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Ukraine: no blitzkrieg, no lasting peace

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## Ukraine: no blitzkrieg, no lasting peace

### Abstract:

The prolongation of the war in Ukraine is having serious consequences for all the actors involved. The sanctions imposed by some countries on Moscow not only damage the Russian economy, but also have harsh repercussions throughout Europe. Western cohesion is subject to tensions derived from the different perspectives on both sides of the Atlantic. And the alignments of the international community in the face of the Russian invasion of Ukraine are strongly conditioned by the Energy security interests of each country.

Having failed the Russian blitzkrieg in Ukraine, a negotiated solution to the conflict seems to be far off. The positions around a hypothetical negotiating table are irreconcilable. Everything points to a long-lasting conflict. A hybrid war that rules out, indefinitely, lasting peace in the 21st century in Europe.

### Keywords:

Long-lasting War, Cohesion, Energy Security.

**\*NOTE:** The ideas contained in the **Analysis Papers** are the responsibility of their authors. They do not necessarily reflect the thinking of the IEEE or the Ministry of Defence.

## Ucrania: ni guerra relámpago, ni paz duradera

### Resumen:

La prolongación de la guerra en Ucrania está teniendo graves consecuencias para todos los actores implicados. Las sanciones impuestas por algunos países a Moscú no solamente dañan la economía rusa, sino que tienen también duras repercusiones en toda Europa. La cohesión occidental está sometida a tensiones derivadas de las diferentes perspectivas a uno y otro lado del Atlántico. Y los alineamientos de la comunidad internacional ante la invasión rusa de Ucrania vienen fuertemente condicionados por los intereses de cada país en relación a su Seguridad energética.

Fracasada la *blitzkrieg* rusa en Ucrania, la salida negociada del conflicto parece lejana. Las posturas de partida en torno a una hipotética mesa de negociación son irreconciliables. Todo apunta a un conflicto enquistado de larga duración. Una guerra híbrida que descarta, indefinidamente, la paz duradera en la Europa del siglo XXI.

### Palabras clave:

Guerra prolongada, Cohesión, Seguridad energética.

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**"The world is neither tranquil nor stable".**

Xi Jinping (March, 2022)<sup>1</sup>

What should have been a short campaign, achieving its objectives in a few days and overthrowing the Zelenski government has over the months turned into a hybrid war, with all the elements of this type of confrontation: military, economic, diplomatic, disinformation and intense cyberspace activity. The blitzkrieg has not been a blitzkrieg, and a final, mutually satisfying solution is nowhere in sight within a reasonable timeframe. And the longer the war lasts, the worse its consequences will be and the more difficult it will be to find a way out.

Countless times in the months since Russian troops invaded Ukraine on 24 February, we have heard that we are facing a new international order. The consequences of this war will undoubtedly be of a scale previously unimaginable, and we will certainly be seeing them starting from now. But already in our previous Analysis Paper, "*War in Ukraine, a punch on the international chessboard*"<sup>2</sup>, we pointed out that this being true, this new chapter of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine arises in an already highly tense international panorama, and the war only adds a renewed impetus to the pre-existing conflict. With no need to go any further back in time, let us recall how the US National Security Strategy, approved in 2017, relegated the threat of transnational terrorism, until then the first priority, to second place and replaced it with the *Great Power Competition* between the major powers.

The last years of the 2010s were marked by the exchange of sanctions and tariffs between the United States and China, to which the rest of the world was no stranger; by technological vetoes between the two big countries; and by geopolitical tensions around the globe, especially worrying in China's inland seas. The COVID-19 pandemic, the de-globalisation trends reflected in value chains and the chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan

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<sup>1</sup> Statement made by President Xi in video conference with President Biden on 18MAR22. Available at: <https://english.news.cn/20220318/b32e7ff2f8f744e7a4d41c2d4bf6ec2a/c.html>

<sup>2</sup> DACOBA CERVIÑO, Francisco José. *War in Ukraine, a punch on the international chessboard*. IEEE Analysis Paper 26/2022. Available at:

[https://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs\\_analisis/2022/DIEEEA26\\_2022\\_FRANDAC\\_Ucrania.pdf](https://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2022/DIEEEA26_2022_FRANDAC_Ucrania.pdf)

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are just some examples of this perfect breeding ground, to which the war in Ukraine has added much, much more fuel to the fire.

### International alignments

After Trump's "*America first!*", his successor's "*America's back!*" initially brought some reassurance to the international community, and especially to the countries closest to the US leadership. This confidence was soon shattered by the new president's unilateral decision to withdraw troops from Afghanistan and the way in which it was done. However, aware that the United States, despite being the great Western power, needs its allies and friends, Biden is trying to consolidate this harmony in a sort of privileged club of the world's democracies<sup>3</sup>, an initiative that is raising reasonable doubts about, for example, who decides and under what criteria, whether a given country is a democracy or not.



Russia's invasion of Ukraine has tested the strength of that leadership beyond the traditional hard core of Western democracies. A few days after the aggression, on 2 March, the UN General Assembly condemned it with a very large majority of 141 votes in favour, with only five votes against and China's significant abstention. Weeks later, on 7 April, the same forum decreed Russia's expulsion from the Human Rights Council with the support of 93 countries; still a very considerable majority, but clearly smaller than the previous one of condemnation and, this time, with the opposition of Beijing. Shortly afterwards, on 26 April, amid the heaviest fighting on Ukrainian soil, US Secretary of

<sup>3</sup> The Summit for Democracy. February 2021. <https://www.state.gov/summit-for-democracy/>

Defence Lloyd Austin convened the anti-invasion countries at the US military base in Ramstein, Germany, to establish the Ukraine Security Consultative Group to coordinate all support for the invaded country in its fight against Russian forces. Only some 40 countries came to the Austin call, just a few more than the NATO, European Union and Pacific democracies<sup>4</sup>. Of these, only about twenty are heavily involved in the supply of armaments and military combat equipment.

The rest of the international community navigates a calculated ambiguity. Without supporting or justifying the invasion, it keeps trade channels open with Moscow, which in turn seeks to relocate the surplus hydrocarbons it used to sell to its main customer, Europe. China, for its part, is taking advantage of the circumstances to source Russian gas at friendly prices, while at the same time avoiding direct military support for Moscow's war effort. India, a global actor that cannot be left out of the conflict, also maintains its traditional good relations with Russia, especially in terms of arms procurement and energy supplies, although the country is already beginning to diversify its imports to reduce this dependence<sup>5</sup>, while also strengthening its role in US-led security initiatives in the Indo-Pacific<sup>6</sup>, such as the Quadrilateral Indo-Pacific Security Dialogue Framework, QUAD, which also includes Japan and Australia.

## Part of War

The worst consequences of this war, in the short and long terms, will clearly be paid for dramatically by Ukraine, a country already territorially amputated since Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, with its infrastructure razed to the ground, its population decimated by fighting and forced migration, and its economy destroyed. The granting of EU candidate country status to Ukraine is hardly a glimmer of hope in such a bleak picture<sup>7</sup>. Moscow's aggression, paradoxically, has done much to consolidate what it was so keen to deny: the concept of Ukraine as a nation; and at the cost of destroying

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<sup>4</sup> US rallies global allies to help Ukraine repel Russia. 26 April 2022. <https://www.politico.eu/article/ukraine-war-russia-united-states-defense-consultative-group/>

<sup>5</sup> Defence independence: India has to reduce Russian imports, but dependency on the West is no solution either. 8 March 2021. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/toi-editorials/defence-independence-india-has-to-reduce-russian-imports-but-dependency-on-the-west-no-solution-either/>

<sup>6</sup> PM Modi arrives in Japan to attend Quad summit. 23 May, 2022.

[http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/91730806.cms?utm\\_source=contentofinterest&utm\\_medium=text&utm\\_campaign=cppst](http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/91730806.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst)

<sup>7</sup> The European Council grants Ukraine the status of candidate country for EU membership. 24 May, 2022.

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/es/policies/eu-response-ukraine-invasion/>

emotional bridges between two peoples who share historical, cultural, linguistic and religious ties.

Putin's calculations that the invasion of Ukraine would be a quick and not too costly success in military terms possibly included the precedent of the timorous Western reaction to the aggressions in Crimea and Donbas in 2014. And also, of course, Europe's dependence on Russian hydrocarbons; a dependence that not only did not diminish as a result of these events of eight years ago but increased over this period. The construction of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline is the most tangible example of how unwilling Germany was to reduce this vulnerability. However, to the surprise of all, friends and foe alike, in 2022 the European Union reacted quickly and decisively. The goal of cutting off Russian oil and gas imports, even with all the difficulties arising from member states' divergent positions, forces Russia to look for alternative markets. Imports of technological components from Western countries will also be a drag on Russian industry, including the space and military industry. But having said that, the revenues in Moscow's coffers are still huge given the rising energy prices in international markets, sanctions have not collapsed its economy and Putin is definitely not isolated from the rest of the world<sup>8</sup>.



Europe is also at the top of the list of those who have been harmed by this war in the heart of the continent. The conflict will have inevitable social (millions of migrants) and economic (slowing growth and inflation) consequences, and severe strain is being placed on cohesion in maintaining pressure on Russia. And this cohesion will weaken further as the war drags on, as will the support of public opinion, which is already getting used to

<sup>8</sup> BRICS Summit. Vladimir Putin took part in the 14th BRICS Summit, held via videoconference and chaired by China. 23 June 2022. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/68696>

the shocking images that in the first weeks provoked an incredible wave of solidarity with the Ukrainian people. Difficulties in reaching the necessary unanimity in decision-making in Brussels have revived the old debate on the need to change some aspects of EU-27 governance. There are even calls in European capitals for the re-foundation of Europe, which is right now as necessary as it is unfeasible<sup>9</sup>.

It has been NATO, suffering from strategic disorientation in recent years and wounded in its prestige after the chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan, that has unexpectedly benefited most from events. The Madrid summit at the end of June was rich in agreements and important messages. The Allies have closed ranks, and the new Madrid Strategic Concept reclaims collective security as the undisputed cornerstone, the *raison d'être* of the Alliance. Germany has reversed its previous stance on defence issues; Sweden and Finland are moving towards membership; Denmark is abandoning its absenteeism in the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy. It seems that this time, the commitment to increase military spending is serious. This reinforcement of security and defence in Europe, an undesirable effect for Moscow, means that Russia will have to manage a common border with NATO that will double in size by the time the Nordic enlargement is completed. It will have to increase its military spending to reinforce the new border regions with increased deployment, the creation of units, the construction of bases and other infrastructure, the conduct of major exercises and the build-up of its arsenal<sup>10</sup>.

To put a snag in this panorama of transatlantic understanding and unanimity, it remains to be seen whether the Eastern countries' call to contain Russian aggressiveness will not once again relegate to the background the imperative need to contain the same Russian presence in Africa, and more specifically in the Maghreb and the Sahel, scenarios where the deterioration in the security situation has become alarming. The explicit mention of the Sahel in the new Strategic Concept is a good step in this direction that should not remain as simply good intentions<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Macron calls for a Convention to revise the European Treaties. 9 May, 2022.

[https://www.lepoint.fr/politique/emmanuel-berretta/macron-appelle-a-une-convention-de-revision-des-traites-europeens-09-05-2022-2474839\\_1897.php](https://www.lepoint.fr/politique/emmanuel-berretta/macron-appelle-a-une-convention-de-revision-des-traites-europeens-09-05-2022-2474839_1897.php)

<sup>10</sup> Russia's defence chief says 12 military units and divisions in the western region will be launched in response to the Finnish and Swedish bids to join the alliance. 20 May, 2022. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/5/20/russia-vows-countermeasures-to-finland-sweden-bid-to-join-nato>

<sup>11</sup> "We will work with partners to tackle shared security threats and challenges in regions of strategic interest to the Alliance, including the Middle East and North Africa and the Sahel regions". NATO 2022 SC, 29 June, 2022. [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/290622-strategic-concept.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/290622-strategic-concept.pdf)

China is watching with great interest what is happening in the old continent. As long as North America remains "hooked" on Europe, the People's Republic will continue to expand its influence among small and medium-sized Pacific countries<sup>12</sup>. While it is clearly in tune with Russia, the indefinite prolongation of the war and its disastrous consequences cannot be to the liking of a global trading power, whose most valued client is also Europe. With an eye on the rivalry with the United States in its immediate surroundings, it will draw valuable lessons from the unfolding events in Ukraine and reactions in the West, while aware that Ukraine and Taiwan are radically different cases. America, in turn, must seek ways to contain Beijing in the Pacific by increasing cooperation with Asian countries, and not just the usual ones (Japan, South Korea or Australia), through mutually advantageous agreements not only in security but also in economic and trade matters. It was with this in mind that President Biden undertook a tour of the Pacific countries in May. During this tour, the US President insisted, more forcefully than usual, on Washington's determination to defend the current status of the island of Formosa in the event of an invasion by the People's Republic<sup>13</sup>. This over-enthusiasm had to be subsequently tempered by the US administration.

### **OK, and at this point... what?**

The international community's first priority must be to put an end to the fighting. While the number of voices in this direction is increasing, it is also true that other very powerful voices advocate continuing the war until Russia is totally defeated<sup>14</sup>, a particularly dangerous gamble given that Russia is the world's leading nuclear power. The negotiating table is a long way off, as both sides start from irreconcilable positions: Ukraine claims its undeniable right to territorial integrity and sovereignty; and Russia, having started the war, cannot accept defeat. From this side of the trench, the European side, the debate is between two positions that are difficult to reconcile. On the one hand, there are those who suggest taking a deep breath and seeking a (bad) deal, in which Ukraine would pay the

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<sup>12</sup> China and Cambodia break ground at naval base in show of 'iron-clad' relations. 10 June 2022.

<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/06/09/asia/china-cambodia-naval-base-military-intl-hnk/index.html#:~:text=The%20denials%20came%20after%20The,province%2C%20Cambodia%2C%20in%202019>.

<sup>13</sup> Joe Biden on his tour of Asia: The US will defend Taiwan if China attempts an invasion. 23 May, 2022.

<https://www.france24.com/es/asia-pac/C3%ADfico/20220523-biden-taiwan-china-acuerdo-comercial-indopacifico>

<sup>14</sup> Offering the Russian president a face-saving compromise will only enable future aggression. 23 May, 2022.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/05/why-ukraine-must-defeat-putin-russia/629940/>



price of the mutilation of its sovereignty and territory so that Putin could claim victory<sup>15</sup>, albeit a Pyrrhic one; and on the other, there are those who warn of the risk of repeating the mistake of 1938 in the Munich Pact, when Premier Chamberlain opted for appeasement towards Hitler, with the well-known results. For the latter, the only acceptable option is the unmitigated defeat of the Russian forces<sup>16</sup>.

The urgency of events in Ukraine should not lead us to ignore the situation on other stages. Let the Ukrainian tree not prevent us from seeing the whole of the global forest. Multilateralism is being challenged by powers that do not share the norms and rules on which the current international order is based. As we have seen, the West is far from being a source of widespread and unwavering adherence. The war in Ukraine highlights how global governance is suffering: The United Nations is paralysed by the veto of the very person who has savagely violated international legality; the G-7 will no longer be the inclusive G-8 that invited Russia to join the big players club; the G-20 will have great difficulty reaching consensus between China and Russia on the one hand, and the democratic powers on the other; the more necessary than ever arms control agreements and confidence-building measures are, in these circumstances, a chimera; returning to some kind of agreement with Iran over its nuclear race will not be easy either, and so on.

Globalisation is a victim of its excesses; of the last fifteen years' economic crises; of a pandemic that paralysed the world; and even of a shipping accident through the Suez Canal that interrupted maritime traffic along this route for barely a week. The reconsideration of value chains is leading us towards a slower model of globalisation, *Slowbalisation* as *The Economist* called it; more regionalised by shortening and diversifying these value chains, and more protectionist, having not forgotten the tariff war during Trump's presidency. This journal returned to the subject in its June issue: *Reinventing globalisation*<sup>17</sup>. In a globalised and highly interconnected world it is very worrying to imagine a partition into two blocs revolving



<sup>15</sup> Macron: Peace in Ukraine cannot be achieved by humiliating Russia. 9 May, 2022.

<https://www.dw.com/es/macron-paz-en-ucrania-no-se-logra-con-humillaci%C3%B3n-de-rusia/a-61738315>

<sup>16</sup> The utter necessity of a Russian defeat. 20 May, 2022. <https://thehill.com/opinion/national-security/3495945-the-utter-necessity-of-a-russian-defeat/>

<sup>17</sup> Reinventing globalisation, The Economist. June, 2022. <https://www.economist.com/weeklyedition/2022-06-18>

around the United States and China, with watertight trading systems, not communicating with each other and on a determined geopolitical collision course.

Last, when the guns fall silent, a new European security architecture will have to be established based on the changes resulting from NATO's revitalisation and its new Strategic Concept. It should also incorporate the EU initiatives contained in the recently approved Strategic Compass; and include a sincere and determined 360° approach that also considers the South<sup>18</sup>. It must be, unfortunately, currently against Russia. And while the opposite would be desirable, it is impossible with this aggressive, threatening and destructive Russia. But it could be possible with a different, reliable Russia that respects international legality. And that would be so necessary since there will be no stability or lasting peace on the continent until Russia's integration into Europe's security design is part of the equation. But this is not going to happen tomorrow.

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<sup>18</sup> DACOBA CERVIÑO, Francisco José. *New Strategic Concept: the South also exists*. November, 2021. <https://institutofranklin.net/sites/default/files/revistas/%5B2022-01/tn36-dacoba.pdf>