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RUSSO-UKRAINE WAR: A DOZEN LESSONS FOR INDIA

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On October 8, 2022, the infamous Russo-Ukraine conflict entered its 227th day and is still ongoing. The conflicting narratives and information warfare, particularly from the Ukrainian side, have frequently kept military warfare practitioners and international geopolitical experts at bay in the conduct of a thorough analysis of the war. In the ninth month of the conflict, there have been at least three phases of the war. The military action of the Russians has made at least 12 million people flee their homes since Russia's invasion of Ukraine as per the United Nations (UN) Report. On July 7, 2022, the Russian government officially announced that it had taken an operational pause to rest and recuperate. Even now, a few questions remain unanswered as to why Russia, which is technologically and numerically far superior to the non-nuclear country of Ukraine, was unable to achieve its stated goals. This article tries to give an overview of the stages of the war and draw some lessons for India so that it will be better prepared for a similar situation in India.¹

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1. The war analysis was created based on information found on Russia's and Ukraine's official websites. In addition to this, a number of news websites and think-tank websites (pro-Western and pro-Russian) have been investigated for their analysis of the war, and lessons for the Indian setting have been inferred accordingly.

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RUSSO-UKRAINE RELATIONS

The border between Ukraine and Russia is the focus of interest for the entire world. Russia has already taken over Crimea, which is part of Ukraine, and started a separate conflict in Donbas, which is in the southeast of Ukraine. This is where the biggest military build-up in Europe has happened since the end of the Cold War. If Russia changes borders again by force, it will be a challenge to the whole of European security. But how did Ukraine become a flashpoint between Russia and the West? And

why won't Russia leave Ukraine alone? Let us take a look at the Russia-Ukraine relationship in the background of the current war.²

Vladimir Putin questions the necessity of a border between Ukraine and Russia. He has asserted that Ukraine is not a state and that Ukrainians and Russians are one people. Ukraine, though, is proud to be independent. There is a common ancestry between Russia and Ukraine. The Russian Empire was built on the Confederation between Moscow and Kyiv in the 17th century. Moscow views Kyiv as the birthplace of its culture and religion. Since then, there has been a close bond between the two nations. Ukraine served as the Soviet Union's fulcrum until its dissolution in 1991. At the time, the independence of a newly democratic Russia and Ukraine went hand in hand.

In many ways, Ukraine set the example for Russia's own independence from the Soviet Union and the idea of Russia as a democratic republic. But as time went on, Moscow started to see Ukraine's independence as both a strategic and an emotional blow. About 13 per cent of Ukrainians are of Russian descent, and almost a third speak Russian as their first language. Despite these ties, however, recent events have turned a great number of Ukrainians against Russia. It is the nation that is responsible for the 17,000

2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sUKblujiRyk&t=31s>

military and civilians killed in the conflict in eastern Ukraine. It is the country that has grabbed part of Ukraine's territory. It is the country that poses the most constant threat to Ukraine. Seventy-five per cent of Ukrainians born since 1991 now see their future in the European Union (EU) rather than Russia. But a democratic Ukraine with ties to the West is unacceptable to Russia, mainly due to Ukraine's strategic significance.

Ukraine is stuck in the middle of two competing areas of influence. On the one hand, there is Western Europe and its protective alliance, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO); on the other hand, there is Russia. Vladimir Putin is determined to keep Ukraine in Russia's orbit and stop it from joining forces with any other country. Putin does not want Ukraine to join NATO because he now sees it as an antagonistic move toward Russia. In 1991, NATO's borders in Central Europe only ran as far east as Germany, but as former Soviet bloc countries joined it, the NATO alliance in Central Europe now runs in some places right up to the Russian border. Ukraine itself separates Russia from four NATO members. As far as Russia is concerned, Ukraine must never join NATO. And for Ukraine, in the first years of independence, that didn't seem likely.

Ukraine was led by a government friendly to Moscow. But by the time of Ukraine's 2004 presidential elections, it was clear that Ukrainians had begun to look westwards and Russia's influence had its limits. With the help of mass protests, the Putin-backed candidate Viktor Yanukovich lost to the pro-Western Viktor Yushchenko. It became known as the *Orange Revolution* and was evidence that Russia was losing control of Ukraine. The Orange Revolution mattered because people rose against somebody Putin backed. Even when Yanukovich was voted in five years later, Putin could not get his own way in Ukraine. Yanukovich continued to look both ways—to Europe

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and to Russia. When Ukraine was offered an association agreement with the EU, Putin countered with an economic offer of his own. Yanukovych eventually ditched the EU deal in favour of the economic pact with Russia. But many Ukrainians felt sold out, and peaceful protests in Kyiv followed. Yanukovych's response was brutal, sparking further demonstrations and the downfall of his government.

It was a humiliating loss for Putin, as similar demonstrations were widespread throughout Russia. Putin was enraged and felt compelled to punish Ukraine. He had to show that events such as revolutions end badly, and the end of the Civil War was no exception. Putin's response was to annex the Ukrainian territory of Crimea. Crimea, of course, means a lot to Russians; it has the enormous symbolic importance of all the territories lost by Russia during the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The loss of Crimea was felt most acutely. Putin annexed Crimea in 2014, which shot up his popularity rating. Putin went on to encourage uprisings of pro-Russian separatists in the east of Ukraine, a conflict that is still going on. Putin's strategy ensured that the EU and NATO kept Ukraine at arm's length, and stirring up conflict on Russia's borders could help with troubles at home.

In 2021, street protests erupted after opposition leader Alexei Navalny was poisoned and then thrown into jail. Putin needed a new source of legitimacy, and the conflict with the West, in his eyes, provided that source of legitimacy. Putin portrays himself as Russia's defender against a failing West. A Western-style democracy cannot be allowed to contrast favourably against his rule, least of all in neighbouring Ukraine. A successful democracy next door might lead people to demand the same thing at home. He is trying to protect his regime and compensate for insecurity and weakness internally through external aggression. As long as Putin's political troubles persist, it is unlikely that Russia's border with Ukraine will remain peaceful.

CONFLICTING NARRATIVES OF THE WAR

Until the fifth month of the war, the Russo-Ukraine conflict was shrouded in the fog of information warfare, resulting in psychological propaganda

by both sides. In fact, this has been executed pretty well by the Ukrainians with the support of the Western narratives. Russia has been found to be lacking in building its narratives of special operations and, unfortunately, they have not found an adequate relevant place in the global media. This has led to conflicting narratives of the entire phases of the war and has also created doubts in the minds and logic of think-tanks across the globe.

Conflicting accounts may focus on the occupation and ceding of territories, the number of casualties among soldiers and civilians on both sides, and the targeting of a small number of significant military and strategic targets, but some facts are undeniable, such as the fact that the war is now entering its ninth month, and whatever goals Russia may have had in mind when it launched its special military operations appear to be unfulfilled up to this point of time. Special operations are, therefore, still going on. The fact that the *Moskva* sank, the military's top brass was replaced, food security was compromised, energy costs were rising, and other factors prevented Russia from occupying Kyiv cannot be denied.

Ukraine may be thinking that it is winning the war, but the fact remains that it has been almost decimated, and the effects will be felt for generations to come. Whether President Zelensky has succumbed to the propaganda of the West's proxy war on Russia or it is his charismatic leadership that has steered Ukraine's defence, the country has lost its integrity, particularly in the east and south, and it is very likely that this will soon extend to the north and central parts as well. The people of Ukraine are so war-weary by now that a significant percentage of their populace may look to Russia for a reprieve. If at all such a mood gets to be seen in the near future, it will validate the fact that the war has hardly been of advantage to anyone.

It is pertinent that the war needs to be impartially analysed for the purpose of drawing military lessons. It is also to be appreciated that Russia has waged a war against a non-nuclear country. Ukraine entered this war willingly, and the maximum destruction has been on its soil. Thus, the summary of the

war commentary might appear to be a pro-inferior country's summary, as references are mostly made to Ukraine's territory.

Table 1: Losses Claimed by Russia and Ukraine as of October 7, 2022

No of Losses Claimed by Ukraine	Equipment	No of Losses Claimed by Russia
266	Aircraft	315
233	Helicopters	158
1,067	UAVs (Unmanned Aerial Vehicles)	2,164
177	Anti-Aircraft Missiles	379
7,559	Tanks and Armoured Vehicles	5,448
344	Multiple Launch Rocket System	862
1,455	Field Artillery	3,453
3,862	Special Military Vehicles	6,360
61,680	Troops	NK
246	Cruise Missiles	NK
135	Special Military Equipment	NK

Source: <https://mil.ru> and <https://war.ukraine.ua/news/>

A SUMMARY OF THE RUSSO-UKRAINE WAR

On February 21, 2022, the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, declared that his country recognised the independence of the secessionist Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DPR and LPR). Three days later, Putin reportedly launched a military assault on Ukraine to defend Donbas from the Ukrainian government. The invasion led to the Russian military targeting Ukraine's key cities and infrastructure.³

3. <https://www.statista.com/topics/8922/russia-ukraine-conflict-2021-2022/#dossierKeyfigures>

Fig 1: First Day of Russo-Ukraine War (February 24, 2022)

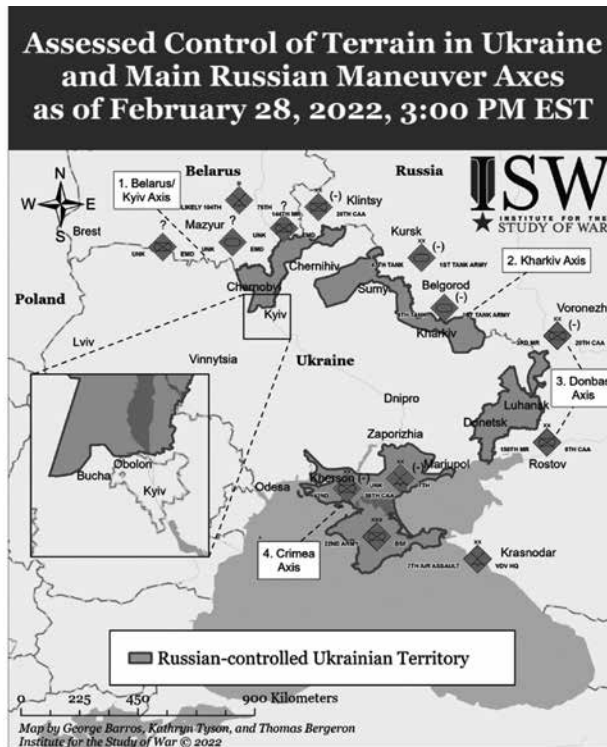


Source: Institute for the Study of War.

This massive invasion of Ukraine on February 24 was probably intended to overthrow the government and occupy the country. Putin has stated that he wants to “demilitarise” and “de-nazify” Ukraine, but this is only a cover for an unprovoked invasion of a neighbouring country. Putin and the Kremlin media continue to dismiss the Russian invasion as a special military operation rather than a war. Putin’s message wasn’t just for the Russians at home, whom the Kremlin hasn’t fully prepared for the cost of a war with Ukraine. It was also meant to build an international narrative that would be widely accepted around the world, especially in NATO.⁴

4. <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/ukraine-conflict-updates>

Fig 2: Russian Captured Area in Ukraine as of February 28, 2022



Source: Institute for the Study of War.

On February 24, Russian military activities started with a brief and ineffective air campaign that was directed at Ukrainian air defences, logistical hubs, and airfields throughout unoccupied Ukraine. However, a section of the Ukrainian Air Force was still in use, and it looked like Ukrainian command and control were still in place.⁵ With the exception of a Russian breakout from the Crimean Peninsula, the Ukrainian forces were able to effectively stall the Russian offensives in order to protect their country's territorial integrity. Russia probably couldn't stop these early Ukrainian victories because it wasn't able to neutralise the command and control system or completely ground the air force.

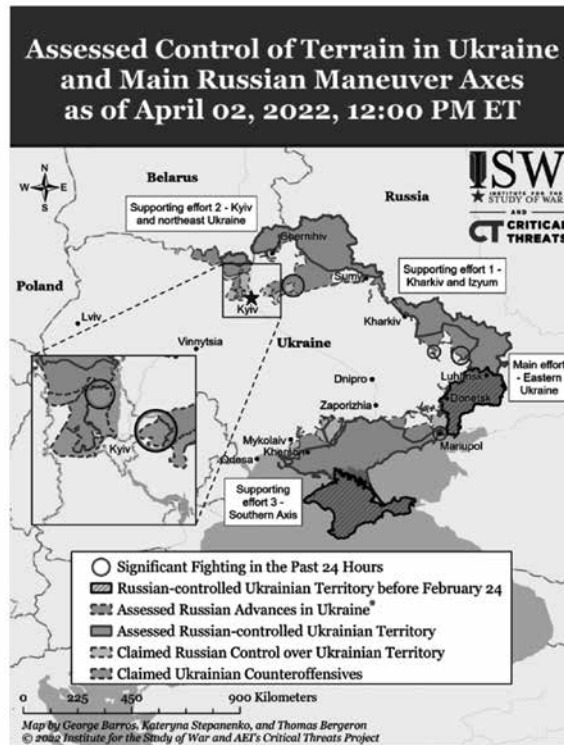
5 <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/ukraine-conflict-updates>

Phase One of Special Operations: The summary of the first two months of the conflict coincides with the culmination of the first phase of “special military operations” by the Russians, which forces us to draw vital lessons in today’s technological contemporary era. On February 24, Russia did not successfully ground the Ukrainian Air Force or cripple the Ukrainian armed forces, enabling several Ukrainian successes. The Russian failure to comprehensively strike key Ukrainian assets is a surprising break from expected Russian operations and has likely enabled a stiffer Ukrainian defence. On the first day of the war, the Ukrainian military shot down seven Russian aircraft and seven helicopters.

After one week of special operations, the Russian military undoubtedly realised that its early assumptions that limited Russian attacks would result in the collapse of Ukrainian resistance were incorrect and that its strategy must be recalculated accordingly.

Russia was initially unable to demonstrate its full air and missile capabilities; hence, it launched additional waves of strikes in the days and weeks that followed, damaging Ukraine’s command and control and ability to redeploy soldiers. After one week of special operations, the Russian military undoubtedly realised that its early assumptions that limited Russian attacks would result in the collapse of Ukrainian resistance were incorrect and that its strategy must be recalculated accordingly. Therefore, the Russian forces largely conducted an operational pause by the end of the first week and resumed offensive operations subsequently, using greater air and artillery support. The Russian forces in northeast Ukraine continued to experience morale and supply problems, most likely as a result of poor planning, ad hoc command structures, and execution based on erroneous assumptions about the Ukrainians’ desire to resist. In addition, the Ukrainian General Staff warned that Russian soldiers are “suffering from a severe lack of fuel and food” and are more reliant on Belarussian rail networks to resupply their forces in Ukraine. Due to the delay in reinforcements, the scope of the Russian operations surrounding Kyiv remained constrained.

Fig 3: Russian Captured Area in Ukraine as of April 2, 2022



Source: Institute for the Study of War.

The Russian military continued its unsuccessful attempts to encircle Kyiv and capture Kharkiv. They continued to attack piecemeal, committing a few battalion tactical groups at a time rather than concentrating overwhelming force to achieve decisive effects. The Russian naval infantry in Crimea continued to prepare for amphibious operations, primarily to capture Odessa in the south. As an example of effective layered air defence, Ukrainian air defence operations continued to impede Russian ground force manoeuvres by potentially restricting Russian close air cover and exposing Russian mechanised units to Ukrainian air and artillery attacks. According to the Ukrainian General Staff, Russia's human resources have been "seriously depleted" due to fighting deaths, incidences of self-mutilation to escape

deployment and psychological factors. Such willful national resolve and well-orchestrated military operations led the Russians to abandon plans to attack Odessa till the commencement of the fifth month of the war.

**Fig 4: Counter-Offensive by Ukraine and Russian Captured Area
as of April 9, 2022**



Source: Institute for the Study of War.

To summarise, the Ukrainian forces were able to repel the original Russian campaign in this conflict, which attempted to conquer Kyiv, Kharkiv, Odesa, and other significant Ukrainian cities in order to compel a change of government in Ukraine. The Russian forces made limited advances in some parts of eastern Ukraine but were unable to seize their objectives in this way. The original Russian effort to invade and conquer Ukraine ended

By the end of the first phase, Ukraine had run short of weapons, ammunition, and sensors to a large extent. Ukraine has been seeking assistance from all major countries, and it claims that nearly 141 countries have supported the military response.

without attaining its goals; in other words, it was a loss. The conclusion of this phase of the conflict was a stalemate throughout the majority of the theatre. But it also indicated that this war is not likely to be over in the near term. Eventually, Russia might win the war in the long run, but it could turn into a bigger version of the stalemate in the east of Ukraine that lasted from 2014 until Russia's invasion started in February 2022.

Phase Two of Special Operations:

The minimal success in getting hardly any territory from Ukraine has jolted Putin to a large extent. Following the failure of attempts to conquer Kyiv and other significant Ukrainian cities throughout March, Russia altered its campaign strategy in Ukraine. Hence, it seemed that Russia preferred to change its goalpost and, thus, tweaked the first principle of war of "selection and maintenance of aim" by claiming that now Russia's main objective was eastern Ukraine instead of the northern part. The initial campaign of fighting in the north was only to confuse the Ukrainian forces, whereas the focus of Russia's efforts then turned to eastern Ukraine. In the subsequent days, Russian forces wanted to retake the entire Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts, as well as Mariupol. Decisively, Ukraine won the Battle of Kyiv up to this stage. Russia was forced to withdraw. The Ukrainian forces are still trying to get rid of the few Russian troops that stayed behind in Kyiv Oblast after the retreat.

By the end of the first phase, Ukraine had run short of weapons, ammunition, and sensors to a large extent. Ukraine has been seeking assistance from all major countries, and it claims that nearly 141 countries have supported the military response. For the first time, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said that the "security guarantees" that Ukraine wants instead of joining NATO are written promises from several

states to give the Ukraine military aid right away and put sanctions on Russia if Russia keeps attacking. Ukraine thinks that more shipments of weapons from the United States and the United Kingdom will add to what it already has and give it more ways to attack Russian forces that are gathering in the south of Ukraine and in the Black Sea.

The Russian military tried to build up enough fighting power to take over, and keep, parts of Donetsk, Luhansk, and Mariupol. Despite the constant military action, Russia has not been able to achieve its desired objective.

One of the main reasons assessed so far has been the lack of operational art exercised by the military leadership in executing operational and tactical command and control of the campaign. Russian Army General Aleksandr Vladimirovich Dvornikov, commander of the Southern Military District, took over the overall command of Russian operations in Ukraine. He happened to be the seniormost of the three Russian military district commanders involved in the invasion, and the Russian military is concentrating its efforts almost exclusively in the area of Ukraine that Dvornikov had already been commanding.

A major setback of the sinking of the Russian missile cruiser *Moskva*, flagship of the Black Sea Fleet, by a likely Ukrainian anti-ship missile strike proved to be another example of a lack of operational and tactical advantage over Ukraine. According to Ukrainian officials, two Neptune anti-ship cruise missiles were used in the attack on the *Moskva*. Russia, on the other hand, has categorically refuted this, stating that the *Moskva* was damaged by an accidental fire, causing the ammunition explosion. Irrespective of a Ukrainian missile attack or an accident, the loss of the *Moskva* proved to be a big propaganda win for Ukraine. The sinking the *Moskva*, which was used in the capture of the “Snake Island” event early

According to Ukrainian officials, two Neptune anti-ship cruise missiles were used in the attack on the *Moskva*. Russia, on the other hand, has categorically refuted this, stating that the *Moskva* was damaged by an accidental fire, causing the ammunition explosion.

in the Russian invasion, boosted the Ukrainian morale as a signal of their ability to strike back against the Russian Navy. The loss of the flagship of the Black Sea Fleet could mean that Russia has weak air defences or bad safety procedures and damage control.

This phase witnessed large-scale offensive operations in eastern Ukraine with the intention of capturing important cities in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts along with Mariupol. According to reports, this stage of the Russian offensive in eastern Ukraine started primarily with artillery and aerial bombing campaigns supporting a few minor ground offensives. It was widely expected that Russian President Vladimir Putin would declare victory over Ukraine in his Victory Day speech on May 9. However, owing to the dismal performance of the Russian forces, this did not happen. Instead of making a change, he complimented the continued Russian operations in Ukraine and encouraged the current Kremlin perspective. He didn't declare an escalation in the conflict or a triumph. The unforeseen Ukrainian battlefield victories led to the Kremlin reducing its goals in Ukraine from its original purpose of seizing Kyiv and total regime change. However, by forcing celebrations of Victory Day on occupied Ukrainian territory, the Kremlin intended to show the claimed legitimacy of its takeover of eastern Ukraine.

To establish a firm foothold in the occupied areas, Russian officials were reported to have increasingly taken over governmental positions in an attempt to annex the occupied areas of Ukraine into Russia as federal districts. While acknowledging that it would take time to implement the new Russian methods, President Putin reiterated his determination to "complete" the Russian campaign in Ukraine. Additionally, it was claimed that the Kremlin dismissed Colonel-General Andrey Serdyukov, the head of the Russian Airborne Forces, because of his unsatisfactory performance. The Russian military leadership explored ways to expand the pool of eligible recruits because of the significant losses on the Russian side and to offset the ongoing manpower losses in Ukraine. The

Russian Ministry of Defence announced a number of changes, including a new chief for its central and southern units fighting in Ukraine. This confirms that the Russian high command is restructuring the leadership of operations in Ukraine to influence the outcome of the special operations in its favour.

Fig 5: Russian Captured Area as of April 9, 2022



Source: Institute for the Study of War.

According to the United Kingdom's Ministry of Defence, the Kremlin's ongoing characterisation of its incursion into Ukraine as "special military operations" instead of a war is actively impeding Russia's ability to

generate forces. Given that the conflict in Ukraine is classified as “special military operations,” which precludes the use of legal punitive provisions that could be used during a formal war, Russian officials appear to be struggling to find legal ways to punish military dissidents and those who refuse to mobilise. It is believed that the Kremlin’s framing of the conflict as “special operations” is exacerbating the ongoing problems, with Russian nationalists’ negative impressions of the military’s leadership, challenges with paying the soldiers, a shortage of available men, and ambiguous objectives among the Russian forces. The term “special military operations” has a fundamental problem, which the Kremlin is still working extremely hard to fix.

Continuing with the underperformance of the Russians, the Ukrainians, through their missile and artillery campaign, forced the Russian forces to retreat at the end of June from Snake Island, which Russia had acquired in one of the first missions of the campaign, at the end of June. As a face-saving move, the Russian Defence Ministry spun the retreat as “a step of goodwill,” proving that the Kremlin does not obstruct UN efforts to set up a humanitarian corridor for the export of Ukrainian agricultural products. However, the ministry failed to mention that the retreat was actually the result of Ukrainian artillery and missile fire.

By the end of the second phase, the Russian forces had taken control of all of the area between the administrative borders of Lysychansk and Luhansk Oblasts. Severodonetsk and Lysychansk are under the Russian military and administrative power consolidation. Vladimir Putin’s initial goals for his country’s actions in Ukraine were reiterated by the Secretary of the Russian Security Council, Nikolai Patrushev, indicating that the Kremlin still has maximalist goals, such as regime change and territorial expansion well beyond the Donbas. The continued consolidation of administrative control over Ukraine’s seized territory by the Russian authorities is likely laying the groundwork for its eventual annexation into the Russian Federation.

Igor Konashenkov, the spokesperson for the Russian Defence Ministry, declared on July 7 that the Russian forces in Ukraine are taking an operational pause to refuel and replenish their combat readiness. This suggests that the Russian forces will probably confine their offensive operations to a smaller scale as they build up their forces and prepare the ground for a larger onslaught in the coming weeks or months. At this point, it appears that the so-called special operations won't end anytime soon.

Phase Three of Special Operations: The months of August and September can be broadly categorised under phase three of the conflict, in which Russia made efforts to launch an offensive with more “punch, push, and power.” To a large extent, it could be deduced, once again, due to the troubling fallout of the special military operations in terms of less manpower willing to fight and incur heavy losses, President Putin called for the partial mobilisation of the reservists on September 21, 2022, and announced the mobilisation of hundreds of thousands of reservists, which led to rare anti-war protests in Russia and a huge exodus of military-age men. This has sparked unusual criticism of the country's military and is considered a major embarrassment for President Putin.⁶

Drawing lessons from the conflict in the past five months, it was decided to launch simultaneous campaigns in Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, and Kharkiv in the northeast region. But once again, the counter-offensive by the Ukrainians made this fight bloody and difficult for the Russians to achieve the objective areas, especially north of the Dniپر river and the Odessa region. This probably resulted in the Kremlin changing its tactics beyond military force and diverting attention to the nuclear realm in the backdrop of conducting referendums in the eastern and southern regions.

6. Hugo Bachega and John Simpson “Ukraine War: World Must Act Now to Stop Russia Nuclear Threat—Zelensky”, BBC News, Kyiv, October 8, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-63173443>. Accessed on October 8, 2022.

Fig 6: Russian Captured Area as of October 7, 2022



Source: Institute for the Study of War.

Finally, as expected, Vladimir Putin signed “accession treaties” formalising Russia’s annexation of the four occupied regions of Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Luhansk, and Donetsk in Ukraine, marking the largest takeover of territory in Europe since World War II. The signing ceremony took place in the Grand Kremlin Palace, in the presence of the country’s political elites. In response to this, Ukraine formally submitted its application to join the NATO alliance in fast-track mode. Volodymyr Zelensky was quoted as saying that “Ukraine was taking a decisive step for the entire security of free nations.” He also vowed to liberate the “entire territory” of his country.⁷ This phase of the war is getting murkier and more deadly, and once again, the nuclear threshold is being raised by both countries in the midst of the announcement of the joint Nobel peace prize for 2022 to the Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarussians.

7. “Russia-Ukraine War Live: Putin Annexes Ukrainian Regions; Kyiv Applies for Nato Membership—as it Happened”, *The Guardian*, September 30, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/sep/30/russia-ukraine-war-live-news-biden-and-zelenskiy-reject-expected-annexations-ahead-of-putin-speech?filterKeyEvents=false&page=with:block-6336f9b38f08ec87f110568e#block-6336f9b38f08ec87f110568e>. Accessed on October 8, 2022.

WHO IS WINNING THE WAR?

The question of “who is winning the war?” has been a matter of speculation all across the world, except for the Russians and the Ukrainians, who are the victims of it. As per the data available on the website of the United Nations Human Rights, as of July 18, 2022, 6,114 civilians had been killed and 9,132 injured.⁸ By the end of September, more than 6.9 million people had been internally displaced, while more than 7.5 million refugees had been recorded across Europe.⁹ It is evident from the war by now that it is not being fought between the two states of the erstwhile USSR but also between many groups and independent superpowers, both visible and hidden.

Table 2: Assessment of Winning Matrix as of September 30, 2022

	Militarily	Territorial Gains	Ethically	Econo- mically	Global Image	Net Result
Ukraine	Loser	Loser	Loser	Loser	Loser	Total Loser
Russia	Loser	Gaining	Loser	Loser	Loser	Stalemate
US	Winner	–	Loser	Winner	Loser	Winner
Western World	Winner	–	Loser	Winner	Loser	Winner
NATO	Loser	Gaining	Loser	Loser	Loser	Stalemate
UN	Loser	–	Loser	Loser	Loser	Total Loser

Source: As compiled by the author.

This war is no longer about territorial gains; it is a reflection of the changing global order, which is moving toward a multipolar world. Russia is reported to have struck a deal with Iran for large numbers of drones. Turkey has already supplied drones to the Ukrainians at the beginning of the war. The US, along with other NATO countries, is pumping in defence equipment

8. “Number of Civilian Casualties During the War in Ukraine 2022”, Statista Research Department, October 4, 2022, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1293492/ukraine-war-casualties/>. Accessed on October 8, 2022.

9. Unicef Report, <https://www.unicef.org/emergencies/war-ukraine-pose-immediate-threat-children>.

Every country will have to depend on itself during such a crisis due to the multitude of complexities in global and regional geopolitics and geoeconomics.

in support of the Ukrainians. In a nutshell, the sale of defence equipment is on a spree in the battle zone. Despite the Western sanctions, Russia appears to have been unaffected due to its vast energy resources. For the national interest, India too has carried out imports of crude oil from Russia, thus, giving some financial respite to the Russian economy. Hence, it would be unfair to declare a decisive winner in this war. However, it is beyond doubt that while Ukraine has emerged

as the total loser on all fronts in the entire episode, Russia cannot be termed as the victor. The invasion has been only a stalemate for Russia as a face-saving consolation. Table 2 depicted above summarises the winning matrix to a large extent.

A DOZEN LESSONS FOR INDIA

The Russo-Ukraine War in the highly technological era has plenty to offer in terms of how war is not to be fought by the superior nation and that the end state of the superior force can still be kept at bay by the inferior nation, although at a higher cost. It also brings out the fact that every country will have to depend on itself during such a crisis due to the multitude of complexities in global and regional geopolitics and geoeconomics. Though there is not much similarity with the Indian context, many lessons can be learned from this crisis between a superior nuclear state and an inferior non-nuclear one. The lessons could be addressed at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels for the defence forces, while the war has also brought various lessons to the fore for the national and political leadership, the common populace, industry, etc. While many of the scholars and practitioners of warfare have outrightly changed their stance due to the outcomes of wars, such as short and swift war moving to long drawn war, air power once again being absent, all-out physical war having returned, etc., these may not be the right lessons in the Indian context.

- (i) **Nuclear Deterrence:** Numerous geopolitical realities around the world have been highlighted by the conflict. The primary concern was the potential use of nuclear weapons by a state against a weaker non-nuclear state that appeared to have earned support from NATO and the Western world. In fact, possession of nuclear weapons and setting up of a scenario wherein Russia might use them, has served as a deterrent to other more powerful foes, restraining them from interfering. This has effectively prevented other major players in the Western and NATO countries from directly entering the conflict, ensuring de-escalation through an escalation stance. This implies that a country would not receive the appropriate military backing throughout the conflict, as Ukraine had anticipated before the conflict started. Also, the use of nuclear weapons is still relevant as a tool of deterrence rather than of destruction. **Not only Ukraine, but it appears that even the Russians have felt the scarcity of artillery, missiles, and ammunition in this prolonged war of over nine months.**
- (ii) **Self-Reliance:** As Ukraine has learned to its cost, self-reliance on indigenous technology and production of military hardware ranging from bullets to aircraft, ships, and tanks has come to be a necessity. Not every country can afford, and execute, this, but a regional power like India has no other choice. Not only Ukraine, but it appears that even the Russians have felt the scarcity of artillery, missiles, and ammunition in this prolonged war of over nine months.
- (iii) **National Resolve:** A glaring lesson that has emerged during the war is the extremely positive national resolve of the Ukrainians, whereas it was seen to be lacking in the Russians. It is said that Putin was gaining significantly with the relative successes in Georgia, Crimea, and Syria, but this has fallen flat in the case of Ukraine. It could be said that both countries disintegrated just thirty years ago. The current adult and teen generations are the only ones who were born after the USSR's

disintegration. As a result, the entire population of both countries is not inherently hostile. This war is not between friends or enemies: the soldiers are caught between friends and enemies, who can be termed “frenemies.” This could be the reason why the Russian soldiers have not lived up to the expectations of Putin, whereas the Ukrainian soldiers had no option but to defend their country from the Russian invasion. However, in the Indian context, it has been four generations since independence, and, thus, national resolve will be at its peak on both sides.

- (iv) **Military Leadership:** During the past four months of special operations, Putin has changed the senior military leadership at least three times, including firing the special operations airborne commander. The fact that theatre commanders have been changed between campaigns indicates that there have been problems with planning and executing the strategies, integrating the forces on the battlefield, achieving the objectives excessively slowly, and losing territory to the Ukrainians’ counter-offensives.
- (v) **Operational Art:** The orchestration of military operations at the commencement, during the campaign, and then losing the acquired territories speaks of a lack of vision in the conduct of operational art. The intelligence preparation of the battlefield and sustenance of the objectives have been found to be totally lacking in the Russian side, which is otherwise superior to the Ukrainians in all respects. The surrender of Snake Island, the withdrawal from Kyiv, the sinking of the *Moskva*, the inability to capture Odessa till now, and losing almost the entire north Ukraine at the end of four months of the war are a direct reflection of the mistuned operations by the Russian forces. India can learn plenty from this very vital military lesson, as the issues of joint and integrated operations across all spectrums of the Indian defence forces have always been a most contentious issue.
- (vi) **Ground Follow-Up of Air Operations:** The much-hyped absence of air power in the war has unfortunately been the wrong narrative built

up once again. It is, in fact, the ground forces that once again could not match up to the speed of air power and the air force in particular. This lesson has a direct bearing on the Indian context as the speed and plan mismatch between the air and ground forces has always been a contentious issue. On the first day of the special operations, the Russians launched pincer attacks from the north, east, and south of Ukraine. However, the ground forces were not able to finish the operations as planned, so the Ukrainians were able to take back the areas in later counter-attacks.

- (vii) **SEAD Operations:** Footage of helicopters shot down by the Man-Portable Air Defence Systems, (MANPADS) at the beginning of the war indicates that the prerequisite of Suppression of Enemy Air Defences (SEAD) operations has not been adhered to by the Russian forces, which directly reflects on the improper assessment of the enemy's capability. The lack of regular surveillance and intelligence gathering and improper operational art could be the main reasons for this. The Russian Air Force, which had created a favourable air situation near Kyiv, decided to undertake an airborne assault to capture the Hostomel airfield but had to face massive enemy fire. Such operations are the result of non-adherence to the basic principles of war.
- (viii) **Misplaced Long Drawn Wars:** Many thinkers and analysts started commenting since the third week of war that the era of conventional wars had returned and that today's wars are no longer as swift and agile as had been perceived till the breakout of this war. It is true that this war is in its ninth month, but it must be analysed and understood from the Russian perspective that it is not a war but special operations. The recent statement of the Russian officials also indicated that the invasion has been termed as special operations and will continue till the objectives are met. Russia is able to do so because it has most of the military assets in its favour. The onus is on Zelensky to get to the negotiating table and end this war rather than accepting military support from the West and prolonging the war indefinitely. Such a

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scenario may not exist, especially when both adversaries are nuclear power nations, as in the case of India-Pakistan or China-India conflicts. In the Indian context, if at all it happens, the war will still be short and swift.

(ix) **Spatial Intelligence vs Surveillance:** It seems that the Russians had used spatial intelligence to the maximum before the commencement of their special operations. But from the results seen and analysed in hindsight,

it appears that they did not adhere to the regular and heightened surveillance for intelligence gathering during the campaign. It led to multiple failures while undertaking the subsequent operations. The use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) for intelligence gathering has hardly been heard of, at least during the first phase of the war. Thus, it remains that the basics of Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance (ISR) gathering are a prerequisite for undertaking any operation, be it on land, air, or sea. As reported by the US, "The near real-time intelligence-sharing also paved the way for Ukraine to shoot down a Russian transport plane carrying hundreds of troops in the early days of the war, helping repel a Russian assault on a key airport near Kyiv".¹⁰ The Russians eventually took the airport for a time, but never had enough control to fly in massive amounts of equipment. That failure had a significant impact on the battle for Kyiv. India must invest adequately in both spatial and unmanned surveillance mechanisms.

(x) **Information Warfare:** A lesson that India needs to learn and adapt to quickly is the exploitation of information warfare. For at least 90 days plus, if not more, Ukraine had garnered tremendous support from nearly 150 countries across the globe, which was primarily

10. Ken Dilanian, Courtney Kube, Carol E. Lee and Dan De Luce, "U.S. Intel Helped Ukraine Protect Air Defenses, Shoot Down Russian Plane Carrying Hundreds of Troops", <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/us-intel-helped-ukraine-protect-air-defenses-shoot-russian-plane-carry-rcna26015>

due to the exceptional execution of information warfare. A similar exercise was carried out by Pakistan post-Balakot operations by India. Although India did nullify the Pakistani propaganda subsequently, the fact remains that India can achieve phenomenally on issues of national security and geopolitical and geostrategic contexts through information warfare along with diplomatic measures.

- (xi) **Proxy Wars as a Test Bench:** This battle has taught us a valuable lesson about how powerful nations will take advantage of weaker or more vulnerable countries for their own interests. It is possible that the nation is weaker overall because of its military assets or its leadership. It will not be wrong to assume that this war has served as a test case for the major powers' idea to alter the global order. Vested interests have used both Russia and Ukraine as direct and indirect proxies. Most likely, this trial by the main international powers, especially the US, is more about learning lessons for future combat against the greater threat that China poses.
- (xii) **Losing Relevance of International Organisations (UN, NATO):** The effectiveness of well-known international organisations like the United Nations, NATO, and others has once again been negatively exposed. Given that the majority of problems, crises, and conflicts do not find prompt and amicable solutions, it is clear that these organisations are now acting as political white elephants. The recent handling of the global COVID-19 pandemic is an illustration of the UN's failure. The UN was unable to halt this war either. NATO and the EU have not been able to end the conflict peacefully or bring about a peaceful settlement.

