation** is an independent, non-partisan think-tank specialising in foreign policy and international security. The Pulaski Foundation provides analyses that describe and explain international developments, identify trends in international environment, and contain possible recommendations and solutions for government decision makers and private sector managers to implement. The Foundation concentrates its research on two subjects: transatlantic relations and Russia and the post-Soviet sphere. It focuses primarily on security, both in traditional and non-military dimensions, as well as political changes and economic trends that may have consequences for Poland and the European Union. The Casimir Pulaski Foundation is composed of over 40 experts from various fields. It publishes the Pulaski Policy Papers, the Pulaski Report, and the Pulaski Viewpoint. The Foundation also publishes "Informator Pułaskiego," a summary of upcoming conferences and seminars on international policy. The Foundation experts cooperate with media on a regular basis. Once a year, the Casimir Pulaski Foundation gives the Knight of Freedom Award to an outstanding person who has promoted the values represented by General Casimir Pulaski: freedom, justice, and democracy. Prize winners include: Professor Władysław Bartoszewski, Professor Norman Davies, Alaksandar Milinkiewicz, President Lech Wałęsa, President Aleksander Kwaśniewski, President Valdas Adamkus, Bernard Kouchner, Richard Lugar, president Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, president Mikheil Saakashvili, Radosław Sikorski, Carl Bildt, president Toomas Hendrik Ilves, Michaił Chodorkowski, president Mary Robinson, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, president Dalia Grybauskaitė, as well as Thorbjørn Jagland and Aleksiej Navalny. The Casimir Pulaski Foundation has a partnership status with the Council of Europe.

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