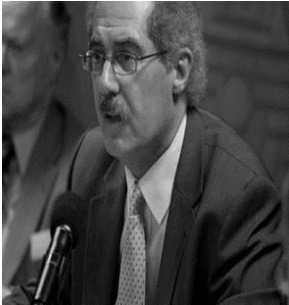


## HOW THE WAR IN UKRAINE MAY END - OR NOT



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Russia's war against Ukraine is still continuing. The war may yet even escalate further and draw in some of the neighboring countries, such as Moldova and others. Russian President Putin may also once again try to take the war to Kiev and western Ukraine, if he manages to conquer eastern Ukraine and the wider Donbas area. But one aspect has already become clear in the months that have followed Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022: Putin has badly miscalculated regarding his entire war strategy. It is thus unlikely that an end of the war in Ukraine can be expected any time soon.

### **Putin's Miscalculation**

Russia's military capabilities are much less formidable than both Putin and the West assumed while Ukraine's willpower and military skills to resist the Russian onslaught have proven to be much stronger than assumed. Russia, after all, has been unable to conquer the Ukrainian capital Kiev and much of the surrounding area and has thus re-focused its war effort on eastern Ukraine, at least for the time being. Thus, the military strategy of Putin and his military command have turned out to be seriously flawed. Desertions, obstruction and a general lack of professionalism and discipline among Russia's soldiers have contributed to this and undermined the Russian war effort.

Moreover, both the NATO alliance and the EU have become much more united and determined to resist Russia's aggression than many analysts predicted. In fact, the heavy weapons which Ukraine has received from the US and some other western countries have proven to be highly effective in preventing Russia's conquest of most of Ukraine. The massive western sanctions imposed on Ukraine have also seriously undermined the Russian economy and the country's warfare capabilities.

The above factors will profoundly affect the settlement and aftermath of the war as Russia is in a much weaker position than was envisaged by Putin when he embarked on the war. He quickly had to abandon his *blitzkrieg* strategy

and instead became involved in a protracted war with a formidable enemy, supported by the western alliance, which has greatly damaged and weakened Russia's image and strength in global politics.

### **How the War in Ukraine May End – Four Options:**

Regarding the end of the war in Ukraine there are essentially four options, with the last one being the mostly likely outcome in my view:

1. There might be regime change in the Kremlin due to the development of a revolutionary movement in the streets of Moscow, St. Petersburg and elsewhere as a consequence of the worsening military and above all economic situation in Russia (or in the case of Putin's fatal illness or incapacity). On the model of the 1918 Brest-Litovsk peace agreement with Germany during World War I, Putin's successor(s) would then perhaps sue for peace and try to obtain the best deal available in the context of a possibly looming defeat in the war against Ukraine. At present, however, such a scenario appears to be highly unlikely.
2. The war will continue until Putin feels he has achieved at least some of his war objectives and is prepared to proclaim victory. This would still require the readiness of Ukraine to join Russia at ceasefire negotiations, which may or may not be brought about with the help of an international mediator such as Turkey or another country. Unless strongly pressured by the US or having being decisively militarily weakened, it is highly doubtful that the Zelensky government in Kiev would agree to an armistice on such a basis. After all, in all likelihood it would mean the division of the country and the annexation of much of eastern Ukraine by Russia. Zelensky would hardly survive politically the subsequent referendum the Ukrainian President has promised to enable the Ukrainian people to either accept or reject any ceasefire agreement with Russia.
3. Both sides will continue to fight until they are both utterly exhausted and agree to an armistice along the lines of the pre-February 2022 territorial situation in Ukraine. Such a situation may be based on the model of the armistice in the Korean war which was eventually signed on 27 July 1953. It re-confirmed the 38th parallel as the demarcation line between the two Korean states prior to the North Korean invasion of South Korea in late June 1950.
4. The war will not end properly for a long time to come. While in due course military action – not least due to the exhaustion of and economic consequences for both sides – will be tuned down to some extent, brutal skirmishes and even outright battles will frequently flare

up in the wider Donbas region. In general, there will be a military stalemate. Moreover, this situation will be accompanied by a long drawn-out guerilla war in eastern Ukraine. Thus, Ukraine will remain in a state of precarious instability and economic weakness for a prolonged period of time. This will also have highly negative political and economic consequences for Ukraine's neighboring countries. The whole region will thus remain quite unstable and will not return to political and economic stability and an externally secure environment for a long time. This appears to be the most probable scenario.

(The question of the use of tactical nuclear weapons and its consequences, if Putin were pushed into a corner and about to lose the war decisively – though an unlikely result in my view - cannot be addressed here; this requires a separate article).

### **The Future of European Security and the Transatlantic Alliance**

In any case, the above means that in particular eastern Europe - though in fact the entire European continent - will be exposed to a prolonged period of political, economic and military instability. Indirectly Putin and Russia would thus have achieved one of their major long-standing objectives.

While it can be expected that NATO will be expanded further beyond Finland and Sweden and might well become ready to include Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova and perhaps even some of the Balkan states, Europe would be faced with a politically and economically volatile Russia and certainly with a continuing Russian security threat for an extended period of time.

Fissures and tension among EU states about the continuation of sanctions on Russia, the costly delivery of military and economic aid to Ukraine and the disputed energy question, to name but a few controversial issues, can be expected to become more contentious than they have been so far. The EU will thus become much less united and stable than has been the case during the war.

The question would also arise whether or not the US - in particular in the post-Biden years - would be prepared to continue to cover the majority of the costs for Ukrainian and European security. If the US were to become more skeptical about whether or not Washington should remain to be so deeply and decisively involved in European security matters and would probably expect the Europeans to do significantly more than hitherto, this would lead to further volatility and tension on the European continent as well as within NATO and the entire transatlantic alliance. It goes without saying that Russia and also China would attempt to exploit the rising friction within the EU and in transatlantic relations to their own advantage.

## **Outlook**

In the mid- to long-run we can expect a prolonged period of volatility in Europe and rising tension among the transatlantic partners. As seldom before the future and fate of the European continent appears to depend to a high degree on policymakers and parliamentary representatives to skillfully maneuver between these conflicting fault lines. Simultaneously they will have no choice but to attempt to de-escalate the tense situation with Russia and on the ground in Ukraine as much as possible. Perhaps the only other period of time in recent history when politicians were exposed to similar profound challenges were the late 1930s. Let's hope western leaders will do a lot better this time round.