



How Will the War Between Russia and Ukraine End?

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JCSP 50

Exercise Solo Flight

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Introduction

Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Over 2 years later the conflict continues to rage on with losses mounting on both sides and potentially no end in sight. With Ukraine's failed counteroffensive last fall the war has reached a stalemate, and after many failed rounds of peace negotiations, hope is minimal that the upcoming peace conference in Switzerland in June will achieve anything. But at some point, the war between Russia and Ukraine will come to an end. How the war will end remains very much a certain, with many potential variables affecting its eventual outcome. The continued support from Europe, continued support from the United States, the upcoming election in the United States among many others can all have a significant impact on how the rest of the war plays out. Both sides of the war are still pushing for their original aims, with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky still hoping to push the Russians out of the Donbas and perhaps return to the pre-2014 borders that would include the retaking of Crimea¹. Russian President Vladimir Putin's original aims of his special military operation to demilitarize and denazification of Ukraine may still be intact, however Putin's most recent annual state of the nation address to the Russian parliament may suggest a slight change in direction. In his address he focused this conflict on defending the "sovereignty and security and protecting the lives of our fellow countrymen in Donbas and Novorossiia"² (i.e. New Russia – the current regions of Ukraine that Russia currently occupies). This might suggest a potential compromise on the side of the Russians that this conflict may not have to end at the extremes of a full conquest of the Ukraine, but perhaps the loss of the areas currently under Russian control, and have been in conflict long before the invasion began in 2022, going back to the Minsk agreements following the Maidan Revolution in 2014 and the conflicts that followed in the Donetsk and Luhansk areas.

Admittedly any type of agreement that includes the loss of territory on the part of Ukraine is currently just not acceptable by Ukrainians and can't be forced upon them. Nevertheless, this paper is not seeking to evaluate the likelihood, or desirability, of any one particular outcome over another. Given the above complexities of the environment this paper will assume the majority of the current stalemate will define the eventual borders resulting from whatever peace agreement is signed between Ukraine and Russia. This includes the territories of the Donbas including the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, as well as Crimea, Zaporizhzhia and a majority of Kherson. This hypothetical peace agreement will also include a provisional cease-fire and potential guarantees against future aggression, as well as considerations or limitations on the ability of Ukraine to join the European Union (EU) or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). This paper will seek to evaluate this post Russo-Ukrainian conflict reality with a focus

¹ Vohra, "Ukraine Is Serious About Taking Back Crimea."

² Papachristou, "Putin's Address to Russia's Parliament."

on its security implications for Ukraine, Russia, NATO, and Canada. It may also help to inform current decisions making processes with respect to continued support in Ukraine in hopes of encouraging a more favourable security environment.

Strengthening Ukraine

In this post conflict reality that has been described above where Ukraine has lost almost 20% of its original, pre-2014, territory, Ukraine will have to focus on consolidating the territory still under its control, with a focus on strengthening its position through reconstruction and of course, alliances with the West. War has ravaged the Ukrainian landscape with large scale damage to critical infrastructure and the environment. This includes billions of dollars of losses to residential buildings (\$53.6B USD), infrastructure such as roads, bridges and railways (\$36.2B USD), farming and agricultural resources (\$8.7B USD), and energy infrastructure (\$8.1B USD).³ Like any post war country reconstruction efforts will be extensive and likely take many years, but must remain the country's top priority (as well as the international community's top priority) as a weakened Ukraine will only invite further aggression despite whatever guarantees were made in an armistice agreement. Given the amount of international support Ukraine has received during its conflict with Russia, once the conflict ends it is pretty safe to assume that the international community will likewise support Ukraine's reconstruction efforts. These efforts should be focused on "engaging local entities and civil society,"⁴ as well as ensuring that reconstruction activities "reflect local priorities"⁴ in order to ensure success, rather than the aims of aiding western nations. The misalignment of the needs of western nations (strengthening Ukraine in order to counter and deter Russian aggression) with the needs of Ukrainians (strengthening the country in order to provide basic services to its citizens) could affect the prioritization of reconstruction tasks (i.e., "de-mining, rubble clearance, building shelter and schools, and providing basic medical care"⁴ vs rebuilding the military) making it even more important that international aid should flow through and be directed by local organizations.

International aid also proposes an additional challenge as well as an opportunity that Ukraine can take advantage of. There will likely be billions upon billions of dollars flowing into the country in order to help with its reconstruction. And for a country that has "consistently ranked 40th out of 40 countries in Europe (including the Western Balkans and Turkey) in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index"⁴ this poses a problem to ensure that all of that aid ends up in the right hands. Ukraine has had a long history with corruption within its political and economic system leading it to also rank "last in the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (ERBD) governance index"⁵ Ukraine is dominated by oligarchic groups, sometimes called clans, with individuals combining political and economic

³ Dunayev et al., 'Wartime Destruction', 11.

⁴ Ries and Shatz, "Looking Beyond the War."

⁵ Sapir, 'Ukraine and the EU', 214.

power at their top.”⁶ Reconstruction and the post conflict environment presents an opportunity for Ukraine to reform its governance structures, its political and economic systems, with the goal of reducing corruption to a minimum. Zelensky himself was quoted as saying that “all the corrupt officials [have] fled the nation.”⁷ How true this is or more importantly whether they will be allowed to come back in the post conflict environment is unknown. Nevertheless Ukraine should pursue policies that promote good governance including “transparency, integrity, lawfulness, sound policy, participation, accountability, responsiveness”⁸ in order to combat corruption. Ukraine should strive to ensure these elements are present at every level within its political and economic systems. The international community through the UN can help with these initiatives, by ensuring that all aid that is given is accompanied by a thorough auditing process. This would help to ensure that international aid flooding the country during reconstruction would actually be used to support reconstruction activities, thereby strengthening Ukraine and providing for a more secure environment.

Finally, Ukraine will have to strengthen its ties with the west by exploring all alliance type frameworks and options. This process has already begun and, in fact, has sped up as a result of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. First is Ukraine’s candidacy for accession into the European Union. Prior to February 2022, “Ukraine had little prospect to obtain the status of candidate from the EU, let alone actually become an EU member anytime soon.”⁹ Since then Ukraine has completed its application to the EU and was given official candidate status on June 23, 2022. The President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen has even gone so far as to claiming that “the future of Ukraine is in our Union.”¹⁰ Candidate status does come with some significant reforms that Ukraine must implement in order to meet accession requirements including: reforms to its constitutional court, judicial reforms, anti-corruption, anti-money laundering, and anti-oligarchic laws, harmonizing media legislation with that of the EU and legislations on national minorities.¹¹ While Ukraine has been making some progress on all of these initiatives, it is doubtful that full accession with the EU will be achieved while the conflict with Russia is ongoing. However as soon as the conflict is over, Ukraine must take all steps to ensure that the above requirements are met even if they haven’t been already and push for EU accession as quickly as possible. Ukraine’s membership within the EU will not only secure its future, but also provide a united front against continued Russian aggression on European states.

Ukraine will also want to pursue membership within NATO as soon as possible following the end of its conflict with Russia. Membership within NATO, like the EU, is vital towards securing the future of Ukraine and provides many benefits outside of the security protections of

⁶ Richter, “Call the Bluff” or “Build Back Better”, 613.

⁷ Richter, “Call the Bluff” or “Build Back Better”, 611.

⁸ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Anti-Corruption Module 2 Key Issues*, 10.

⁹ Sapir, ‘Ukraine and the EU’, 216.

¹⁰ Von der Leyen, “Press Corner.”

¹¹ European Commission, “Commission Opinion on Ukraine’s Application for Membership of the European Union.”

Article 5. NATO membership will give Ukrainian forces the opportunity to train with NATO forces and develop interoperability doctrine and become more effective militarily. It will also provide them with the opportunity to “improve its own armed forces, establish civilian control over the armed forces and intelligence services, which would also increase the level of compliance with the rule of law in the state.”¹² NATO, like the EU, has also accelerated the process of Ukraine membership following Russia’s invasion with Ukraine formally applying to NATO on September 30, 2022¹³ and a formal declaration at the Vilnius summit in July 2023 that “Ukraine would join NATO in the future.”¹⁴ Despite some concerns of some NATO members on allowing Ukraine into the organization, which will be discussed later, many other western nations have already begun the process of establishing agreements on security cooperation between their own individual states and Ukraine. So far, the UK, Germany, France, Denmark, Canada, Italy and the Netherlands have all established similar security agreements committing military support to Ukraine in the long term.¹⁴ These agreements can all be seen as part of a transitional stage along Ukraine’s path towards joining NATO. Therefore, particularly in the post conflict environment, Ukraine should look to establishing more of these agreements while it waits for full NATO membership. Together these security arrangements along with NATO and EU membership, and the reconstruction efforts that will be necessary towards securing those memberships, will all help to provide a more secure environment for Ukrainians to prosper in a post conflict environment.

Russian ideological motivations

Russia will continue to define the overall security environment and remain an antagonist, primarily for Europeans, but also for NATO, in a post Russo-Ukrainian conflict era. But first, and similar to Ukraine, it also will have to go through a long period of reconstruction and reconstitution of its military forces. Russia has experienced significant losses particularly within its land forces (both personnel and materiel), as well as within its Black Sea Fleet.¹⁵ However, its losses within its air forces as well as cyber and space forces have been minor or completely negligible.¹⁵ Estimates vary on how quickly Russia can build back up its forces, and its reconstitution rate will be affected by negative actions such as international sanctions placed on them by the west, or positive actions through support from Russian alliances (i.e. China, Iran, India, BRICS, etc.). A report by the German Council on Foreign Relations estimates that Russia will be able to fully reconstitute its armed forces following the cessation of armed conflict in Ukraine within six to ten years.¹⁶ These estimates include assumptions of Russia being able to train “about 280,000 recruits per year,”¹⁶ meaning that after six years Russia could add up to 1.7 million of trained troops to their military capacity, and 2.8 million after ten years. These numbers

¹² Mansur et al., ‘Ukraine and NATO’, 18.

¹³ Subramaniam et al., “Zelensky says Ukraine is applying for NATO membership ‘under an accelerated procedure.’”

¹⁴ Gotkowska, Nieczypor, and Graca. “The West and Ukraine: Agreements on Security.”

¹⁵ Molling and Schutz, “Preventing the Next War.”

¹⁶ Molling and Schutz, “Preventing the Next War.”

are quite significant and pose quite a challenge for the west, and if Russia will be fully reconstituted within six years, the window for NATO and Europe to be ready is one year less (i.e. five years in order to prepare and be able to respond and defend against a Russian attack).

However, the question remains, in a post conflict era where Russia controls the Donbass areas along with Crimea, where will Russia strike next? What will it do with those reconstituted forces? Will it feel emboldened with its “successes” in Ukraine and push its expansionist agenda further? There is a lot of fear surrounding Russian aims within mass media, however accurately predicting what Russia will do in the future requires a more nuanced approach that takes into consideration Russian perspectives and ideologies.

To understand Russian motivations, we must first examine Russian ideologies and the lenses through which they see the world. After all ideologies have the power of “mobilizing narratives that forge organizational identities, articulate collective grievances, identify specific enemies, justify violence, and outline the programmatic steps or stages necessary for sociopolitical change.”¹⁷ And it is through Russian ideologies that Putin has been so effective at rallying his people behind his agendas by referring to them in his public speeches since the early 2000s.¹⁸ The specific Russian ideology of the “Russkiy Mir” or the “Russian World” speaks of a unified Russian identity that exists across international borders. This identity is defined by the shared history of Russian people, cultural heritage, the Russian Orthodox Church, and language. With Russkiy Mir the Russian language has taken on a particular level of significance over and above other elements. It has become the “key unifying factor, and it correlates with the foreign policy of the Russian Federation, the government of which has repeatedly used manipulations around language issues as a pretext for aggressive actions.”¹⁹ Using language Russia identifies who the in-group is and is deserving of its protection, and who the members of the out-group are (ethnic groups whose mother tongue is not Russian) that are threatening the in-group. Therefore Russia’s “intention was not to expand in the geopolitical sense”²⁰ just for the sake of expansion in an effort to “conquer the world,” but to “recapture Russianness and rebirth the Russian civilization after the trauma of implosion.”²⁰ Russia sees itself as a great power and wishes to recapture its position on the global stage that it had during the Cold War, and in pursuit of this idea it sees its duty to protect Russians living beyond its borders in line with its ideology of Russkiy Mir. These ideas figured very prominently in the pretext to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, as well as the overall conflict within the Donbass area since 2014.¹⁹ And they will continue to shape Russian foreign policy decisions after the conflict in Ukraine has ended.

A direct threat to Russian desire to recapturing its former position on the global stage is NATO. Historically NATO was created in direct opposition to the Soviet Union and its allies.

¹⁷ Hafez, “Ideology in Civil Wars,” 135.

¹⁸ Hybrid Warfare Analytical Group, “‘Russkiy Mir’ as the Kremlin’s Quasi-Ideology’.

¹⁹ Hybrid Warfare Analytical Group, “‘Russkiy Mir’ as the Kremlin’s Quasi-Ideology’.

²⁰ Chiriac, The Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, 20.

Even after the Cold War, while there was an opportunity to rebrand the organization and perhaps bring alongside the new Russian Federation, little efforts were made with this regard, and in the end the old perspectives of “the West vs the East” have been maintained within the organization and more importantly within Russia itself. As a result Putin has been very critical of NATO and its enlargement while he has been in power, criticizing “NATO’s endless expansion policy”²¹ and saying that “the alliance was reaching far beyond its Euro-Atlantic remit.”²¹ However if you look closer you can see that his comments are mixed and in line with the above discussion on Russian ideology and protecting the Russkiy Mir. When it comes to countries that are perceived as being outside of the Russkiy Mir, i.e. Finland and Sweden, he says that “there is no immediate threat to Russia from an expansion (of NATO) to include these countries.”²¹ However his tone changes dramatically when NATO turns its eyes to countries that he perceives as part of the Russkiy Mir, for example he “called NATO’s promise of eventual membership for Georgia and Ukraine ‘a direct threat’ to Russian security.”²² Therefore what concerns Russia when it comes to NATO encroachment is NATO’s impact on the Russian sphere of influence. And Putin is adamant about them not joining NATO because it can be assumed that he knows that once under the NATO umbrella not only does that come into direct conflict with Russian ideology and their sphere of influence, but also that Russia would be less likely to invade that country directly.

In the post Russo-Ukrainian conflict era states that are part of the Russkiy Mir ideology but outside of the NATO umbrella will continue to be under direct threat from Russia, especially if they are “resistant” to Russian influence. States that are within the NATO umbrella of protection will likely see Russia use means other than direct invasion in order to settle perceived security concerns. Russia has a long history of utilizing hybrid warfare methods in order to achieve its geopolitical aims. From “the ‘little green men’ who invaded parts of Crimea in 2014,”²³ to “evidence confirming Russian interference in the 2016 US presidential elections, and the admission by President Putin that Wagner was financed by Russia”²³ are all examples of how Russia has operated within the grey zone of conflict in order to “achieve political security objectives with activities that are ambiguous or cloud attribution and exceed the threshold of ordinary competition yet fall below the level of large-scale direct military conflict.”²⁴ These types of strategies will continue to be employed by Russia during the post conflict era, especially when dealing with nations within NATO, as Russia will not want to begin a conflict with an alliance that is wealthier and better armed than it is.

Finally, one question remains. Who will Russia turn its attentions to next following its “successes” in Ukraine in the post conflict era? Using the above analysis of the Russian ideology of Russkiy Mir, it is fair to say that it must be a state that Russia perceives to be (or should be)

²¹ Faulconbridge, ‘Putin Sees No Threat from NATO Expansion, Warns against Military Build-Up’.

²² Erlanger, “Putin, at NATO Meeting, Curbs Combative Rhetoric.”

²³ Bilal, ‘NATO Review - Russia’s Hybrid War against the West’.

²⁴ Krishnan, "Fifth Generation Warfare, Hybrid Warfare, and Gray Zone Conflict: A Comparison," 22.

within its sphere of influence, with potential threats that exist towards ethnic Russians within that state. Using these parameters, we come to the conclusion that Latvia would be the most likely target of Russian ambitions. Latvia has a significant population of ethnic Russians, sitting at almost one quarter of the population in 2020.²⁵ And since the invasion of Ukraine the Latvian government has been taking some controversial steps in the hopes of developing social cohesion against Moscow, but could be perceived by Russia as threatening the almost half a million ethnic Russians living in Latvia. These measures include the removal of Soviet-era statues, separating the Latvia Orthodox Church from the Russian Orthodox Church, banning some Russian TV broadcasts, and “elimination of the Russian language from standard school curricula.”²⁶ That last step also included prohibiting “the use of Russian in airports, train stations, and several commercial establishments.”²⁶ These actions, particularly the ones related to language, are the most likely to provoke Russian aggression as they directly threaten the ideology of Russkiy Mir and the Russian diaspora that exists within Latvia. Driven with a duty to protect ethnic Russians abroad, Russia will likely take steps to pressure and influence Latvia to improve the lives of the Russians found within its borders. However, Latvia is a state protected by the umbrella of NATO, therefore as discussed above, Russia will likely not engage directly or in the same manner that it has with Ukraine in order to achieve its aims. It will pursue actions within the grey zone of conflict and hybrid warfare in an effort to subvert, undermine and challenge the Latvian state in pursuit of its objectives.

Posturing NATO in the post Russo-Ukrainian conflict era

In this future scenario, despite having a ceasefire and peace returning to Europe, NATO and the west must not return to a state of complacency and be ready to respond to Russian antagonism and provide support to Ukraine. As described above this support should include not only supporting reconstruction efforts according to local priorities, but also bringing in Ukraine within the protective umbrella of NATO. With Ukraine no longer in a conflict, NATO members no longer have to fear that making Ukraine a member of NATO wouldn't automatically trigger a larger conflict with activation of Article 5. However, it is likely that some NATO members may still feel uncomfortable having Ukraine within NATO even with a peace agreement in place. There are two arguments that should help to ease those members' concerns. The first is the above discussion on Russian ideology. With the loss of the majority of Eastern Ukraine which comprises most of the Ethnic Russians within Ukraine in this future scenario, we should see a lessening of tensions between Russia and the remaining parts of Ukraine. If Russia's desire is to protect Russian speaking people, they will have achieved this goal following a peace agreement that sees the regions of the Donbass and other areas mentioned above either given independence or allowed to join Russia. Seeing minimal threat to its ability to influence those it sees as within the Russian sphere, tensions and fears should be decreased about Ukraine joining NATO.

²⁵ Coolican, 'The Russian Diaspora in the Baltic States: The Trojan Horse That Never Was', 6.

²⁶ Vohra, 'Latvia Is Going on Offense Against Russian Culture'.

The second argument, and admittedly more challenging, is the establishment and maintenance of borders and border control following any such peace agreement. The loss of almost 20% of its territory will, obviously, be very difficult for most Ukrainians to accept. This could lead to situations involving continued border skirmishes, and there will likely also be a period of migrations with Ethnic Russians flowing east and Ukrainians flowing west. What this post conflict Ukraine must avoid is a perception that it has contested borders. This level of instability will only serve to fuel the fears of other NATO members and cause massive delays to Ukraine joining NATO until the situation is resolved. Border control and a clear sense of where the new Ukraine starts and ends is central to the stability of Ukraine and its quick entry into NATO, which is essential to maintaining peace in Europe.

NATO members may also have fears related to the use of ‘red lines’ in either Russian rhetoric or the foreign policy statements made by western nations. Red lines have become quite common during the current Russo-Ukrainian conflict with Putin stating on multiple occasions what he saw as red lines of western involvement in the Ukrainian conflict. From saying “if Washington decides to supply longer-range missiles to Kyiv, then it will be crossing a red line, and will become a direct party to the conflict,”²⁷ or even literally “by demarcating the territory that was supposed to be ‘integrated’ into the Russian Federation, and that would henceforth benefit from the same – potentially nuclear – protection as any other integral part of Russia”²⁸ as a red line, to even the original justification of the war when Putin describes NATO encroachment as “the red line which we have spoken about on numerous occasions. They [NATO] have crossed it.”²⁹ These red lines will continue to be used in the post-conflict era, and while NATO and its members should do whatever they can to avoid escalation of a conflict, they should be careful how much weight they give to these ‘red lines’. “These red lines have occasionally been crossed and blurred”³⁰ with now U.S. produced long range missiles (ATACMS) being used by the Ukrainians against Russia,³¹ the U.S. sharing of battlefield intelligence with Ukrainian forces,³² there are even multiple reports of western special forces operating inside Ukraine.³³ Even outside of the Ukraine conflict, western nations have also evoked the concept of ‘red lines’ and failed to follow through on them, as Obama famously did in 2013 during the Syrian conflict.³⁴ ‘Red lines’ may be used by states as a way to signal intention, influence others, or justify actions after they have taken them, but NATO members should be wary to use them as a direct predictor of behavior and not allow them to direct or limit their foreign policy decisions. If they do, they risk

²⁷ Dos Reis and Grzybowski, ‘Moving “Red Lines”’, 19.

²⁸ Dos Reis and Grzybowski, ‘Moving “Red Lines”’, 12.

²⁹ Dos Reis and Grzybowski, ‘Moving “Red Lines”’, 10.

³⁰ Dos Reis and Grzybowski, ‘Moving “Red Lines”’, 22.

³¹ Reuters, ‘Russian Officials Say Ukraine Attacked Crimea with U.S.-Made ATACMS Missiles’.

³² Dos Reis and Grzybowski, ‘Moving “Red Lines”’, 20.

³³ Adams and Wright, ‘Ukraine War’.

³⁴ Chollet, ‘Obama’s Red Line, Revisited’.

allowing their adversaries to direct the tempo of conflict, and where, when and how it will escalate.

At the end of 2023 NATO has established a forward presence in the eastern parts of its alliance. NATO battlegroups have been established in countries including Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and of course Latvia. But are these battlegroups ready for the security concerns discussed above in a post conflict era? Many of these battlegroups have been setup to fight a conventional land-based conflict with pre-positioned equipment and weapon stockpiles, pre-assigned forces, and integrated air and missile defence systems.³⁵ As discussed earlier, Russia's actions will likely be more along the line of hybrid warfare acting within the gray zone of conflict in order to avoid attribution and engaging in a larger conflict with a larger alliance. Therefore in this post conflict era these NATO battlegroups need to be strengthened to counter these specific hybrid threats. They would need to have a significant cyber command to respond and defend against cybercrime and cyber-attacks. They need to be able to conduct defensive and offensive information operations. Countering hybrid threats usually also requires an integrated, whole of government approach, therefore these battlegroups should not just be integrated with local defence forces, but also every level of government, and look to strengthen areas of the local government that might be vulnerable to Russian actions within the gray zone of conflict.

Canada in the post Russo-Ukrainian conflict era

In this future post Russo-Ukrainian conflict era Canada needs to be aware of the antagonistic threat that Russia will continue to pose as described earlier and maintain its strong alliances in order to provide security to Canadians. In pursuit of its Russian ideology Russia will continue to antagonize those that pose a threat to its sphere of influence, and as these actions will likely remain within the hybrid, unrestricted, grey zone of conflict, it opens the potential playing field to anyone who is allied with its intended target. If Latvia is Russia's most likely target after Ukraine, and the goal is to weaken, subvert and undermine them as much as possible, then anyone allied with Latvia is fair game and needs to be prepared to defend against Russian actions, and this includes Canada. Even more, Canada has been named as the framework nation for the NATO battlegroup in Latvia,³⁶ therefore it, more than any other NATO nation, must understand the hybrid threat Russia poses and be ready to counter it.

However, how can Canada be expected to counter these threats effectively if it isn't even meeting its defence expenditure targets in accordance with NATO guidelines. In 2006, NATO Defence Ministers "agreed to commit a minimum of 2% of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to defence spending to ensure the Alliance's military readiness."³⁷ In 2023, Canada stood at a

³⁵ NATO, 'NATO's Military Presence in the East of the Alliance'.

³⁶ NATO, 'NATO's Military Presence in the East of the Alliance'.

³⁷ NATO, 'Funding NATO'.

dismal 1.38%, within the bottom six of the alliance.³⁸ The nature of alliances is that individual member states accept the responsibility of participating in that alliance, meaning that they can expect to receive the full benefits of the alliance by taking certain steps or making certain contributions. It is a reciprocal relationship. Canada cannot rely on being a ‘free rider’ and expect the alliance to fight its battles for it without at least making the minimum contribution. As a middle power Canada needs the strength of its alliances so that it can secure its position on the global stage and protect its interests from larger, great powers. Otherwise it risks losing credibility and being left out of other future alliances, as it has already been left out of the trilateral defence and security pact known as AUKUS³⁹ and an important trade group called the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF).⁴⁰ If these trends continue into the post Russo-Ukrainian conflict era, Canada risks being left behind and alone to face the new threats that this era will pose.

Conclusion

Looking forward to the era after the conflict in the Ukraine is over is important because it allows us to better prepare for what lies ahead. The post conflict Russo-Ukraine era has significant security implications involving the Ukraine, Russia, and NATO that need to be understood in order to better prepare for them. While not getting into the potential likelihood of different outcomes of the war, this paper assumed the current stalemate as a framework to evaluate the future era.

Ukraine will be faced with a very long but important reconstruction process following the end of the conflict. Reconstruction will be critical to improving the well-being of those in the region, but also their security as a weakened Ukraine will only invite further aggression. Reconstruction efforts will give the country the opportunity to address the long-standing corruption issues that have plagued the country for years and improve its ability to join the EU and NATO, of which it should pursue as quickly as possible.

As much as we may want to be friends with Russia, they will likely continue to be antagonistic in the post conflict era and define the security environment for western nations. Russia will be influenced by its Russian ideology of *Russkiy Mir*, where it sees itself as the protector of the Russian World, and more specifically Russian speaking people outside of its borders. Russia will see threats to its sphere of influence through this ideological framework and push strongly for states that it sees within that sphere to not join NATO, as it is less likely to directly attack a NATO nation and use instead hybrid warfare within the grey zone of conflict. But Russia will also have to go through a reconstitution phase following the end of hostilities, taking approximately six to ten years to fully reconstitute. Once it has, Latvia will likely be its

³⁸ NATO, ‘Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014-2023)’.

³⁹ Brewster, “PM’s Former Adviser Says There’s No Indication Canada Was Invited to Join AUKUS Defence Pact.”

⁴⁰ McGregor, “As Major Pacific Summit Wraps, Canada Is Sidelined on a New U.S.-Led Trade Initiative.”

next target, as Latvia has a significant population of Ethnic Russians, and has already started to implement policies that Russia might interpret as discriminatory against the minority population.

While NATO may have some reservations about accepting Ukraine as a new member, using the analysis provided in this paper, tensions with Russia should decrease after the regions of Ukraine that are composed of a majority of Ethnic Russians are allowed to become independent or join Russia in this post conflict era. However Ukraine will have to firmly establish the borders of this 'new' Ukraine, as a weak level of border control will only lead to greater instability in the area with border skirmishes and/or refugees.

Finally as Canada is the framework nation for the NATO battlegroup getting setup in Latvia (i.e. Russia's most likely next target), Canada must be keenly aware of the potential threats in the post conflict era in order to be ready to counter them. However this will be difficult for Canada as it is not meeting its NATO defence budget commitments. This will only lead to a loss of credibility for Canada and potentially be left behind and out of other future alliances. Canada and the other western nations need to be ready to address the adversarial threat Russia will pose in the post Russo-Ukrainian conflict era, or risk further aggression from the Russian state.

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