

Thayer Consultancy
ABN # 65 648 097 123



Background Brief:
War in Ukraine: One Year On
February 21, 2023

We are preparing a special report on the topic "Ukraine war, one year on" and request your written insights into the following questions:

Q1. How do you evaluate the current situation in the Ukraine war after one year?

ANSWER: President Vladimir Putin expected a quick victory when he ordered "special operations" against Ukraine. He failed to capture Kyiv and Russian forces have suffered a terrible toll of casualties and destruction of military equipment. Russia has turned its wrath on Ukraine's civilian infrastructure, energy plants in particular, in order to break their will to resist.

At the time of this writing, western military analysts expect Putin to launch a large scale military offensive in order to claim some sort of victory.

On the first anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine it appears the war has reached a strategic stalemate akin to the fighting in the First World War. Russia is not capable of defeating Ukraine's armed forces and occupying its territory. Ukraine is not able to project enough force to liberate the Russian-occupied Donbas region or expel the Russians from Crimea.

Q2. How has the war changed the network of international relations?

ANSWER: Putin has created his own worst nightmare. In public he blames NATO expansion for causing the conflict. In private, Putin firmly believes the West is weak and in decline and that NATO members are divided.

Putin's invasion has succeeded in unifying not only Europe and its NATO members but also reinforced their alliance with the United States. Sweden and Finland have changed their independent posture and applied to join NATO.

The war in Ukraine has undermined the trend towards multipolarity and produced global polarisation. Russia and China have declared there are "no limits" to their partnership. Iran and North Korea both provide Russia with military weapons.

If the war in Ukraine becomes protracted, the Western alliance is likely to further polarize international relations by imposing sanctions and other punitive measures against countries that abet Russia by trade or other means.

Q3. In the Asia-Pacific region, how are these changes manifest?

ANSWER: U.S. allies in the Indo-Pacific, such as Australia, Japan and South Korea, are unified in opposing Russia. They see parallels with the situation between China and Taiwan. The war in Ukraine has succeeded in creating a strategic linkage between Europe and Indo-Pacific. Major powers in the EU have written strategic policy documents linking their national security and economic wellbeing to securing and maintaining peace in the Indo-Pacific. They identify China as the major disruptive force.

At the moment, world attention is mainly focused on the war in Ukraine and its impact on energy security and global inflation not only in Europe but the developing world as well. A protracted war in Ukraine will only lead to further polarisation of the international system but instability in the regions affected. This will slow global growth and delay recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Q4. What lessons should countries in the region draw from the war in Ukraine?

ANSWER: The war in Ukraine demonstrates that there are no easy options for the international community to deal with an aggressor that is armed with nuclear weapons. In addition to Russia's strategic nuclear weapons and means of delivery, Russia has several thousand tactical nuclear weapons that could be used to escalate the conflict, especially if Russia is backed into a corner and fears defeat.

The conflict in Ukraine only underscores the inability of the United Nations and its Security Council to maintain peace.

The utility of nuclear weapons has emboldened Kim Jong-un in North Korea to keep violating United Nations Security Council resolutions by developing and testing intercontinental ballistic missiles capable of reaching the United States. China and Russia stand ready to veto any further sanctions on North Korea.

If anything, regional states in the Indo-Pacific should redouble their efforts to resolve all territorial and boundary disputes, including the land border between China and India and overlapping claims in the East and South China Seas.

Q5. What are the potential scenarios for the war in Ukraine?

ANSWER: There are at least four plausible scenarios for the war in Ukraine.

Protracted stalemate but no settlement– neither side can defeat the other and the conflict settles into a predictable pattern of flare up of artillery, missile and UAV attacks.

Protracted stalemate with cease fire – similar to the situation on the Korean peninsula today, a ceasefire (armistice) is reached, armed conflict simmers down, but negotiations do not lead to a permanent political settlement. Tensions arise from time to time.

Russian defeat – the Russian economy is weakened, the Russian army is hollowed out, and the conflict subsides, and Russian forces are gradually withdrawn

Ukraine capitulation – as a result of protracted conflict Ukraine infrastructure and society are destroyed. Western arms support declines and the Ukraine government gradually loses territory.

Negotiated settlement – pressure from the international community and China leads to a complex negotiated settlement monitored by an international force under UN sponsorship

Q6. Can Ukraine and Russia reach a peace settlement during this year?

ANSWER: There will be no peace deal negotiated or otherwise agreed this year. Neither side has reached the point of exhaustion. The objectives sought by Russia and Ukraine are diametrically opposed. Russia wants Ukraine to capitulate and recognise its incorporation into the Russian Federation. Russia will not brook an international presence in Ukraine.

Ukraine wants to drive the Russians out of the Donbas region and Crimea. Ukraine then wants to become a member of the European Union and live under NATO protection as it negotiates membership.

The coming Russian offensive and the planned Ukraine counteroffensive will be major testing points of each sides' capacity to force its will on the other side.

Suggested citation: Carlyle A. Thayer, "War in Ukraine: One Year On," *Thayer Consultancy Background Brief*, February 21, 2023. All background briefs are posted on Scribd.com (search for Thayer). To remove yourself from the mailing list type, UNSUBSCRIBE in the Subject heading and hit the Reply key.

Thayer Consultancy provides political analysis of current regional security issues and other research support to selected clients. Thayer Consultancy was officially registered as a small business in Australia in 2002.