

CEPA

Containing Russia, Securing Europe



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Containing Russia, Securing Europe

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Executive Summary

Russia is at war with the West.

Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, while devastating in its own right, is only the opening salvo in a much larger campaign designed to upend a US-led global order that has maintained peace and prosperity in Europe and the United States for nearly 80 years. To restore stability, America and its allies must focus their efforts on containment, through a strategy designed to defeat Moscow's ability to wage war now, and to disrupt its ability to even contemplate war in the future.

Russia's attempt to remake the European and global orders by force has been long in the making, and it will be equally long in the unmaking. Restoring order will require diligence and vigilance from the United States for years, if not decades, to come. As the diplomat and influential foreign policy architect George Kennan recognized in 1946, when faced with an intransigent and intractable adversary capable of causing irreparable harm to American and allied interests, the only alternative to ongoing and escalating war is containment.

It is time for a new strategy of containment. This strategy, which must begin in Ukraine, does not end with victory in the present war. Effective containment will require renewed commitment to the security of NATO's eastern flank, a concerted strategy to counteract Russian influence in Western societies and globally, and a principled refusal to cede any of Moscow's former vassals in the post-Soviet space to continued domination.

US and broader Western interests are clear. If left unchecked, Russia will continue to manufacture forever wars on the European continent, threatening NATO allies with military and non-conventional violence. The Kremlin's playbook is, by now, well known: it includes weaponizing energy, disrupting commodity and financial markets, and sowing internal and international discord to keep democracies off-kilter and create a blueprint for other malign actors to follow. Moscow's strategic objectives are also clear: to destroy the U.S.-led system of international rules and norms, and it will not be appeased by abdication of territories in Ukraine or elsewhere so long as Western institutions still find global appeal. **A strategy of renewed containment thus represents a return to an interest-driven policy towards Russia.**

For most of the three decades since the end of the Soviet Union, Washington and its allies were content to let the relationship be driven in the direction and at the speed determined by Moscow, falsely secure in the mistaken belief that convergence and even integration were inevitable. Containment, by contrast, must be guided by a clear and consistent articulation of US national security interests —

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chiefly the interests of durable security and stability in Europe and globally — as the fundamental determinant of the contours and content of any future relationship with Russia. And it must be rooted in a sober recognition of the stakes and difficulties involved in achieving them.

The New Geopolitical Reality After Russia's War in Ukraine

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine shattered the post-Cold War order and reshaped the geopolitical map. The new geopolitical reality is defined by four facts:

This is not just Putin's war: Russia has demonstrated a lasting commitment to regional and global disruption, grounded in a worldview that sees the existing global order as fundamentally detrimental to Russia's national interests — a commitment and worldview that are unlikely to change after the end of the present war in Ukraine and even the end of Vladimir Putin's regime.

Russia is a long-term challenge: The US and its allies, which erected and seek to defend the existing order in the service of global peace and prosperity, cannot reasonably expect to deliver to Russia an overwhelming military defeat sufficient to prevent it from pursuing its aims. Nor can they engineer a shift in Russia's aims through constructive engagement. As a result, Russia will retain both the means and the will to cause global disruption and insecurity for the foreseeable future.

Despite the impact of war and sanctions, Russia retains — and will likely increase — the capability to exert domination in the post-Soviet space and disrupt security and stability in the West. Russia likely needs no more than seven years to reconstitute its military; its nuclear forces have already demonstrated their capacity to deter Western action; its economy is successfully retooling for war; and its cyberforces, covert operations services, and disinformation infrastructure retain a global reach.

America faces an authoritarian alliance: The challenge posed by Russia is inextricably linked to those posed by China, Iran, and other global and regional actors that seek to undermine American and Western structural power and increase their own room for aggressive maneuver. Each of these powers benefits from the proliferation of conflict across multiple fronts, from Ukraine to the Middle East to the Strait of Taiwan, and a failure to address any of these fronts exacerbates the severity of the others.

Transatlantic solidarity is vital: The outbreak of war on the European continent has exposed Europe's unpreparedness to take responsibility for its own security and defense. Neither, however, can American interests at home and around the world be defended if Europe is not secure. US leadership thus remains critical to European and transatlantic security, particularly as the US prepares to face a mounting challenge from China.



Photo: Huge banner in support of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in the streets of Moscow, on march 10, 2023. Banner says “victory will be for us” with the name of a killed soldier in the invasion, Lieutenant Andrei Smagin. Credit: Celestino Arce/NurPhoto

Russia's Strategic Objectives

Russia's regime has consistently pursued — and can reliably be expected to continue to pursue for the foreseeable future — three overarching geostrategic ambitions:

Exercising military, political, and economic dominance in the post-Soviet space, circumscribing the sovereignty of its neighbors, limiting their ability to pursue autonomous domestic and foreign policies, and claiming an unlimited right of military intervention.

Undermining global order, disrupting Western political consensus, fracturing global political and economic institutions, reducing the ability of the US and Europe to maintain stability, and rolling back the progress of the European project.

Maintaining domestic power by using geopolitical conflict to mobilize regime supporters and repress opponents, and fusing the state, society, and economy into a unified tool of war.

Recommitting to Containment

Containment does not mean the elimination of conflict or the basis for conflict. Rather, it focuses on preventing conflict from escalating to levels that might lead to wider war. Just as the object of Cold War containment was neither to defeat nor dismantle the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) — though these eventually occurred — the new containment aims neither to defeat nor dismantle Russia. Instead, the goal is to protect American and allied security by preventing the further destabilization of international relations.

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A new containment strategy should:

- Be rooted in an understanding that the threat posed by Russia is neither localized to Ukraine nor likely to dissipate in the coming years, and thus that the Western response must be commensurate to the scale of the challenge.
- Disrupt Moscow's regional and global strategies and keep Russia "off balance" and unable to pursue its global agenda. This disruption must start in Ukraine, where the Kremlin is most exposed and vulnerable, and then identify other areas where the US and allies can roll back Russian domination and further stress the regime's limited resources.
- Increase the costs on Moscow for pursuing its strategic objectives until it is no longer able to do so.

This report — which draws on six workshops conducted over 12 months, involving more than 30 analysts from the US, Europe, Ukraine, and Russia itself — provides a stereoscopic view of the challenges of responding to Russia in the near term and building durable containment for the longer term. It begins by reviewing the contours of Russia's aims and capabilities before delving into what will need to be the four pillars of effective containment: (1) **Defeating Russia in Ukraine**; (2) **reestablishing deterrence by denial**; (3) **hardening the West's soft targets against non-kinetic aggression**; and (4) **pushing back against Russia's regional domination**.

Defeat Russia in Ukraine

The **first pillar of containment** is found in Ukraine, where Russia has made its clearest challenge to the West, and where US and NATO deterrence has failed to keep the peace. Deterrence cannot be restored until and unless Russia is defeated in Ukraine, prevented from undertaking further aggression against its neighbor, and forced to reckon with the costs of its aggression. To this end, the US and its allies must do the following:

Shift the emphasis of wartime support from "as long as it takes" to achieving victory "as quickly as possible," including increasing the pace of weapons provision and reducing obstacles to Ukraine's ability to retake territory.

Maintain political commitment to Ukraine's rapid integration into the European Union (EU) to cement the country's break from Russian domination.

Effect the near-term accession of Ukraine to NATO or the establishment of commensurate security commitments with clear triggers for collective defense.

Pursue justice as a matter of urgency, including by holding tribunals for war crimes and the crime of aggression, redirecting frozen assets to Ukraine, and maintaining an ongoing sanctions regime.

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Invest in Ukrainian resilience, reconstruction, and recovery, including a modern and productive defense industrial sector.

Deterrence by Denial in Europe

The **second pillar of containment** focuses on NATO's eastern flank, which has been shown to be the critical vulnerability in the European security architecture maintained by the US and its allies. Russia must be effectively deterred from any further adventurism in the region and prevented from concluding in the context of any future conflict that time is on its hands. To this end, the US and its allies must do the following:

Commit to a durable transatlantic consensus on geostrategic priorities, including the revitalization of America's strategic commitment to Europe and the redoubling of dialogue on strategic alignment on Russia, China, and other challenges.

Strengthen domestic, bipartisan consensus on geopolitical challenges and the role of America and NATO in the world on both sides of the Atlantic.

Undertake large-scale and coordinated investments in defense-industrial production on both sides of the Atlantic, driven by the projected requirements of maintaining long-term deterrence against land wars on the European continent as a core US and NATO interest.

Reassess regional and global energy security, including the development of a transatlantic energy security doctrine and the structural reduction of dependencies on Russian oil, gas, and nuclear fuel.

Harden the Soft Targets of Russian Influence

Containment without a military component is vulnerable, but containment built only on a military component is unsustainable. Thus, just as Cold War containment began with post-war reconstruction and the Marshall Plan, so must contemporary containment be erected on the foundation of an investment in the kind of world in which we want to live — a world of robust kinetic defense, in which American and European citizens are safe in their homes, as well as a world of peaceful interaction among sovereign states, a world safe for democracy, and a world in which goods and ideas flow freely across borders. Accordingly, the **third pillar of containment** focuses on hardening the West's own soft targets and rebuilding a new foundation of relations with the Global South. To this end, the US and its allies must do the following:

Close off avenues of kleptocratic influence by strengthening domestic institutions of financial governance and oversight and disrupting attempts by Russian or other malign capital to distort policymaking.



Photo: Russia's President Vladimir Putin, Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu and Chief of the General Staff of Russian Armed Forces Valery Gerasimov visit the firing range Donguz to oversee the military exercises known as «Centre-2019» in Orenburg Region, Russia September 20, 2019. Credit: Sputnik/Alexei Nikolsky/Kremlin via REUTERS

Reinforce counter-intelligence defenses against malign covert activity and information manipulation, neutralizing Russian efforts to weaponize the democratic contestation and impede internal and transatlantic consensus.

Recommit to diplomacy, trade, investment, and conflict resolution in the Global South to provide a durable alternative to the opportunistic and often parasitic authoritarian “regime services” proffered by Moscow and Beijing, and reestablish American and Western credibility on issues of global peace and prosperity.

Undermine Russia's Influence in Its Former Empire

The **fourth pillar of containment** takes the fight to Russia by refusing to cede the post-Soviet space to Moscow's domination. To this end, the US and its allies must do the following:

Maintain momentum for EU accession in Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia and reinvigorate the EU accession process in the Western Balkans.

Provide clear incentives for democratically minded opposition and civil society in Belarus to increase pressure on the puppet regime in Minsk.

Prioritize a robust NATO presence and the reestablishment of freedom of navigation in the Black Sea.

Focus on peacebuilding in the South Caucasus, after Russia's failure to prevent the reemergence of war between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Pursue trade diversification in Central Asia, ensuring that governments and economies there have options beyond Russia and China.

The Russian Threat

Russia's reasoning in launching a full-scale invasion in February 2022 — the cost-benefit analysis that led it into a disastrously costly war — may be opaque, but its objectives are clear.

Throughout post-Soviet history, the Russian Federation has sought to dominate the countries and societies it once ruled, attempting to exercise a veto over their domestic politics and foreign relations, and stymieing the emergence of democracy. For much of the past 20 years, those regional ambitions have been augmented by a concerted and increasingly audacious effort to make the world safe for Moscow's brand of autocracy, halting the spread of Euro-Atlantic institutions and seeking to roll back the influence of Washington and Brussels. All of this, meanwhile, has been in the service of the concentration of authoritarian power at home, where Vladimir Putin's ever tightening grip is made possible — indeed, necessary — by a conflict with the West that is detrimental to Russian society and is existential to Russia's regime.

It is not easy to discern national interests in a system where the behavior of the state seems largely determined by one man. Nonetheless, Putin's decisions are not his alone. While Russia is not monolithic, and elites and ordinary citizens can and do disagree about the country's trajectory, Putin has broadly served the interests of a powerful elite and conditioned the behavior of a quiescent public. As a result, even when Putin eventually departs the scene, those interests and behaviors are likely to reassert themselves, and Western leaders must thus be prepared for continued confrontation with a Russian state that sees its objectives as antithetical to those pursued by the US and Europe.

What's more, despite what might seem to have been Russia's dismal military performance in its invasion of Ukraine and the damage done by sanctions, the reality is that Russia retains considerable resources with which to pursue its interests and has shown no willingness to abandon the fight. These resources include both conventional and nuclear forces, cyberforces, and a global architecture of subversion and subterfuge, as well as an economy that has proved stubbornly resilient to Western sanctions. And crucially, while their experience on the battlefield in Ukraine may have instilled a degree of military modesty in Moscow, it has dampened neither Russia's drive to maintain and indeed expand its power, nor its political appetite for geostrategic confrontation with the West.

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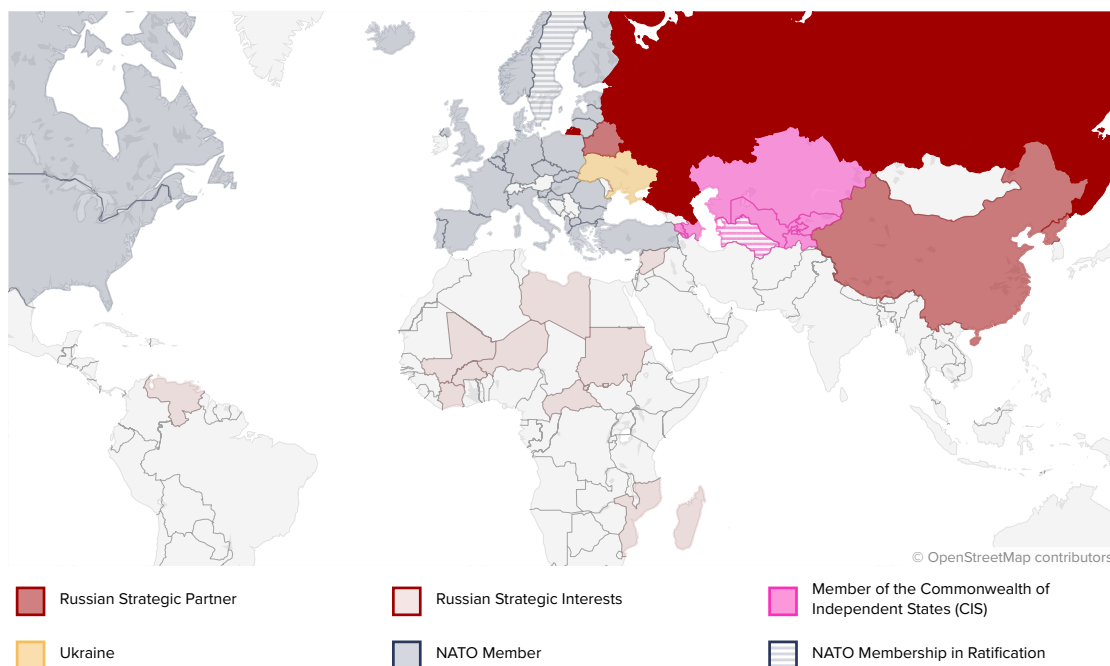
Russia's Geostategic Ambitions

As the 2022 US National Security Strategy notes, Russia's "longstanding efforts to destabilize its neighbors ... and its blatant attempts to undermine internal democratic processes in countries across Europe, Central Asia, and around the world" have culminated in the pursuit of "an imperialist foreign policy with the goal of overturning key elements of the international order."¹ Britain's 2023 Integrated Review Refresh adds that, with an "ability and intent to disrupt UK [United Kingdom], Euro-Atlantic and wider international security," Russia has "violated the norms and principles that contributed to a stable and predictable European security order, and we cannot discount the possibility of an attack against Allies' sovereignty and territorial integrity."² Per NATO's 2022 Strategic Concept, Russia does the following:³

- "[S]eeks to establish spheres of influence and direct control through coercion, subversion, aggression and annexation."
- "[A]ims to destabilize countries to our East and South."
- Works "to disrupt Allied reinforcements and freedom of navigation" in the North Atlantic, High North and Baltic, Black and Mediterranean Seas.
- Is projecting military power deeper into Europe via its integration with Belarus.

In its own 2023 Foreign Policy Concept, Russia itself claims a "unique mission to support the global balance of power and develop a multipolar international system,"⁴ while the Kremlin's 2021 National Security Strategy identifies resisting "the West's efforts to preserve its hegemony" as a core national interest.⁵ Moreover, Russia's National Security Strategy explicitly links "unity" at home with confrontation abroad, and vice versa, arguing that failure to hold the line in one realm inevitably undermines the other.

Russia's Global Interests



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Russia's geostrategic ambitions, then, fall into three overarching objectives. First, Russia seeks regional domination, including the ability to enforce political, military, and economic dependency as far as possible throughout the post-Soviet space. Second, Russia seeks to undermine the Euro-Atlantic security architecture and fracture the broader global order, rolling back the European project and doing away with the notion that democracy is "the only game in town." And third, Russia seeks to manufacture and manipulate geopolitical confrontation in the service of its domestic political agenda, keeping both masses and elites quiet while further concentrating control and being recognized as a global Great Power.

Objective 1: Regional Domination

Russian national security and foreign policy documents identify the loss of the country's "traditional allies" — read former colonies — as a strategic failure that needs to be remedied. As a result, Russia has more or less consistently sought to reverse the centrifugal forces created by the collapse of the Soviet Union and restore as much power as possible in its erstwhile dominion.

In its efforts at regional dominion, Moscow has consistently pursued four core goals:

- Limiting the political sovereignty of neighboring states, including attempting to exercise a veto on neighbors' international engagements and trading and security arrangements.
- Maintaining the post-Soviet space as far as possible as a democracy-free zone, supporting authoritarian incumbents and suppressing democratic openings.
- Enforcing economic dependency, ensuring that Russian interests have free rein in neighboring markets and thus enjoy access to a larger pool of available assets.
- Maintaining military domination, such that no state or set of states, either from within or outside the region, can effectively circumscribe Moscow's ability to exercise military force as and where it pleases throughout the post-Soviet space.

Through the Commonwealth of Independent States, Moscow sought initially to capitalize on Russia's structural position — including its centrality to regional transportation infrastructure, and the role of the ruble, as well as the remarkable degree of soft power it enjoyed due to the role of the Russian language and cultural institutions — to bind newly independent states to Moscow. Through the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), it has sought to create integrated security arrangements that it, by sheer dint of size, would also dominate. And it has tried through the Eurasian Economic Union to tie post-Soviet markets to its own economy.

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Alongside these fitful but persistent attempts to build an institutional basis for regional domination, Russia has focused on modulating its bilateral relations to punish governments that have sought to diversify their geopolitical and geo-economic engagements. In particular, targeted formal and informal trade sanctions against Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, together with political interference, have been deployed since 2005 to exacerbate the costs of Russia's neighbors' ambitions for sovereignty and autonomy.⁶

Almost all of these efforts have been in vain largely because Russia's neighbors are determined to defend their sovereignty. The Commonwealth of Independent States never became anything other than a talking shop. Despite multiple requests by beleaguered governments from Bishkek to Yerevan, the CSTO has acted in its members' defense only once — when troops were sent in January 2022 to put down a popular uprising in Kazakhstan. While the Eurasian Economic Union did engender some genuine economic integration, it has been fatally undermined by Russia's confrontation with the West and the imposition by both sides of sanctions. And while bilateral pressure has brought Belarus, Kazakhstan, and, increasingly, Kyrgyzstan firmly into the Russian orbit, it has succeeded mostly in alienating Armenia, Moldova, and Ukraine, among others.

Moscow has responded to these failures by shifting away from institutional and soft-power approaches and toward hard power. The peacekeeping missions left over from the separatist conflicts of the early 1990s became instruments of ad hoc leverage in Tajikistan, Armenia, Georgia, and Moldova. Trade flows, whether of natural gas or tomatoes, have been similarly weaponized in an effort to cow independent-minded governments into submission. War — in Georgia in 2008, or in Ukraine in 2014 and until the present day — is only the latest innovation in Moscow's regional domination toolkit.

More than simply seeing the “near abroad” as a “zone of privileged interests,” Moscow claims the right to limit its neighbors' autonomy in the service of Russia's own geopolitical and geo-economic interests. This, indeed, was the logic presented by Putin in his infamous Munich speech in 2007 and at the equally infamous Bucharest NATO Summit in 2008, when he demanded that Georgia and Ukraine not be given a membership perspective; the same logic underpinned Russia's objections to Ukraine's Association Agreement with the European Union and eventually led Russia to war. Armenia's attempt to diversify its international relationships similarly motivated Moscow's apparent decision to abandon its CSTO ally in the face of attack from Azerbaijan. The choice to employ military force can also be attributed both to Russia's expanding ambition under Putin to bolster its regional influence and to its significantly enhanced hard-power capabilities — themselves symptomatic of the learning curve in Russian foreign policymaking.



Photo: Russian Army reconnaissance units attack Ukrainian positions near Krasny Liman. Credit: Russian Ministry of Defence.

Moscow also, however, sees its neighbors' politics as directly relevant to its own, for at least two reasons. One, ever since the Rose Revolution in Georgia in 2003 and the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004, the Kremlin has worried about the signal that democratic uprisings send to Russian citizens, the opportunity for Russian activists to learn from their neighbors, and the broader potential for democratic "contagion." Moscow has thus sought to undermine democratically legitimate governments from Kyrgyzstan and Armenia to Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova, while assisting autocrats in the violent suppression of democratic movements, most recently in Belarus and Kazakhstan. Keeping the region autocratic, meanwhile, has an added benefit: A network of corrupt client-state governments gives Russian state-linked economic interests easier access to assets and rent flows, and thus helps satiate the appetites of Russia's increasingly voracious kleptocratic elite.

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Objective 2: Undermining Western Power

Behind Russia's struggles in achieving regional domination — including its inability to forestall democratization in Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia; the gradual decline in influence in Central Asia; and the remarkable erosion in its soft power — the Kremlin sees the West, the US and Europe as blamed for encroaching on Moscow's "traditional" territories, for "fomenting" democracy, and for seeking to encircle Russia. As Russia's attempts at dominion have become more militarized, the advent of sanctions has reinforced Moscow's view.

To be clear, Moscow has reason to worry. Despite intervening to prop up Belarusian dictator Alyaksandr Lukashenka in August-September 2020 and extending Russia's military — including nuclear — presence into that country, Moscow has been unable to procure direct Belarusian involvement in its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. A similar intervention in January 2022 to prop up Kazakh strongman Qasym-Zhomart Toqaev has not been enough to cajole Astana into recognizing Russia's annexation of Ukrainian territory, or into fully resisting secondary sanctions against Russia; indeed, Toqaev declared as recently as September 2023 that Kazakhstan would "unambiguously ... follow the sanctions regime."⁷ Russia has also found itself unwilling or unable to rein in Azerbaijan's appetites in the South Caucasus, or to protect its longtime CSTO ally, Armenia.

Russian policy and doctrine point to Western economic power as a threat to Russian sovereignty and political autonomy, and thus see the disruption of that power as a critical mission. The strength and cohesion of the global trading and financial systems, the increasing standardization of business practices, and the centrality of the US dollar all limit Moscow's freedom of maneuver both at home and abroad and give Western powers instruments with which to impose significant consequences on the Kremlin for its aggression. What's more, effective rule-of-law practices — including extraterritorial jurisdiction for corruption and human rights violations — blunt many of Moscow's tools of trade. Undermining these institutions is thus of the utmost importance.

To that end, Russia has consistently pursued three core goals in its campaign to make the world safe for autocracy:

- Stalling and/or rolling back the process of EU enlargement and integration to reduce the institutional power of the common market and the pressure that it exerts on Russia and other kleptocratic systems.
- Fracturing the global trading and financial system to reduce the centrality of the US dollar and prevent the imposition and enforcement of both primary and secondary sanctions.
- Disrupting Western political consensus, with respect to Russia and more broadly, both within countries and among NATO allies to impede effective decision-making and forestall concerted action.

Russia's Imports of Selected Categories, Including Goods Subject to Export Bans

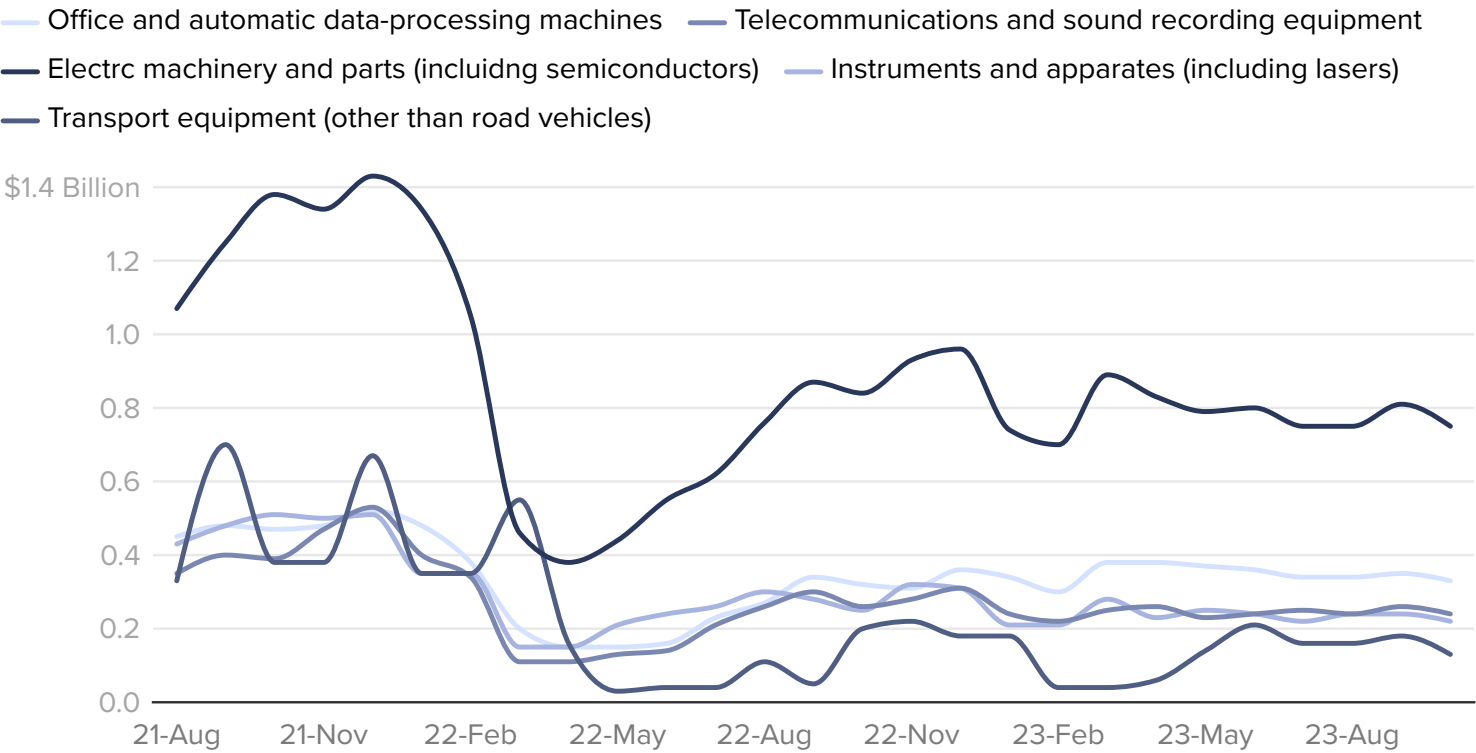


Chart: Center for European Policy Analysis • Source: Bruegel Russian Foreign Trade Tracker

The fusion of political and economic power in Russia — creating a system of extraction and patronage that is often described as kleptocracy — is not wholly compatible with the rules-based approaches to capitalism practiced in the US and Europe.⁸ Kleptocracy relies on political corruption, highly concentrated markets, and an ever-expanding source of rents to survive, while Western systems, even if imperfect, tend to seek accountability, transparency, rule of law, competitiveness, and efficiency. Of particular concern to Moscow is both the centrality of the US dollar to global trade and transactions, and the status of the EU as a “normative superpower” when it comes to market regulation.⁹

It was this mismatch that eventually led Russia to reject EU integration projects in the 2000s, understanding that bringing Russian markets and corporate governance in line with EU standards would undermine the system of power Vladimir Putin was building. Having rejected its own European future, however, Moscow then set about preventing its neighbors from pursuing their own. After the 2008 global financial crisis, Russia determined that it needed to seek rents elsewhere and turned to the Eurasian Economic Union as a solution — and in 2014 it went to war to block the conclusion of an EU Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement with Ukraine in an unsuccessful attempt to keep Ukraine open for Russian kleptocrats.¹⁰

Russia's Exports to Competitors

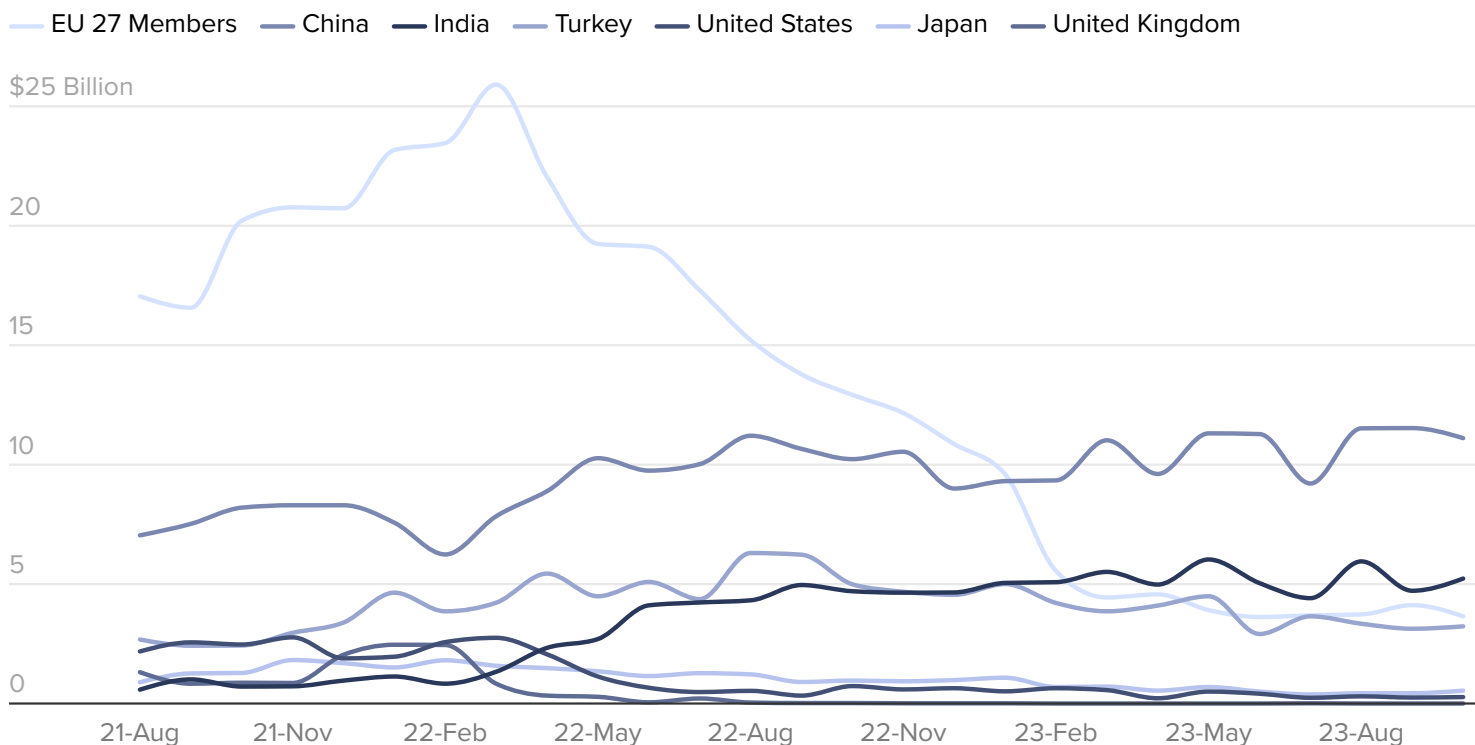


Chart: Center for European Policy Analysis • Source: Bruegel Russian Foreign Trade Tracker

The fact that Russia's initial 2014 invasion of Ukraine failed to stop Europe's geo-economic advance only reinforced Moscow's intentions to disrupt Western structural power. It approaches this task in two ways. First, it works to both disrupt the ability of Western societies to maintain democracy and the rule of law at home and deepen discord within the North Atlantic community. While the US is foremost in Russia's geopolitical thinking, the brunt of this attack is borne by Europe, where Russia has built tacit alliances with fringe movements and authoritarian-populist parties that share Moscow's aim of ending or even reversing European enlargement and impeding the unanimity that underpins EU decision-making and exacerbates ongoing tensions within Western societies.

Secondly, Russia is deepening its clientelist relations with autocrats and would-be autocrats from Hungary and Serbia to the Central African Republic and Venezuela, to say nothing of China. Indeed, Moscow is slowly building these relationships with the intent of carving out a section of the world — and a parallel infrastructure of trade, finance, and security — where Western structural power will not hold.

Objective 3: Maintaining Domestic Power

Unlike leaders in democratic countries, who generally seek to build on their predecessors' foreign policy achievements and craft relationships that will serve the national interest for generations to come, autocrats generally do not conceive of a political future beyond their own reign. Russia's autocratic leadership does not appear to be an exception. As a result, Russia's geostrategic objectives are

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inevitably subordinate to the regime's primary imperative: survival. The idea of maintaining domestic power as a geostrategic objective thus consists not only in heading off what the Kremlin sees as Western attempts at regime change, but also — and likely more importantly — in ensuring that foreign policy makes domestic politics easier, rather than harder.

From a domestic-power standpoint, then, the Kremlin's strategic foreign policy goals are fourfold:

- Using geopolitical conflict and confrontation as a tool for mobilizing regime supporters and demobilizing regime opponents.
- Deploying a sense of geopolitical threat and national-security imperative as a justification for coercion, political control, and material sacrifice.
- Instrumentalizing the war and its consequences to further concentrate political control in the hands of Putin.
- Maintaining authoritarian stability around Russia's borders and averting "democratic contagion" from the borderlands.

Throughout his first decade in office, even as he concentrated control over the media, the party system, the federal system, and the commanding heights of the economy, Vladimir Putin faced no concerted opposition. As a result, it wasn't until Russia's first genuine anti-authoritarian opposition emerged in 2011-12 that Putin discovered the need for ideology — and he settled on anti-Westernism and an evolving range of "conservative" principles. To marginalize democratic forces, Putin and his propagandists launched a successful campaign to tar anyone who opposed him as servants of an anti-Russia, anti-Christian, and anti-family agenda, cynically calculated to rally Russia's elderly and heartland voters to his side.¹¹

From that point forward, Putin's power at home has been inextricably linked to geopolitical conflict and confrontation. The idea of an external threat is the core justification for the closure of all of Russia's major human rights organizations and the exile of all of its major independent media; approximately 754 Russian organizations, media outlets, and individual journalists, activists, and academics have been declared "foreign agents," hounded, fined, and, for many, forced into exile.¹² Putin's campaign speeches are replete with exhortations to his compatriots to defend Russia against Western influence the way their forebears did against Napoleon and Hitler.

The idea that the West seeks to "keep Russia down" is also used to explain a decade of stagnant real incomes and the economy's galloping inefficiencies. The advent of actual war, moreover, serves to justify still further material sacrifices as belt-tightening in the defense of the motherland. Broadly, these messages have

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worked with ordinary Russians, helping to underpin “rallies ‘round the flag,” boosting Putin’s approval ratings, in both 2014-18 and since February 2022, despite the dire consequences of military adventure for Russians’ welfare.

Finally, geostrategic ambition can be an important source of new rents and assets for Russia’s political economy. The full-scale invasion of Ukraine — with all of the economic turmoil it has wrought — has created significant new opportunities for enrichment among various parts of the Russian elite, who have profited from military contracts, access to stolen assets in occupied Ukrainian territory, and more generally war profiteering. The departure of thousands of Western businesses from Russia has also provided more assets for redistribution. The fact that the war and Western sanctions have simultaneously deprived that same elite of access to their assets in the West, and thus of autonomy, is an added bonus for the Kremlin. The result is an elite that has both something to gain from staying in the game, and even greater dependence on the Kremlin for their lives and livelihoods.¹³

Russian Capabilities: Down, but Not Out

Russia has demonstrably failed to achieve the objectives Vladimir Putin set out on February 21, 2022. Throughout the war in Ukraine, Russia has adjusted and downsized its ambitions, without giving any indication of a willingness to abandon the field. As the Russian military fights to hold on to illegally occupied territory in Ukraine’s east and south and redeploys its Black Sea Fleet out of Sevastopol, any hope of taking Kyiv, installing a puppet government, and enforcing Ukraine’s adherence to Russian interests seems far-fetched.¹⁴ As of August 2023, US officials estimate Russian casualties to be around 300,000, while Ukrainian forces claim to have destroyed nearly 40,000 pieces of Russian military hardware, including nearly 5,000 tanks and more than 9,000 armored fighting vehicles.¹⁵

Those losses, however, should not be interpreted to mean that Russia is unable to fight. Entrenched in occupied Ukrainian territory, Russian forces have demonstrated a capacity to learn from their earlier mistakes and mount an effective defense.¹⁶ In the absence of Western support to establish Ukrainian air superiority, this has been sufficient to stymie Ukraine’s 2023 counter-offensive, while Russian missiles continue to cause death and destruction far from the front lines on a daily basis.

A similar dynamic holds on the economic front. Western sanctions have indisputably impacted the Russian economy. Consumer and financial markets are less liquid and more primitive than they were before.¹⁷ Labor, parts, and fuel shortages plague industry.¹⁸ The broad decoupling of Europe from Russian hydrocarbons has been both a long-term strategic blow and a major short-term financial challenge for Russia and will decrease Russia’s growth potential.¹⁹

Table One: Assessment of Russia's Military Losses and Replacement Efforts

Accurate as of January 2024.

Russian Military Reconstitution (Annual Rate)				Russian Military Losses (2022-3)	
	New production	Modernization	Deconservation / Cannibalization	Oryx Spionkop Estimate	Ukrainian Armed Forces Estimate
Main Battle Tanks	30 (T-90M)	160 - 180 (T-72, T-80, T-90)	600 - 800 (T-62, T-72, T-80)	2,661	6,257
Armored Fighting Vehicles	400 - 600	1000 - 1500 ^A	1000 - 1500 ^A	4,903	11,621
Barrels 122 mm and 152 mm	50 - 60	n/a	800 - 900	802	9067 ^{***}
Artillery Shells (All Types)	1,200,000 - 1,300,000	500,000 - 700,000 ^A	500,000 - 700,000 ^A	n/a	n/a
MLRS	50 - 70	unknown ^A	unknown ^A	343	972
Combat Helicopters (Ka-52)	15	n/a	n/a	60	324 ^{****B}
Combat Helicopters (Mi-28)	10<15	n/a	n/a	13	
Combat Helicopters (Mi-35)	<10	n/a	n/a		
Combat Aircrafts (Su- 30/Su-34/Su-35)	30 - 35	unknown	n/a	41 ^C	331 ^{****}
Cruise Missiles Kalibr/Kh-101/9M729	120 - 150 [*]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Cruise Missiles Kh-32	20 - 25	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Cruise Anti-Ship Missiles "Onyx"	50 - 60	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Ballistic Missiles 9M723 ("Iskander-M")	50 - 60	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Aeroballistic Missiles Kh-47 ("Kinzhal")	unknown ^{**}	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Anti-Aircraft Missiles 40N6 for S-400	<200	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

^{*} Assessed according to estimated production rates of TRDD-50A/B engines (OMKB). This assessment does not count the unknown number of R95-300 engines in store. ^{**} Possibly, may be counted as part of 9M723 production. ^{***} Number includes all types of artillery, not only 122 and 152 mm systems. ^{****} Number includes all types of aircrafts/helicopters, not only those production rates of which are assessed. ^A Combined calculation for both modernized equipment and deconserved and cannibalized equipment. ^B Combined calculation all combat helicopter types. ^C Losses are distributed across aircraft types as (11/25/5).



Photo: A service member of pro-Russian troops fires a mortar in the direction of Avdiivka during Russia-Ukraine conflict, outside Donetsk, Ukraine September 17, 2022. Credit: REUTERS/Alexander Ermochenko

Nonetheless, a coalition of Russian oligarchs and Swiss, Indian, and Gulf traders has conspired to keep petrodollars flowing to Moscow's coffers.²⁰ Russia's intelligence services have been tasked with finding ways to circumvent sanctions on microchips and other critical components for weapons systems, which they are doing successfully alongside other Kremlin-backed oligarchs.²¹ As a result, Russia has been able to switch its economy to a war footing.²² And while it comes at a cost both to the budget and to overall efficiency and welfare, Russia's own arms production has consistently outstripped Western expectations.²³ Putin also anticipates that the consensus among and within Western nations will erode over time, leading to increasing internal pressure for at least a partial resumption of economic and business ties with Russia.

Russia retains, then, a considerable arsenal of weapons with which to challenge the West:

Nuclear forces

Russia owns a nuclear deterrent on par with or surpassing that of the United States, with some 4,489 warheads.²⁴ While there is little evidence that Russia is prepared to use nuclear weapons in a war of its own choosing, such as that currently being fought in Ukraine, its nuclear arsenal has affected the course of the war by impeding American willingness to provide arms to Kyiv.²⁵ Moreover, Moscow seems to have recognized the power of nuclear saber-rattling and is thus both ramping up rhetoric and ramping down participation in the global arms control infrastructure.

Securing Europe

Conventional Forces

Russia's conventional armed forces are significantly degraded by the war in Ukraine and too bogged down to even deter a comparatively small-scale assault in Nagorno-Karabakh. Casualties are estimated at 120,000 killed and between 170,000 and 180,000 wounded through mid-August 2023. Nonetheless, they are clearly not a fully spent force, having doubled in size to roughly 2 million in a year.²⁶ Western estimates of the time it will take Russia to retool and rearm after a cease-fire in Ukraine range from three to seven years. While Russia has not demonstrated a capacity to win wars with its military, it has demonstrated a willingness to inflict severe losses on an opponent, even at the cost of overwhelming losses on its own side (see Box One).

Cyberforces

Despite an estimated 10-15 serious Russian-origin cyberattacks per day — including some 3,000 in 2023 through September and 4,500 throughout 2023 — Russia's cyberforces are broadly seen as the weapon that has not fired in the war in Ukraine.²⁷ This is likely only partly true. Significant amounts of Western governmental and private-sector support were poured into hardening Ukrainian digital infrastructure before the fighting began and into repulsing attacks in the period since February 2022. But close analysis nonetheless suggests that Russia has significant offensive cyber capacity that has not yet been brought to bear, that has not been degraded by the war or by sanctions, and that, due to the loss of private-sector income for Russian specialists, may actually have grown in strength.²⁸

Malign Influence

While Russia's invasion of Ukraine has made the country toxic in many parts of the world — and particularly in Europe — Moscow's soft power has not been entirely lost. In the Global South, Russia retains a degree of support from approximately 40-50 states.²⁹ Even in the West itself, Moscow can count on opposition to support for Ukraine and sanctions against Russia from the government of Viktor Orbán in Hungary and, likely, that of Robert Fico in Slovakia, as well as from influential political fringes in Germany, France, and the United States. To obtain this support, Moscow has at its disposal networks of online influencers and manipulators, groups like Wagner that can provide various "regime services" to autocrats, kleptocratic transactions, and ideological networks.³⁰ While Russia undoubtedly conducts malign influence campaigns, it is important to note that there are also disagreements in the West's policy toward Russia, which the Kremlin tries to influence. Russia is conservatively estimated to have funneled at least \$300 million to political parties and candidates in Europe and elsewhere since 2014.³¹

Containing Russia

Intelligence

From attempted assassinations in Britain to attacks on munitions depots in the Czech Republic, Russia's intelligence services have demonstrated a capacity to conduct significant covert operations in Europe and beyond. While indications are that most of this capacity has been redirected toward sanctions evasion, there is also evidence that Russian operatives poisoned several exiled Russian activists and journalists in Georgia, Germany, and the Czech Republic.³²

Energy

The initial spike in global energy prices sparked by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine — up to 20% over the first five months of the war, by some estimates, equivalent to roughly 2.85% of global gross domestic product (GDP) — was sobering but has largely subsided.³³ While European decoupling and investments in energy security have blunted Moscow's ability to wield energy as a weapon there, and sanctions have severely curtailed Russia's income, Russia will never again be the exporter that it once was.³⁴ Gazprom's loss of revenue and business and political connections represents a remarkable setback for Russia. Nonetheless, Russia is still able to evade oil price caps and may soon reenter European gas markets via Turkey. As a result, Russia maintains the capacity to cause damage to Western economies by manipulating global energy prices. Furthermore, dependencies on nuclear fuel and technology remain largely unaddressed by Western policymakers.³⁵

All of these arsenals remain available for deployment across a range of domains and, while none of them are foolproof, all of them have already proved their worth in Russia's efforts to date to maintain and expand its regional domination, and undermine institutions defended by the West.

Russia's Imports from EU Member States



Bears and Foxes

Russia has through most of its post-Soviet history pursued a set of persistent and mutually reinforcing geostrategic aims: imposing — militarily if necessary — its political, economic, and security domination throughout the region that once made up the USSR; “mak[ing] the world safe for autocracy” by limiting American power, rolling back EU enlargement and undermining Western unity; and manipulating foreign entanglements for domestic political purposes.

While these objectives are closely associated with Vladimir Putin and with the war in Ukraine, they have grown roots in Russia’s ruling elite and broader society, which means that they are likely to persist even after Putin is gone. So, too, will Russia’s quiver of geostrategic arrows persist. Nonetheless, a significant change in the course of the war or Putin’s departure have the potential to put in motion processes that could lead to a meaningful shift in emphasis and coordination across Russia’s geostrategic entanglements.

It is not the purpose of this report to predict the future. Rather, the intention here is to map out the variables that will condition the future and the impact they may have on Russia’s pursuit of its geostrategic objectives, and thus present the reader with a range of plausible futures for which the US and its allies might reasonably prepare. These variables include the status of the war itself, the interests and behaviors of Russia’s elite, Russian public opinion, the Russian opposition, and Russia’s regions.

The War and Russia’s Future

The decision to go to war rested squarely on the shoulders of one man: Vladimir Putin. Neither the Russian people, nor the Russian elite as a whole (with a few notable exceptions), were clamoring for an invasion of Ukraine and most appeared genuinely to have been caught by surprise. If it were not for Putin, this war would not have happened. And yet, does that mean that if Putin is gone, the war goes with him? What about the obverse: If the war is lost, does Putin fall?

Understanding what is and is not plausible requires rephrasing the questions. First, we need to understand the degree to which political forces — whether elites or masses — are likely carry this war forward in the absence of the man who started it. And second, we need to understand the degree to which the current system of power is sustainable in the absence of war. If we can answer those two questions, then we can form reasonable judgments about the future not just of Russia’s war in Ukraine, but of Russia’s broader conflict with the West.

In addition to the war itself, Russia’s trajectory over the next several years will be shaped by five core factors:

Containing Russia

Whether and how **Vladimir Putin** eventually leaves office.

Which of the competing factions within **Russia's elite** comes to the fore, and whether the elite remains cohesive or fractures as a result.

The degree to which **public opinion** constrains Russia's leadership in its ability to pivot both on the war and on domestic policy.

The role and position of the **Russian opposition**, including whether leading figures return from prison and exile.

Regional cohesion, including how any post-Putin regime that emerges in Moscow arranges relations with the country's regional decision-makers.

The disposition of each of these factors impinges on the others and has important implications for how a future Russian regime is likely to pursue its core geostrategic interests, the resources it will be able to bring to bear, and the trade-offs it is likely to perceive — and thus the challenges and opportunities that will face the US and Europe.

The most obvious place to start, of course, is with the war itself. Predicting the course and outcome of the fighting is beyond the scope of this paper, but the basic range of plausible near- to mid-term outcomes is both clear and fairly limited. We can rule out a wholesale Russian victory in the near term; Russia does not have the wherewithal to effect the complete military defeat and occupation of Ukraine. We can also rule out a negotiated peace settlement; neither Kyiv nor Moscow believes that it can achieve more at the negotiating table than it can on the battlefield, and neither Putin nor his successor will enjoy enough trust in Ukraine and the West more broadly to make a genuine peace deal feasible. That, in turn, leaves three basic options:

A wholesale Ukrainian victory. While Ukraine's 2023 counteroffensives have not recaptured significant amounts of territory, it remains more likely that Ukraine will push Russian troops entirely out of Ukraine than that Russia will capture Kyiv. Such an eventuality would call into question Russia's ability to pursue all three of its core geostrategic objectives: Its attempts at regional domination would be shattered, Western powers would emerge triumphant, and significant (though perhaps not insurmountable) challenges would arise for the Russian regime at home. An incontrovertible Russian defeat is the necessary condition for a transition of power to forces diametrically opposed to Putin's interpretation of Russia's geostrategic interests, including potentially democratic forces, but in itself it is not a sufficient condition. It is equally if not more likely that power would flow to revanchist forces that would seek to avenge Russia's losses over time.



Photo: Vladimir Putin, Commander-in-Chief reviews warships in Saint Petersburg with Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and Commander-in-Chief of the Navy Nikolai Evmenov.

An uneasy cease-fire. If fatigue sets in on both sides, and if the willingness and/or ability of the US and Europe to provide significant new military and economic assistance to Ukraine wanes, a de facto cease-fire — or the reduction of fighting to a considerably lower level of engagement — may emerge. While negotiations may help establish a line of control and provide some visibility and predictability, there will be no discussion of conflict resolution, akin to the first and second Minsk Agreements of 2015. Russia and Ukraine would remain at war and casualties would continue to occur along any agreed line of control. Replicating its behavior in Georgia post-2008, Russia would be likely to keep pushing the line forward, while entrenching its positions and rebuilding its military and economy for renewed fighting at a time of Moscow's choosing. Ostensibly irredentist claims to "Russian territory temporarily occupied by Ukraine" in the four illegally "annexed" Ukrainian oblasts would continue to motivate Russian politics, helping Putin remain in power or ensuring that a successor hews to his line.

A protracted war of attrition. If a stable cease-fire is unavailable or unattractive to either side, the fighting will continue, likely at a pace and cost similar to what we have seen in 2023, both along the front lines and in cities across Ukraine, which have been and would remain subject to regular and deadly bombardment of civilian targets. The implications of this state of affairs are in many ways akin to those that would be obtained under an uneasy cease-fire, including maintaining Russia's current geostrategic posture indefinitely and increasing the concentration of power in the hands of the Kremlin. However, a higher-temperature conflict also multiplies the stresses on the Russian system, making events such as Yevgeny Prigozhin's mutiny in June 2023 more likely and increasing the plausibility of an eventual wholesale military defeat.

Political Transit

One way or another, and regardless of the disposition of the war, Vladimir Putin will eventually leave office. While it does not appear likely that he will do so in the immediate future, it would be foolish to rule it out entirely, if the task is to prepare for the full range of plausible futures. As such, it is helpful to review the basic configurations of regime change in Russia.

Any transition phase would bring about political instability. The absence of an established process for choosing a new leader, along with the sway of informal structures over formal institutions and patronage connections within the “network state,” complicates the task of efficiently handling the transition and fostering the establishment of a successor government.

The key initial variable in any regime-change scenario is whether the change of leadership is planned. In some cases, this might happen because a leader cultivates a successor, as Nursultan Nazarbayev did in Kazakhstan. In others, it might happen because the leader is elderly and a transfer of power thus seems only a matter of time, as was the case in the Soviet Union in the early 1980s. Neither of those conditions appears plausible in Russia, however, at least in the near future; Putin has had ample opportunity to transfer power to a successor and has shown no appetite for doing so, and he appears to be in reasonably good health.

Assuming, then, that regime change happens in an unplanned manner, the next key variable is whether the existing ruling elite can come to a consensus on who takes over. A consensual transition would allow the successor to maintain most or all of the levers of power currently enjoyed by Putin, including control over the media, the Duma, the coercive apparatus, and the commanding heights of the economy, although the need to seek compromise with competing groups within the elite may lead to increased autonomy for some.

If the elite cannot agree on a consensus candidate to succeed Putin, then the process becomes competitive. The contours of the competition will depend in large measure on how much the competitors think is at stake. If competitors in one camp or another are convinced that there will be no place for them in the new system, then they have every incentive to prevent the emergence of a new system unless they are in charge at all costs. If elites cannot countenance losing the battle for the Kremlin — either because they fear for their survival or that they’ll be permanently excluded from the political game — they are thus likely to fight, or at least threaten violence. For a time, at least, this will force Russia to focus more on internal conflict than on external conflict, but the end state will depend on who comes to power and the resources they have gained and lost along the way.

Securing Europe

If the various elite factions find that they cannot arrive at a consensus but decide that they don't want to fight it out, they are likely to decide the contest via an election. This scenario is particularly plausible if the balance of force available to the elite factions is relatively even, and thus if nobody has the certainty of victory. Instead of risking a winner-takes-all fight to the death, the elite could — as many authoritarian elites have in the past — decide to fall back on constitutional procedure.

Given the state of Russian politics and political institutions, it is difficult to imagine that such an election would be free and fair. It would, as with all of Russia's post-Soviet elections, be subject to fraud and manipulation. But even on that basis, it would be competitive, to the extent that the winner is not a forgone conclusion. It would also fracture the regime's monopoly on the media and on the political space more broadly, helping a plethora of new conversations to emerge out into the open. To many people, it might even feel like democracy.

In such a scenario, however, anyone trying to argue that the war was a mistake will face the inertia of public opinion. It is likely, then, that such elections would bring to power someone who in important ways sounds a lot like Putin and pursues many of the same policies. And as a result, while there may be some shifts toward opening to the West, and while the power structure itself may begin to change, there is not likely to be a short-term improvement of Russia's international standing.

Bears and Foxes

Western sanctions policy has been predicated in part on the idea that the elite's interests and those of the Putin regime are not entirely aligned in the context of this war. The war, after all, has cut elites off from their assets in the West, thus depriving them of autonomy vis-à-vis the Kremlin, and robbed Russia's super rich of some \$100 billion in wealth.³⁶ There has been no appreciable elite resistance to the war, however.

In fact, to the extent we have seen a visible elite fissure, it has been around the question of whether Putin is fighting hard enough. It is impossible to know whether people like the late Yevgeny Prigozhin argued for Russia to fight harder because they were ideologically committed to the cause, or because they found the cause materially beneficial. There is no question, however, that a significant number of Russian elites have found and continue to find the war and geopolitical confrontation with the West materially beneficial, regardless of their ideological orientation. Others may have devised ways to justify what they personally view as a challenging and unwanted situation, or have come to terms with it. Consequently, these same individuals may easily adjust to significantly different circumstances and similarly offer their unwavering support to a leadership succeeding Putin.

Focusing on material interests rather than ideology, however, reveals one evident dividing line among the Russian elite, running between those who believe that long-term geopolitical confrontation with the West works in their favor, and those who believe that they would be better off with a return to something approaching the status quo ante.³⁷ If the former group (call them the “Bears”) captures Putin’s attention or comes to power, some version of this war is likely to continue, and Russia’s configuration of interests as described earlier in this paper are also likely to remain the same.

If the latter group (call them the “Foxes”) is in ascendance, however, the improvement in Russia’s relationship with Ukraine and the West is only likely to be temporary and limited. This is because any configuration of the current Russian elite who come to power post-war or post-Putin is most likely to seek to replicate the kleptocratic and patronage relationships at the core of the Putin system, just with greater efficiency and less friction. For a time, that might lead elites to seek a kind of reconciliation — but unless Russia’s internal power structure fundamentally changes, the dynamics that brought it into conflict with the West will eventually reemerge. Only if there are substantial and enduring political transformations would it be possible for Russia’s strategic culture to undergo any modifications.

If the Bears — current Russian elites who have come to see their material interests best served by continuing large-scale geopolitical confrontation with the West — dominate the negotiating process through which the elite choose a successor, they will, in all likelihood, need to keep at least some of the Foxes in the system, as they

Table Two: Who's Who? Bears and Foxes

Looking forward, Russia will likely be governed either by “Bears”, who thrive on conflict with the West, and “Foxes”, who may seek a partial détente abroad while maintaining autocracy at home. Western governments should encourage the Foxes, where possible, but recognize that both groups pose a threat to regional and global peace and security.

Bears	Foxes
Aleksandr V. Bortnikov — Director of the Federal Security Service (age 72)	Andrei R. Belousov — First Deputy Prime Minister (age 64)
Sergei V. Chemezov — Director of Rostec (age 71)	German O. Gref — President of Sberbank (age 59)
Dmitry A. Medvedev — Deputy Chairman of the Security Council (age 58)	Sergei V. Kirienko — First Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration (age 61)
Sergei E. Naryshkin — Director of the Foreign Intelligence Service (age 69)	Sergei V. Lavrov — Minister of Foreign Affairs (age 73)
Nikolai P. Patrushev — Secretary of the Security Council (age 72)	Mikhail V. Mishustin — Prime Minister (age 57)
Sergei K. Shoigu — Minister of Defense (age 68)	Elvira S. Nabiullina — Head of the Central Bank (age 60)
Gennady N. Timchenko — Owner of the Volga Group (age 71)	Igor I. Shuvalov — Chairman of VEB.RF (age 56)
Nikolai P. Tokarev — President of Transneft (age 72)	Anton G. Siluanov — Minister of Finance (age 60)
Vyacheslav V. Volodin — Speaker of the Duma (age 59)	Sergei S. Sobyanin — Mayor of Moscow (age 65)
Viktor V. Zolotov — Head of the National Guard (age 69)	Yury P. Trutnev — Deputy Prime Minister (age 67)

Securing Europe

occupy key posts and have key technocratic skills. Their overarching aim, however, will be to keep the Foxes and their interests in the financial sector and the digital economy in subordinate positions, while maintaining the extraordinary levels of defense spending — expected to hit \$109 billion in 2024, which is 29.4% of Russia's total proposed expenditures — from which the Bears have so greatly benefitted.³⁸

With the Bears ascendant, the world would witness a continuation of Russia's current policies: Russia will remain at war in Ukraine (assuming war is ongoing at the time of transition), its structural conflict with the West will be cemented, and it will seek an ever closer relationship with China. Russia will maintain its war economy, retool, and prepare for the next war, and the war after that. Levels of political repression will increase, and the system will likely develop a more concerted political ideology to justify and explain the final abandonment of Russia's erstwhile openness.

If, however, the Foxes — current Russian elites who see their interests best served by returning to something approaching life before the war — dominate the succession process, they will also need to keep their opponents around, less because of their skills than because trying to push them out of power would be too dangerous. Thus, while the Foxes would likely seek to push the state at least partially out of the private sector and reduce Putin's emphasis on defense and national security spending, they would nonetheless seek to compensate the Bears for their diminished status by maintaining at least some the volume of rents available to them. They would also face significant challenges to social stability, particularly in the early phases after a change in leadership.

To serve the interests of the ascendant Foxes and placate the recalcitrant Bears, Russia in this scenario would seek to end the conflict, reduce sanctions, and reintegrate, as far as possible, with the West. Because this is still an authoritarian transition, the ruling Foxes would enjoy control over all of the things Putin currently controls, including the media, the coercive apparatus, the Duma, and so on. As a result, it is politically possible to engineer a shift in public opinion, so long as the propaganda machine projects the leader as a reflection of social consensus. Depending on how well this goes, it may even be possible to restore Ukrainian territorial integrity and make reparation payments.

The Foxes' power in this scenario, however, is predicated on them maintaining and even improving the same kleptocratic and patronage practices that made Putin so successful in his earlier years, and that drove Russia inexorably into conflict with Europe and the US. As a result, any improvement in Russia's relations with the leading Western powers is likely to be temporary.

Thus, while it is plausible that, depending on who comes to power, an elite-led regime change could result in a temporary amelioration of the Russian threat, it would be a mistake to assume that such an amelioration could be long-lasting. A genuine and permanent reorientation of Russian foreign policy toward a long-term rapprochement with the West in such a scenario is not plausible.



Bears Медведи



Aleksandr V. Bortnikov
Director
Federal Security Service
Age 72



Sergei K. Shoigu
Minister of Defense
Age 68



Sergei V. Chemezov
Director
Rostec
Age 71



Gennady N. Timchenko
Owner
Volga Group
Age 71



Dmitry A. Medvedev
Deputy Chairman
Security Council
Age 58



Nikolai P. Tokarev
President
Transneft
Age 72



Sergei E. Naryshkin
Director
Foreign Intelligence Service
Age 69



Vyacheslav V. Volodin
Speaker
Duma of the Russian Federation
Age 59



Nikolai P. Patrushev
Secretary
Security Council
Age 72



Viktor V. Zolotov
Head
National Guard
Age 69



Foxes Лисы



Andrei R. Belousov
First Deputy Prime Minister
Age 64



Elvira S. Nabiullina
Head
Central Bank of Russia
Age 60



German O. Gref
President
Sberbank
Age 59



Igor I. Shuvalov
Chairman
VEB.RF
Age 56



Sergei V. Kirienko
First Deputy Chief of Staff
Presidential Administration
Age 61



Anton G. Siluanov
Minister of Finance
Age 60



Sergei V. Lavrov
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Age 73



Sergei S. Sobyanin
Mayor
City of Moscow
Age 65



Mikhail V. Mishustin
Prime Minister
Age 57



Yury P. Trutnev
Deputy Prime Minister
Age 67

Containing Russia

The Democrats

Russia's pro-democratic opposition was largely a spent force well before February 2022. Increasing repression beginning in 2017 had sent increasing numbers of activists, journalists, and ordinary dissident citizens into exile, and many to prison. A year and a half into the war, the situation has only gotten worse: Leading opposition figures Alexei Navalny, Ilya Yashin, and Vladimir Kara-Murza are serving long prison terms on political charges, while their comrades and scores of independent journalists attempt — largely in vain — to carry on the fight from abroad. While they play an important role in helping to get information in and out of Russia, supporting Ukrainian and Russian refugees, and advocating on behalf of political prisoners, as well as organizing largely futile acts of resistance on the ground, there is little sense that any of these efforts can bring about a change in the makeup or direction of the Russian regime.

Nonetheless, a change in the makeup or direction of the Russian regime could, in certain circumstances, lead to a significant change in the position and role of Russia's democratic opposition. Any government that seeks to stabilize or even improve relations with the West — even if only on a temporary basis — is likely to improve the position of Russia's political prisoners and exiles as an olive branch. If the process of political transit also involves more or less pluralist elections, as described above, the elite may find it expedient to allow members of Russia's democratic opposition to contest those elections. The Bears, if they come to power, may make symbolic concessions to the pro-democratic opposition to placate the Foxes. The Foxes, if they come to power, may seek to co-opt the pro-democratic opposition as a hedge against the Bears and an olive branch to the West. Opposition leaders and their supporters in the West, then, should be wary of manipulation and false promises.

Should the position of the opposition change, the consequences are inherently unpredictable. Russia's current democratic opposition — which emerged as a force in the 2011-12 Bolotnaya protest movement — has never had the chance to contest an election with unimpeded access to both the ballot and the media. As a result, it is impossible to know what kind of support they might be able to garner if they are allowed to compete more or less openly. Moreover, if they are given amnesties as part of this process, it may communicate to the broader Russian public that an injustice had been done, which could help alleviate some of the skepticism with which many Russians have tended to view the democratic opposition.

If elites turn to an election to decide who should rule, it would be to select among existing establishment groups — not to bring in a new president from the outside. As a result, if the democratic opposition generates a groundswell of support, the elite are likely to push back, restricting their ability to mobilize and justifying such restrictions with reference to the support opposition activists and leaders have



Photo: Opposition politician and publicist Vladimir Kara-Murza makes the sign of the cross at the place of Boris Nemtsov's death in Moscow, February 27, 2021.
Credit: Michał Siergiejewicz/Wikimedia Commons

received from the West. Such attempts at suppression can backfire, leading to even more mobilization, but they are more likely to succeed — and so the most likely role to be played by Russia's democratic opposition is to legitimize by their presence an election they are unlikely to win.

In the unlikely but still plausible event that the democratic opposition does enter into power after Putin's departure, it would not guarantee the establishment of democracy in Russia. Democratically minded politicians, after all, took control of Russia in December 1991 and proceeded to sow the seeds of the present autocracy. Once in power, they would face powerful opposition from the old elite and large sections of the public, as well as a state apparatus built for corruption and conflict; the potential for failure is clear. Nevertheless, the arrival in power of the democratic opposition is the only near- to mid-term route to a genuine break from Russia's long-standing geostrategic orientation.

Containing Russia

The Russian Public

Russians' antipathy to the US, Europe, and Ukraine was close to an eight-year low when Putin decided to go to war.³⁹ Even since the war began, while approximately 70% of Russians express support for the so-called "special military operation," there is evidence that much of this support is passive.⁴⁰ While most Russians will support whatever course of action Putin pursues, a majority prefer negotiations to continued fighting (even if they aren't ready to make concessions) and favor improving relations with the West.⁴¹

Nonetheless, this support — passive or otherwise — has been more than sufficient to allow Russia to continue fighting at increasing cost to its own citizens and with rising levels of atrocity in Ukraine. Most Russians' reaction to the war has been not to react at all, regardless of political orientation or valence: pictures of atrocities from Ukraine, soldiers coming back in body bags, drones hitting buildings in Moscow, the arrest of nationalist figure Igor Girkin, or the death of the warlord Yevgeny Prigozhin — none of these have had any appreciable effect on Russian public opinion.

The degree to which this state of affairs is enabled by repression is difficult to ascertain, although it almost certainly plays a role. A larger role, however, seems to be played by a long-standing culture of political inertia, in which Russian citizens tend not to respond to events that occur outside the realm of their lives, and to seek individual rather than collective solutions when problems do occur in their lives. Even servicemen's wives and mothers — who have traditionally been at the heart of anti-war mobilization in Russia — have remained largely silent. Many of those who fled the country since the war began did so not because they supported Ukraine or opposed Putin, but because they simply didn't want to have to fight.

As a result, there is little evidence to suggest that ordinary Russians would demand that this war be carried forward, whether under Putin or anyone else, or that they would pull Putin down if he fails to obtain a victory. But there is equally little to suggest that ordinary Russians would demand — under Putin or any other leader — an end to the fighting or a restoration of the status quo ante.

The most plausible assumption, then, is that most Russians would remain largely inert and follow their leadership in virtually any direction, whether on this war or the next one, so long as that leadership is understood to enjoy consensus support across society. If, however, there is a scenario in which that sense of consensus breaks down, then public opinion may come into play in a more active manner, as would-be successors to Putin vie for public support. In such a scenario, the outcome would be fundamentally unpredictable — but the basic human tendency is toward consistency of expressed opinion over time. Thus, people who have spent the first years of the war expressing support are unlikely to abandon that support during a political contest.

Russian Public Opinion

Do You Think that Military Action Should Continue Now or Peace Negotiations Should Begin?

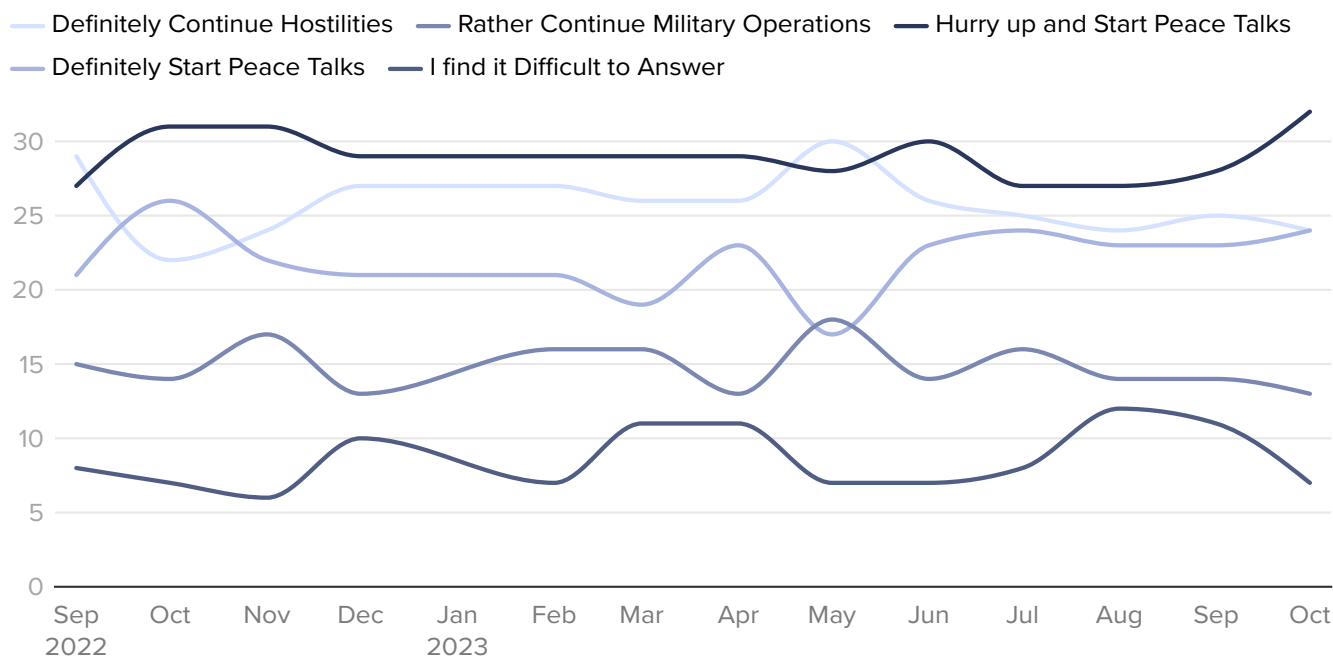


Chart: Center for European Policy Analysis • Source: Levada Center

The Regions

A country as large and diverse as Russia cannot be ruled from Moscow alone. Any process of political change will provoke responses in Russia's regions. The current relationship between the Kremlin and the regions — in which regional governors are on salary with little functional autonomy, tasked with extracting revenue and compliance from their regions for the benefit of the system — masks significant underlying cleavages and imbalances, which can return to the fore. As a result, whoever succeeds Putin will need to either rapidly reassert Putin's prerogative in relations with the regions, or devise a new federal bargain.

The process of transit from Putin to a successor — even if that transit is carefully stage-managed by a consolidated elite — will be perceived by regional leaders as a moment of weakness. For some regional leaders, particularly those who owe their positions to Putin and who have no genuine local power base, this will be a moment of anxiety, as they seek to secure their positions with the new leadership. For others, particularly those who enjoy a strong local power base — like Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin, St. Petersburg head Georgii Poltavchenko, or Tatarstan's Rustam Minnikhanov, to say nothing of Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov — it will look like an opportunity to renegotiate their relationships with Moscow, perhaps gaining more political and fiscal autonomy.

How those negotiations play out will depend in large measure on who comes to power in Moscow, as well as the economic situation and the new regime's ability to buy off different political constituencies. If it is the Bears, with their emphasis



Photo: Head of the Chechen Republic Ramzan Kadyrov (C), attends a military parade on Victory Day, which marks the 77th anniversary of the victory over Nazi Germany in World War Two, in the Chechen capital Grozny, Russia May 9, 2022. Credit: REUTERS/Chingis Kondarov

on national security and geopolitical confrontation, ambitious regional leaders are likely to be replaced by more subservient suzerains. If it is the Foxes, with their emphasis on economic enrichment, more flexible bargains may be struck. The center-periphery relationship will also depend significantly on the popularity and perceived strength of Putin's successor. A successor who is seen as strong and who enjoys broad nationwide popularity (even if only thanks to propaganda) will be able to use regional publics to hem in governors. By contrast, a successor who is seen as weak and unpopular will be vulnerable to attack and disobedience from governors whose powerbases may be comparatively stronger.

Russia's regions, of course, are not created equal, and that, too, will be a source of challenge for the new regime. Many regions — including ethnic republics such as Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, and Chechnya, as well as Russian-majority regions in Siberia and the Far East — have a strong sense of local identity and a residual resentment of rule from Moscow. Others, especially the Muslim-majority republics of the North Caucasus, have fresh memories of brutalization. And still others, such as Sakha-Yakutia or the Komi Republic, continue to see their tremendous natural resource endowments shipped away, with little of that wealth reinvested in the region. The resulting friction has historically been difficult for Moscow to manage, and it has been ameliorated only under a flood of liquidity from Russia's post-1999 oil boom. It is thus possible that the post-Putin federal bargain will not suit all regions, and fragmentation — particularly at the country's edges — may result.

Securing Ukraine

Defeating Russia in Ukraine is the crux of successful containment. With respect to both the current crisis and to the defense and promotion of the West's long-term strategic interests, allowing Russia to win communicates both to Putin and to governments around the region and the world that Russia is incontrovertibly dominant in the post-Soviet space, leaving Russia's other neighbors little choice but to fall into line. With Ukraine subjugated, Moscow would conclude that it enjoys free rein as well in Belarus and Moldova, the South Caucasus and Central Asia — and would likely seek to exercise that self-claimed prerogative. By contrast, a Russian defeat in Ukraine clearly communicates that the US and Europe are not inclined to let Russia limit the sovereignty and autonomy of its neighbors.⁴²

The first task in containing Russia, then, is to prevent its military — and then its political and economic — domination of Ukraine. That means more than simply helping Ukraine win the war, though that is where it starts. Containment also requires ensuring that Ukraine wins the peace through successful long-term reconstruction and recovery, and through reforms that will harden the country's soft targets by reducing the role of oligarchs, strengthening civil society and democracy, and ensuring that Russia pays a just price for its crimes.

Russia as a Threat and a Neighbor

It is common to note that Russia's invasion of Ukraine did not begin in February 2022. From a Ukrainian perspective, however, Russian aggression also did not really begin in February 2014, with the occupation of Crimea and intervention in the Donbas.⁴³ Russia has historically viewed Ukraine as a territory rightly subject to Moscow's influence and control. From the Pereyaslav Agreement of 1654 to Ukraine's independence in 1991 and thereafter, Russia's responses have been marked by attempts to exert political, economic, cultural, and military dominion.⁴⁴ The justification for such behavior is so deeply rooted in decades and centuries of Russian internal doctrine and propaganda and continues to be peddled through Putin's claim of a common destiny that, even if Russia undergoes profound political change, it is likely to remain a threat to Ukraine for generations to come.⁴⁵

In principle, the surest guarantee of Ukrainian security would be a Russia that no longer harbors any imperialist ambitions. In reality, however, such a Russia is only likely to emerge decades into the future, if at all. As explained later in this report, most plausible vectors of Russia's near- and mid-term political development point to continued aggression. The key to successful containment thus hinges on the sustained deterrence of Russia in the long run.

Containing Russia

From Kyiv's point of view, then, the enduring threat posed by Russia not just to Ukraine's territory, but to its very independence and nationhood, cannot be underestimated, ignored, or wished away. To be secure, Ukraine must be prepared for the possibility that Russia will remain an ongoing and existential threat. Moreover, even an outright victory in the current war will not alter the essentially asymmetric nature of the conflict. Russia will always possess superior human and financial resources and can regroup, over time, for a second strike.⁴⁶ The persistent Russian threat, meanwhile, need not be of a military nature to be critical. There remains the potential for significant action to Ukraine's progress toward recovery, reconstruction, and EU and NATO integration. The post-conflict landscapes in Crimea and the Donbas region, in particular, may present ample chances for Russian intervention.

Theoretically, there are multiple routes to reliable security for Ukraine. One is to militarize, with Western technological backing, along the lines of Israel, South Korea, or Taiwan. Another is to build a suite of unilateral arrangements that would allow Ukraine to rely on the deterrent capacity of the US, the UK, Poland, or others. In practice, though, while arguments exist about how and when it should happen, there is only one effective solution: NATO membership.⁴⁷

Ukraine does not have the wherewithal to pursue independent militarization on the scale needed to withstand indefinite Russian aggression, nor can it afford the requisite investment while also trying to rebuild from the current war. Flexible unilateral arrangements may be a necessary stop-gap solution, but they lead to diffuse decision-making and invite further provocations and aggression from Russia, while also sending a signal to international investors that Ukraine's long-term future may be precarious. Only full membership in the core Western defensive alliance can provide solid deterrence against Russian attack.⁴⁸

Once in place, multilateral security arrangements will provide the deterrence Ukraine needs to focus on reconstruction and recovery, and on the development of Ukraine's own defensive capabilities, such that Ukraine can transition away from being a subject of the Euro-Atlantic security order toward being an active constituent of that order. Ukraine will need to invest in increased military forces and in an expanded and modernized defense manufacturing sector, giving it ownership over its own security within the alliance.

Constraining Russia from Renewed Aggression

Along all of the vectors described above — from the war itself, through reconstruction, the hardening of Ukraine's soft targets, and the establishment of post-war justice — Russia can be expected to resist. Even if Russia is militarily defeated, Ukraine and the West must be prepared for Russia to revert to the soft-power and hybrid methods it has pursued against Ukraine since the early 2000s, and for those tactics to be a prelude for a new invasion.



Photo: A Ukrainian soldier sits atop a BMP-1 infantry-fighting vehicle during Exercise Combined Resolve. Credit: NATO

After the current war is won, the US and Europe would thus find it more cost effective to prevent re-escalation by constraining Russia's ability to return to its habitual trajectory in Ukraine. In the first instance, this would mean resisting the temptation to see a return to non-kinetic aggression as progress. While deterrence against military attack is essential, it is equally important for Western powers to establish robust deterrence against "softer" forms of interference and disruption.

To this end, the US and Europe will need to maintain an ongoing targeted sanctions regime well beyond the end of the current hostilities. These sanctions would target the following:

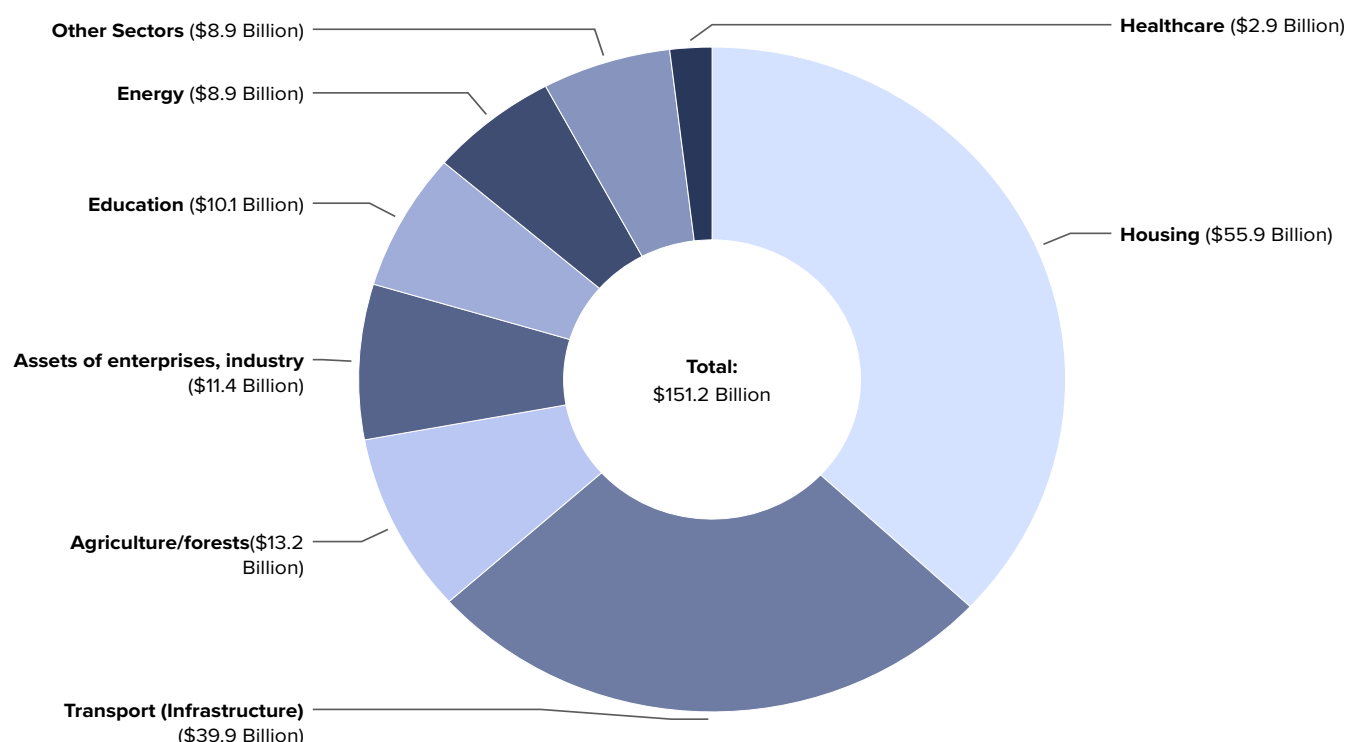
- Russian state and nonstate actors — including Russian actors domiciled outside Russia itself — that attempt to interfere in the Ukrainian media space and/or electoral politics.

- Russian state and nonstate economic actors that attempt to interfere in the governance and productivity of the Ukrainian economy, including its international trading relations.
- Ukrainian oligarchs and oligarch-linked assets that attempt to undermine de-oligarchization, anti-corruption, and the strengthening of the rule of law in Russia.
- Russian and other defendants in internationally recognized tribunals for war crimes, crimes of aggression, and other offenses, regardless of jurisdiction, as well as Russian and non-Russian actors that provide shelter and succor to defendants attempting to avoid justice.
- Russian state and nonstate actors that have profited from the occupation and the theft of Ukrainian property.
- Russian state and nonstate entities that attempt to avoid performance of reparations obligations, as well as non-Russian entities that provide shelter and cover for reparations avoidance and sanctions avoidance.

Effective implementation of these sanctions will require close coordination among Kyiv, Washington, and Brussels to ensure that sanctions targeting and enforcement are responsive to the governance challenges faced by Ukraine, and that targeted actors are not able to exploit differences in Ukrainian, American, and European law and jurisprudence.

In addition to these measures, the US and Europe may find it expedient to suspend Russia's participation in international organizations and political formats until Moscow can demonstrate a consistently constructive approach to the restoration of Ukrainian sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national security. Clear benchmarks should be established, in consultation with Kyiv, to ensure that both Russia and Ukraine have predictability and confidence in both the rewards for good behavior and the consequences of continued malfeasance.

Damages to Ukraine's Economic Sectors



Winning the Peace

As the Marshall Plan was after World War II, so too is Ukrainian reconstruction much more than just an economic project. Ukraine's post-war success equates to Russia's strategic failure. It is also an investment in a more secure and prosperous world, and thus in vital American and European interests. Whether Ukraine emerges from the war successful will set the precedent for future conflicts and determine American and Western credibility. Moreover, Ukraine is a key player in global energy, agricultural, and other commodity markets, without whom markets will remain unstable.⁴⁹

The US and Europe are already playing an important role in Ukrainian wartime resilience, and the rebuilding of critical infrastructure — particularly in the energy and transportation sectors — is well underway.⁵⁰ Looking further ahead, the US and Europe will need to provide a consistent and predictable level of support; assistance with public-sector capacity building; a clear pathway to EU integration, ensuring robust conditionality; and, of course, security. Critically, reconstruction and recovery should focus on more than just rebuilding what was destroyed, but on building a more efficient, productive, and secure Ukraine for the future. This includes hardening not only the governance of the Ukrainian economy, but also its physical security, through investment in distributed infrastructures that are harder to target and robust anti-aircraft defense systems (see Box One).

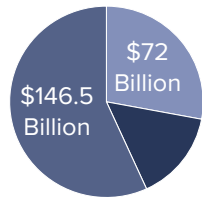
Reconstruction and Recovery

The destruction wrought by Russia's invasion varies from region to region, with areas closer to the front line and those having experienced occupation suffering the most damage. These regions in particular may encounter difficulties in attracting investment, causing them to lag in their recoveries and creating new regional imbalances, as well as opportunities for Russia to destabilize Ukraine. To mitigate this, the US should integrate the development and implementation of local projects into its support efforts, building on Ukraine's successful decentralization reforms and local authorities' role in managing wartime crises.

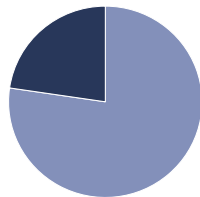
Territories that were under occupation will require particular care and support from the US in the restoration of Ukrainian power and the facilitation of reintegration. While such discussions have largely focused on Crimea, initiating discussions about the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts with Ukrainian civil society and Ukraine's international partners is equally important. Such discussions can also help elaborate recovery projects that impede Russia's ability to sow and capitalize on discord within and among Ukrainian communities. Another formidable obstacle will involve addressing domestic political and social reconciliation, which entails the unification of communities that have been torn apart, disrupted, and fractured by war and the significant population shifts since 2014.

Damage to Ukraine's Economic Sectors

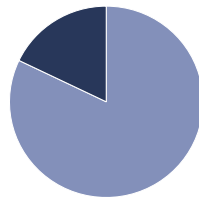
- Damages*** - Direct costs of destroyed or damaged physical assets and infrastructure; valued in monetary terms with costs estimated based on replacing or repairing physical assets and infrastructure, considering the replacement price prevailing before the war.
- Losses*** - Changes in economic flows resulting from the war; valued in monetary terms, for example, increased operating costs, revenue losses etc.
- Needs**** - Value associated with the resumption of pre-war normality through activities such as repair and restoration, including a premium linked to building back better principles (e.g., improved energy efficiency, modernization efforts, and sustainability standards), as well as factors such as global inflation, surge pricing due to volume of construction, higher insurance, etc. Needs do not equal the sum of damages and losses.



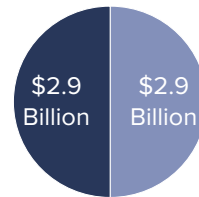
Social Sectors
Total:
\$257.9 Billion



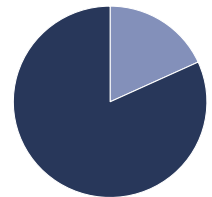
Housing
Total:
\$72.3 Billion



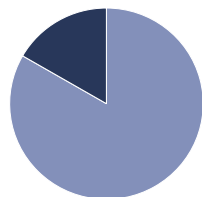
Education
Total:
\$12.3 Billion



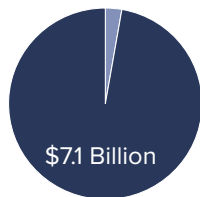
Healthcare
Total:
\$5.8 Billion



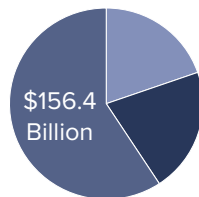
Culture, Sport, Tourism
Total:
\$13.2 Billion



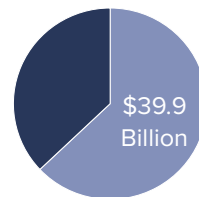
Administrative Buildings
Total:
\$0.6 Billion



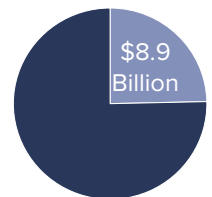
Social Protection and Livelihood
Total:
\$7.3 Billion



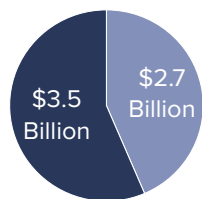
Infrastructure Sectors
Total:
\$264 Billion



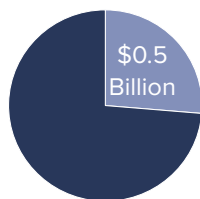
Transport
Total:
\$63.4 Billion



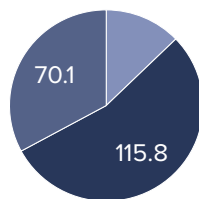
Energy
Total:
\$36.1 Billion



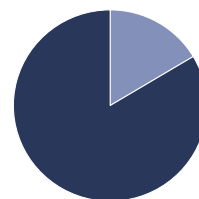
Utilities
Total:
\$6.2 Billion



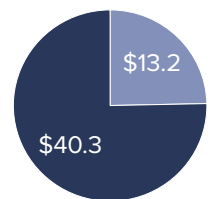
Digital
Total:
\$1.9 Billion



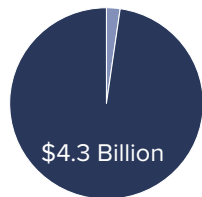
Productive Sectors
Total:
213.1



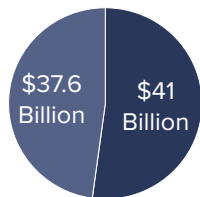
Commerce and Industry
Total:
\$85.2 Billion



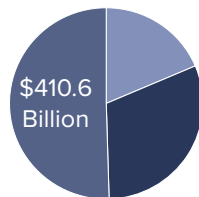
Agriculture/Forests
Total:
\$53.5



Financial
Total:
\$4.4 Billion



De-mining
Total:
\$78.6 Billion



Total
Total:
\$813.5 Billion

*Latest assessment as of September 2023 by KSE Institute's Russia Will Pay project. **Latest assessment as of February 2023 by World Bank (RDNA2); needs do not equal the sum of damages and losses.

Chart: Center for European Policy Analysis • Source: Benjamin Hilgenstock, Kyiv School of Economics Institute



Photo: Destroyed windows of the markets in Sviatohirsk after the hard combats between the Russian and Ukrainian armies for the control of the city. Credit: Celestino Arce/NurPhoto

There is also a critical role for the US and other Western governments to play in facilitating war insurance mechanisms to encourage private capital to invest in Ukraine, stimulating economic recovery and growth. Having helped to channel post-war investment to recovery projects around the world, US experience and expertise can be vital here.

Similarly vital is the US role in the establishment of a Project Implementation Unit in Ukraine.⁵¹ The challenge Ukraine faces now and will face in the future is not so much a shortage of funds, but the effective use of existing resources. The task of undertaking thousands of projects simultaneously across the country is daunting and will require Western technical assistance. The ineffective use of funds, or perceived ineffectiveness, will sap Western willingness to support Ukraine and provide an opening for renewed Russian military and/or hybrid intervention.

Finally, a successful Ukrainian recovery effort will require clear political leadership from Washington. While impressive in their scope and ambition, the projects currently addressing recovery — including those at the US Agency for International Development, the EU's Multi-agency Donor Coordination Platform, the World Bank, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development — are technocratic in nature and lack the leverage to unlock new sources of funding.⁵²

The appointment of former Commerce Secretary Penny Pritzker as the US special envoy for Ukraine's recovery is an important step in this direction, which will need to be matched on the European side.⁵³ Critically, only concerted political leadership will resolve the problem of how to access the \$320+ billion in frozen Russian assets.⁵⁴

Box One: Ukrainian Reconstruction and Recovery

For a full analysis of the near-, mid- and long-term challenges of Ukrainian reconstruction, see CEPA's upcoming report, *Resilience, Reconstruction, Recovery: The Path Ahead for Ukraine*. The following passage is an excerpt from that report.

The damage wrought by Russia's invasion of Ukraine is difficult to overestimate. Dollar terms — which put the scale of rebuilding at anywhere between \$400 billion and \$1 trillion — do not fully reflect the reality of what is at stake. Beyond winning the war itself, restoring and reinforcing Ukraine's prosperity, stability, and security after nearly a decade of sustained Russian attack will reduce the likelihood of further conflicts in Ukraine and around the world, reestablish American and Western credibility on the world stage, rebalance global energy and commodity markets, and ensure the future of the European project. Failure to restore Ukraine's prosperity, stability, and security, by contrast, will usher in a world of more war, less development, and broken leadership.

- The agenda for Ukrainian recovery is clear. Western governments must:
- Maximize Ukraine's wartime resilience in the face of continued Russian aggression.
- Invest in the economy and infrastructure of Ukraine's future, rather than its past.
- Prepare for Ukraine's rapid integration into the European Union and NATO.
- Harden Ukraine's state, economy, and infrastructure against future threats.

While full-scale reconstruction will take place only after the fighting ends, the work of recovery begins now. Waiting for the war to end will only push success further into the future and increase costs to all involved. Instead, a phased approach to recovery and reconstruction — with clearly defined objectives and logically sequenced tasks at each stage — can underpin consistency of planning and implementation. This approach would involve three phases: wartime resilience, rapid rebuilding, and durable development (see Table Three).

De-Oligarchization

The removal from Ukrainian economic and political life of oligarchs — people with outsized degrees of political and economic influence, able to operate outside the normal strictures of the rule of law — is a prerequisite for Ukraine's accession to the EU. It is also a prerequisite for Ukrainian security.

Ukraine's oligarchs have long been both a direct and indirect channel for Russian interference. Some, such as Viktor Medvedchuk, have put their assets at the service of the Kremlin, using their media holdings and political networks to push Russian

Table Three: Recovery and Reconstruction Sequencing

	Objectives	Priorities for Ukraine	Priorities for the West
Wartime Resilience	Minimize destruction, Maintain Core Functions, Limit Displacement, Strategic Planning	Prioritize Triage, Monitoring and Planning, Alliance Formation	Military Support, Targeted Response, Investment Facilitation, Trade Facilitation, Resource Identification
Rapid Rebuilding	Restore Full Functionality, Encourage Return, Channeled Investment, Foundation for Integration, Flexible Defense,	Absorption of Aid, Absorption of Refugees, Legal and Structural Reform, Democratic Consolidation, Transitional Justice	Consistency of Support, Governmental Capacity-Building, Integration Pathway, EU Reform, Security Commitments, Reparations
Durable Development	Euro-Atlantic Integration, Transition to Value-Added, Right-Sizing, Strategic Defense	Development Goals, Privatization and Corporate Governance, Structural Transform	Full Economic and Security Integration, Structural and Cohesion Support

Table: Center for European Policy Analysis • Source: Kyiv School of Economics Institute

messaging and further Russian interests.⁵⁵ But even where such relationships do not exist, the corruption associated with the oligarchs gives rise to political disaffection, as well as chronic political fragmentation and potential for policy stalemate, which in turn creates an opening for Moscow to meddle. It is thus clearly in US and European interests to see Ukraine succeed in this endeavor.

The war itself has already solved part of this problem. The Russian seizure and/or destruction of industrial assets in the country's east and south, and the nationalization of stakes in strategic enterprises, has already and likely irrevocably altered the balance of economic power in the country. Significant strides, however, have also been made on the reform front. The passage in September 2021 of the so-called Oligarch Law was designed to identify oligarchs and restrict their activities.⁵⁶ Many inside and outside Ukraine, however, worry that the law is too focused on targeting individuals,⁵⁷ rather than undertaking systemic reforms, and thus that its enforcement is likely to be counterproductive.

The Venice Commission of the Council of Europe has thus called for the law's implementation to be deferred. Suggested amendments span judicial reform and antitrust regulations to lobbying controls and tax law. Equally important is the

Containing Russia

enhancement of transparency in public procurement, the reinforcement of media pluralism, and tighter anti-money laundering measures.⁵⁸

To ensure that an amended law is effective, Ukraine's Western partners will need to assist with monitoring and oversight, setting clear and consistent expectations for implementation and reporting, producing a focused action plan, and conducting regular impact assessments. Ukrainian citizens and civil society — and, indeed, the country's civil servants — will rely on Western leaders to hold the feet of Ukraine's political leadership to the fire on this.

There is homework for Western governments to do, too, however. Numerous Ukrainian oligarchs — including the gas magnate Dmytro Firtash, who is wanted on charges in Ukraine — continue to have significant assets in Western Europe and North America. The West's failure to act in these cases allows these oligarchs to escape justice and prevents the Ukrainian state from achieving de-oligarchization. Similarly, the failure of international lenders to stick to strict conditionality has repeatedly undermined the leverage of reform-minded Ukrainian governments vis-à-vis recalcitrant oligarchic interests. Unless both of these Western failures are addressed, the risk will remain of reemerging avenues of Russian influence.

Supporting Civil Society and Democracy

In Ukraine, civil society has long stood as a vital bulwark in support of sovereignty and in resistance to Russian aggression, as well as a critical source of pressure for domestic reform, particularly since 2014. Since Russia's initial aggression in 2014, civil society has played an integral role both in providing much-needed support to Ukraine's military, and in holding successive governments to their word on reform, particularly in the areas of anti-corruption, decentralization, and transparency. If Ukraine is to remain resilient and free, Ukrainian civil society will have to do even more.

Ukrainian civil society is the throughline in the country's democracy. As elected leaders come and go and as ideas shift, it is the country's vibrant landscape of civic organizations, analytical centers, universities, and independent media that have ensured that the country remains firmly pluralistic and respects citizens' civil and democratic rights. When Ukrainian leaders have sought to overstep their bounds, it has been Ukrainian civil society that's brought them down.⁵⁹

Ukraine, however, has never faced a test akin to what lies ahead. While the war rages, consolidation is more or less a given. The longer the war lasts, however, the more pressure there will be for a return to democratic accountability and the more difficult conversations Ukrainians will have about how to pursue the fight. Once the fighting stops and attention turns to winning the peace, the task becomes even

Ukrainian Public Opinion

With which of these statements regarding possible compromises to achieve peace with Russia do you agree to a greater extent?

— In order to achieve peace and preserve independence as soon as possible, Ukraine can give up some territory — Under no circumstances should Ukraine give up any of its territories, even if, because of this, the war will last longer and there will be threats to the preservation of independence. — Difficult to say

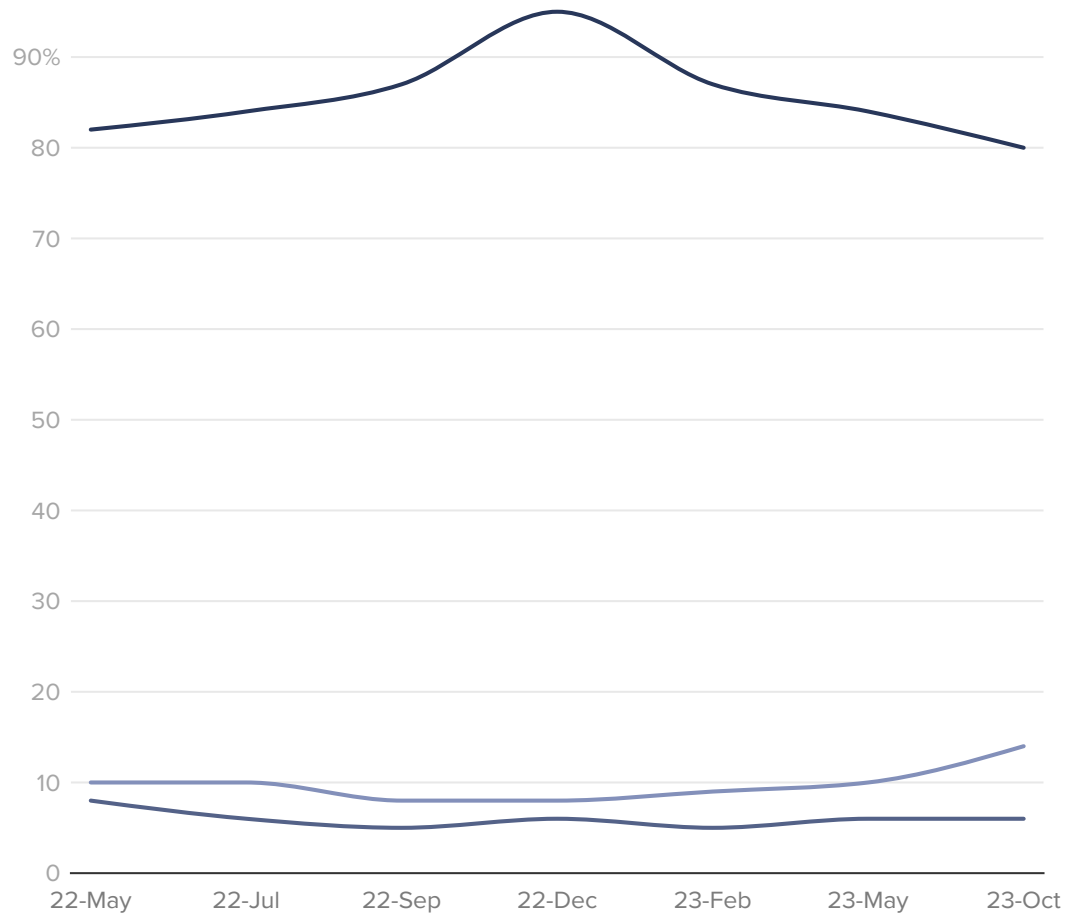


Chart: Center for European Policy Analysis • Source: Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS)

harder. Reconstruction, the return of refugees, and the reintegration of occupied territories will require civic oversight, nuanced debate, and social trust — all things civil society will need to deliver.

Western governments, then, will need to ensure that, as part of their support for Ukrainian security and recovery, they include both material and political support for Ukrainian civil society. This should include both funding for civil society capacity building and an insistence that all major governmental, intergovernmental, and public-private initiatives include civil society representation. This will help ensure that ordinary Ukrainian citizens have a say in how their country is secured and rebuilt, thus once again reducing opportunities for Russian interference.

Containing Russia

In particular, Ukrainian civil society has a critical role to play in a number of key sectors:

- *Transforming the country's military landscape.* Initiatives range from providing essential items that the armed forces lack to advocating for changes in everything from import regulations to the treatment of troops. Civil society groups continue to streamline support for wounded and disabled veterans, monitor defense procurement, and ensure the efficacy and transparency of defense expenditures.⁶⁰
- *Overseeing state and regional budgets.* Civil society scrutiny ensures fiscal transparency and public sector efficiency, making certain that resources are allocated to projects and programs that benefit the broader population. This watchdog function contributes to the country's economic stability and political accountability.⁶¹
- *Documenting Russian war crimes and addressing wartime humanitarian challenges.* This work extends to critical issues including maintaining bomb shelters, identifying and rescuing prisoners of war and kidnapped civilians, and supporting international tribunals seeking to bring Russia to justice.⁶²
- *Supporting veterans and military families.* Civil society and charitable initiatives help provide a crucial safety net and assistance to those who have themselves been injured in combat or who have lost loved ones.⁶³

Justice and Accountability

However it is or is not resolved, Russia's invasion of Ukraine demands a comprehensive framework for accountability and justice. While some organizations are attempting to hold Russian leadership accountable for their crimes, such as the International Criminal Court issuing arrest warrants for Vladimir Putin and Maria Lvova-Belova for the deportation of Ukrainian children, more venues and jurisdictions are needed.⁶⁴ Establishing a tribunal for Russian leadership, irrespective of jurisdiction and the presence of the accused, and without an inherent link to the disposition of the conflict, is an imperative step toward restoring justice and a rules-based order.

The international call for a tribunal to hold Russia's leadership to account is resolute. This pursuit is not contingent on the war's termination, but should rather be seen as a matter of urgency, given the gravity and ongoing escalation of the accusations. A trial held in absentia of the accused would not only signify the international community's commitment to justice, but also allow the world to address ongoing wrongdoings in a more concerted manner.⁶⁵



Photo: A volunteer places a cross with a number to a grave of one of unidentified people killed by Russian troops, as Russia's attack on Ukraine continues, during a mass burial ceremony in the town of Bucha, in Kyiv region, Ukraine September 2, 2022. Credit: REUTERS/Vladyslav Musiienko

Contending with the injustices of the war, however, requires more than just symbolic gestures. The first order of business is establishing and enforcing responsibility, along three dimensions:

- *Personal responsibility.* War criminals must be held individually accountable for their actions. Justice must prevail regardless of an individual's position or geographic location.⁶⁶
- *State responsibility.* Russia bears responsibility for the war and its consequences at the state level. This includes accountability both to the Ukrainian state as such and to private actors affected by the fighting.⁶⁷
- *Collective responsibility.* A true resolution of the war requires a profound recognition of the collective responsibility of Russian citizens for the crimes committed in their name. Such introspection is an essential step toward healing and reconciliation.⁶⁸

Finally, justice must involve reparations. These may begin with the transfer of frozen Russian assets to Ukraine, but should extend beyond this. Russia might, for example, be required in a settlement to provide some volume of energy free of charge to Ukraine and other countries that have suffered as a result of Russia's aggression.

Deterrence and Denial in Europe

In Russia's struggle to make the world safe for its brand of autocracy, the United States is the target. The battleground, however, is Europe. Rightly or wrongly, Moscow perceives Europe as the bleeding edge of Washington's attempt to reinforce democracy as "the only game in town" globally, and it is from the expansion of the European Union that Vladimir Putin feels most threatened. To blunt American power and give itself free rein to act both regionally and globally, Moscow feels it must not only block the eastward expansion of the European project, but contribute directly to the EU's destabilization.

Containing Russia, then, requires strengthening the political, diplomatic, and security ties that bind the transatlantic community together, making Europe robust enough to support its own defense in the framework of NATO, and removing the policy gaps between Brussels and Washington into which Moscow might otherwise be tempted to insert itself. Further, as in Ukraine, Europe will need to address its own soft targets, including pressures from authoritarian-populist governments and movements on EU and NATO cohesion, and Europe's permeability to Russian and other kleptocratic money. Finally, even as it seeks victory for Ukraine, Europe will need to gear up for further geopolitical confrontation with Russia over Belarus, Moldova, and the Black Sea, and to counteract Russian dominance in the South Caucasus and Central Asia.

Transatlantic Strategic Alignment

Russia's full-scale war on Ukraine has brought the United States and Europe closer than at any point since the end of the Cold War. Transatlantic alignment has been in evidence since the earliest days of the war, with nearly lockstep responses on sanctions and military support, which, while insufficient thus far to secure a clear Ukrainian victory, has nonetheless far outstripped what many believed was possible. Europe and the US share a clear political vision on the need to defeat Russia in Ukraine, isolate Moscow regionally and globally, and prevent it from destabilizing Europe and the world in the future.

This unity, however, is fragile. Strategic alignment is vulnerable to factors including electoral cycles, "Ukraine fatigue" and "war fatigue," and the greater willingness in some capitals and political circles to countenance a near-term return to the status quo ante in commercial relations with Moscow. As a result, the challenge lies in maintaining this alignment on Russia and extending that alignment to weather the dual challenge of adversarial relations with both Moscow and Beijing.



Photo: President Volodymyr Zelenskyy (Ukraine) with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg.
Credit: NATO via Flickr

Alignment is not easy. Russia remains a complex issue, where the lack of defensive muscle memory and connective tissue is exacerbated by the presence of residual reflexes toward collaboration and ostensibly productive engagement. There are important constituencies on both sides of the Atlantic who are likely to seek compromise with Moscow, extend olive branches, accommodate Moscow's revanchist demands, or even attempt another "reset" of relations.

The cost of unity increases still further when Russia and China are addressed simultaneously. The fact that it took two invasions of Ukraine, the downing of MH-17, a chemical weapons attack on British soil, and countless crimes against humanity to achieve even the current degree of support for Ukraine and unity versus Russia suggests that the threshold for achieving alignment remains high.

Because the key front lines in the conflict with Russia run through the European continent, much of the analysis and recommendations that follow focus on Europe. Indeed, if it is in America's strategic interest to contain Russia, then Europe is the indispensable ally, without which that objective cannot be achieved. Equally, however, Europe cannot attain that aim without America. European unity in support of Ukraine and in resistance to Russia has been made possible in large measure due to astute and sensitive American leadership, recognizing and accommodating Europe's complex interests while maintaining a resolute commitment to the security

US Public Opinion

Which would you prefer the US to do in the Russia-Ukraine conflict: Try and end the conflict as quickly as possible, even if it means allowing Russia to keep territory it has captured from Ukraine, or support Ukraine in reclaiming territory Russia has captured, even if it results in a more prolonged conflict between the two nations?

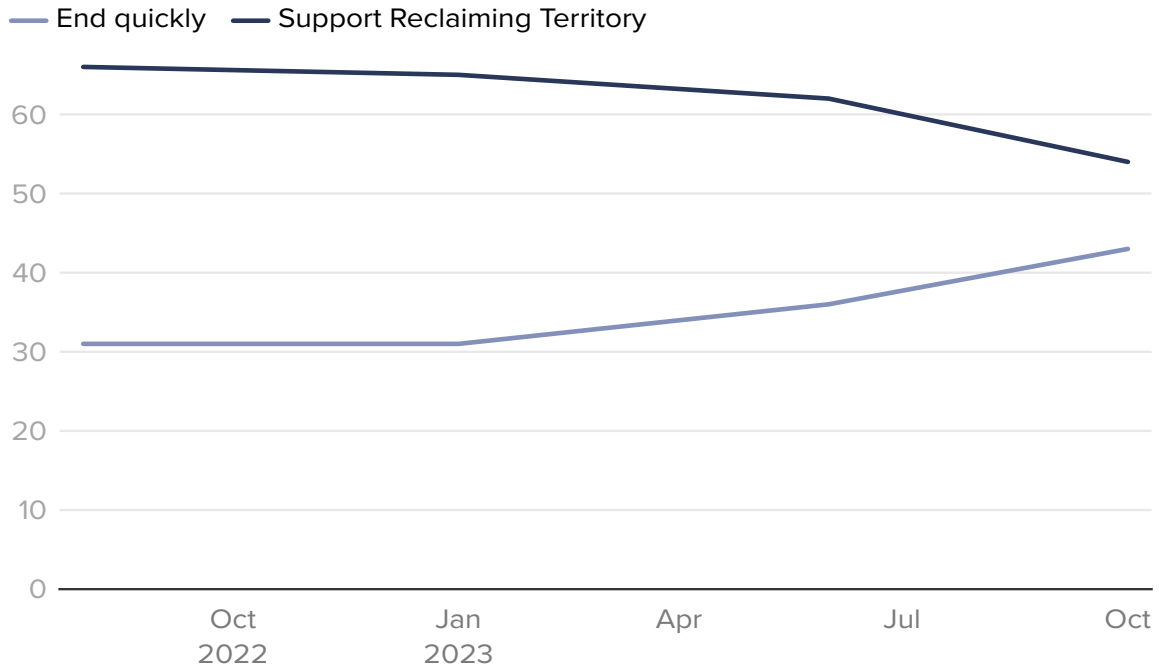


Chart: Center for European Policy Analysis • Source: Mohamed Younis, "American Views on the Ukraine War in 6 Charts," Gallup, November 2, 2023

of every inch of NATO territory. Maintaining unity in the future — without which Russia cannot be contained — will thus require continued American commitment not only to America's interests, but to the security of Europe itself.

Ultimately, defeating and constraining Russia while deterring China will require sensitive but resolute leadership from Washington. Short-sighted focuses on bones of political contention, such as the framing of the current transatlantic power imbalance, the optics of burden sharing, and the distribution of procurement contracts, should take a back seat to the strategic realization that the US and EU are locked into adversarial relations with Moscow and Beijing for the short, medium, and long terms.⁶⁹ Only a unified transatlantic community can prevail.

European Strategic Sufficiency

The invasion of Ukraine served as a resounding wake-up call for both the United States and Europe, revealing the scale of a challenge many politicians had been tempted to ignore or belittle, and compelling a wholesale reevaluation of defense strategies. The war prompted unprecedented provision of military equipment, training, and financial support to a non-ally and pushed many European capitals to reconsider their defense budgets.⁷⁰ Decades of prioritizing peace dividends over security in the post-Cold War era came to an end.

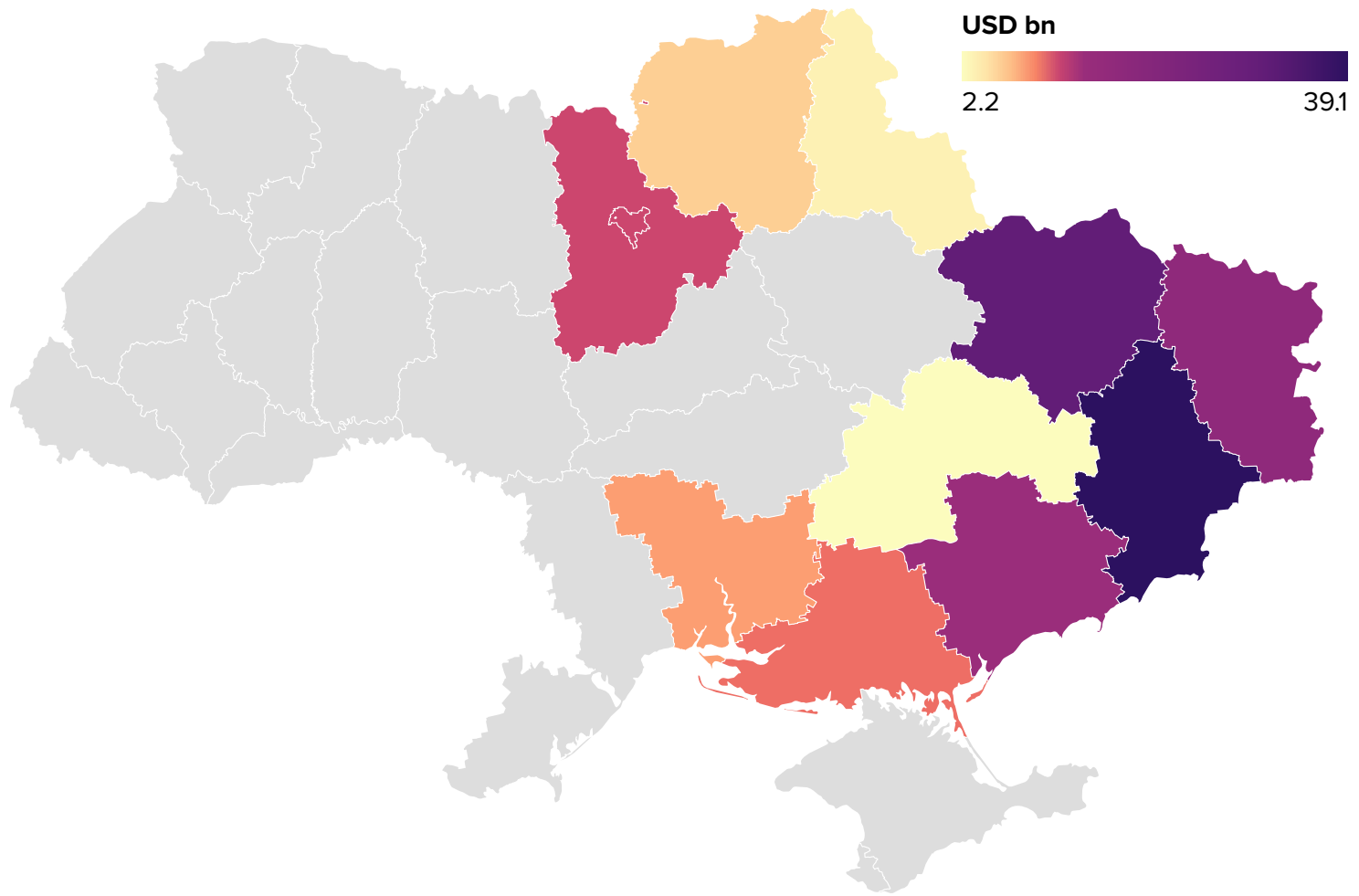
Indeed, European countries have displayed a surprising degree of political alignment — both among themselves and with Washington. This unprecedented cohesion led to the approval of comprehensive sanctions against Russia; the granting of EU candidate status to Ukraine; and initiatives like the EU defense fund, with a \$5.47 billion (€5 billion) annual budget to support Kyiv's long-term military needs.⁷¹

However, while there is broad agreement that Europe needs a more robust security architecture, and that a strengthened NATO must be the keystone of that architecture, there remain important differences in both policy and performance. NATO statistics show that only 10 allies meet the agreed-upon target of investing at least 2% of their GDPs in defense.⁷² Obstacles including industrial competition, divergent perceptions of national interests, and disparate procurement needs continue to impede effective defense cooperation within the EU, with concomitant effects for NATO. Adding to this complexity is the long-standing controversy between Washington and some European capitals on so-called “European strategic autonomy” and competition between the European and American defense industries.

The *Zeitenwende* declared by German Chancellor Olaf Scholz should not be underestimated.⁷³ For Germany alone, military commitments have accounted for 81% of the country's \$23 billion in direct support to Ukraine, making Berlin the second-largest military contributor after Washington.⁷⁴ The EU as a whole, for the first time in its history, has mobilized to provide lethal aid to a state in active conflict, recognizing that the war in Ukraine is — for Europe more than for America — an existential threat.⁷⁵

Despite the progress made by Europe since February 2022, it will take time to overcome the degradation of Europe's strategic culture, engendered by the peace that Europe has enjoyed since the end of World War II and the security umbrella provided by the United States. To wit, despite repeated rhetorical commitments, only 11 NATO members currently spend 2% or more of GDP on defense; France and Germany remain among the laggards.⁷⁶ This residual culture continues to deter the development of a cohesive European defense posture capable of both projecting influence and providing security. While strategic documents like the EU Strategic Compass for Security and Defence are commendable, their potential remains untapped without the backing of tangible hard power.⁷⁷

The Cost of Damage to Ukraine



Damage to Kyiv City and Kyiv Oblast calculated as a combined figure amount.

Map: Center for European Policy Analysis • Source: Benjamin Hilgenstock, Kyiv School of Economics Institute

To face down the Russian challenge, Europe should — with American support — shift from discussions of “strategic autonomy” to “strategic responsibility” and “strategic sufficiency.” Overemphasizing autonomy can lead to an inward-looking approach that could jeopardize relations with other partners and, particularly, as many in Washington fear, with the United States. Responsibility and sufficiency, by contrast, would privilege a close but more equal partnership with the US, playing to the EU’s traditional non-military strengths while prioritizing step-change improvements in Europe’s kinetic capacity.⁷⁸ These need not be a bone of transatlantic contention. Because Russia’s challenge to the West focuses on Europe as the key battleground, a more politically cohesive and militarily capable Europe is in the best interests of the United States.

European Cohesion

The clearest and most present threat to the coherence of the transatlantic coalition in support of Ukraine and in resistance to Russia emanates from the authoritarian-populist challenge to democracy in the frontline states of Central and Eastern Europe. Where Hungary's Viktor Orbán once stood alone in opposing European military support for Ukraine and sanctions on Russia, the return to power in Slovakia of Robert Fico — who has promised to block aid to Ukraine and reopen trade with Russia — is a troubling sign.⁷⁹ Fico's decision in December 2023 not to block the opening of accession talks with Ukraine and Moldova left Orbán isolated, but as budget battles continue into 2024, the fault lines remain. And while the defeat of the far-right Konfederacja Party in Poland provides some respite from the bad news, the problem is far from resolved, nor is it limited to Central Europe, as the strong showing by Geert Wilders' Party for Freedom in Dutch parliamentary elections demonstrated.⁸⁰

The source of the challenge from Orbán, Fico, and potentially others is complex, but it starts at the top. While voters in Hungary, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Greece, and elsewhere are less supportive of Ukraine than those in other European countries, the reality is that there is no genuine groundswell of support for Russia.⁸¹ Rather, populist politicians in the region have found that they can effectively weaponize a combination of historically ingrained anti-Ukrainian sentiment and frustration with continued austerity in the face of rising costs of living. The target of this weaponization, however, isn't Ukraine: It's Brussels.

Orbán and Fico focus on bucking European policy on Ukraine for the same reason they once bucked European policy on migration: because it is a high-value bargaining chip in relations with the European Commission and more powerful EU member states, chiefly Germany. By threatening to undermine core European policy, Budapest and Bratislava hoped to win concessions on EU funding and force Brussels and Washington, DC to tolerate the rollback of democratic institutions in their respective countries. In this desire to prevent the Commission from enforcing EU conditionality, Orbán is joined by Fico in Slovakia and, until recently, Mateusz Morawiecki in Poland.

Preventing Moscow from taking advantage of this crack in the European edifice is of critical importance. At Europe's request, Washington should backstop Brussels in enforcing basic democratic standards and accountability in all EU member states, including respect for the rule of law, the independent media, and a non-politicized judiciary, and the US should continue to fund initiatives in Central and Eastern Europe aimed at supporting a free and vibrant media and civil society. In addition, the US and Europe should also be prepared to sanction individuals and entities that serve as or facilitate conduits of clandestine Russian influence, much as the US did when it pushed Hungary to withdraw from the Moscow-controlled International Investment Bank in April 2023.⁸²

EU Public Opinion: The EU should continue....?

■ "Totally agree"
 ■ "Tend to agree"
 ■ "Tend to disagree"
 ■ "Totally disagree"
 ■ "Don't know"



Chart: Center for European Policy Analysis • Source: Eurobarometer, "EU challenges and priorities in 2023."

The problem, however, is not limited to Central and Eastern Europe or to societies governed by would-be autocrats. Very few European countries, with the notable exceptions of the UK and Poland, have a robust cross-party consensus in support of Ukraine. In France, Spain, Germany, and Italy — not to mention the United States — major parties and credible candidates for leadership are more than willing to take a page from Orbán and Fico's books and weaponize the war for political gain. These efforts, too, must be identified and called out.

Counteracting the spread of pro-Russian and anti-Ukrainian sentiment by opportunistic politicians, however, will require more than moral condemnation. To deprive Russian influence operations of oxygen, the European Commission and the US need to work with their regional allies to shore up counter-disinformation and counter-kleptocracy efforts, boosting transparency in both communications and financial networks. Equally importantly, policymakers need to recognize the linkage — as they did during the Cold War — between foreign policy and domestic fiscal policy. Governments that are unresponsive to the material concerns of their citizens and that fail to tackle corruption open the door for illiberalism and, thus, for Russia.

Securing Europe

Finally, the goal of cohesion requires shoring up Europe's own strategic vulnerabilities. Chief among these are two: energy security and kleptocracy. The former will be dealt with in a separate section below. The latter, however, needs explaining now. Since the end of the Cold War, oligarchs and other private actors who have profited from high-level corruption have been able to protect their ill-gotten gains in various European jurisdictions. The resulting "institutional arbitrage" — which allows these individuals to earn money in a low rule-of-law environment such as Russia and to defend that money in high rule-of-law jurisdictions like the UK — has undermined the rule of law both at home and in the EU itself.⁸³

To this end — and to clamp down on the approximately \$1 trillion in Russian dark money estimated to be hidden abroad — Europe, with support from the US, will need to make a clean break from the market for laundering ill-gotten gains.⁸⁴ The UK Criminal Finances Act and the US Corporate Transparency Act are steps in the right direction, but if law enforcement authorities are not given the resources they need to investigate and seize ill-gotten assets and block illegal transactions, they will remain ineffective — much as UK and EU beneficial ownership registries and "unexplained wealth orders" have been to date.⁸⁵

Energy Security

Europe has made significant and commendable progress — with US support — in reducing its dependence on Russian energy since February 2022, bolstering its financial autonomy and directly and indirectly aiding Ukraine in the process. In the first year of the full-scale war, Europe more than halved its gas imports from Russia (despite no formal sanctions on natural gas) and cut oil imports by some 90%.⁸⁶ Nonetheless, Russian energy continues to seep into the continent, perpetuating Moscow's leverage over individual member states and the EU as a whole.

Reinforcing energy security for the medium and long terms requires urgent action on multiple fronts by individual states and the EU as a body. A holistic approach to energy security should be embraced across Europe, with buy-in from Washington, with a clear definition and integration of energy security imperatives into national policies. Even as Europe transitions toward renewables, threats to energy security will persist. As Ukraine's remarkable resilience has demonstrated, developing local backup generation and reducing external supply dependence will be critical.

Historically, energy policy has been in the national purview of EU member states.⁸⁷ However, a more cohesive, pan-European energy policy is needed. Such a collective approach should focus on averting threats to EU energy security, protecting the cohesion and stability of the common energy market, increasing interconnectivity and alleviating infrastructural bottlenecks, and identifying other priority areas for transitioning from national to pan-European decision-making.

European Union Gas Storage Net Withdrawal Levels 2019-2023

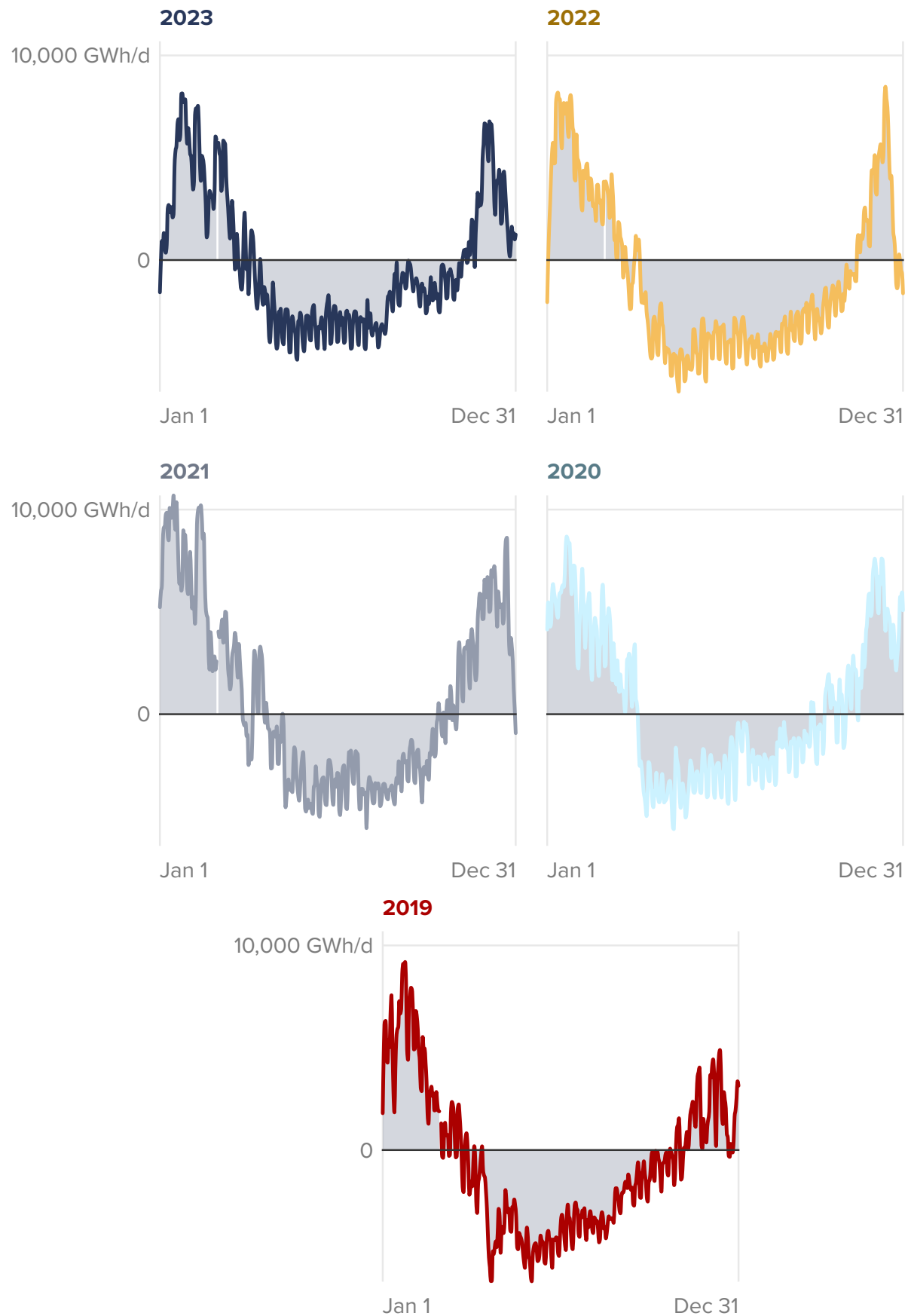


Chart: Center for European Policy Analysis • Source: Gas Infrastructure Europe, Aggregated Gas Storage Inventory

European Union Gas Import Levels 2019-2023

70 USD per Million BTU

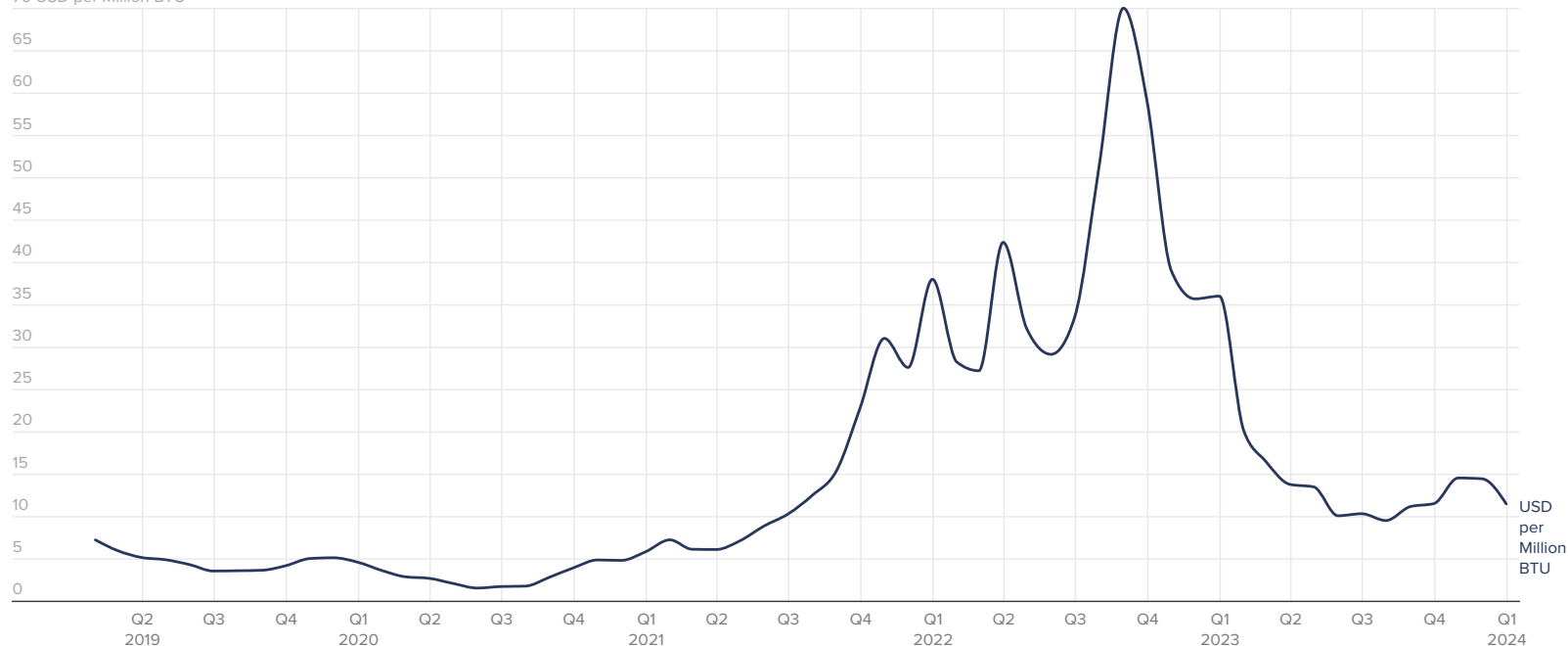


Chart: Center for European Policy Analysis • Source: YCharts

Energy cooperation between European and Russian companies, especially regarding liquefied natural gas (LNG) and pipeline gas supplies, should continue to diminish. Any reliance on Russian energy sources — even if they come through the back door — opens the door to potential Russian influence over EU governments, as Hungary and Slovakia demonstrate, and threatens the unanimity that enables EU foreign policy.

The US can play a pivotal role in reinforcing EU energy security. US energy companies are well positioned to supply LNG and offer expertise in developing innovative energy technologies, such as small modular reactors. However, any cooperation should be mutually beneficial, dispelling unfounded claims of US exploitation, which would readily be weaponized by Russia.

In addition to bolstering Europe's own energy security against Russian attack, Europe and the US need to carry the fight to Russia by sanctioning Russian pipeline gas and LNG imports. The EU has committed politically to phasing out Russian gas imports by 2027, but recent developments suggest the need for an accelerated timeline and more robust measures.⁸⁸

The present scenario shows gas demand 15% lower than the five-year average, with alternative supplies already in place to mitigate the Russian deficit.⁸⁹ Russia's recent actions, including a drastic reduction in pipeline supplies and manufactured energy price surges, expose the unreliability of Russia as a gas supplier.

Containing Russia

This unreliability, coupled with Russia's efforts to establish a hub in Turkey for potential gas exports to Europe, threatens the energy security of Central and Eastern European nations.⁹⁰ A Russian gas ban would help eliminate vulnerabilities and expedite alternative supply arrangements. The EU, with potential US support, should consider banning Russian gas imports outright, to both harden Europe's energy markets and disrupt Russia's. A ban on both LNG and piped gas would turn much of Russia's gas production and export infrastructure into a white elephant, increasing its cost base and reducing its pricing power. The result is a reduction both in its ability to use energy as a weapon of war, and in its ability to use proceeds from energy exports to fund the procurement of other weapons of war.⁹¹

As global energy dynamics continue to shift, the US and EU find themselves at a pivotal juncture in the quest for energy security. The interplay among energy resources, political influence, and economic stability underscores the need for a unified approach to consolidating energy security. With imperatives outlined above in mind, a transatlantic approach to European energy security presents a unique opportunity for the US and EU to collaborate effectively.

Addressing the Neighborhood

While Ukraine is likely to remain the focus of Russia's attempts at regional domination in the post-Soviet space, and though Russia faces significant headwinds elsewhere in the region, Moscow has not abandoned its ambitions. Furthermore, any thoughts that anyone may have harbored about the possibility of "sharing the neighborhood" and not forcing countries in the space between the EU and Russia to choose sides should by now have been dispelled. Europe will continue to face geopolitical and geo-economic competition in the east, creating permanent instability until the eastern neighbors are embedded in Euro-Atlantic institutions.

Belarus

After Alyaksandr Lukashenka's legitimacy was shattered by his subversion of the 2020 presidential election and his suppression of the peaceful resistance movement, Belarus severed its remaining ties with the West and fully aligned itself with Russian foreign policy. In time, this alignment came to include willing complicity in Russia's aggression against Ukraine, despite a long-standing Belarusian policy of maintaining friendly relations with Kyiv.

With Belarus's integration into the Eurasian Economic Union, its subjection to Western sanctions, and the placement of Russian nuclear forces and, for a time, the Wagner mercenary group on Belarusian soil, Moscow's sway over Belarus's domestic politics, economy, and defense has multiplied. If this trajectory continues, Belarus will continue to pose a danger to Ukraine's peace and security, as well as to that of Europe as a whole.⁹²

European Union Gas Storage Net Filling Levels 2019-2023

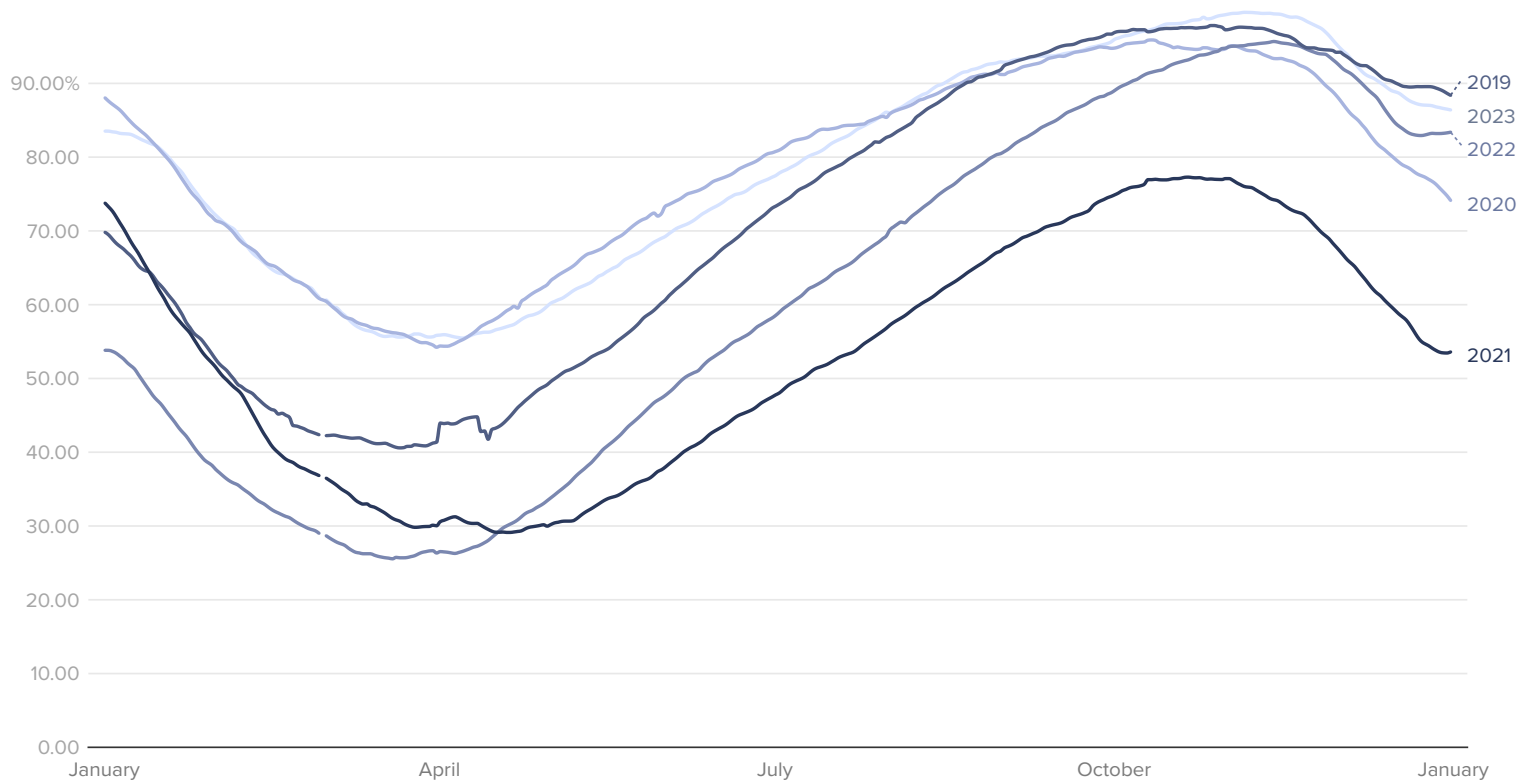


Chart: Center for European Policy Analysis • Source: Gas Infrastructure Europe, Aggregated Gas Storage Inventory

The linchpin of Moscow’s sway over Belarus is the role that Russia plays in insulating Lukashenka’s regime from public dissatisfaction. Despite concerted propaganda and a pervasive police state, Lukashenka’s popularity remains low — around 30%⁹³ — as is public support for Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Russian force of arms has backstopped galloping repression; Belarus is home to some 1,500 political prisoners, and many more have been persecuted or forced into exile.⁹⁴

In return for this support, Lukashenka has turned Belarus into an instrument in Russia’s geostrategic arsenal. While Minsk is likely to continue to resist active involvement in the war, the country serves as a base for attack and a source of vulnerability, particularly if Lukashenka’s resistance should succumb to Russian pressure. Even without participating in the war, however, Lukashenka has proved his usefulness to Putin’s efforts to destabilize Europe, including instigating a migration crisis on Belarus’s borders with Poland and Lithuania, and hosting Wagner private military company fighters.

Western sanctions on Belarus — while fully justified by Lukashenka’s domestic and foreign policies — will inevitably increase Moscow’s grip on the Belarusian economy and further institutional integration, potentially making Belarus not only de facto but de jure part of Russia. Restoring sovereignty could become an insurmountable task for Lukashenka’s eventual successor.



Photo: People gather to mourn the death of Belarusian anti-government protester Roman Bondarenko, who was allegedly beaten by the country's security forces in Minsk, outside the Belarusian embassy in Kyiv, Ukraine November 13, 2020. A placard displays images depicting Russian President Vladimir Putin and Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko. Credit: REUTERS/Valentyn Ogirenko

Nonetheless, a Ukrainian victory would weaken Putin's grip and Lukashenka's position, and thus open a window of opportunity for the Belarusian opposition. The movement that nearly toppled Lukashenka in 2020 has strengthened its resource base and gained opposition in exile, learning to advocate for the interests of the Belarusian public in the international arena. Despite its challenges and fissures, the movement represents a viable alternative to the Lukashenka regime and the best hope of turning Belarus toward Europe.

Western policymakers should thus continue their support for the Belarusian opposition and independent Belarusian media and make it clear to Belarusian citizens that the country has a real European prospect if it breaks out of Russia's hold. At the same time, Western leaders should encourage Kyiv to establish formal contact with the Belarusian opposition, acknowledging Lukashenka's rule as illegitimate and Belarusians' plight as fellow victims of Russian imperialism. Down the road, a friendly and European-oriented Belarus will prove an important bulwark for Ukraine against further Russian aggression.

Securing Europe

Moldova

Despite Moldova's progress toward EU membership and the fact that pro-European parties control both the legislative and executive branches of government, Russia is positioned to continue exerting significant influence in Moldova in the near term. Moldova has struggled to disentangle its economy from Russia's, in part due to rule by pro-Russian Communist and Socialist parties through much of the 2000s and 2010s. The country has paid a significant price for the Russian attack on Ukraine, absorbing more Ukrainian refugees per person than any other country. This influx, combined with larger economic disruptions from the war, sent inflation soaring to 20% at the beginning of 2023 before returning to more stable levels.⁹⁵

The impact of the war has meant that whatever party was in charge during the invasion would be likely to be punished at the ballot box. Local elections in 2023 and 2022 delivered a series of small victories to the Russian-backed Sor Party — which has since been banned — as well as the Socialists and Communists.⁹⁶ The next presidential election in 2024 is likely to be a repeat of the pro-European Maia Sandu facing off against the pro-Russian Igor Dodon. While it is far too early to make predictions, a recent poll put Dodon in the lead.⁹⁷

The discontent that exists among ordinary Moldovans provides an opening for Russia, and Moscow is unleashing its full non-kinetic arsenal on the country. Gazprom regularly punishes Moldova for stepping outside the Kremlin line, and promises cheaper gas should Dodon win, which will appeal to many voters.⁹⁸ Although the government has banned numerous Russian-language TV channels, Russia-based newspapers and online media still remain a trusted source of news for many.⁹⁹ Chisinau will need support to develop a nuanced response to Russian information interference, which would disrupt Moscow's campaigns without building tools of censorship that could be coopted by a potential pro-Russian government.

To prevent Moldova from becoming a source of instability — sandwiched between Ukraine and Romania, commanding a strategic position near the Black Sea and along Danube shipping routes to Europe — Western powers need to make sure that Moldova is not forgotten in the effort to support and sustain Ukraine. The decision by the European Commission to open accession talks with Moldova alongside Ukraine is a strategic victory for both Europe and Moldovan President Maia Sandu, but more is needed than talks. As long as the war continues, Moldova needs support to keep the lights and heat on and costs of living down, and investment in energy and transportation interconnections with Romania. Further, Moldova needs support to be able to maintain a pace of progress toward EU membership in lockstep with Ukraine.



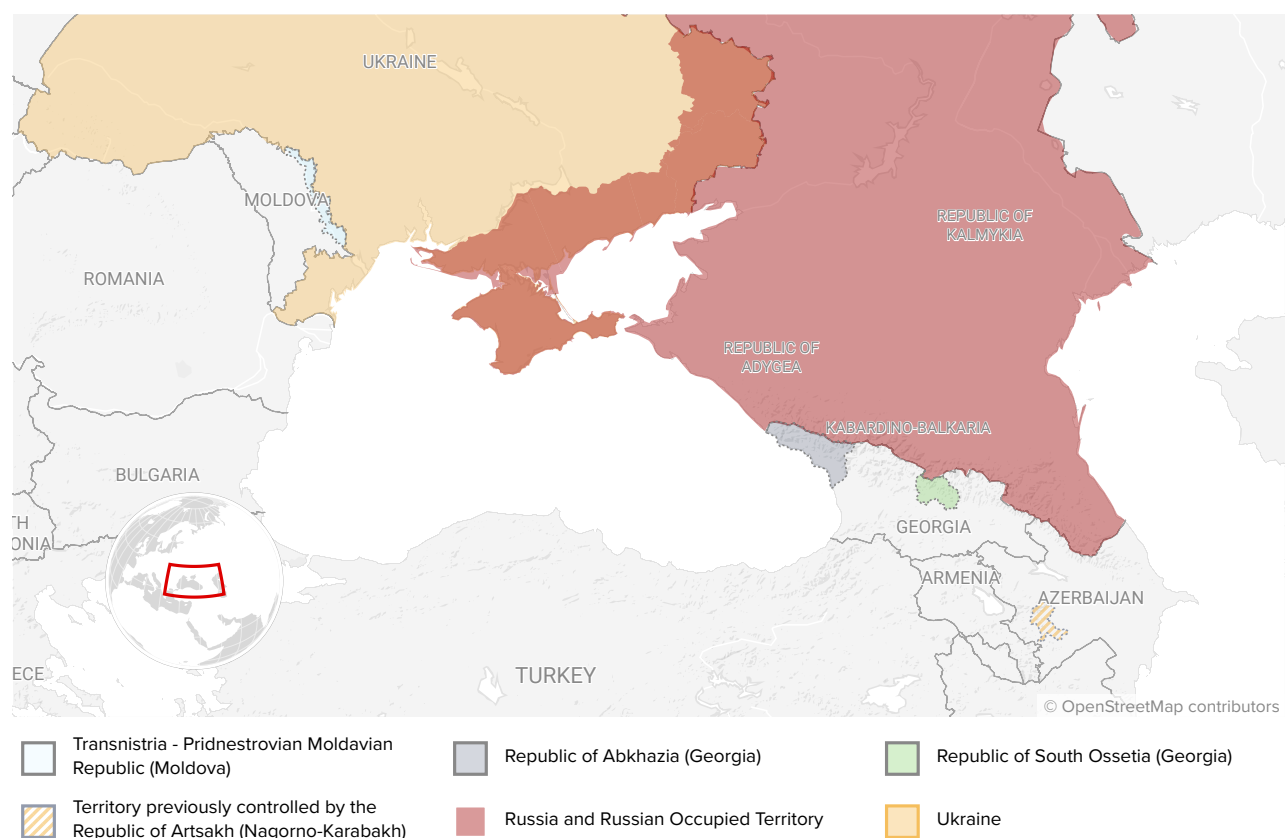
Photo: Service members take part in a flag-rising ceremony on Victory Day, marking the 77th anniversary of the victory over Nazi Germany in World War Two, in Tiraspol, in Moldova's breakaway region of Transnistria, May 9, 2022. Credit: REUTERS/Vladislav Bachev

The Black Sea

The Black Sea region has long been a strategic crossroads, connecting Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. However, since 2014, Russia's actions in the Black Sea have raised significant concerns, violating the fundamental principle of freedom of maritime navigation and threatening regional stability. Addressing these challenges and safeguarding regional and global security economic interests requires a multifaceted approach.

Russia's aggressive actions in the Black Sea have disrupted the freedom of maritime navigation, endangering both military and commercial vessels. As Russia continues to threaten to sink foreign-flagged ships and target grain exports and energy infrastructure, it is essential to reaffirm and uphold the principles of international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.¹⁰⁰ Diplomatic efforts should be intensified to pressure Russia to respect these norms and cease its disruptive activities.

From Odesa to Romania and Bulgaria, Russia has littered the Black Sea with underwater mines, posing a significant threat to shipping and maritime safety.¹⁰¹ Establishing humanitarian programs for mine clearance is a vital step to mitigate



Accurate as of September 29, 2023

Map: Center for European Policy Analysis • Source: liveUAmmap

this risk. International organizations and regional partners should cooperate in funding and executing mine-clearance operations to make the sea lanes safe for navigation.¹⁰²

Black Sea shipping lanes play a crucial role in global trade and food security, particularly for Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria, and Turkey. The trading and shipping routes also have massive economic implications. While economic security is not a traditional NATO role, it is key to the overall security of the Black Sea region. Economic security, as well as energy security, must be accounted for in any strategy related to the Black Sea. In addition to reinforcing land borders, a Black Sea NATO Command Center should be established in Romania. This facility would serve as a hub for intelligence sharing, joint exercises, and rapid response to security threats in the maritime domain.

Military mobility in the Black Sea should also be enhanced. The Danube River should be used to transport military supplies to reinforce NATO's southeastern region. However, moving NATO forces into this region is challenging as there are significant concerns regarding the safety, security, and stability of Ruse Bridge as the infrastructure is outdated and some of the ports are under Russian influence. To be effective, additional ports would need to be constructed and infrastructure updated.¹⁰³

To counter Russia's naval dominance, Black Sea NATO members and strategic partners, such as Ukraine, must modernize their fleets. This includes integrating

Containing Russia

naval drones, coastal anti-missile and anti-ship defense systems, maritime patrol aviation, and robust cyberdefense capabilities. Supplies, equipment, and ammunition should also be in place for rotations and deployed forces in Central and Eastern Europe. Additionally, NATO should increase intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance to mitigate anti-access denial capabilities deployed from Russia. To further bolster security, NATO should commit to more military exercises in the region and should train partners to counter Russian hybrid actions. NATO's Black Sea security strategy also must include non-ally partners such as Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia. Improving outreach measures to these countries through military presence, exercise, and activities is essential. These investments will not only improve regional security but also bolster NATO's deterrence.¹⁰⁴

In addition to the United States' support to NATO, the US can take further action in the Black Sea. First, to ensure robust support, the Joe Biden administration and Congress should argue the importance of the region to the US public, noting that the Black Sea is integrated into the global economy and that peace in the Black Sea is a vital US national interest.¹⁰⁵ This is necessary to ensure that the Black Sea continues to be on the US agenda. The US must also address NATO members' vulnerabilities, specifically their military support to Ukraine. The US can also take bilateral actions with Turkey, Bulgaria, and Romania to optimize those nations' regional leadership for Black Sea security. Lastly, the US Black Sea Strategy should also find ways to bolster economic security in the region.

The South Caucasus and Central Asia

Russia's invasion of Ukraine, its use of Belarus as an outpost from which to project force into Europe, and, latterly, the defeat of Armenia by Azerbaijan in Karabakh are all ample demonstration of the danger of ceding domination of any part of the former Soviet Union to Moscow. While many large countries are influential in their neighborhoods, and that influence can often serve as a basis for stability and prosperity, Russia's role across its former empire has consistently been a source of conflict, oppression, and threat. It is thus imperative that the US and its European allies invest in alternatives to Russian domination in the South Caucasus and Central Asia.

The European Commission's decision to award candidate status to Georgia — recognizing the aspirations of a clear majority of Georgian citizens, even as reforms sputter on various fronts — is an important and impactful acknowledgement of this imperative. To stall Georgia's European trajectory, even as Ukraine and Moldova progress along theirs, would only undermine democratic forces in Georgia and, by signaling Western skepticism about Georgia's future, increase Moscow's leverage.

Securing Europe

By contrast, the broad absence of an effective Western effort to stop the fighting between Azerbaijan and Armenia is short-sighted. If the status quo persists, the task of maintaining peace in the region will fall to Russia, Iran, and Turkey, all of which have stoked war in the region and may again conclude that they benefit from renewed fighting. What is more, Moscow, Tehran, and Ankara all share the goal of locking the US and EU out of the South Caucasus and using the region's hydrocarbon reserves, pipelines, and other trade routes to weaken Western sanctions regimes. The US and EU, on the other hand, share a genuine interest in maintaining peace and stability in the region.

In Central Asia, similarly, the domination of Moscow and Beijing — together with the former's increasing geopolitical subservience to the latter — is a source of instability and conflict, rather than peace and genuine security. Russia's confrontation with the West and China's economic struggles have circumscribed the ability of regional governments to deliver development and prosperity to their citizens, leading to an escalating cycle of protest and repression. The relative lack of US and European engagement only serves to exacerbate these problems.

Given the difficulty of government-to-government engagement in the South Caucasus and Central Asia — where most states are controlled by highly repressive regimes — the task for American and European policymakers is three-fold. First, with particular reference to Armenia and Azerbaijan, Washington and Brussels should develop a long-term peacebuilding framework with concrete positive and negative inducements, predicated on the observance of human and minority rights in Karabakh and the absence of further aggression. Second, throughout both regions, the US and Europe should encourage private-sector investment and trade to reduce the relative importance of trade with Russia and other problematic actors, such as Iran, and build constituencies within the region for stable and mutually beneficial relations with the West. And lastly, the US and Europe must take a careful approach to enforcing secondary sanctions, balancing the need to ensure that critical goods and technologies do not find their way to Russia against the danger of forcing these countries to choose between trading with the West and trading with Russia. On all three points, the near-term goal is not to end Russian influence in the region, which is impossible even in the medium term, but to give regional governments and societies more options, and thus to complicate Russian dominance.

Constructing Containment

“Our first step must be to apprehend, and to recognize for what it is, the nature of the movement with which we are dealing. We must study it with the same courage, detachment, objectivity, and the same determination not to be emotionally provoked or unseated by it, with which a doctor studies an unruly and unreasonable individual.”

George F. Kennan, “The Long Telegram,” 1946¹⁰⁶

Russia is and will remain for the foreseeable future the clearest and most present threat to the interests of the United States and Europe. Moscow’s long-standing geostrategic ambitions — to exercise military, political, and economic dominance in the post-Soviet space (Russian Objective 1), break the power of the West to enforce a stable and prosperous global order (Russian Objective 2), and fuse international conflict and internal autocracy into a fully weaponized state (Russian Objective 3) — represent an enduring challenge that, if it is not effectively managed, will expand and escalate, costing increasing amounts of lives and treasure, and eventually drawing the United States and its European allies into a direct military conflict with Russia.

Russia’s challenge to the US and its allies does not occur in isolation. As President Biden noted after Hamas’s October 7 2023 attack on Israel, Russia’s geostrategic objectives are confluent with those of Iran and China, all of which seek to undermine American power and believe that they benefit from the multiplication of conflict across the world. Venezuela’s territorial claims against Guyana — clearly emboldened by Russian aggression in Ukraine — demonstrate just how far the failure of Western deterrence in Europe might reverberate. Thus, meeting the Russian challenge and containing Russian power is not separate from containing China or Iran. Quite the contrary, effective containment of Russia severely reduces Beijing’s and Tehran’s room for maneuver and demonstrates the futility of further global confrontation.

Structurally, institutionally, and from a resource perspective, the collective West is stronger than Russia and can withstand Moscow’s attempt to undermine Western power and fracture the global system that has preserved peace and prosperity since the end of World War II. That is not, however, cause for complacency. There are weaknesses as well in the transatlantic community, including imperfect strategic alignment between the US and Europe; a lack of strategic preparedness for conflict, and thus of deterrent capacity; and fissures among European states and within Western societies.



Photo: A view shows a patch on a sleeve of a servicemen during the opening ceremony of the memorial to Russian soldiers killed in Russia-Ukraine conflict, at a military unit in the Leningrad Region, Russia September 22, 2023. Credit: REUTERS/Anton Vaganov

Russia can be expected to weaponize all of these vulnerabilities as a matter of utmost strategic priority. This will include testing Western military and non-military defenses, using cyber and other influence capabilities to exacerbate political conflict and disrupt consensus, manipulating energy price and supply, and fostering instability on the West's periphery. For all of these campaigns, the front line will be Europe. Defending the global order thus begins with holding the line in Ukraine and in Europe, but it does not end there.

Containment: Why and How

Containment is the only viable option when faced with an adversary that can be neither vanquished from without nor changed from within. As in the Cold War, containment is predicated on the assumption that the adversary — once the Soviet Union, now Russia — will remain both adversarial and powerful. It will stay adversarial because its understanding of how the world works, which motivates its behavior, is both antithetical to the understanding of the United States and deeply seated. It will remain powerful because the United States and its allies are unable to appreciably reduce its strength without engaging in a prohibitively costly war.¹⁰⁷



Photo: Ukrainian servicemen fire an anti-aircraft gun towards Russian positions on a frontline near the town of Bakhmut, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in Donetsk region, Ukraine January 15, 2023. Credit: REUTERS/Oleksandr Ratushniak

Much as the Soviet Union's sense of the world stemmed from the nature of Soviet Communism, with its ideology of inevitable conflict and its drive to undermine capitalism, so too is contemporary Russian foreign policy rooted in the nature of a system of political power that is epitomized by Vladimir Putin, but that is also overwhelmingly likely to outlast him. And so, just as the emergence of Cold War containment meant the abandonment of the dream of universalism after World War II, so too does the reemergence of 21st-century containment now mark the abandonment of post-Cold War dreams of universalism and the end of history. It is a recognition of both the hard realities of the world we inhabit, and of the limitations of American and allied power in that world.

Containment does not mean the elimination of conflict or even the basis for conflict, but only the prevention of conflict from escalating to levels that might lead to a wider war.¹⁰⁸ Just as the object of Cold War containment was neither to defeat nor dismantle the USSR, the strategy proposed here aims neither to defeat nor dismantle Russia. Rather, the aim is to protect American and allied security by preventing the further destabilization of international relations and creating circumstances in which Moscow reliably finds it in its interests to pursue peace rather than war. As a result, the emergence of any eventual détente — the pressure for which will grow almost as soon as the fighting in Ukraine subsides — must be carefully calibrated to avoid instilling complacency among American and allied policymakers and avoid allowing Moscow to believe that a détente can serve as an opportunity to increase its offensive potential.

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While Russia has been dealt a significant blow by Ukrainian and Western resistance to its full-scale invasion, Russia retains formidable resources of conflict. These include a conventional army that, while weakened and bogged down, will almost certainly rebuild; a nuclear arsenal that serves to deter Western responses to Russian aggression; cyberforces, covert operations, and a broad infrastructure of malign influence, which disrupts internal and international consensus in the West; and an energy sector that, while circumscribed by sanctions, remains a tool of both enrichment for Russia and leverage over potential vassals and adversaries.

A large part of the response to the Russian threat lies in increasing the West's military preparedness, scaling up defense production on both sides of the Atlantic, and revitalizing NATO. Those imperatives are explored in detail in a companion report to this one, "A New Vision for the Transatlantic Alliance: The Future of European Security, the United States, and the World Order after Putin's War in Ukraine." This report focuses on the non-kinetic side of the containment equation.

Effective containment of Russia will rest on four pillars:

- Defeating Russia in Ukraine.
- Deterrence by denial in Europe.
- Hardening the West's soft targets.
- Undermining Russia's influence in its former empire.

The containment of Russia begins in Ukraine and Europe. To see off the Russian threat and help ensure that an overt Chinese challenge does not emerge, American policymakers must cement the progress made in transatlantic cohesion since February 2022 and reestablish the US commitment to European security as the enduring bedrock of peace and prosperity. This involves greater unity of both purpose and resources, more closely aligning American and European approaches to everything from energy security and defense procurement to counter-kleptocracy and democratic values.

With that in mind, then, containing Russia should not be seen as a distraction — or a drain of resources — from addressing China as the pacing threat to America's interests and those of its allies. While China's interests and Russia's are not fully concomitant, Beijing has provided tacit and, in some respects, material support to Russia's war in Ukraine and its activities globally because Moscow's efforts to disrupt and diminish Western power increase China's own room for maneuver. The same can be said of Iran. Defeating Russia in Ukraine, then, and preventing it from promulgating conflict elsewhere in Europe or the world is critical not only to depriving China of a key ally and lever of power, but to ensuring that China's leaders see peaceful competition with the US as preferable to violent conflict.

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Pillar I: Defeating Russia in Ukraine

Winning the war in Ukraine is the sine qua non of containing Russia's ambition to dominate the post-Soviet space. As long as Russia retains any piece of Ukrainian territory, its invasion of Ukraine will have been a strategic success — and a strategic defeat for the West. Only the full restoration of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity can send a clear signal both to Russia and its neighbors that military intervention and territorial expansion are effectively deterred.

Containment, however, requires winning the peace, as well as winning the war. If Russia can exercise even a partial veto over Ukrainian domestic politics and/or foreign policy, and retains the ability to strike again without fear of overwhelming consequences, Ukraine and the other post-Soviet states will remain insecure, and Russia will remain aggressively irredentist. The most rapid and surest route to winning the peace is Ukraine's full membership in NATO, the only available security arrangement that has proven its ability to provide deterrence against Russian attack.

Alongside a robust security architecture, winning the peace in Ukraine requires successful post-war reconstruction. A robust and productive Ukrainian economy integrated into the European Union would allow Ukraine to take more responsibility for funding its own security, contribute to the stability of global food and commodity markets, and reduce the risk of further conflict. It would also require hardening Ukraine's soft targets. First, this would mean continuing to make progress on anti-corruption and de-oligarchization, which will close down key avenues through which Russia has historically exercised control over Ukraine. And second, it would mean re-empowering Ukrainian civil society to play a key role in upholding Ukraine's sovereignty and democracy, pushing for reforms, and maintaining social consensus.

Recommendations:

Political leaders in Washington and Europe should shift the emphasis of wartime rhetoric and policy from “as long as it takes” to achieving victory “as quickly as possible,” including increasing the pace of weapons provision and reducing obstacles to Ukraine's ability to retake territory.

The United States must support the near-term accession of Ukraine to NATO or the establishment of commensurate security commitments with clear triggers for collective defense, and ensure that any interim bilateral security arrangements are only a brief way station en route to full accession to the alliance.

The White House should build on the appointment of Penny Pritzker as special envoy for Ukraine's reconstruction to spearhead high-level transatlantic leadership and commitment and prioritize investment in Ukrainian resilience, reconstruction, and recovery, including a modern and productive defense industrial sector.



Photo: Ukrainian soldiers patrol in the frontline of Mykolaiv surrounded of the destruction after the Russian shelling over a village, Ukraine. Credit: Celestino Arce/NurPhoto

Western leaders must pursue justice as a matter of urgency, including by doing the following:

- Establishing a tribunal for war crimes and the crime of aggression, and pursuing Russian fugitives from international and Ukrainian justice.
- Moving expeditiously to redirect frozen Russian sovereign assets to Ukraine.
- Suspending Russian participation in international formats and organizations until Moscow demonstrates a consistently constructive approach to Ukraine.
- Maintaining an ongoing sanctions regime well beyond the end of the current war, targeting attempts to (1) interfere in the Ukrainian media and electoral politics or economic and administrative governance; (2) evade justice and reparations; and (3) profit from Russia's war and the theft of Ukrainian property.

Finally, Ukraine's supporters should backstop the reforms needed to bolster Ukrainian democracy and sovereignty, including by doing the following:

- Structuring sanctions in support of Ukrainian efforts at de-oligarchization.
- Funding capacity building for Ukrainian civil society and insisting on its inclusion in major decisions.
- Ensuring rapid progress toward EU accession.
- Investing in Ukraine's military modernization and defense industrial base.

Pillar II: Deterrence by Denial in Europe

Collectively, the US and Europe are stronger than Russia. The West's political, economic, institutional, and military advantages, however, are meaningless if the West cannot act — and Moscow knows that. Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine appears to have been predicated at least in part on an assumption that the West was divided, and that Russia had enough tools at its disposal to exacerbate those divisions and thus impede concerted resistance. Russia was wrong. For containment to work in the future, Russia must remain wrong.

Reestablishing and maintaining Western resilience requires first and foremost a political, financial, and military investment in transatlantic alignment. Leaders on both sides of the Atlantic must work to transform their common commitment to a Ukrainian victory into a shared vision for countering Russian aggression over the short, medium, and long terms. They should also move away from needlessly acrimonious debates over European “strategic autonomy” to more productive strategies for achieving European “strategic responsibility” and “strategic sufficiency” for its role in maintaining European and global security as part of an increasingly equal partnership with the United States.

Additionally, Europe needs to further the progress made on energy security and reduce its dependence on Russian energy. Russian fuels still seep into the continent and are set to increase their presence, restoring a degree of leverage and capacity for destabilization. While diversifying supply, Europe should move to a full and rapid embargo on Russian gas imports.

Recommendations:

To deter further Russian aggression — including against NATO allies — and reduce China's potential appetite for conflict, the US must revitalize its strategic commitment to Europe by doing the following:

- Working jointly with its European allies to ramp up Western defense production capacity.
- Redoubling transatlantic diplomatic and political dialogue on strategic alignment.
- Maintaining bipartisan leadership on and political commitment to engagement in Europe beyond the end of the war in Ukraine.

To reduce Russia's structural power and deprive it of the means for further regional and global ambitions, the US and Europe should reassess regional and global energy security by doing the following:



Photo: The British Army train Ukrainian recruits on AS-90 self-propelled artillery guns donated to Ukraine. Credit: NATO

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- Developing and implementing a shared transatlantic energy security doctrine based on friendly interdependence and solidarity and reduced external dependence.
 - Jointly pursuing stability of supply and demand for LNG and critical minerals.
 - Addressing strategic dependencies on Russian nuclear fuel and developing a noncompetitive approach to diversifying supply.
 - Imposing a full embargo on Russian gas, including pipeline gas and LNG, and acting against those who would seek to bring Russian gas in through the back door.

Pillar III: Hardening the West's Soft Targets

Like Ukraine, Europe too must address its soft targets. First, this means countering the rise of authoritarian populist movements and regimes, particularly but not only in Central and Eastern Europe, which find common cause with Putin in their struggle to reduce the norm-setting influence of the EU. It is imperative that Brussels, EU member state governments, and the US all insist on the enforcement of democratic standards and accountability and take action against individuals and entities undermining these basic principles, whether in the service of Russia or anyone else.

To this end, Europe and the West more broadly need to become unsafe for Russian kleptocratic money. The post-Cold War flood of kleptocratic money into the West has distorted asset and financial markets, legal systems, and politics at the highest levels, helping to give the Kremlin a sense of impunity in both its domestic and international affairs. Oligarchs and others who have profited from high-level corruption must no longer be able to protect their ill-gotten gains in Western jurisdictions, and the Kremlin must no longer be allowed to believe that Western quiescence can be bought. More robust ramparts must be erected against illicit finance, including foreign investment reviews and effective beneficial ownership registries on both sides of the Atlantic.

Recommendations:

Europe must enforce democratic standards for all EU member states and act against those who would undermine those standards and/or facilitate Russian malign influence.

The US and Europe need to work together to close down avenues of kleptocratic influence by doing the following:

- Implementing robust transatlantic investment review mechanisms.
- Establishing and resourcing encompassing and consistent beneficial ownership registries, linked to effective unexplained wealth investigations and enforcement actions.
- For NATO allies, focusing on reinforcing non-kinetic defenses in Europe and elsewhere, including sharing intelligence on malign activity, acting against malign information manipulation, and neutralizing Russian efforts to weaponize democratic contestation and impede political consensus.

Pillar IV: Undermining Russia's Imperial Influence

The West must also prevent Russia from creating instability on Europe's periphery. Moldova in particular must be helped to progress toward European integration in lockstep with Ukraine and should be supported in bearing the considerable economic and social costs of this war, as a bulwark against ongoing attempts by Moscow to subvert the country's democratic gains. In Belarus, the West should continue to work with the opposition to prepare a path out of Russia's increasingly tight grip. And in the Black Sea, NATO and the EU must work to reestablish the primacy of international law, protect international shipping lanes, and neuter Russian naval power.

In addition to hardening Russia's potential targets, Russia itself must be effectively constrained against further kinetic and non-kinetic aggression, whether targeting Ukraine or any of its other neighbors. Critical to such constraints will be establishing justice and accountability for Russia's crimes against Ukraine. This includes individual, state, and collective responsibility for war crimes and the crime of aggression, and reparations. Equally important will be Western vigilance against renewed Russian interventions. Even if Russia is militarily deterred, it will also need to be deterred against the deployment of "softer" and hybrid methods through a targeted and responsive sanctions regime.

Lastly, while Russia is unlikely to become a democracy any time in the foreseeable future, it is highly plausible that it will enter a period of pluralism, meaning that elections will be held for which the results will not be an entirely foregone conclusion. The West should be prepared for this eventuality, as well. That preparedness means having at the ready a set of policies that would incentivize Putin's successors to recognize Putin's strategic failures, the costs of continued confrontation, and the potential benefit of a root-and-branch reconsideration of the country's domestic and foreign politics. At the very least, the West must be careful not to provide adverse incentives that would ease a reversion to Putinism.

Recommendations:

Europe, with support from Washington, must reinforce Moldova's European perspective and act against Russian and corrupt Moldovan actors who would seek to reestablish Moscow's domination. Similarly, Brussels needs to keep Georgia's European perspective alive to empower citizens and disempower Moscow.

Washington and Brussels should recommit to Belarus's legitimate government in exile and work with it to develop a viable European perspective for a post-war and post-Lukashenka Belarus, while sanctioning state and nonstate agents of Russian domination.

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NATO must prioritize the reestablishment of freedom of navigation in the Black Sea by creating a Black Sea NATO Command Center, projecting allied power in the region, protecting allies' exclusive economic zones, and demining shipping lanes.

Washington and Brussels should construct a long-term peacebuilding framework for Armenia and Azerbaijan and supplant Russian destabilization.

American and European trade officials should encourage private-sector engagement in both the South Caucasus and Central Asia to reduce Russian domination and bolster pro-Western constituencies.

The US and Europe should continue supporting the democratic aspirations of Russia's free civil society and predicate any future shift in relations on moves toward genuine pluralism, press freedom, and the release of political prisoners.

Acknowledgments

We are extremely grateful to the contributors to this paper as well as the reviewers, Duncan Allan, Pavel Baev, Kadri Liik, Ben Noble, and Catherine Sendak, and the research assistants, Ryan Anast, Iurii Bystro, and Charlotte Schomaker, as well as other experts, for their feedback on various drafts of this report and their invaluable advice and expertise during the project. We are particularly grateful to those Russian analysts whose valuable contributions remain anonymous, and who risk their freedom to work with CEPA. This report was made possible by the generous support from the Sarah Scaife Foundation.

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