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ONE MAN’S VISION, ONE PROTRACTED WAR: VLADIMIR PUTIN AND THE RUSSIA–UKRAINE CONFLICT

Abstract

The protracted Russia-Ukraine conflict is considered one of the deadliest conflicts in Europe after World War II. This paper argues that Vladimir Putin’s ideological vision, rather than external threats such as NATO’s expansion, is the primary driver sustaining this crisis. Putin’s strategic objective is to reassert Russian dominance by restoring a “Russian World” and countering Western dominance through alliances with authoritarian regimes, including China, Iran, and North Korea. The paper critically examines competing narratives, contrasting realist explanations of defensive security responses with Putin’s assertive ambitions to reshape the global order. Employing a qualitative methodology grounded in constructivist international relations and political psychology, the research highlights the psychological and individual dimensions of Putin’s leadership. The findings reveal how Putin’s nationalist and authoritarian vision, combined with evolving global alliances and geopolitical tensions, perpetuates the conflict and challenges the existing international security framework. This paper offers renewed insights into the interplay between individual leadership, ideological conviction and the shifting balance of global power.

Keywords: Russia-Ukraine War, Putin’s Vision, Authoritarianism, Geopolitics, Global Conflict, NATO Expansion

1. Introduction

Russia-Ukraine war has by now transformed into a protracted conflict.¹ Along with preparation for war, it is also a matter of decision-making where leaders always take the first stance.² In the case of the Russia-Ukraine war, the scenario is not different. Some argue that from the realist perspective, the war has been taking place

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¹ Protracted conflict refers to an armed conflict that continues over a long period of time without reaching a decisive or lasting solution.

² Iffat Ara Jasmin et al., “American Exceptionalism Redefined,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Social Problems*, eds. Rajendra Baikady et al. (Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2026), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-68127-2_888-1.

due to the threat from the West, in particular from NATO.³ It is common that scholars have different opinions and perspectives regarding reasons for war.⁴ However, this paper seeks to explain why Putin can be considered as responsible for prolonging the conflict and how this war has become a global engagement, along with its outcomes.

In 2014, Russia took 7 per cent of Ukraine's land, which was the home of about three million people.⁵ Since the 2022 invasion, Russia has captured three times as much territory. By early 2025, Russia controlled about 80 per cent of Donbas and nearly 75 per cent of the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions. Although exact numbers are unclear, around six million people, more than 10 per cent of Ukraine's population, now live under Russian rule, including 1.5 million children.⁶ This suggests that the invasion was not an accident, as it took a long time and involved numerous efforts.

Adam Kinzinger, former US congressman, and retired general Ben Hodges, wrote in a 2024 CNN op-ed that if Ukraine had received all the weapons that they needed from the beginning, the war could have ended sooner.⁷ Though in the later period, Ukraine attained the highest level of support, why is this war still taking so long to end? It poses a significant question: was it Putin's vision to continue the war even after facing many barriers?

The West and the US have supported Ukraine the most and made the war costlier, making it harder for Russia to continue the war with sanctions, and forcing Putin to end the war. On the other hand, it is unlikely that Putin would accept another option. He has this belief that stopping Ukraine from becoming too close to the West is essential for Russia, along with the matter of safety for his regime as well.⁸

³ Ryuta Ito, "Hubris Balancing: Classical Realism, Self-Deception and Putin's War against Ukraine," *International Affairs* 99, no. 5 (2023): 2037–55, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iad180>; Jeremi Suri, "Realism and Empire," *Diplomatic History* 47, no. 2 (2023): 354–57, <https://doi.org/10.1093/dh/dhac099>; Saeed Khavarinejad, "How Putin's Perceived Threats Escalate Russia-West Tensions: A Balance of Threat-Based Content Analysis," *Russian Politics* 9, no. 4 (2024): 524–54, <https://doi.org/10.30965/24518921-00904004>; John J. Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault," *Foreign Affairs*, August 18, 2014, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-08-18/why-ukraine-crisis-west-s-fault>; Harald Edinger, "Offensive Ideas: Structural Realism, Classical Realism and Putin's War on Ukraine," *International Affairs* 98, no. 6 (2022): 1873–93, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iia217>.

⁴ Sabyasachi Karmaker et al., "Integration of Rebel Groups and Stability of Peace Agreements," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Social Change*, eds. Rajendra Baikady et al. (Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2026), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-87624-1_450-1; Sabyasachi Karmaker et al., "The Implications of AI in Monitoring Human Rights Violations," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Social Problems*, eds. Rajendra Baikady et al. (Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2026), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-68127-2_863-1.

⁵ Brandon C. Prins et al., "Managing Territorial Conflict: An Introduction to This Special Issue," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 34, no. 2 (2017): 121–25, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0738894216650640>.

⁶ Nataliya Gumenyuk, "Putin's Ukraine: The End of War and the Price of Russian Occupation," *Foreign Affairs*, February 12, 2025, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/putins-ukraine>.

⁷ Adam Kinzinger and Ben Hodges, "Opinion: Time to Call Putin's Bluff," CNN, May 30, 2024, <https://www.cnn.com/2024/05/30/opinions/biden-ukraine-russia-putin-nuclear-kinzinger-hodges/index.html>.

⁸ Khavarinejad, "How Putin's Perceived Threats Escalate Russia-West Tensions."

When Putin invaded Ukraine, it was his personal choice; there was less urgent or ostensible danger to Russia in attacking Ukraine. Top US officials, like CIA Director William Burns and National Security Council expert Eric Green, observed that many Russian officials did not even know about the plan of attack.⁹ However, Russian officials and some leaders from the Global South argued that NATO's continued expansion and Ukraine's closer ties with Western institutions created a growing security concern for Russia.¹⁰ Apart from that, China has also stressed the idea of "indivisible security," suggesting that the security of one state should not come at the expense of another, and has criticised alliance-based approaches for increasing tensions.¹¹ While these perspectives emphasise structural security issues, this paper argues that they do not fully account for the prolonged nature of the conflict.

The paper is guided by two interrelated research questions. First, how has Vladimir Putin's strategic vision contributed to transforming the Russia–Ukraine war into a protracted conflict, and to what extent is it driven by his individual ideological motivations rather than external security threats? Second, how has the persistence of this war contributed to its evolution into a globally engaging conflict, reshaping geopolitical alignments and challenging stability of the existing international order? While both questions are addressed, the primary analytical focus of this paper is on explaining the war's protracted character through leadership ideology and political psychology.

The paper argues that although structural security concerns created permissive conditions for conflict, the war's prolonged character is better explained by Putin's ideational framework and psychological commitment to restoring a civilizational "Russian World."¹² His leadership vision transforms the conflict from a limited strategic operation into an identity-driven, regime-sustaining project, thereby reducing incentives for compromise and extending the war's duration.

It further analyses the broader geopolitical consequences, including the formation of authoritarian alliances challenging the existing Western-led international order. Addressing a critical gap in the literature, this paper explores

⁹ Peter Schroeder, "Putin Will Never Give Up in Ukraine," *Foreign Affairs*, September 3, 2024, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/putin-will-never-give-ukraine>.

¹⁰ Qinru Dai et al., "The Impact of NATO in the Current International Political Landscape in the Russia–Ukraine War," *Journal of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences* 28 (April 2024): 154–58, <https://doi.org/10.54097/tkpxwj62>.

¹¹ Daojiong Zha and Ting Dong, "Catchy but Not New: 'Indivisible Security' in the Chinese Foreign Policy Lexicon," *China: An International Journal* 22, no. 1 (2024): 42–59.

¹² Iffat Ara Jasmin and Imran Hosen, "Trump 2.0: Redefining America's Role in the Global Order," *Discover Global Society* 3, no. 1 (2025): 140, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s44282-025-00281-7>.

the underexamined psychological and personal factors influencing Putin's strategic choices, offering new insights into the persistence and escalation of the conflict. The paper first reviews the existing literature on the Russia-Ukraine conflict and Putin's role in it. It then analyses Putin's ideological vision and the war's global implications before examining the geopolitical consequences and challenges to peace efforts.

The paper employs a qualitative research design grounded in interpretive and thematic analysis of publicly available secondary data. The data sources include official speeches and writings of Vladimir Putin, government policy documents, academic literature, media reports, and historical texts related to the Russia-Ukraine conflict and its global repercussions. Using a constructivist international relations framework and insights from political psychology, the paper analyses the ideological and psychological motivations underlying Putin's strategic decisions, emphasising how his nationalist vision and authoritarian leadership contribute to the conflict's protracted and globally engaging nature.

The constructivist perspective states that state behaviour is not solely shaped by the military or material resources; rather, identity, historical narratives, and norms also meaningfully contribute.¹³ For this reason, this study adopts an approach that goes beyond realist assumptions and helps interpret how Putin, as a leader, views Russia's history, norms, identity, responsibility and its role in the international system. To achieve a better understanding of Putin's personal beliefs along with cognitive patterns, a perspective has been taken based on political psychology, where this study observes speeches from Putin directly, for instance, his articles, official statements, and policy narratives, to identify patterns such as nationalism, historical mythmaking, and the perception of the threat from the West. These sources help infer psychological factors such as cognitive biases, emotional motivations, and identity-driven beliefs. These psychological factors help explain why Putin is deying the high cost of war and not looking back.

The research involves coding qualitative data by manually identifying and categorising key themes, and thematically analysing narratives concerning Putin's personal beliefs, the formation of authoritarian alliances, and geopolitical realignments that challenge Western dominance. Given the sensitive and opaque nature of high-level political decision-making, this approach relies on discourse analysis to infer leadership intentions and motives. Limitations include reliance on secondary sources and potential interpretive bias, but triangulation across diverse materials that aims to ensure a balanced, rigorous analysis.

¹³ Richard Jackson and Matt McDonald, "Constructivism, US Foreign Policy and the 'War on Terror,'" in *New Directions in US Foreign Policy*, eds. Inderjeet Parmar, Linda B. Miller, Mark Ledwidge (London: Routledge, 2009).

The argumentative part of this article is divided into three sections. In the first section, it tries to prove that Putin's invasion was not a defensive move but rather a strategic choice rooted in his personal beliefs. In the next section, it explains how it becomes a globally engaging war. Also, this part addresses how Putin's establishment of ties with some authoritarian countries helps reduce Russia's isolation, while these ties also pose a challenge to Western dominance. The third part examines the costs of the Russia-Ukraine war and the uncertain peace-making process, including barriers, by considering Trump's peace talks and what might be the future consequences for geopolitics in Europe and the world.

2. Literature Review

The Russia-Ukraine war, initiated by Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, has rapidly evolved into a protracted and complex conflict with significant global ramifications. This literature review critically examines existing scholarship on the causes, motivations, and consequences of the conflict, with particular emphasis on Vladimir Putin's central role in both initiating and sustaining the war. The primary objective is to explore dominant theoretical explanations, the ideological underpinnings of Putin's decisions, and the international repercussions reshaping the geopolitical landscape.

A dominant theme in the literature is that Putin's vision of restoring Russia's imperial stature, combined with his authoritarian leadership style, is the principal driver of the conflict. This stands in contrast to traditional realist interpretations, which primarily attribute Russia's aggression to NATO's eastward expansion. Mearsheimer, a leading realist scholar, posits that NATO's encroachment on Russia's borders provoked a defensive reaction, triggering the war.¹⁴ However, more recent analyses, including those by Cox and Ferraro, underscore the primacy of Putin's personal ideological ambitions.¹⁵ Fukumoto and Tabuchi further elucidate how authoritarian regimes often employ external conflicts as mechanisms to consolidate internal power, reinforcing this perspective.¹⁶

The protracted nature of the conflict is frequently attributed to Putin's steadfast refusal to negotiate or withdraw, driven by a nationalist vision intertwined

¹⁴ Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault."

¹⁵ Michael Cox, "In the Shadow of the Russian Revolution: Putin, Xi and the Long War in Ukraine," *Critique* 50, no. 2–3 (2022): 287–305, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03017605.2022.2135276>; Vicente Ferraro, "Why Russia Invaded Ukraine and How Wars Benefit Autocrats: The Domestic Sources of the Russo-Ukrainian War," *International Political Science Review* 45, no. 2 (2024): 170–91, <https://doi.org/10.1177/01925121231215048>.

¹⁶ Kentaro Fukumoto and Takahiro Tabuchi, "The Rally 'round the Flag Effect in Third Parties: The Case of the Russian Invasion of Ukraine," *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* 35, no. 1 (2025): 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17457289.2023.2293198>.

with his authoritarian governance.¹⁷ This stance has not only prolonged hostilities but has also entrenched divisions within the international community. Putin's strategic alliances with China, Iran, and North Korea, countries sharing authoritarian traits, have served to mitigate the effects of Western sanctions and further polarised global power structures.¹⁸

The "rally around the flag" effect, in which authoritarian leaders mobilise public support by portraying external threats, is central to understanding the domestic dynamics underpinning the conflict. Fukumoto and Tabuchi note that regimes like Putin's manipulate perceptions of external danger to unify populations behind their leadership, particularly when facing internal challenges.¹⁹ This dynamic has been evident in Putin's framing of Ukraine's Western alignment, especially its prospective NATO membership, as existential threats to Russian sovereignty. Ferraro elaborates that the war exceeds territorial disputes, functioning instead as an instrument to reinforce Putin's personal authority and Russia's geopolitical dominance.²⁰

While realist perspectives provide critical insight into the conflict's geopolitical context, they inadequately account for the deeply ingrained ideological and personal motivations driving Putin's decisions. The literature reviewed suggests that the war's persistence stems as much from these internal drivers as from external security concerns. Putin's nationalist vision, grounded in the belief that Ukraine and Russia share a common historical and cultural heritage essential to restoring Russia's global power, has been a decisive factor.²¹ This ideology transforms the conflict from a localised territorial dispute into a broader civilizational struggle, with Putin seeking to reassert Russia's rightful place in the international order.²²

Authoritarian consolidation is another recurrent theme. Edinger argues that authoritarian leaders, once committed to war, seldom retreat, as doing so risks undermining their grip on power.²³ In Putin's case, the war serves as a tool to suppress domestic dissent by equating opposition with betrayal of national interests. This has enabled him to maintain power despite the considerable economic and military costs Russia has incurred.

The global consequences of the war extend beyond Russia and Ukraine. The conflict has catalysed a geopolitical realignment, exemplified by Russia's deepening

¹⁷ Edinger, "Offensive Ideas."

¹⁸ Saeed Shokoohi, "Putin's Misperceptions and the Russian Invasion of Ukraine in 2022," *Central Eurasia Studies* 15, no. 2 (2023): 265–88, <https://doi.org/10.22059/jcep.2023.349531.450103>.

¹⁹ Fukumoto and Tabuchi, "The Rally 'round the Flag Effect in Third Parties."

²⁰ Ferraro, "Why Russia Invaded Ukraine and How Wars Benefit Autocrats."

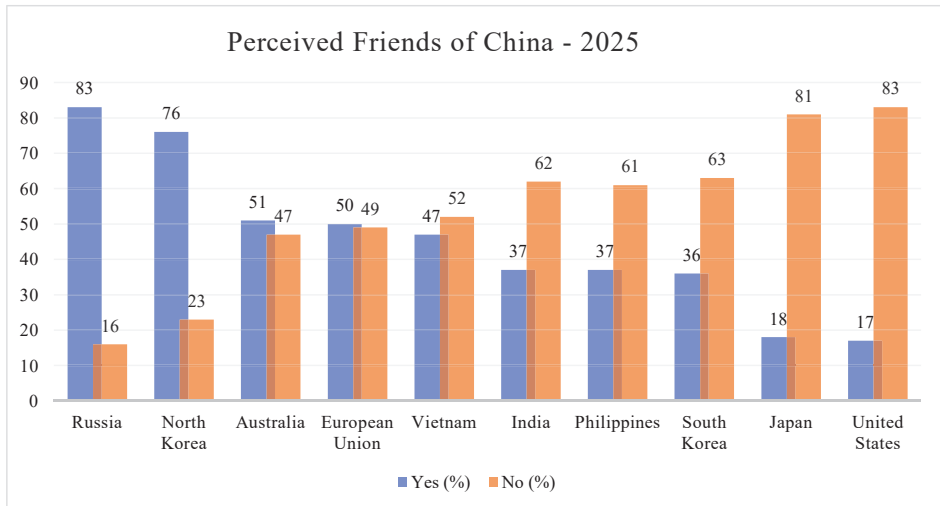
²¹ Cox, "In the Shadow of the Russian Revolution."

²² Ferraro, "Why Russia Invaded Ukraine and How Wars Benefit Autocrats."

²³ Edinger, "Offensive Ideas."

ties with China, Iran, and North Korea, an emerging axis challenging Western liberal democracies.²⁴

Figure 1: Public perceptions of which countries are “friends of China.”²⁵



Source: Chicago Council on Global Affairs & The Carter Center (2025)²⁶

As shown in Figure 1, Russia (83%) and North Korea (76%) are overwhelmingly viewed as China’s closest friends, while Western democracies such as the United States (17%) and Japan (18%) are perceived as least friendly. These perceptions highlight how Russia’s alignment with other authoritarian states is not only strategic but also widely recognised, reinforcing the argument that the Ukraine war has accelerated global polarisation. These alliances have been instrumental in allowing Russia to withstand sanctions and sustain its military campaign.

Traditional diplomatic efforts, such as the Minsk agreements, have largely failed to achieve lasting peace. Kendall-Taylor and Kofman highlight the challenges of negotiating with authoritarian regimes whose leaders prioritise personal vision over pragmatic compromise.²⁷ Edinger similarly stresses the absence of internal

²⁴ Shokoohi, “Putin’s Misperceptions and the Russian Invasion of Ukraine in 2022.”

²⁵ The figure generated by the authors based on the given data from the Chicago Council on Global Affairs and The Carter Center (2025). The survey sample included 1,002 Chinese citizens.

²⁶ Sam Dong Dina Smeltz et al., “Friends with Benefits: Chinese See Russia and North Korea as Beijing’s Closest Comrades,” Research, The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, September 2, 2025, <https://globalaffairs.org/research/public-opinion-survey/friends-benefits-chinese-see-russia-and-north-korea-beijings-closest>.

²⁷ Andrea Kendall-Taylor and Michael Kofman, “Putin’s Point of No Return,” *Foreign Affairs*, December 18, 2024, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/russia/putins-point-no-return>.

checks on leaders like Putin, which diminishes prospects for negotiated settlements despite escalating costs.²⁸

Although, extensive research explores the geopolitical and ideological dimensions of the Russia-Ukraine war, the psychological and personal motivations driving Vladimir Putin's decision-making remain underexamined. Hence, a clear research gap remains. This oversight limits a comprehensive understanding of the conflict's protracted nature. Addressing this gap, this study investigates how Putin's personal beliefs and historical perceptions shape strategic choices that have prolonged and globalised the conflict. In sum, the Russia-Ukraine war is a multifaceted phenomenon shaped by a complex interplay of external security concerns, ideological convictions, and authoritarian political dynamics. Putin's nationalist and authoritarian vision remain central to the conflict's duration, while the war's global repercussions signal a profound shift in international power relations.

While existing scholarship has explored Putin's personal ideology and authoritarian motivations in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, this study advances the discourse by integrating psychological factors such as Putin's cognitive biases, historical perceptions, and the emotional motivations behind his strategic decisions with an analysis of emerging global authoritarian alliances and the complex challenges of the peace process. Unlike prior research, which often treats ideology and geopolitics separately, this paper provides a holistic understanding of how Putin's personal vision intersects with broader international realignments, thereby sustaining the conflict's protracted and global nature. This integrative approach fills a crucial gap by revealing the dynamic interplay between individual leadership, ideological conviction, and shifting global power structures.

3. Putin's War in Ukraine: A Conflict Fuelled by One Man's Vision

Western countries warned in 2021 that Russia might invade Ukraine, a claim Putin denied. However, on 24 February, 2022, he shocked the world by launching an invasion, which has since escalated into a protracted conflict.²⁹ There are numerous explanations for why the war occurred; some argue that as NATO expanded closer to Russia, Ukraine expressed a desire to join, which prompted Russia to perceive a threat and launch an invasion.³⁰ Most importantly, some argue that Putin is solely responsible for the war, citing his personality and ambition to establish Russia

²⁸ Edinger, "Offensive Ideas."

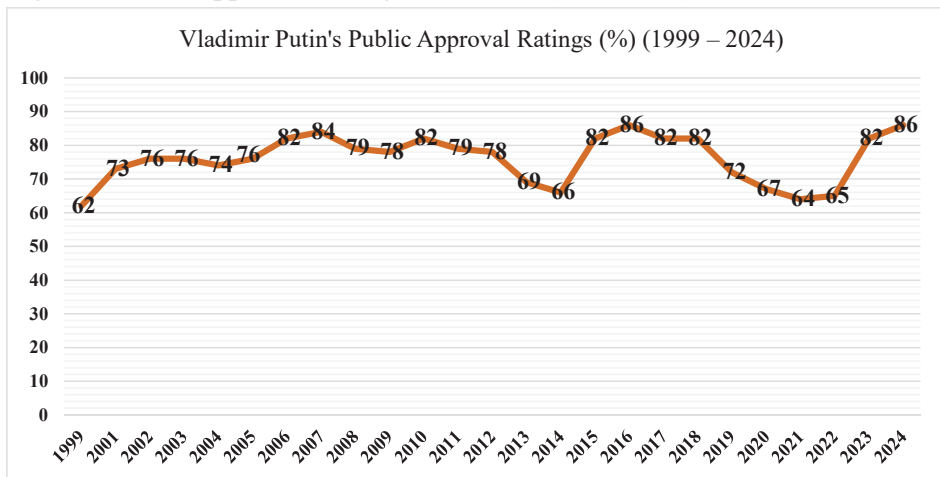
²⁹ Mikhail Polianskii, "Inside Vladimir Putin's Hall of Mirrors: How the Kremlin's Miscalculation of Western Resolve Emboldened Russia's Invasion of Ukraine," *Nationalities Papers*, October 31, 2024, 1–19, <https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2024.76>.

³⁰ Suri, "Realism and Empire."

as the most powerful country, free from Western domination.³¹ According to the defensive realist scholars, the invasion was nothing more than a response to NATO's expansion and a means for Russia to preserve the balance of power. On the other hand, the aggressive war view holds that it was Russia's authoritarian government and imperial ambitions that caused the war, where Putin's view helped to sustain the momentum of the war.³²

Putin and his government portrayed Ukraine and the West as a threat as part of their strategic tool to legitimise the invasion.³³ That has led to his regime's survival, increased nationalism, and boosted his popularity (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Putin Approval Ratings Over Time (1999–2024)³⁴



Source: Levada Analytical Center (August 1999 – October 2024)³⁵

Putin perceives this invasion as a means of ‘state building’ nationalism, aimed at strengthening the current state by seizing external territory based on

³¹ Ito, “Hubris Balancing”; Robert Person and Michael McFaul, “What Putin Fears Most,” *Journal of Democracy* 33, no. 2 (2022): 18–27, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/jod.2022.0015>; Jeffrey Mankoff, “The War in Ukraine and Eurasia’s New Imperial Moment,” *The Washington Quarterly* 45, no. 2 (2022): 127–47, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2022.2090761>.

³² Ferraro, “Why Russia Invaded Ukraine and How Wars Benefit Autocrats.”

³³ Magdalena Kaltseis, “(De)Legitimization Strategies of Russia’s War against Ukraine: A Case Study of Russian Television Programs,” *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 66, no. 3–4 (2024): 368–88, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00085006.2024.2421660>.

³⁴ The chart was generated by the authors based on the data taken from the Levada Analytical Center, and it is also summarized in The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, January 13, 2025. <https://globalaffairs.org/research/public-opinion-survey/russians-rally-around-putins-foreign-policy>.

³⁵ Levada Center, *Indicators*, 2025, <https://www.levada.ru/en/ratings/>.

historical claims to Ukraine.³⁶ This form of nationalism compels individuals residing in Russia to support the continuation of the conflict until victory is achieved, serving as a source of inspiration for Putin that mirrors his personal beliefs.

Putin's government worked meticulously to portray Ukraine as a bigger threat. In 2004, when Ukraine's Orange Revolution took place, Putin's government spread the idea that Ukraine's identity was influenced by the West to weaken Russia.³⁷ This framing also helped Putin to invade Ukraine as a way to defend Russia.

3.1 *Authoritarian Power and War as Regime Survival*

Since the 1990s, most conflict or political violence have been involved in strengthening the dictatorship.³⁸ The reason is simple: this is how authoritarian governments try to sustain their power. War or fighting against minority groups increases public and political support for the leader, a phenomenon known as the "rally 'round the flag" effect.³⁹ Putin is not exceptional in this case. In an authoritarian regime like Putin's, power is concentrated in a single leader. In this case, there are fewer people to stop the leader from starting a war. Putin did the same; there is no check-and-balance in his regime. However, it is important to remember that Putin is also using this war as a tool to weaken the remaining opposition. Through this war, Putin has successfully captured people's consent along with power so that nobody can raise questions regarding his steps.⁴⁰

During war or other dangers, people are willing to sacrifice their freedom for security. For example, after the 9/11 attacks in the US, many supported strict security measures.⁴¹ Even though political psychologists have shown that when people feel threatened, they tend to support authoritarian ideas or leaders. Even elites and individuals from all sectors support authoritarian leaders when they feel threatened

³⁶ Ecaterina Locoman and Richard R. Lau, "Narratives of Conflict: Russian Media's Evolving Treatment of Ukraine (2013–2022)," *Media, War & Conflict*, June 13, 2024, 17506352241257053, <https://doi.org/10.1177/17506352241257053>.

³⁷ Rolf Zimmermann, "Power Politics for Western Democracy: The War against Ukraine in the Context of Epochal Conflicts," in *After the War?: How the Ukraine War Challenges Political Theories*, ed. Anton Leist and Rolf Zimmermann (De Gruyter, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111183343-009>.

³⁸ Faisal Z Ahmed, "Analytical Framework," in *Conquests and Rents: A Political Economy of Dictatorship and Violence in Muslim Societies*, Political Economy of Institutions and Decisions (Cambridge University Press, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009367509.003>.

³⁹ Fukumoto and Tabuchi, "The Rally 'round the Flag Effect in Third Parties."

⁴⁰ Katarzyna A. Przybyła, "State Silencing as a Tool to Suppress Russians' Civil Resistance to the War with Ukraine," *Peace Review* 36, no. 1 (2024): 75–82, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10402659.2024.2314586>.

⁴¹ Murat Haner et al., "Making America Safe Again: Public Support for Policies to Reduce Terrorism," *Deviant Behavior* 42, no. 10 (2021): 1209–27, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2020.1738638>.

for security.⁴² This supporting umbrella of people helps the leader to focus on his own vision.⁴³ Putin used NATO's expansion and Western help to Ukraine as a tool to portray in front of the Russian people as a threat, so that people feel a threat to their security and support Putin.⁴⁴ Eventually, this war created an opportunity for Putin to focus on his vision and make it a protracted one. He was not only securing his regime but also looking for the next step.

The realist approach to international relations views countries as "billiard balls" solely concerned with acquiring power, while disregarding internal developments. Realists often say that Russia invaded Ukraine to make sure of a balance of power in Europe.⁴⁵ But they overlooked the possibility that war could occur not only to maintain a balance of power but also to help leaders gain support to stay in power. This is the approach Putin has adopted to maintain his power and solidify his regime.

Along with Russia's external security, it is also important to discuss Russia's internal issues. While geopolitics and economic security matter, this invasion helped Putin to attain more power at home. Putin realised the benefits of war during his early presidency. In the Second Chechen War (1999–2000), because of his strong stance, he enhanced his popularity and let him win the first round of the presidential election that took place in 2000.⁴⁶ As shown in Figure 2, Putin's approval rating among the people increased significantly during periods of military conflict and while he was dealing with external threats. This pattern provides stronger support for the argument that war and perceived external pressure reinforced domestic support for Putin, helping him sustain his authoritarian attributes and contributing to the continuation of the war.

3.2 *National Mythmaking and Historical Revisionism*

Putin believes a democratic Ukraine might be a threat to his regime and Russia. And invading was the only way to deal with this threat. Putin's war strategy makes it clear that he has a series of plans to restore Cold War-era power. Even in his

⁴² Oluf Gøtzsche-Astrup and Michael A. Hogg, "Psychology of Authoritarianism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Authoritarian Politics*, ed. Anne Wolf (Oxford University Press, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198871996.013.46>.

⁴³ Iffat Ara Jasmin et al., "Geopolitical Chessboard: China's Belt and Road Initiative and Shifting Power Dynamics," *Discover Global Society* 3, no. 1 (2025): 65, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s44282-025-00200-w>.

⁴⁴ Claudio Catalano, "Casus Belli: NATO Enlargement to Eastern Europe as a Justification for Russian Aggression to Ukraine," *De Europa* 7, no. 2 (2024): 57–74, <https://doi.org/10.13135/2611-853X/11421>.

⁴⁵ Ito, "Hubris Balancing."

⁴⁶ Paolo Calzini, "Vladimir Putin and the Chechen War," *The International Spectator* 40, no. 2 (2005): 19–28, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03932720508457122>.

speech, he mentioned that all post-soviet states belong to Russia.⁴⁷ It might be only one reason for his war in Ukraine, driven by the desire to expand Russia's power.

Russia has the military strength to take over Ukraine, but holding the war for a long time, it indicates a different plan that Putin was preparing for long-time. Again, it is also stated that Putin and his action do not fit in the rational actor model; rather, his political beliefs override the logical strategy.⁴⁸ Putin's self-deception played a key role in the Soviet Union's past glory, and his obsession with restoring unity, along with his vision of the Russian nation, was shaped by his imagination. He also seems remaining blind to the high cost of war. His belief in his own greatness as a leader prolonged the war. And, this belief is not allowing him to step back from the battlefield.

Putin wants to rebuild the "Russian world," and to revive the power, which once defeated Nazi Germany during the Second World War; this is also echoed by Joseph Nye as well.⁴⁹ His overconfidence and ambition for restoration of Russian image prolonged today's war. This war is not solely focused on Ukraine; it also encompasses the threat of Western liberalism, which he perceives as an ideological conflict between Russia and the West. After the Soviet Union broke apart, that emotional factor drove him to continue the war and to restore lost territory. It is to be taken into consideration that there is a gap between the ideology of Western liberalism and Russian conservatism, and this conservatism fuelled the war by Putin.

Yevgeny Primakov, who was the former prime minister of Russia, once stated that the expansion of NATO is more than a military threat; it is also a psychological factor where it is being perceived as a threat to Russia.⁵⁰ Putin was also being plagued by the same concerns. This is why he is making the war more complex.

Putin's invasion of Ukraine goes beyond material or strategic concerns. He considers Russia a unique land where only Russian culture will exist, nothing else, and this is the greatest one. He is concerned that if Ukraine engages with the US, in particular NATO, there is a possibility of a cultural shift in his geography as well, which will eventually be a big burden and threat for Russia.⁵¹ As a result, he does not wish to face this civilizational threat that would undermine Russia's traditional values. Consequently, Putin seems unstoppable in making a reconciliation. And the victory of

⁴⁷ Roger E Kanet, "Rebuilding a 'Greater Russia' and the Russian Invasion of Ukraine," *Qeios*, June 8, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.32388/ZFI0N0>.

⁴⁸ Schroeder, "Putin Will Never Give Up in Ukraine."

⁴⁹ Marina F Bykova, "A Country That No Longer Exists Editor's Introduction," *Russian Studies in Philosophy* 60, no. 5 (2022): 349–52, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10611967.2022.2174737>.

⁵⁰ Cihan Günyel, "Analysis of NATO-Russian Federation After the Cold War in the Context of the 'Other Identity' Approach," in *International Relations Dynamics in the 21st Century: Security, Conflicts, and Wars*, ed. Merve Suna Özel Özcan (2025), <https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-5688-3.ch010>.

⁵¹ Gumenyuk, "Putin's Ukraine."

Russian conservative ideology is the ultimate goal, which he called “holy war,” and this was stated during the formal annexation of four Ukrainian regions.⁵² He also used the strategy of national myth-making to lead this war according to his direction, where he tried to portray that Ukrainians, Russians, and Belarusians are historically united and one ethnic group.⁵³ The dissolution of the Soviet Union led to the collapse of this unity, which Putin is currently attempting to restore. Hence, Putin’s national mythmaking is another way to justify his brutal actions and to continue the perpetual fight against the West.

There is always a question while blaming Putin for making the war so long; does it have a logical explanation as well? Russia was also very powerful in 2012 and 2014, however, in spite of that he did not launch a full-scale invasion against Ukraine. During that time, Putin prepared the map of national mythmaking; the sense of nationalism had grown in him more aggressively.⁵⁴ Putin’s articles also support the view that he is solely making the scenario worse. In these articles, which were published in 2012 and 2021, the narrative shift of Putin is very visible.⁵⁵ In 2012, he supported and promoted shared citizenship rather than ethnicity. However, in 2021, he united Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians into a single ethnic group. From this vantage point, it is clear that the spirit of the war is not coming solely from NATO’s expansion or from including Ukraine in it; rather, it is his own vision. And after four years of war, Putin still seems determined.

3.3 *Repression, Media Control, and the Silencing of Dissent*

Putin has created a strong narrative to justify his invasion, while exerting strong control over foreign policy decisions. That has also helped him to create the narrative and spread it. It was never intended as a defensive move by Russia, but rather as a means to assert Russian control. He was also inspired by some particular individuals as well, for instance, Lev Gumilev, who used to promote the Russian greatness and uniqueness, and most importantly, Ivan Ilyin, who used to accuse the West of destroying Russia, which aligns with Putin’s idea.⁵⁶

⁵² Cynthia McCormick Hibbert, “What Does It Mean That the Russian Orthodox Church Is Calling Putin’s Invasion of Ukraine a ‘Holy War’?,” *Northeastern Global News*, 2024, <https://news.northeastern.edu/2024/04/03/russian-orthodox-church-ukraine-holy-war/>.

⁵³ Jon Roozenbeek, *Propaganda and Ideology in the Russian–Ukrainian War*, Contemporary Social Issues Series (Cambridge University Press, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009244039>.

⁵⁴ Matthew Blackburn, “The Morphology of Putinism: The Arrangement of Political Concepts into a Coherent Ideology,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* (2024): 1–31, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2024.2431864>.

⁵⁵ Vladimir Putin, “Russia: The Ethnicity Issue,” 2012, <http://archive.premier.gov.ru/eng/events/news/17831/>; “Article by Vladimir Putin: On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians,” President of Russia, July 12, 2021, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>.

⁵⁶ Cox, “In the Shadow of the Russian Revolution.”

Clausewitz once stated that “everything in war is very simple, until it inevitably becomes difficult.” Putin did not take this into consideration; rather, he was obsessed with Russian imperialistic history. Instead of negotiations, Putin imposed stronger laws to punish those who avoided military service or refused to join the fight. What is more concerning is that he is offering the prisoners freedom if they agree to go to the battlefield and fight. Even Ukrainian children were taken, and they were told they were not Ukrainian; rather, they were Russian.⁵⁷ This reflects Putin’s view and imposes his idea on these children. Most importantly, taking children from another country is one of the most heinous crimes and extreme levels of atrocity. Russian actions show that even after three years, Putin is more determined to continue his war against the West and Ukraine, which is also related to changing Europe’s post-Cold War system, where Russia will be the biggest power holder. These goals are not new to the Russians, but as the war has become protracted, it has limited Putin’s options to step back, except to continue. And the roadmap is also very clear: he has created it to fight.

Putin has framed Russia in such a way that no one will ever be able to challenge or change it till he is in power, or maybe even after his departure. Putin also stated that Russia is in an “existential struggle” with the West, and confrontation with the West is a key part of Russian foreign policy, and this has been bolstered due to this war, as the West stands like pillars against Russia and makes barriers to its invasion.⁵⁸

Through using media power, he has also created a narrative that Russia is in a fight with the West, so that his repression gets overlooked and he can focus on his plan. His goals also align with his strategy of intimidating European countries.⁵⁹ Top officials have stated that a significant number of officers were unaware of the attack on Ukraine.⁶⁰ It was Putin who started the war, and he has the capability to end it as well. If he decides to end the war, it will not negatively impact his region, as he has established a system in which no one is superior to him. It is not going to be wrong to state that it is Putin’s own war that he has been planning and will not easily back down.

4. How the Russia-Ukraine War Escalated into a Globally Engaging War?

The Russia-Ukraine war has rekindled the tensions of the Cold War, as it has involved both powerful military alliances and nuclear-armed countries. It will not be

⁵⁷ Rajan Menon, “Putin’s Victory Will Be a Hollow One,” *Foreign Policy*, February 27, 2025, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2025/01/13/russia-ukraine-war-putin-military-strategy-victory-settlement-territory/>.

⁵⁸ Kendall-Taylor and Kofman, “Putin’s Point of No Return.”

⁵⁹ Schroeder, “Putin Will Never Give Up in Ukraine.”

⁶⁰ Kendall-Taylor and Kofman, “Putin’s Point of No Return.”

wrong to say, to some extent, that the war has split the world into two camps based on their interests. Survey evidence also reinforces this geopolitical divide. As Figure 1 demonstrates, Russia and North Korea are most frequently identified as China's closest friends, whereas the United States and Japan are perceived as its least friendly states. This perception maps closely resemble to the emerging authoritarian-versus-democratic bloc dynamic, illustrating how public opinion mirrors the geopolitical realignments triggered by the war. The war made the relationship between the West and Russia worse; despite the long talk, they could not stop Putin from invading.

Since the Cold War, Russia and the West have had both cooperation and conflict. This war is not only about Ukraine but also about the West and the US in particular, which also includes the EU and NATO countries as well. More like this war has engaged the whole world, as these countries and the organisation considered the most influential actor in world politics are involved; in that case, it is justified to state that it is a world-engaging war, but not a world war.

It is also true that the war has failed to meet its immediate needs and caused growing instability. The war also brings China very close to Russia. In 2022, they declared their unrestricted partnership, uniting against Western democracy and the US in particular, with the aim of replacing the global system.⁶¹ Xi Jinping and Putin share the same view on Russia; both admire Stalin and see the collapse of the Soviet Union as a disaster.⁶² This view makes the relationship much stronger, also posing a threat to other countries that share democratic principles.

Ukraine and Russia both got support from other countries. Ukraine received advanced weapons, particularly from the West.⁶³ This helping factor has a drawback. Need to focus on the fact that this battle is not confined to the field but also to leaders' minds, influencing their decisions and perceptions. As previously mentioned, this war has divided the world into two factions: those who support Russia and Putin, and those who advocate the Western perspective. Since the West has come up with its helping hand to Ukraine, Russia, along with its allies, also done the same. This growing sense of division has negative consequences for the future. If any global casualty occurs, it's very likely the division will be there, and cooperation might become impossible. As a result, the idea of the "global" itself and the liberal international order will be questioned.

⁶¹ Marie Pegu, "Russia-China Relationship in the Context of the War in Ukraine: Bonding Over Shared Ideology or Western Sanctions," *Bulletin of "Carol I" National Defence University* 13, no. 3 (2024): 3, <https://doi.org/10.53477/2284-9378-24-44>.

⁶² Cox, "In the Shadow of the Russian Revolution."

⁶³ Margaret MacMillan, "Stress Test," *Foreign Affairs*, January 7, 2025, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/stress-test-trump-margaret-macmillan>.

Even those countries that used to act as neutrals have shifted as well. Initially, India was reluctant to criticise Russia. But later, the Indian prime minister told Putin that today's era is not one of war.⁶⁴ Even the former British prime minister, Liz Truss, stated at the UN that stronger action should be taken against Russia.⁶⁵ This is how this war is becoming engaging for everyone and complicating the path to cooperation. Even a UK magazine called Putin a "cornered rat".⁶⁶ Putin has also threatened the West with the use of nuclear weapons. While talking about the Russia–Ukraine war, these things also need to be taken into consideration: what made a country's leader so aggressive and take a stand so strongly against Putin? These statements prove that the impacts of this war are not confined to Russia and Ukraine but extend beyond them.

4.1 *From Regional Conflict to Global Power Confrontation*

On 06 August 2024, Ukrainian soldiers attacked the Kursk region; this was the biggest attack on Russian land since the Second World War.⁶⁷ In response to this, Putin strongly criticised the US and Europe and also stated that the West was using the Ukrainians to fight against Russia. This is how the war scenario is extended from the Russia-Ukraine battlefield to the West. But more surprisingly, this event almost changed the course of the war, and it can be said that, from a protracted conflict perspective, it became a world-engaging war. From this attack by Ukrainian soldiers, they were stationed for almost three months; after that, Russia brought in North Korean soldiers to push them out.⁶⁸ This was the first time in 100 years that Russia allowed foreign soldiers on its land. This should be highlighted: how this war is engaging other countries and dividing the world. Through this war, one thing is very evident: authoritarian states can work together.

4.2 *Authoritarian Alignment and Systemic Global Consequences*

Russia is already preparing for the future by carrying out secret operations in Europe while working with Iran and North Korea.⁶⁹ The question is not whether Russia is a threat to the US; rather, it is how much bigger a threat Russia poses to the US and its allies. And in the coming days, will Western countries be able to confront the threat or not?

⁶⁴ "Indian PM Modi Tells Russia's Putin Now 'is Not an Era of War'," *Reuters*, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/indian-pm-modi-tells-russias-putin-now-is-not-an-era-war-2022-09-16/>.

⁶⁵ Cox, "In the Shadow of the Russian Revolution."

⁶⁶ Paul Wood, "Cornered: Could Putin Go Nuclear?," *The Spectator*, September 21, 2022, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/cornered-could-putin-go-nuclear/>.

⁶⁷ Kendall-Taylor and Kofman, "Putin's Point of No Return."

⁶⁸ Kendall-Taylor and Kofman, "Putin's Point of No Return."

⁶⁹ Kendall-Taylor and Kofman, "Putin's Point of No Return."

The idea of Russia being in constant conflict with the West strengthens Putin's rule and also helps him stay in power. A concerning fact is that this might help other countries, particularly those with an anti-Western mindset. When Russia is working with countries like China, Iran, and North Korea, apart from working with authoritarian states together, it is helping Russia to stay in long-term competition with the US and its allies. Also, this is a shared view through this war: all of them got the corridor. This support system makes Russia less isolated and less vulnerable, particularly to US economic sanctions; the same goes for others as well. But the biggest beneficiary here is always Russia, as it has overcome its fear of depending too much on China by working with North Korea and Iran. And this strategy will continue even after the Ukraine war ends.

Most importantly, this war put Europe's defence capabilities into question for failing to defend Ukraine. And in the coming days, European countries might come forward again in the Ukrainian field to help them from Russian aggression. Hence, it can be noted that this war is not all about Ukraine-Russia, or the West and Europe, rather it is a war between other emerging powers that transforms this war into a world-engaging conflict? Europe and the US are not dealing with a distant threat. Russia is waging an unconventional war against Europe. Some suspected Russian-backed groups have burned the houses in Germany, pushed the migrants from the Middle East and North Africa to the borders of Poland and Finland, targeted the railways in Sweden and the Czech Republic, assassinated a Russian military defector in Spain, and also plotted to kill the German head of a major European arms company.⁷⁰

In October 2024, Russia hosted the BRICS summit, which indicated that many countries support or still want to work with Russia.⁷¹ Even nuclear weapon drills have been conducted in the southern region of Russia, with the aim of targeting not only Ukraine but also potentially NATO countries such as Bulgaria or Romania.⁷² Moscow stated that the drills were a response to comments made by French President Emmanuel Macron and other NATO leaders regarding the deployment of troops to Ukraine.⁷³ This war is not only posing a threat to the US in particular, but also to others. This threat extends to NATO members as well.

⁷⁰ Kendall-Taylor and Kofman, "Putin's Point of No Return."

⁷¹ Sarah Shamim, "Russia's BRICS Summit: What's on the Agenda and Why It Matters to Putin," *Al Jazeera*, accessed February 24, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/10/22/russias-brics-summit-whats-on-the-agenda-and-why-does-it-matter>.

⁷² "Russia Announces Nuclear Weapon Drills after 'Provocative' Western Threats," *Al Jazeera*, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/5/6/russia-announces-nuclear-weapon-drills-after-provocative-western-threats>

⁷³ Laura Gozzi, "Russia Will Hold Tactical Nuclear Weapons Drills," *BBC News*, May 6, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cq5npwdv3wzo>.

4.3 *Nuclear Brinkmanship, Alliance Expansion, and Global Norm Erosion*

The US and Russia agree on one thing, that is they do not want a nuclear disaster, but then Russia continues to making nuclear threats that seem impossible to ignore. The world has not witnessed such behaviour since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. It can be argued that through this, Russia wants to prove it is ready to take any kind of risk; it does not matter to them what the future circumstances are. These attributes not only fuel the war but also make it hard to step back.

Any peace deal that will take place, where Russia will insist that Ukraine not join NATO, is inconsequential. Because, even if Ukraine does not align with NATO, European countries will not stop supporting it; the number of supporters might decrease, but many will still support Ukraine. Ironically, Putin's war helped NATO grow and made Europe spend more on defence.⁷⁴ Finland and Sweden had no interest in joining NATO before 2022, but after the Russian invasion, they quickly signed up.⁷⁵ Even Switzerland has decided to increase its military spending up to 19% by 2028 and strengthen its ties with Europe, though Switzerland has always been considered a strictly neutral country.⁷⁶ Due to the high cost of war, Russia is relying on foreign soldiers from countries such as Cuba, Nepal, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan when it is short-staffed.⁷⁷

The US secretly helped in the 1980s with the Afghan rebels and made it harder for the Soviets to fight, but the US aid to Ukraine is much more public and makes it a much riskier situation.⁷⁸ As a result, two divisions have been created: one side shares Russia's corner, another side shares the West's corner. In the past, the US supported rebel groups in Afghanistan, not the government. Even during the early Cold War period, in Eastern Europe, the US tried to weaken the Soviet control. But in the case of Ukraine, the scenario is different as the US now is helping a government entity. As international law supports it, the US can provide such help, but there are not many instances available where big powers like the US offer weapons to a smaller country to attack a nuclear-armed enemy. This made the situation much worse.

People in the Global South suffer the most, even when sheltering refugees. Comparatively, it is proven that refugees in the Global South get little attention

⁷⁴ Menon, "Putin's Victory Will Be a Hollow One."

⁷⁵ Phelan Chatterjee, "How Sweden and Finland Went from Neutral to Nato," *BBC News*, May 10, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61397478>.

⁷⁶ Menon, "Putin's Victory Will Be a Hollow One."

⁷⁷ Menon, "Putin's Victory Will Be a Hollow One."

⁷⁸ Taisiya V Rabush "The Provision of Indirect Military Support by US Administration to the Afghan Mujahideens in the 1980s," *Science Journal of VolSU* 22, no. 1 (2017): 77–87, <https://doi.org/10.15688/jvolsu4.2017.1.8>.

compared to those in the Global North. Due to this war, most of the Ukrainian refugees have a better standard of life than the Global South refugees.⁷⁹ This war has brought to light numerous hidden realities. Now the war has been observed all over the world due to its protracted nature, along with how the refugees are being treated, which has been seen from the perspective of marginalisation of the Global South. In this case, if China and Russia show support for this downtrodden region, they will eventually not only defeat the West's hard power strategy but also its soft power strategy. And of course, developing countries need support; they will support those countries that offer a sustainable approach. It would not be a surprising stance if Russia or China showed up in this category. If Russia wins the war, it will be a victory for Russia, with advantages: it will be seen first as NATO's failure and, second, it will raise questions about the US' leadership and the capability to handle global security in the 21st century.

5. The High Cost of War and the Uncertain Road to Peace

The resolution to the Russia-Ukraine conflict appears to be complex. Under Trump's leadership, Ukraine appears to be negotiating a peace deal. The very recent situation between Zelensky and Trump regarding peace talks, instead of finding a solution, is causing more tension. While Trump had a phone call with Putin to make decisions about Ukraine without including Ukraine or its European allies that poses a direct threat to Ukraine's sovereignty.⁸⁰

Together, Russia's strategic unwillingness to compromise, shifting US policy priorities, Europe's security dilemmas, and the economic incentives of defence industries and mercenary networks operate as key spoilers in the peace process. Ukraine is already experiencing the start of isolationism. This issue affects not only Ukraine but also Europe as a whole. This incident has a significant impact on geopolitics.

Trump on the other hand, started blaming Zelensky for the war, also calling him a "dictator without elections," and warned that Ukraine might be a part of Russia.⁸¹ The Trump administration proposed to Ukraine that the United States receive 50 per cent ownership of the nation's rare earth resources and indicated a

⁷⁹ Sk. Tawfique M. Haque and Raymond Kwun-Sun Lau, "Inaugural Essay Russia – Ukraine War and the Contest for a NewWorld Order: A Global South Perspective," *North South Journal of Peace and Global Studies*, January 1, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.47126/nsjpgs.v1i1.02>.

⁸⁰ Patrick Reeve, "What the Trump-Putin Call Means for Ukraine: Analysis," *ABC News*, 2025, <https://abcnews.go.com/International/trump-putin-call-means-ukraine-analysis/story?id=118788646>.

⁸¹ Aamer Madhani and Stephany Matat., "Trump Calls Zelensky a 'Dictator' Amid Russia-Ukraine War," *TIME*, February 19, 2025, <https://time.com/7259420/trump-calls-zelensky-dictator-tensions-rise-over-russia-ukraine-war/>.

willingness to deploy American soldiers to secure them contingent upon a peace agreement with Russia to conclude the conflict.⁸² Though Zelensky agreed to resign if Ukraine is offered to join NATO, it remains a direct threat to Ukraine's national interest.⁸³ This will fuel Putin's desire to continue his vision, and has made the security of Europe and Ukraine vague. Donald Trump said before the election and still having same approach towards Europe that it might need another umbrella, and now he is following that detachment path.⁸⁴ And with this future, European countries, along with NATO countries, are in danger. This danger will lead these countries to feel a security concern toward Russia and may also form an alliance.

For security purposes, if Ukraine leaves the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and gets nuclear weapons again, which they gave up for exchanging security promises from Russia, the United States, and the United Kingdom in the Budapest Memorandum in 1994, this could hurt Ukraine's relationship with Western countries and will lead to a firmer military response from Russia, along with disrupted peace deal.

Again, the Trump administration should get the view that imposing peace deals will not bring peace. Making a rush in this case can repeat the Minsk agreement, which was made after Russia took Crimea and parts of Ukraine's Donetsk and Luhansk regions in 2014. Leaders from Russia, Ukraine, France and Germany tried enough to stop the fighting by signing two agreements called Minsk I (2014) and Minsk II (2015).⁸⁵ These two agreements were intended to ensure a ceasefire and a peaceful solution. But with Putin's invasion again, this has been ignored completely. There is a high likelihood that, with a short-term ceasefire, Putin will return in a more aggressive form and violate any agreements.

5.1 Long-Term Consequences, Lessons and Future Risks

Harald Edinger stated this invasion as a "strategic disaster" because, due to this, thousands of soldiers had to die, the country was isolated, the economy collapsed, public opinion was shaped, and intellectuals were forced to leave the country.⁸⁶

⁸² Courtney Kube et al., "Trump Officials Pitch Zelenskyy on U.S. Owning 50% of Ukraine's Rare Earth Minerals," NBC News, February 15, 2025, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/trump-officials-us-owning-half-ukraine-rare-earth-minerals-rcna192325>.

⁸³ Nik Martin, "Ukraine: Zelenskyy Offers to Quit in Return for NATO Entry," DW, 2025, <https://www.dw.com/en/ukraine-zelenskyy-offers-to-quit-in-return-for-nato-entry/a-71720973>.

⁸⁴ Justin Logan and Joshua Shiffrinson, "A Post-American Europe," *Foreign Affairs*, August 9, 2024, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/europe/post-american-europe-justin-logan-joshua-shiffrinson>.

⁸⁵ Tetiana Kyselova and Yuna Potomkina, "How Not to End the War in Ukraine," *Foreign Affairs*, March 1, 2025, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/russia/how-not-end-war-ukraine>.

⁸⁶ Torbjørn Knutsen, "Overraskelser kommer sjelden alene. Om misforståelser, myter og invasjonen av Ukraina," *Internasjonal Politikk* 80, no. 4 (2022): 4, <https://doi.org/10.23865/intpol.v80.5129>.

Leaders should not fall into the category of self-deception and underestimate the power of another country.⁸⁷ For instance, Zelensky was once seen as a very weak leader but surprised the world with his strategic skills, leading him to be compared with leaders like Winston Churchill.⁸⁸ Another lesson this war has taught is that easy wins and overconfidence among leaders might lead to a devastating outcome, more like the First World War, where it was expected to be a short war but turned out to be a prolonged one.

This war also provides a good insight: when an authoritarian leader fails to fulfil his immediate goal, he becomes aggressive. Putin's strategy reflects the same scenario. The consequence of Putin's decisions comes with a great cost, which is not only destabilising the country but also making more than 6 million Ukrainians refugees, 7 million people displaced, and thousands of civilians killed or injured.⁸⁹ Apart from that, major infrastructures had been destroyed as well; this shows the pragmatic scenario of modern warfare that has the ability to cripple a country for a decade. This war sends a powerful message to the neighbouring states. These neighbouring states might think twice before collaborating with other countries that go against the Russian order. It might be framed as a direct punch to the global liberal order.

Earlier, it was stated that Putin is offering freedom to the prisoners who agree to fight against Ukraine. This will have a long-term impact and eventually make those prisoners more violent, causing them to become more loyal to their leader in search of more cooperation or support. This is, of course, a harmful practice of patron-client relationships, where Putin is acting as a patron and those prisoners are clients. But Putin is not considering the cost of these clients and their limitations. At some point, it will become increasingly challenging for Putin to manage this client and their expectations.

5.2 Global Diffusion, Emulation, and Future Systemic Risks

Another consequence of winning this war is that Russia will present a new global order. Putin's willingness to invade other countries, break the law, and attack democracy might encourage other leaders to do the same. And with the help of Russia in those countries, for example, Iran, China, and North Korea, that oppose the Western view, it could make the threat worse for the world.

⁸⁷ Imran Hosen and Md Bhuiyan, "The Intersection of Media and Politics in South Asia and the West," *Journal of Governance, Security & Development* 5 (July 2024), <https://doi.org/10.52823/AUWO6762>.

⁸⁸ Liqiang Wang and Ruonan Wang, "Cyber Warfare: A Study of Zelenskyy's Social Media Political Performance Strategies and Effects," *Frontiers in Psychology* 15 (December 2024), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1478639>.

⁸⁹ Cox, "In the Shadow of the Russian Revolution."

There is a drastic economic wave resulting from this war that can serve as a guiding lesson for other countries in the coming days. It has been seen that Russian factories are working hard to prepare military equipment. Along with this, workers also moved into military factories for better pay.⁹⁰ Affluent individuals are investing in the defence industry, thereby reaping financial rewards.⁹¹ From this warfare economic wave, two things have emerged: one is that Putin is getting extreme support from the elite as he has successfully earned money, and the other is that the Russian economy is also benefiting.⁹² This serves as a valuable lesson for other leaders: adhering to similar practices during wartime. However, they do not consider that producing too much military equipment might create a violent society.

Through this war, the Russian army became more experienced and will never return to its former form. The military has shown it can endure heavy losses and still fight; it has also improved its targeting and precision strikes, using drones in combat, deploying long-range weapons, and adapting to Western military tactics. This has paved the way for other nations, particularly those facing Western power, to develop their own strategies for combat. This also serves as a warning to NATO.

After the war broke out, many people assumed that there might be World War III and a nuclear conflict.⁹³ However, this is not possible in the 21st century. But things need to be taken into consideration that if NATO soldiers enter Ukraine and engage in a direct conflict with Russia, in this case, there is a possibility of having another global war, but not another World War. Talking about nuclear conflict seems impossible, but with the threatening attributes of Russia, it might be assumed that it is also bringing an important lesson or, to some extent, another era for the leaders in Europe, Asia, and the US, which is why the way nuclear deterrence works is changing with new threats and risks. Putin and his team lead this era of nuclear brinkmanship.

⁹⁰ Imran Hosen and Shaima Akther, "Integrating Artificial Intelligence for Global Policy and Security," in *Dynamics of International Relations: Continuity and Change in a Globalized World* (2025).

⁹¹ Kendall-Taylor and Kofman, "Putin's Point of No Return."

⁹² Ekaterina Kurbangaleeva, "Economic Gains and Political Loyalty: How Rising Incomes Drive Support for Russia's Authoritarian Regime," APSA, May 30, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.33774/apsa-2025-gwspg>.

⁹³ Mashal Zahid, "Contemporary Perspectives On The Nuclear Dimension Of The Russia-Ukraine War," *BTTN Journal* 3, no. 2 (2024): 2, <https://doi.org/10.61732/bj.v3i2.146>; T. Mas Turi et al., "The Potential Of A Third World War (WWIII) As The Implication Of The War Between Russia And Ukraine," *International Journal Of Humanities Education and Social Sciences* 3, no. 4 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.55227/ijhess.v3i4.820>; Giles David Arceneaux, "Whether to Worry: Nuclear Weapons in the Russia-Ukraine War," *Contemporary Security Policy* 44, no. 4 (2023): 561–75, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2023.2260175>; Peter SAKWE Masumbe, "Foreign Policy-Making, Immorality, Public Opinion, Russia-Ukraine War and a Looming 3rd World War: Challenges, Prospects and Stakes for International Relations and Human Security," *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal* 9, no. 10 (2022): 10, <https://doi.org/10.14738/assrj.910.12897>.

Human suffering caused by this war should not be overlooked when examining its economic effects. People ignore this aspect while discussing the war and its future. People will judge Putin based on this war. If Putin fails and economic losses are high, people will disagree with the decision to invade, but if Putin succeeds, the Russian people will view it as cruel but a successful strategy. If it is positive, it will influence other leaders, especially those who get along with Putin. Since the Second World War, countries have refrained from annexing territory from others, even when the war benefited Russia; undoubtedly, a tragic chapter awaits the entire world, one in which the liberal international order will be severely disrupted.

6. Concluding Remarks

Pragmatically, the US and Europe cannot keep providing aid to Ukraine forever, and this may stop entirely, today or tomorrow. The US has already stopped sharing intelligence and other support for Ukraine. Stopping aid means Putin is successful, and this will make him more aggressive, advancing his vision, which may lead to invading other countries, leaving footprints for other leaders. Putin's vision has significantly increased the complexity of this war, making it difficult to reach a lasting decision or find a solution. In such a protracted conflict, what is the best solution for Ukraine remains a question. The best option for Ukraine is perhaps to have a peace talk with Russia and split its territory, but even if Putin agrees to do that, how the division will be done is very vague- it might bring worse consequences than the war.

Secondly, the ability to secure a fair deal for Ukraine depends entirely on how strong its military will be against Russia in the coming days. But again, Russia is unstoppable in this case, and Ukraine should surrender soon; this statement is also questionable. Observers often ignore Russia's loss while saying that. But for the Ukrainian people, the situation is that fighting against Russia is far better than living under the fear of Russian occupation. At this point in the war, the question is not how much land Russia controls but how Russia will treat the people under its rule, particularly under Putin. His goal is not only to control the land but also to break the spirit of the Ukrainian people, particularly their sense of belonging to Ukraine, and impose a Russian mindset. Putin's fight is not only against the West and its intervention in this war usually portrays, but also wants to present Russia as Europe's last bastion of Christian values, and in this case, the West remains the most competitive one; so the war transforms into a protracted conflict or global engagement not only because of Ukraine and the West but also because of this desire of Putin as well.

This war differs significantly from previous Cold War events, as it directly impacts Putin's survival, image, and vision. In past wars, there were very few

instances in which leaders were not personally at risk, but in this case, Putin's position might be weakened, and his vision might be lost if he loses the war. This war has raised serious questions about NATO's strategic capabilities, thereby posing a challenge to US leadership and its ability to handle global crises in the modern era. Their salami tactics have failed in the first period, particularly under the Biden administration, which has allowed Putin to act more forcefully and focus on his vision despite challenges.

Beyond a democratic international world order, authoritarian states also have the capacity to work together, and this has been proved by the collaborative initiative of Putin through this war. It is a threat to international liberal democratic order, and with Trump taking the chair in 2025, it seems like it will be the end of the democratic world order and create an open floor for Putin to go ahead with war and vision. Putin personally holds this belief very strictly that closing Ukraine to the West is a threat to their safety, and at any cost, he will never allow this to happen. With the changing US government, Ukraine might have a ray of hope, but, most importantly, Trump is a very unpredictable leader; rather than being strategic, he loves dealing with business models. It is a concern for Ukraine and Zelensky that Trump might demand more in exchange for security. In that case, it will be a win-win situation for Russia, particularly for Putin, to [wage](#) the war more forcefully.

As the war started by Putin's choice, which has been argued in this paper from that vantage point, he has the capacity even to end the war if he wants. The war is not a life-and-death situation for Russia, though this is the way Putin talks and portrays it. Taking back Russian soldiers from Ukraine will not harm Russia, and it will not end his regime by doing so. But he has to make sure that there is no one strong enough to replace him in Russia. The current war is taking place because of him, and he is solely responsible.