

# The implications of the protracted Russian-Ukrainian war for China

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**Abstract:** The Russian-Ukrainian war is the regional war with the largest number of countries involved and the widest impact since the Korean War. It will have a profound impact on the geopolitical landscape of Europe and even the world. Behind the Russia-Ukrainian War is actually the competition between Russia and the United States and Western countries for spheres of influence. The protracted war not only caused painful losses to the two warring parties, Russia and Ukraine, but also caused serious impacts on the global industrial chain and supply chain in the context of the global anti-globalization wave, which undoubtedly exacerbated the contradictions between Eastern and Western countries. As a neighboring country with a deep historical connection with Russia and a long-term cooperation with Ukraine, this war will undoubtedly have a huge impact on China. As a responsible major country in the world, China has always adhered to the position of persuading peace and promoting talks. The real dilemma, sense of crisis and urgency brought to us by this war also make us think deeply.

**Keywords:** Russia-Ukraine war; the United States and the Western countries; the collapse of the Soviet Union; NATO's eastward expansion; color revolutions

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## 1 Causes of the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war

The "Orange Revolution" in Ukraine was sparked by electoral disputes, after which the country leaned toward the West. NATO's eastward expansion, Ukrainian nationalism, and EU efforts to court Ukraine deepened its rift with Russia. Conflicts over NATO membership and natural gas intensified tensions, exposing the West's manipulation and NATO/EU's "magnetic pull" effect. The Russia-Ukraine conflict is a result of Western expansion, with Ukraine's strategic position being pivotal: pro-Russian policies enhance Russian influence, while pro-Western alignment benefits the EU with markets and buffer zones against Russia, hence the West's strong reaction. Historically, Crimea's independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1773 through the Treaty of Kuchuk-Kanarya paved the way for Russian annexation. Turkey indirectly recognized Russian control in 1779, and in 1954, the Soviet Union transferred Crimea to Ukraine. After the USSR's dissolution, both Russia and Ukraine claimed sovereignty. The four eastern Ukrainian regions (including Luhansk) historically belonged to Russia and were incorporated into Ukraine during the Soviet era. Post-war, Russia acquired industrial equipment, blueprints, and scientists (approximately 2,000 in 1948, including 338 nuclear experts) from Germany to boost its defense industry, revitalizing national strength through two Five-Year Plans. Although Russia's GDP stagnated post-Soviet collapse and research funding dwindled, historically it has maintained military might by acquiring Western equipment through wars, absorbing technological spillovers, deterring adversaries, and promoting arms trade.

## 2 Problems arising from the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian war

### 2.1 Russia's military-industrial enterprises rely on their "old capital"

As a world military power, Russia has a relatively complete range of traditional military industries. Especially in terms of weapon technologies such as tanks, fighter jets and missiles, it has always been at the forefront of the world. However, its shortcomings in responding to new modern warfare such as electronic warfare, information warfare and unmanned warfare are also very obvious. On the battlefield, Russia has not formed an overwhelming advantage over Ukraine. Russia's traditional air defense system still lacks an effective mode to deal with drone swarm operations. Instead, it has been put in a

very passive position by Ukraine's drone swarm tactics combined with precise navigation and positioning. Moreover, the combat capabilities of drones have been continuously advancing deeper into Russian territory, severely undermining the confidence of the Russian military and the Russian people in defeating Ukraine.

## 2.2 Russia' s asset security has serious loopholes

After coming to power, Putin took iron-fisted measures to crack down on some oligarchs, but this was mainly out of the need to stabilize politics. He did not fundamentally solve the problem of oligarchic politics, nor did he establish a good anti-corruption system. Faced with a large number of wealthy people and corrupt officials fleeing and transferring their assets abroad, the country's wealth suffered serious losses. Russia did not establish an effective system to circumvent this. In many cases, Russia dealt with some defections through Krupp's organization of killing and silencing people, terrorist collective responsibility, and other methods. Although this had a certain shocking effect, it was not a fundamental solution and was criticized.

## 2.3 “Misjudgment” of “tough guy” President Putin

From the wars that Putin has fought since he took office, he has not lost any battles. From the time Putin used an iron fist to solve the Chechen separatist problem at the beginning of his term to the formal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula by Russia on March 18, 2014, Putin has always responded to NATO's eastward expansion and the color revolution with an asymmetric balance, especially by expanding Russia's strategic space through territorial expansion, which has also won him a high support rate at home. Putin's appetite has also been nurtured by the small territorial expansions since he took office. This time, Ukraine decided to join NATO and the EU, and Putin still used the same old tricks to occupy the territories of the four eastern continents of Ukraine like peeling an onion. However, Putin did not expect that this iron-blooded approach would lead to a serious misjudgment on the Ukrainian issue. The war has entered its fourth year, and Russia has not been able to end the war. Instead, it has put itself in a dilemma. In the past, NATO did not dare to confront Russia head-on, fearing Russia's nuclear deterrence. At the beginning of the war, Ukraine's aid was reserved. Now some NATO member states are constantly trampling on Russia's bottom line and ignoring Russia's warnings. Russia cut its own artery while cutting the cake. Putin has gone too far. The Russian-Ukrainian war may be Putin's biggest mistake in governing. He overestimated Russia's strength. It is not impossible for Russia to be dragged down by this war, because the previous war in Afghanistan seriously damaged the Soviet Union's strength, not to mention that Ukraine is not as strong as Afghanistan. Russia's United Russia party lacks historical foundation. If Russia loses this Russian-Ukrainian war, it will affect the ruling position of the United Russia party in the post-Putin era. The political forces in Russia will be reshuffled, and Russia may face the risk of disintegration again.

## 2.4 Russia' s Mistakes in Intelligence Warfare

Russia launched the special military operation , Western media had estimated that Russia would take military action. In the early stage of the Russian-Ukrainian war, Russia's combat intention encountered Waterloo through the "heart-wrenching tactics" of directly taking the Ukrainian capital Kiev. Some Western intelligence agencies had predicted that Russia would strive for military action. The failure of Russia's previous special military operations also confirmed the serious mistakes of Russia's intelligence warfare. The Russian decision-makers, based on the one-sided or false intelligence provided by the Fifth Bureau of the Federal Security Service, inevitably had serious deficiencies in the overall assessment and planning of this military operation. What greeted the Russian army was not the surrender of Ukrainian officials but the stubborn resistance of the Ukrainian army, which made the Russian army's isolated army fall into danger. In the end, the first stage ended with Russia's defeat. If the sensitive information of the Russian army had not been leaked in advance, Ukraine would not have been so brave and good at fighting.

On April 12, 2022, Fox News reported that the United States roughly predicted the time of Russia's invasion of Ukraine before the war. When the Special Military Operation against Ukraine was progressing slowly, Putin suddenly issued a harsh order to eliminate more than 100 agents lurking in the Russian Federal Security Service (formerly the KGB). The Times of London reported on Monday that about 150 FSB agents were fired. These agents belonged to the Fifth Bureau of the FSB, a

new department established in 1998.

## **2.5 Beware of “proxy wars” by the United States and Western countries**

The Russia-Ukraine war is a typical "proxy war". Although Ukraine's tough confrontation with Russia is aimed at safeguarding its territorial sovereignty and integrity, it is indeed unwise to take the risk of joining NATO and the EU when Russia has not yet completely declined. The US and the West have successfully dragged Russia into the quagmire of war through the "fuel tactic" of aiding Ukraine, but the entire Ukraine is also in ruins, and the losses caused may not be restored to the pre-war level for several generations. According to data from the Kiel Institute for the World Economy in Germany, from the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in February 2022 to the end of June 2025, the United States and the European Union have provided Ukraine with various types of aid amounting to approximately 500 billion US dollars. They have also given Ukraine hope of joining NATO and the European Union, enabling Ukraine to fight with all its might. Through the Russia-Ukraine war, one can see through the ugly faces of some countries. Their consistent military strategy is to find someone to act as a vanguard and provide assistance to weaken their competitors.

## **2.6 Mistakes in Russia's Economic Development Strategy**

Only a fully developed economy ensures lasting military power. Russia's Far East development has been delayed for decades. Its economy relies on military industry and resource exports like oil, not matching its global power status. Siberia and the Far East remain underdeveloped, with economic activity concentrated in European Russia. Russia has been conservative in opening these regions to investment from neighbors like China, Japan, and South Korea, lacking favorable laws and business environments. Siberia's population has declined since Soviet times. An example: the Heihe River shows cleaner water on Russia's side versus China's muddy side, affecting fishing. Without economic growth, a country loses appeal. As the saying goes, "Before troops move, supplies must go first"—wars depend on logistics. Russia's economy cannot sustain long-term war, as seen in the resource-draining Ukraine conflict, now an unaffordable war of attrition. With China's demographic dividend declining, Russia's plan to revitalize the Far East and Siberia by relying on China faces challenges. Russia, dependent on the West, must partner with China to develop these regions, boosting China's Northeast economy. Earlier development could have improved Russia's national strength and geographical advantages.

# **3 Lessons from the Russo-Ukrainian War for China**

## **3.1 China needs to cultivate national leaders with strong political qualities**

The Russian-Ukrainian war lasted for three and a half years, and Russia's vitality was damaged. Putin's iron-blooded hand was questioned, which can be seen from the increasing number of anti-war demonstrations in Russia. Putin has been president for nearly 20 years, but Putin is an elected president voluntarily voted by the Russian people. No one can predict what Russia will be like after defeat or without Putin! In such a difficult situation, the only thing worth praising is the support of the people. Putin originally wanted to help Medvedev take over, but Medvedev's reputation among the people is still controversial. Facts have proved that Medvedev cannot be helped. Putin's visit to the Eastern Russian Episcopal Church has collapsed the "tough guy image" in the eyes of many people. Putin's personal charm can no longer support Russia's faith. Putin has shown that he relies on religion to maintain the cohesion and identity of the country. The United Russia Party in the post-Putin era may be in danger, and Russia may return to a state of political and religious integration after the war. From the former Soviet Union to Russia and even other former Soviet republics, there has always been such a problem: the political qualities of the national leaders cultivated by the Party and the government for many years are mostly substandard. Although Zelensky, who has Jewish ancestry, is an actor and his presidency is a romantic legend, he is inevitably manipulated by the United States and Western countries. Yanukovych ran directly to Russia in the face of the opposition, but Zelensky at least did not run away. Although Zelensky was elected, it is undeniable that it was the result of the instigation of the United States and Western countries. As a KGB veteran, Putin has obvious defects in demonstrating the soft diplomatic power of a head of state. President Putin's personal ability is far inferior to that of General Secretary Xi Jinping. Xi Jinping is a very good national leader who has outstanding performance in both hard power diplomacy and soft power diplomacy.

### **3.2 The development of new quality productive forces is a reliable guarantee for enhancing military capabilities**

Russia's economy endures the prolonged Russia-Ukraine war despite sanctions, showing high development quality and independence from the West, aided by rural self-sufficiency and resources. However, lagging light industry causes shortages and public dissatisfaction. China should pragmatically de-bubble, support the real economy, encourage workers and graduates to return home, stimulate rural-agricultural chains, and boost resilience. Adhere to socialism with Chinese characteristics. In the Fourth Industrial Revolution, China must accelerate tech self-reliance, transform productivity, promote digital and intelligent industrial transformation, and leap forward. Seize opportunities from the war, which consumes resources and backfires on Europe, allowing China's cheap goods to enter European and Russian markets, promoting East's rise amid global overcapacity. China should expand overseas markets, increase domestic demand, eliminate backward capacity, and upgrade industries.

### **3.3 Maintaining a constantly innovative military development mindset**

The Russia-Ukraine war has spurred new weapons and tactics, driving global military reform and reshaping the arms market. China must accelerate military development and diversify tech sources as Soviet weapon credibility wanes. After 70 years of progress, China has narrowed gaps in military tech and shows signs of surpassing in some areas; the "863 Plan" and projects like Beidou and space stations help, but self-reliance is essential. Under U.S.-Western tech blockades, China's sources shrink, so civilian tech development is vital to boost military capabilities. Russia's self-sufficient equipment supply allows independence, while China often gets marginal foreign tech. Correctly understanding "take-it-ism" means balancing imports with self-reliance and innovation. Civilian tech can enhance research and be militarized with government support. U.S. "Starlink" satellites proved crucial in Ukraine, prompting China to develop drone industries and adjust strategies amid restrictions. Modern warfare extends to space, emphasizing AI and unmanned systems like drones as dominant forms. Equipment must be flexible and compact, requiring domestic chip and nano-tech development. Strategic nuclear deterrence remains key; Ukraine regrets disarming after the Soviet collapse, and nuclear war risks rise despite treaties. Attacks on nuclear plants and depleted uranium shells highlight new threats, with many countries pursuing miniature nuclear weapons.

### **3.4 Strong national strength is the fundamental condition for avoiding war**

Sun Tzu said that "conquering the enemy without fighting" is the best strategy, but the premise of "conquering the enemy without fighting" is the strong national strength as a backing. The fundamental reason for the repeated outbreaks of wars around Russia is Russia's own weakness. If Russia declines, the entire Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Central Asia may become a mess. General Secretary Xi Jinping rushed to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan to help put out the fire, which has already shown signs. China can resolve the war trap concocted by the United States and Western countries through diplomatic means, which is based on the guarantee of strong comprehensive strength. China avoids the risk of war with its own strong strength and reasonable, beneficial and scientific response measures. The United States is creating frictions around us, and there is no chaos around China because we have strong strength to deter the United States. By keeping a low profile and showing off muscles from time to time, the United States dare not act rashly. If China's national strength weakens, it will also cause a series of reactions from the surrounding areas.

### **3.5 Do everything possible to protect the safety of Chinese overseas assets and Chinese assets**

Financial warfare, as seen in Russia's asset freeze during the Ukraine war, shows some countries' financial credibility is unreliable. China must prioritize overseas asset safety when resolving issues like Taiwan or the South China Sea, as its \$3.2 trillion foreign reserves could face sanctions, debt defaults, or confiscation. To prevent this, China should manage risks, buy gold or other currencies, adjust investments to avoid conflict zones, and strengthen capital controls. With US economic pressures potentially sparking wars, China must avoid traps. Declining trust in Western payment systems necessitates anti-corruption measures like property disclosures. Despite US demands to buy more bonds, China must actively protect its assets.

### **3.6 Ensuring the security of the supply of national strategic resources is of great significance to supporting a protracted war.**

Modern warfare can accurately capture important targets on the battlefield and implement precision strikes through navigation and positioning systems, which accelerates the consumption of war resources on the battlefield. The former Soviet Union's strength was also based on its vast territory and huge resources. Russia was able to cope with NATO's assistance to Ukraine almost on its own, thanks to Russia's self-sufficient war resources. Only with sufficient resources can it withstand a long war. Whether it is the Taiwan Strait Campaign to liberate Taiwan or the campaign to recover the occupied islands and reefs in the South China Sea, we must take precautions in advance and prepare for a protracted war. Although we have the strength to win the territorial defense war, we cannot rule out the possibility that the deep involvement of external forces such as the United States and the West will turn the war into a protracted war of attrition. Therefore, we need to reserve sufficient strategic materials, establish a multi-channel supply system for resources such as oil and natural gas, strengthen the supervision and protection of strategic resources such as rare earths, and ensure that strategic reserve resources that can support a long-term war have played a certain role in protecting China's national defense security.

### **3.7 To ensure the security of large-scale critical infrastructure, we must have a good response strategy**

In order to put pressure on each other during the Russian-Ukrainian war, both sides targeted each other's key infrastructure. Nuclear power plants, hydropower plants, airports, and bridges in Ukraine were all under attack. Important facilities such as the Crimean Bridge, the Siberian Railway, ammunition depots, and energy facilities built by Russia were also bombed by Ukraine. Even civilian facilities such as residential buildings and office buildings were sometimes not spared. China is a country with many large projects, and the developed provinces in the east are relatively dense, such as the Three Gorges Dam, nuclear power plants, the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge, the Chinese Space Station, and the Guizhou Radio Telescope. In peacetime, large-scale infrastructure can better meet the needs of the market economy in serving society and can also demonstrate China's infrastructure strength. However, after the world enters a new period of turbulence and change, once a war breaks out, these key facilities are likely to become an important means of attack by the enemy in the war. Learning from the experience of the "Third Line Construction", especially the construction of important projects such as nuclear power plants, the layout should be appropriately dispersed, and certain restrictions should be placed on the height of buildings. The construction of small and advanced projects should not be too concentrated in the eastern region and some large cities.

### **3.8 We need to step up our efforts to build our country's soft power**

On March 17, 1991, a Soviet referendum showed high support for retaining the Union, but dissolution followed due to a bureaucratic coup and lost communist beliefs. Gorbachev's pro-Western reforms confused public thought, and Yeltsin broke away, enabling NATO's rapid eastward expansion and the Russia-Ukraine war tragedy. China must adhere to socialist values and guard against color revolutions. Putin's Orthodox baptism and the rise of "imperial Russian thought" suggest post-Putin religious-based unity. Controlling discourse is crucial; Russia failed, allowing color revolutions, while the West dominates global discourse. NATO and EU expansions cause instability but face little scrutiny. Russia's security concerns are ignored, losing moral ground and facing sanctions. In 2025, Putin claimed Russian soldiers' steps as territory, reflecting historical expansion that caused ethnic conflicts. Russia's chauvinistic culture led to war, with neighbors de-Russifying. In contrast, China resolves disputes peacefully through consultation, promoting the Belt and Road and winning praise for agreements like with Bhutan.

### **3.9 Peaceful and steady development is the right path**

Peaceful development shares dividends and soft power, while war loses opportunities and causes cycles. Some countries favor China more since the Russia-Ukraine war. Uphold a non-aligned policy; China-Russia partnership isn't an alliance. Historically, alliances like with the USSR damaged autonomy despite thwarting US expansion. Despite strategic cooperation, international opinion supports Ukraine and the war is distant, so cooperate cautiously to avoid risks. Economic ties shouldn't harm China's health; limit Russian resource purchases to prevent financial burdens. Negotiations should be

pragmatic, resolving historical issues while avoiding war impacts and safeguarding global trade. Seize the peaceful rise opportunity as Russia's weakening stabilizes borders and boosts regional influence.

### **3.10 The situation of striving for territorial sovereignty and safeguarding geostrategic security is extremely urgent**

From the perspective of the Russia-Ukraine war, competition among major powers has intensified, while strategic vacuums in neighboring regions are diminishing. Our commitment to peaceful development does not mean abandoning principles or bottom lines. No nation can achieve true strength through prolonged peace. Since the Qing Dynasty's defense against Russia's Yaksa War, historical legacies and Western colonial expansion have perpetuated instability in neighboring areas. In today's complex and volatile global landscape, we must maintain clear judgment and steadfast resolve to meet these challenges.

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