



CAMBRIDGE
UKRAINIAN
STUDIES

Ukraine-2032 Scenarios

A decade past the
full-scale invasion

Olena Davlikanova | Victoria Vdovychenko

Analytical paper. Ukraine-2032 Scenarios: A Decade After the Full-Scale Invasion / Authors: E. Davlikanova, V. Vdovychenko – Kyiv: LLC «Vistka», 2025 – 72 p.

In a world shaped by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity, this intellectual experiment examines a wide range of potential scenarios for Ukraine by 2032—a decade after the launch of the full-scale invasion. To avoid conventional thinking and ensure a balanced perspective, we employ four key variables—ideological orientation, geopolitical orientation, foreign policy orientation, and geopolitical power—which allow us to explore both plausible and currently implausible trajectories, challenging assumptions and uncovering overlooked options often dismissed due to a reluctance to consider radical alternatives.

The analysis is built on a dual-layered framework of 20 scenarios: 10 addressing external developments influenced by the decisions of major actors such as the United States, the EU, China, Russia, and Ukraine, and 10 focused on Ukraine's internal dynamics under the same variables, excluding foreign policy orientation, as being caught in the middle of the emerging blocs' rivalry, Ukraine cannot afford isolationism.

This publication is not a mere theoretical exercise but a call to confront the complexities of the coming decade with urgency and depth. It underscores the necessity of addressing risks—however minimal—before they escalate, as half-hearted policies have already proven to fuel global destabilization and strengthen the axis of authoritarian powers.

Content

Summary.....	4
Abbreviation.....	6
Introduction.....	7
Methodology and Logic Behind Foresight Considerations	9
Chapter 1. External Geopolitical Forces Shaping Ukraine's Path	13
Categories for Framework Scenarios and Analysis of Current Trends Across Major Geopolitical Actors....	14
Ideological Orientation.....	14
Geopolitical Orientation.....	17
Foreign Policy Orientations	23
Geopolitical Power	26
Framework Scenarios: Ukraine's Future in the Context of Global Trends	31
Interim Conclusions	36
Chapter. 2 DOMESTIC DEVELOPMENTS	38
Categories for Domestic Scenarios and Analysis of Current Trends.....	39
Ideological Orientation	39
Geopolitical Orientation	42
Geopolitical Power	45
Scenarios.....	51
Interim Conclusions	56
Chapter 3. Realities and Recommendations	65
Acknowledgements	70
About the Authors.....	71

Summary

For a decade now, Ukraine has been entrenched in Russia's unprovoked genocidal war with no sustainable peace in sight. Following the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the creation of quasi-republics in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, their subsequent integration into the Russian Federation alongside other occupied territories, and the full-scale invasion in 2022, Russia's ambitions to reclaim its sphere of influence and reshape international order have become unmistakably evident.

Numerous attempts by world leaders to ignore or appease these ambitions have proven futile, pushing Ukraine into a protracted struggle for survival. This conflict, however, not only shapes Ukraine's destiny but ultimately defines the fate of global democracy. That is why it is essential to overcome the limitations of conventional thinking in an era where the world has entered a phase of dramatic and accelerating change.

In 2021, many analysts dismissed the possibility of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, while in 2022 some confidently predicted its collapse within days. These [miscalculations](#) reveal the inherent challenges of forecasting in a world increasingly shaped by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA). Events once deemed implausible—such as Ukrainian Armed Forces involved in direct confrontation with North Korean troops in the Kursk region—have now become a grim reality.

Thus, we embarked on an intellectual experiment to examine a wide range of potential scenarios for Ukraine by 2032, including both those that seem plausible and those that currently appear implausible. As a result, we developed a dual-layered framework of 20 scenarios: 10 focused on global interplay and 10 examining Ukrainian domestic developments. Our aim is not merely to chart linear trajectories but to capture the clash of diverging rationalities driving the decisions of major global and domestic actors and the multifaceted forces shaping unprecedented developments.

Chapter 1: Global Interplay

Given Ukraine's dependence on critical aid of its allies, this group of scenarios is centered on the relationships among five major geopolitical actors—the United States, the European Union, Russia, China and Ukraine. These scenarios probe the improbable and the likely alike, from the democratization of Russia, the illiberalization of the West or the chilling specter of a Third World War, to highly probable disruptions, including intensifying hybrid confrontation with an emerging authoritarian axis.

To avoid the trap of conventional thinking and ensure a balanced perspective, we employ four key variables that allow us to explore options often overlooked due to a reluctance to consider radical alternatives:

- 1 ***Ideological Orientation*** – Measuring adherence to liberal democratic values, this variable underscores the ideological divide between democratic and non-democratic systems.
- 2 ***Geopolitical Orientation*** – Assessing strategic alignments, from anti-Western to pro-Western, in an emerging multipolar world.
- 3 ***Foreign Policy Orientation*** – Evaluating states' tendencies toward isolationism or internationalism, which shape their global engagements and alliances.
- 4 ***Geopolitical Power*** – Encompassing economic strength, military capabilities, and societal resilience, this variable also introduces the concept of «wobbling», describing actors with significant resources but limited ability to dominate adversaries.

Through these lenses, the framework offers insights into the broader dynamics that will shape Ukraine's external environment and force critical decisions by its allies, allowing for an exploration of the consequences of various policies, including the major threats to Ukraine's future.

After three years of full-scale war, the collective West still lacks a clear strategy for Ukraine's victory, opting for compromises and avoiding direct confrontation with Russia at all costs. This non-escalation policy has led to slow and limited arms supplies, resulting in heavy Ukrainian losses and damage to critical infrastructure. The West's reluctance to protect Ukrainian skies and its delays in NATO membership of the most skilled army in Europe—driven more by political concerns than the ongoing conflict—highlight Ukraine's precarious position.

This indecisiveness is seen by authoritarian regimes not as wisdom or respect for diverse interests but as weakness, exposing the West's inability to protect its allies. In light of the U.S. chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan and tensions within Europe over EU-Russia cooperation, as well as recent storms in the Collective West caused by the new White House Administration, this hesitation sends a troubling signal to the world.

Chapter 2: Domestic Developments

The second chapter shifts the focus inward, examining Ukraine's internal factors that could shape its future through three of the four presented variables, excluding foreign policy orientation. As a state deeply intertwined with global developments, Ukraine cannot afford isolationism. Its path will lead either to reintegration with the European family or regression into Russia's oppressive sphere of influence—a result not just of Ukrainian policy failures but also of global missteps and shortsightedness.

The scenarios range from the most desirable outcome—Ukraine becoming a prosperous, fully-fledged democracy with EU and NATO membership—to the possibility of it becoming an EU disruptor as an illiberal democracy, descending into authoritarian rule driven by socioeconomic frustrations, or even absorption by Russia.

Exploring undesirable scenarios is essential for recognizing even the most minimal risks and developing proactive policies to address them. Ignoring potential threats or relying on overly optimistic perspectives can result in half-hearted measures that may appear adequate in the short term, yet fail to address deeper, longer-term challenges, ultimately hindering sustainable progress.

This work serves as both a theoretical exploration and a practical guide for policymakers. We go further than traditional analyses anchored solely in economics and military calculus or formal indexes by integrating human drivers—both unpredictable and deeply consequential. The free spirit of the Ukrainian people, a force underestimated by the Kremlin and many global analysts alike, has repeatedly ruined Russia's plans to undermine Ukraine politically and militarily. However, Ukraine's human capital is not limitless, and allies' policies that treat Ukraine as a grindstone against Russia without considering this may lead to the state's ultimate exhaustion.

We distill our findings into recommendations tied to two critical probabilities: one in which Ukraine and the West prevail, and Russia's strategic defeat paves the way for a more secure and stable global order; the other, where indecisiveness or short-sighted policies lead to severe consequences later, with Ukraine enduring socio-economic hardships from the war, a lack of support, and ultimately falling into Russia's sphere of influence, enhancing Russia's capabilities to dominate Europe.

Abbreviation

AA	– Association Agreement
BRICS	– Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa (since recently the group is joined by Iran, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Ethiopia)
CIA	– Cross-Impact Analysis
CIS	– Commonwealth of Independent States
CLA	– Causal Layered Analysis
CSTO	– Collective Security Treaty Organization
DCFTA	– Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area
DI	– democracy index
EAEU	– Eurasian Economic Union
ECFR	– European Council on Foreign Relations
EIU	– The Economist Intelligence Unit
EU	– European Union
FDI	– foreign direct investment
GDP	– Gross Domestic Product
IFI	– international financial institution
IMF	– International Monetary Fund
ITC	– International Trade Center
KIIS	– Kyiv International Institute of Sociology
NATO	– North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCO	– non-commissioned officer
NSATU	– NATO's Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine
OSCE	– Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
RDNA	– Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment
RF	– Russian Federation
SCO	– Shanghai Cooperation Organization
TEU	– The Treaty on European Union
TIA	– Trend Impact Analysis
UAF	– Ukraine's Armed Forces
UAS	– unmanned aerial systems
UN	– United Nations
VUCA	– Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous

Introduction

For a decade now, Ukraine has been entrenched in a relentless conflict with a ‘deal’ but not a sustainable peace in sight. Following the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the establishment of quasi-republics in Donetsk and Luhansk regions, which have recently been absorbed into the Russian Federation along with newly occupied territories, and 2022 genocidal full-scale invasion, Russia's intentions to reclaim its sphere of influence and destroy the rule-based order have become starkly evident. Numerous attempts of world leaders to ignore or appease these ambitions have proven futile, pushing Ukraine into a protracted struggle for survival and killing the post-Cold War aspirations of a Europe extending from Lisbon to Vladivostok.

Today, Ukrainians bear the weight not only of their own missteps but also of the cumulative errors made by global decision-makers since Ukraine's independence in 1991—from the Budapest Memorandum and subsequent denuclearization and demilitarization of Ukraine amid Russia's threats to review its western border, to the missed NATO invitation in 2008, inadequate sanctions for Russian aggression in 2014, and energy dependence trap that Europe put itself into, especially the approval of Nord Stream 2 amid the initial invasion despite Ukraine's warnings that the project is an invitation to a full-fledged conflict.

After three decades marked by significant historical events, including a ten-year long war, it is crucial to project potential scenarios for Ukraine in the decade following the full-scale invasion based on the lessons that should have been learnt. Especially in the past three years, events have transpired that would have been deemed implausible in serious scenario planning preceding year 2022. Many policy analysts have been taken aback by the reality of these previously unimaginable developments. Consequently, the present scenario planning encompasses a broad spectrum of potential situations, including those that are or may currently seem close to impossible, as the price for previous miscalculations turned out to be exceedingly high.

Ukraine claims to be fighting not only for its very existence but the whole democratic world (currently eroding)—a claim that is far from exaggerated. The repercussions of Ukraine's fate extend beyond immediate conflict zones, influencing the broader balance between liberal democracy and authoritarianism, as well as illiberal democracy, globally. Geopolitically positioned as a frontier between Western democracy and allied with China resurgent Russian imperialism, Ukraine embodies a pivotal ideological divide in post-imperial Europe.

The potential defeat of Ukraine would not only narrow the boundaries of the democratic world immediately and even more in the course of time but also undermine the perceived inevitability of democracy, diminishing its global value amidst Western reluctance to go all-in to defend it. This could erode confidence in the West's reliability as a strategic ally, emboldening disruptive forces globally. Unless the West itself loses interest in its values and accepts Russia's imposed rule-based order of the mighty, where democratic values and human rights become relics of the past. In this scenario, future confrontations will no longer be ideological but will devolve into a mere fight for resources and spheres of influence, with volatile alliances. For Ukraine, this would mean a return ticket to the Russian sphere of influence.

The Peace Summit in Switzerland drew delegations from across the globe, highlighting the profound implications of Ukraine's conflict on global stability. However, the tepid endorsement of the summit's final communique underscores global disunity in confronting Russian aggression and upholding international norms. Even the most unifying points of President Zelensky's ten-point peace formula, such as ensuring nuclear safety, food security, and the release of prisoners along with the return of Ukrainian children from Russia, have not garnered unanimous public endorsement from all participants.

The West is also divided in its strategy. While some decision-makers and opinion leaders have finally begun to acknowledge with significant strides that a new Cold War appears almost inevitable and perhaps necessary to [contain Russia](#) and uphold democratic principles—understanding that free markets alone do not secure democracies—others still advocate for trade-offs, and, and incremental steps in relations with Russia.

It is however clear for all that sustainable peace demands sustainable investments in defense and security. Russia's multifaceted aggression, encompassing not just military tactics but also cyber warfare, misinformation operations, strategic financing abroad and export of corruption, etc. However, dissatisfaction among the population with a potential slowdown in economic growth and impact on living standards might hinder investments in security.

Meanwhile, despite enduring three years of full-fledged war for its sovereignty, Ukraine remains severely undersupplied with the necessary armaments to reclaim occupied territories, protect its civil population and critical infrastructure, suffering significant economic and human capital losses. While negotiations for official EU membership have commenced, NATO membership remains a distant and unreachable goal, primarily due to political calculations. While economic recovery is crucial for a country's development, prioritizing security is indispensable for its survival.

Ukraine has undeniably emerged as a significant global player, still its reliance on substantial Western support—both financial and military—makes it vulnerable for external influences and highlights the need for comprehensive strategic recommendations. These should focus on enhancing resilience against mounting domestic socio-economic challenges and potential miscalculations by allies. This imperative comes amidst transformative global shifts, including the Fourth Industrial Revolution, AI boom, a move from globalization to regionalism, climate change impacts, and the resurgence of populism and nationalism.

Enhancing the strategic vision of Ukraine's own steps and Western support for Ukraine is indispensable from the correct assessment of the developments in Russia. Nations that view democracy as a threat to state stability, particularly those rich in natural resources and bound by a social contract favoring superficial order over individual freedoms, often willingly undermine human values and the rule of law. While such choices may fall within a nation's domestic purview, the export of this framework—coupled with aspirations for regional or global dominance cloaked in rhetoric of greatness—poses a serious threat to liberal democracy beyond their borders, the export of this framework—coupled with aspirations for regional or global dominance cloaked in rhetoric of greatness—poses a serious threat to liberal democracy beyond their borders.

Thus, accurate risk assessment can pave the way for strategies that ensure a more just world and sustainable peace in the aftermath of the greatest disruption of the 21st century. The decisions taken today will resonate profoundly over the next decade, shaping not only Ukraine's future but also the geopolitical landscape of Europe, fostering Trans-Atlantic cooperation, and defining the destinies of nations worldwide.

Ukrainians understand too well the announcement of the air raid siren app, with Mark Hamill's voice warning, "Don't be careless. Your overconfidence is your weakness," which serves as a poignant reminder. The West should take this warning seriously to prevent its citizens from ever hearing it on their own phones.

Methodology and Logic Behind Foresight Considerations

The main goal of this analytical report is to facilitate strategic planning, raise awareness, and stimulate discussion among policymakers and intellectuals on possible scenarios for Ukraine a decade after Russia's full-scale invasion. This is achieved by forecasting various alternative futures grounded in an examination of current economic, military, political, and societal conditions and trends.

To develop scenarios for Ukraine in 2032, several primary methods were employed: desk research, geopolitical and historical context analysis, and synthesis of expert insights, and analysis of data from open sources. Scenario planning, the core method, was supplemented with environmental scanning and trend analysis. The focus was on examining political, economic, social, and technological trends to frame potential scenarios. To create a comprehensive set of scenarios Generic Foresight Processes was applied.

In the context of scenario planning for Ukraine in 2032, Trend Impact Analysis (TIA) and Cross-Impact Analysis (CIA) play critical roles in shaping comprehensive future scenarios. TIA is a method used to assess how current trends might evolve over time and their potential future impacts. The process involves:

- *Identifying Key Trends:* Collecting data on existing political, economic, social, and technological trends.
- *Extrapolating Current Trends:* Using historical data and current conditions to project these trends into the future under the assumption that no significant disruptions occur.
- *Analyzing Potential Disruptions:* Considering potential events or disruptions that could significantly alter the trajectory of these trends, such as political upheavals, technological breakthroughs, or economic crises.
- *Adjusting Forecasts:* Incorporating these disruptions into the initial projections to refine and adjust the final scenario outcomes.

CIA is a method used to understand the interdependencies between various events and trends to evaluate how one might influence the probability of others. This involves:

- *Mapping Relationships:* Identifying and mapping out significant factors and their potential interactions within the geopolitical, social, and economic contexts.
- *Assessing Mutual Influence:* Evaluating how changes in one factor (e.g., an economic downturn) might impact other factors (e.g., social stability or political policies) and vice versa.
- *Developing Probabilistic Scenarios:* Creating complex, interconnected scenarios that reflect the dynamic interactions of different elements, enhancing the robustness of future projections.

To prevent the miscalculations that contributed to numerous flawed conclusions before the 2022 invasion, we sought to look beyond mere numbers and facts, delving into the deeper layers of national mythologies and trends that shape a nation's character.

Causal Layered Analysis (CLA), as developed by Sohail Inayatullah, was used to explore events through four layers:

- *Litany:* examination of surface-level data and commonly held public views about the issue. This includes reviewing mainstream news, reports, and publicly available statistics.

- *Social Causes*: delving into underlying social, economic, and political factors that contribute to the observed issues. This might involve analyzing academic studies, policy papers, and historical data.
- *Worldview*: exploration of the broader paradigms and worldviews influencing the issue. This includes understanding cultural narratives, ideological frameworks, and systemic beliefs reflected in literature and expert analyses.
- *Myth/Metaphor*: investigation of the deep-rooted narratives and metaphors that shape societal attitudes towards the issue. This could involve interpreting symbolic language and metaphorical representations in media, literature, and cultural discourse. CLA helped uncover deeper layers of meaning and causation, moving beyond surface observations to explore fundamental drivers.

Synthesis was applied to integrate insights from CLA, resulting in a comprehensive understanding of the issue.

Visioning was used to imagine desirable futures for Ukraine and to define long-term goals. This method aided in identifying strategic directions and potential pathways to achieve a preferred future, as reflected in the recommendations.

The future of Ukraine hinges on a complex interplay of external and internal factors. Externally, these include the rise of a multipolar world order, Russia's persistent focus on Ukraine as a linchpin of its revanchist ambitions, internal social and economic processes in key geopolitical actors (USA, EU, China and Russia coupling with North Korea and Iran), the growing influence of populist, isolationist, and right-wing leaders in the West, the score in the new arms race, economic strains exacerbated by ongoing conflicts and migration issues, and the efficiency of steps addressing climate change and advancing renewable and nuclear energy, which have an impact on Russia's ability to disrupt the global order in the long run.

To address significant theoretical geopolitical changes anticipated in the next decade, we employ several key categories. These encompass crucial dimensions that shape a state's (or union's) path, including ideological, geopolitical, and foreign policy orientations, as well as geopolitical power defined by political, economic, and military capacities, alongside societal values and state's interests, which determines its capability to expand its influence or prevent rival encroachments.

By combining established facts about key factors shaping each country's current geopolitical strategies with uncertain future variables, we construct initial framework scenarios for the major geopolitical players—USA, EU, China, and Russia. These factors are categorized as follows:

- *Ideological Orientation (Democratic vs. Anti-Democratic Stance)* evaluates a state's adherence to liberal democratic values overall. This dimension is particularly crucial in the context of ideological divisions between democratic and non-democratic worlds, which underpin conflicts such as the one involving Russia and Ukraine.
- *Geopolitical Orientation (Anti-Western Orientation vs. Pro-Western Orientation)* denotes a state's strategic alignment, which in the current geopolitical landscape, is closely intertwined with not only pragmatic interests but also ideological orientation, though not always determined by the latter. The distinction between Anti-Western and Pro-Western orientations has become increasingly significant in the context of the rise of a multipolar world and significance of the Global South states' perspective.
- *Foreign Policy Orientation (Isolationism vs Internationalism)* refers to whether a state prioritizes autonomy and minimal involvement in international affairs, emphasizing

sovereignty and non-interference (isolationism), or actively engages in global diplomacy, multilateral agreements, and shaping international norms and policies (internationalism). This dimension is crucial for analysis as it influences the level of support Western allies might provide in countering Russian aggression, contribution to the Trans-Atlantic cooperation etc.

- *Geopolitical Power* encompasses a state's ability to wield influence over global affairs, shape international policies, assert its strategic interests worldwide and effectively counter opposing efforts. States or alliances with robust geopolitical power leverage substantial resources such as economic strength, military capabilities, and diplomatic prowess.

To provide a more nuanced understanding of power dynamics, we introduce the concept of "wobbling" alongside traditional classifications of "strong" and "weak." This term illustrates scenarios, in which, despite possessing considerable economic and military resources, a state or alliance struggles to completely dominate an opponent, even a weaker one. Instead, they may only mitigate the adversary's influence without achieving total control or a definitive victory.

Furthermore, a nation's resilience to geopolitical pressures extends beyond economic and military factors. It also encompasses societal attitudes, values, and the public's capacity and willingness to support or oppose government policies and geopolitical objectives. These societal elements may play a crucial role in shaping a country's overall geopolitical strategy and outcomes.

Thus, based on current trends, in line with identified categories and considering the multitude of uncertainties or drivers of change in the future, we transform plausible developmental paths into alternative scenarios. This approach allows us to outline 10 framework scenarios detailing the trajectories of major geopolitical actors that may impact developments in Ukraine.

Given the difficulty analysts faced in predicting Russia's full-scale invasion, we have opted to describe all scenarios, including those that are highly unlikely or seem 'wild', recognizing the unpredictability inherent in today's VUCA world. Thus, we acknowledge that the unfolding future typically results from a blend of potential paths. There is a limit to how much ambiguity can be resolved. This limitation is known as '[intrinsic ambiguity](#),' an inherent feature of the social sciences, as most definitions in these fields involve subjective elements concerning the extent of the observed phenomenon. In addition, such a comprehensive approach, akin to mathematical modeling that considers all variables and their combinations, helps avoid accusations of the lack of impartiality.

Moreover, it is important to recognize that obtaining complete, reliable, and up-to-date data can be challenging due factors such as sensitive character of defense related data, lack of reliable information on the real state of Russian economics, Ukraine's lack of control over certain territories and ongoing hostilities, ect.

We then apply the same categories—ideological orientation (democracy vs. autocracy), geopolitical orientation (Anti-Western Orientation vs. Pro-Western Orientation), and geopolitical power based on economic, military capacities, and societal orientations—for drafting 10 possible and almost impossible scenarios driven by Ukraine's domestic developments. The exclusion of the category of foreign policy orientation (isolationism vs. internationalism) for Ukraine is justified by the constant existential threat from RF, which necessitates alignment with one geopolitical pole over the other, and excluding a non-bloc status as an option. Thus, we analyze possible developments within Ukraine by focusing on domestic realities with only a glimpse on the impact of external influences. This approach explores internal dynamics and anticipates various outcomes based solely on current realities and factors within the country.

Finally, we integrate scenarios influenced by both external and internal factors shaping Ukraine's future, identifying the most likely outcomes. From there, we formulate recommendations aimed at mitigating unfavorable scenarios and fostering beneficial ones for Ukraine's development as a strong democratic and well-off country.

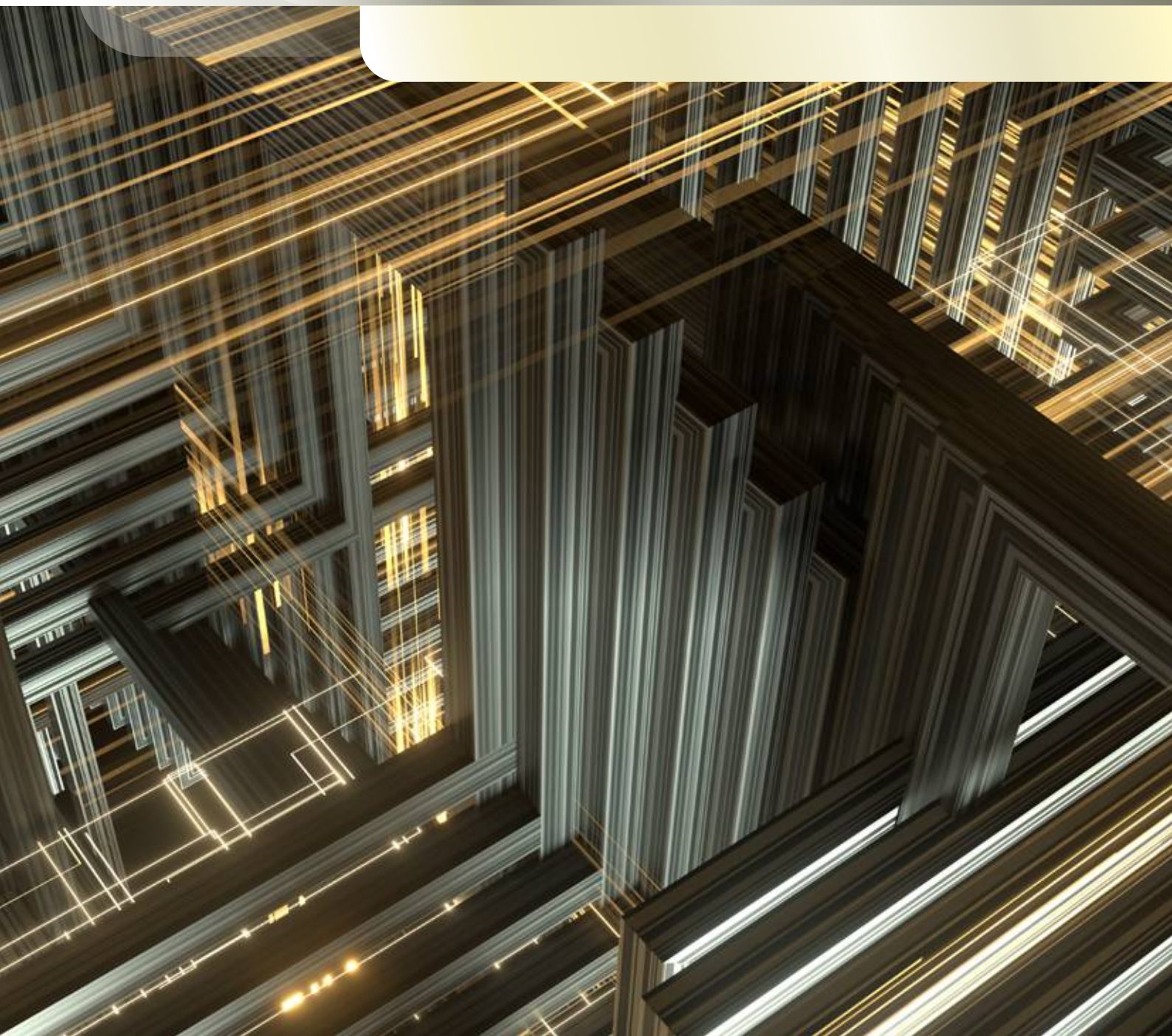
The presented scenarios do not account for the outbreak of nuclear war, though such a catastrophic possibility remains tied to the current trajectory of modern RF's imperialistic ambitions. A nuclear escalation could occur if Russia resorts to the ultimate act of aggression, compelling the West to respond in kind (with nuclear or conventional weapons), risking global devastation. Alternatively, if the West limits itself to expressions of deep concern and condolences without taking decisive action, Ukraine could face a dire outcome: potential disintegration as a state and partial or complete absorption by Russia. This grim possibility highlights the critical importance of unified, proactive measures to deter such outcomes and uphold international stability.

We do not concentrate much on a hypothetical weakening of the U.S. stance as a liberal democracy due to internal shifts, as we believe in the resilience of its checks and balances in a decade perspective, while we recognize the worrisome tendencies. However, recent elections to the European Parliament compel us to carefully consider the potential significant rise of right-wing populism in Europe, which challenges the established European value system. The influence of far-left sentiments, although less prominent in our analysis, also warrants attention, as the "horseshoe rule" suggests converging extremes can influence outcomes unpredictably.

Overall, readers are encouraged to reflect on how each scenario could impact their personal future and the future of their country, as not only Ukraine is being influenced by geopolitical storms but the outcomes of the war in Ukraine will shape the trajectory of the democratic world.

Chapter 1. GLOBAL INTERPLAY

External Geopolitical Forces Shaping Ukraine's Path



Categories for Framework Scenarios and Analysis of Current Trends Across Major Geopolitical Actors

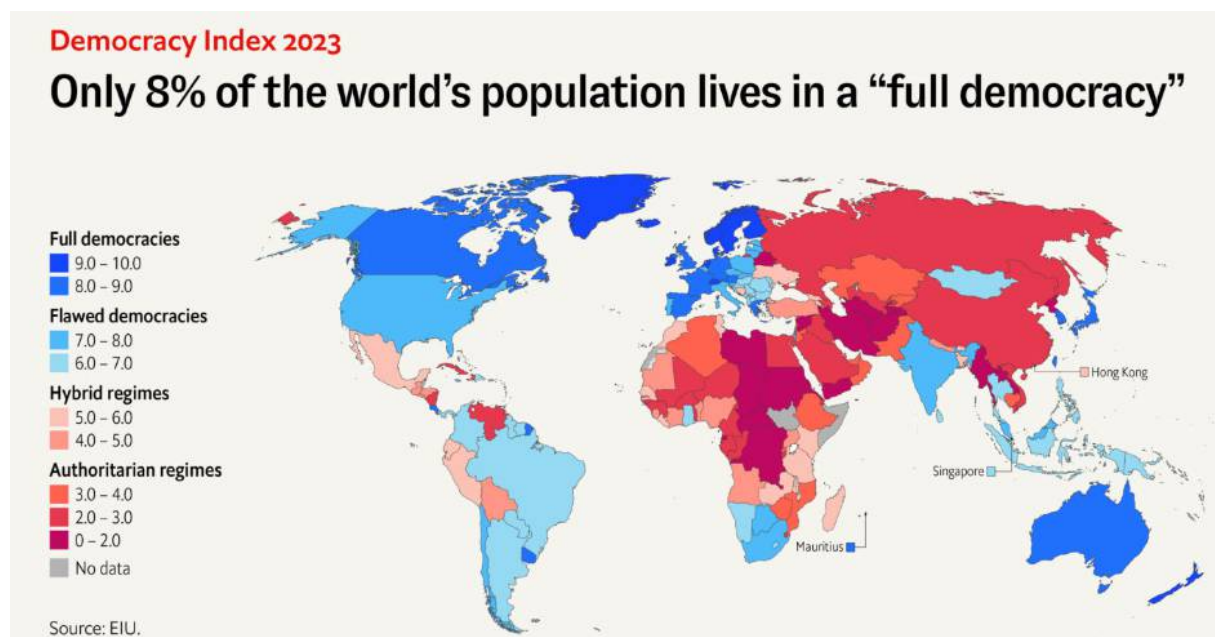
Ukraine's future is intricately tied to the trajectories of its allies and rivals alike. Therefore, any attempt to forecast Ukraine's future must also consider developments in key global powers such as the USA, EU, Russia, and China. These nations exert military, economic, and political influence that shapes the framework within which Ukraine evolves.

In order to cover major theoretical geopolitical developments of the upcoming decade, several key categories are utilized. These categories encapsulate critical dimensions that influence a state's (or alliance's) trajectory in terms of ideological, geopolitical and foreign policy orientation, as well as geopolitical power framed by its political, economic and military capabilities, as well as values, geostrategic interests and intent to either enlarge its sphere of influence or deter rivals from doing so.

Ideological Orientation

Ideological orientation pertains to a state's adherence to political ideologies and principles that shape its domestic governance and international relations. Recognizing the existing diversity of political ideologies within democracies and autocracies alike, for the sake of comprehensiveness in analysis, we narrow down this factor to two broad categories: Pro-Democratic and Anti-Democratic Stance.

Assessing whether a state is democratic or non-democratic may seem inherently complex and subjective. Moreover, illiberal democracies ultimately contain as much threat to the liberal values as autocracies. However, tools like the [Democracy Index](#) by the Economist Group provide a quantitative assessment of democracy quality globally. This index evaluates 60 indicators across five categories: electoral process and pluralism, functioning of government, political participation, democratic political culture, and civil liberties. Countries are ranked and classified into four regime types: full democracies, flawed democracies, hybrid regimes, and authoritarian regimes.



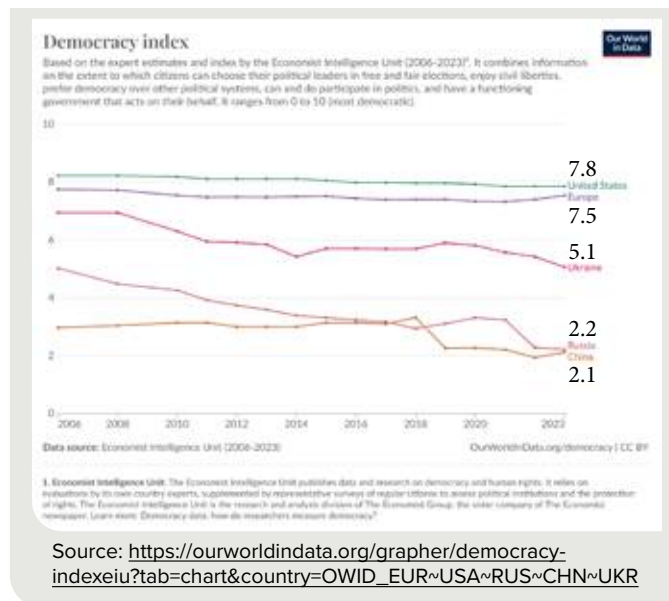
Given that Russian aggression transcends mere territorial or resource-based disputes, being rooted deeply in ideological divisions between democratic and non-democratic worlds (where China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran form an emerging [Authoritarian Axis](#)), the significance of this ideological dimension becomes evident. The tumultuous dynamics of the post-unipolar world are shaping a new divide between democratic and authoritarian blocs, despite significant disparities and variations within each bloc of actors.

For instance, China's adherence to communism, Russia's Putinism (potentially interchangeable with other cults of personality or the broader concept of "Russkiy mir"), North Korea's Juche ideology (critically described as a quasi-religious, nationalist, or fascistic deviation from Marxism-Leninism), and Iran's Islam-driven state policies share several common features. These include:

- *nationalism*: emphasizing the supremacy and interests of the nation-state often above individual rights or international cooperation;
- *militarism*: prioritizing military strength, expansion, and a readiness to use force to achieve geopolitical objectives;
- *centralized authority*: concentration of power in the hands of a ruling elite or single leader, often supported by a strong state apparatus, which is aligned with lack of free elections, independent judiciary, and rule of law;
- *repression of individual freedom*: restricting freedoms of thought, expression, and action through censorship, surveillance, and control or repressions of dissent;
- *suppression of minority rights*: discrimination against or persecution of ethnic, religious, or political minorities perceived as threats to state ideology or unity;
- *international assertiveness*: pursuing assertive foreign policies that challenge international norms, influence global affairs, and promote a vision of alternative international order using disruptive measures, including hybrid wars, to establish themselves as global or regional leaders.

These ideologies, while varied in their specific manifestations and historical contexts, collectively represent a challenge to the liberal democratic principles and institutions, which had been viewed as an ultimate answer to ideological debates in the post-Cold War era.

Meanwhile, the democratic bloc is far from homogeneous. Regardless of the forms of government, which include (federal) parliamentary republics, presidential or parliamentary-presidential systems, and constitutional or federal parliamentary constitutional monarchies, the extent to which they adhere to democratic principles can vary significantly. Some democracies maintain strong institutions and robust civil liberties, while others may exhibit varying degrees of democratic backsliding or erosion of democratic norms.



Once triumphant after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of communist regimes, liberal democracy in the 21st century faces significant challenges. Despite the European Union's foundation on liberal democratic values, as outlined in Article 2 TEU, this trend is particularly evident in Europe, where populist parties (in many cases enjoying Russia's friendship) espousing Eurosceptic ideas have gained prominence, leading to the rise of [illiberal democracy in Hungary](#) and worrisome shifts in some other Eastern and Central European countries. According to the V-Dem Institute [2021 report](#), the EU may be facing its own wave of democratic roll-back as 20% of its members are autocratizing.

Understanding these ideological intricacies is crucial for predicting a state's strategies on the global stage, as they significantly influence how countries interact and position themselves within the contemporary geopolitical landscape. These dynamics are particularly relevant as the world approaches what some describe as a new Cold War or even World War III, with ideological divides and strategic rivalries shaping international relations and influencing global power structures.

Recent shifts in U.S. foreign policy, marked by an increasingly aggressive stance toward its own allies, have already unsettled Europeans and Canadians. If the U.S. veers toward illiberal democracy or outright autocracy, global power struggles will cease to be driven by ideology and instead become a ruthless contest for influence and resources. In a world where economic gain trumps all else, and human rights are rendered meaningless, Russia's grip on Europe may tighten, while China cements its dominance over the Global South.

Despite current realities, democratization of Russia is included in the scenarios, first and foremost as a tribute to some western analysts' wishful thinking. In theory, such democratization could lead to a pro-Western shift, potentially aligning Russia with Western interests in achieving sustainable peace in the European region, contributing to its decoupling from China. Though democratization of any country is theoretically possible, realities make this probability highly unlikely.

It should be noted, however, that neither of the scenarios foreseeing democratization of Russia guarantees Ukraine's wellbeing and territorial integrity as an independent state. Essential is the degree of democratization, but more so the inclination to promote its geopolitical interests with military interventions, which is not fully pre-determined by any ideological orientation.

In its best "democratic shape" of Yeltsin presidency (1991 till 1999) Russia was involved in a number of military endeavors fueled by geopolitical interests.

Tajikistan (1992-1997): Russia was involved in the Tajikistan civil war, aiming to protect its interests in the region.

Chechen Wars (1994-1996, 1999-2009): Yeltsin's administration initiated the First Chechen War to suppress movement for independence (which the Kremlin called separatists) and later launched the Second Chechen War to reassert control over the region.

Abkhazia and South Ossetia (1990s): Russia supported separatist movements in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia.

Moldova (Transnistria) (1990s): Russia supported the separatist Transnistrian region in Moldova, providing military aid and maintaining a presence in the region.

The democratization of Russia per se does not directly correlate with establishment of parity relationships with Ukraine or respect to its territorial integrity. However, if democratization leads to a pro-Western alignment, it could potentially alter the narrative surrounding the roots of

Russian aggression, diminishing the focus on Ukraine's geopolitical choices as a contributing factor.

Though ideology is intertwined with geopolitical orientation, it is replete with nuances that require exploration. It is crucial to separately examine the potential compromises needed to balance the interests of alliances with a country's own strategic objectives.

Geopolitical Orientation

Geopolitical preferences refer to a state's strategic alignment, which happens to be related to the ideological orientation in the current geopolitical context, where the West is believed to be a beacon of democracy for the rest of the world. However, not all democratic states have a clear pro-Western stance, just as not all authoritarian regimes are anti-Western. We will explore this further in Chapter 2, particularly in the context of scenarios for Ukraine driven by internal factors.

This category—Anti-Western Orientation vs. Pro-Western Orientation—appeared to be important with regards to the rise of the multipolar world, spirations of the Global South, as well as Ukraine's and Russia's opposing vectors resulting in insurmountable contradictions and confrontation. While Ukraine's Pro-Western vector motivates it to seek integration into Western political, economic, and security structures, Russia's Anti-Western stance results in a number of strategies. Not only does Russia prioritize forming alternative alliances with non-Western entities, but it also actively seeks to create chaos within western democracies, trying to make the democratic world shrink. And in an effort to restore its sphere of influence both in Europe and globally, it is eager to destroy an independent democracy aspiring country, even at the cost of its own economic hardships.

Some argue that as Russia's primary goal is to reassert its status as an independent and influential global power, the West should have applied a different approach. If the West provided more opportunities for Russia's engagement and showed more respect to its leadership and RF geopolitical interests, the situation today would be different. Though RF actual influence is largely based on its nuclear arsenal and natural resources rather than its economic might or real military capacities, or contributions to global progress, it enjoyed respect and influence in the United Nations (UN) as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, G8 and G20, Council of Europe, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

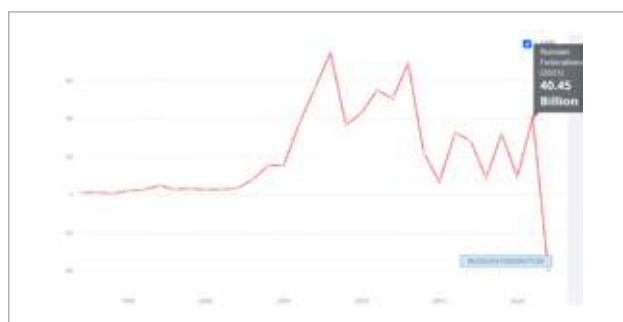


Russian Federation (2021)

193.11 Billion

Net trade in goods (BoP, current US\$) - Russian Federation

International Monetary Fund, Balance of Payments Statistics Yearbook and data files.



Russian Federation (2021)

40.45 Billion

Foreign direct investment, net inflows (BoP, current US\$) - Russian Federation

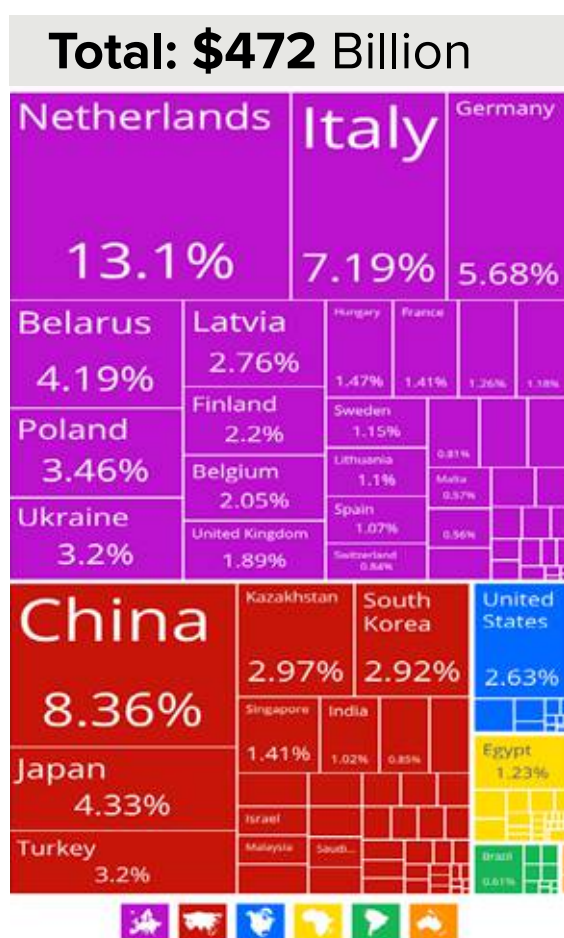
International Monetary Fund, Balance of Payments database, supplemented by data from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and official national sources.

The Russian Federation's exports and imports with China, the EU, and the USA from 2014 till 2024.

RF trade partner	RF Exports (USD Billion)			RF Imports (USD Billion)		
	2014	2021	2023	2014	2021	2023
China	41.5	68.7	129,1	53.6	72.7	110.9
EU	222.2	170.8	84.9	136.2	79.8	78.5
USA	24.4	17.7	17.7	10.7	17.2	0.6

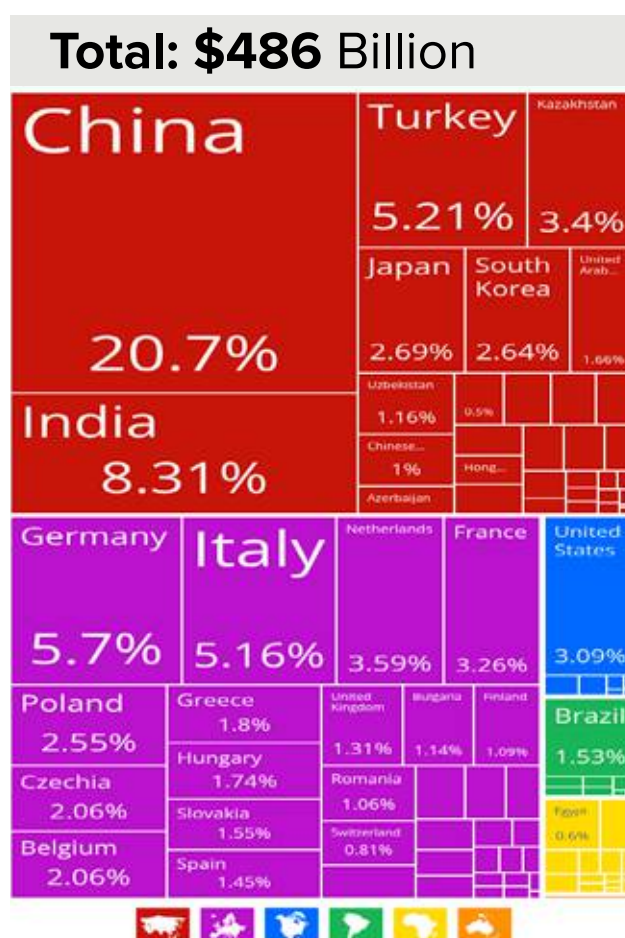
Source: <https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/ALL/StartYear/2014/EndYear/2014/TradeFlow/Import/Partner/RUS/Indicator/MPRT-TRD-VL>

Despite its invasion of Ukraine in 2014, Russia continued to benefit from economic cooperation with the West. Moreover, some western states continued supplying Russia with weapons and cutting-edge technologies, as well as dual-use items. According to the Working Party on Conventional Arms Exports (COARM), between 2015 and 2020, at least 10 European Union member states exported weapons to the Russian Federation, totaling 346 million euros. These member states include France, Germany, Italy, Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Finland, Slovakia, and Spain. The exported military equipment encompassed missiles, bombs, torpedoes, cannons, ground vehicles, and ships.



Russia's trade partners. Exports, 2014.

Source: <https://oec.world/en/profile/country/rus?latestDataNonSubnationalMonthSelector=202312&yearSelector1=2014>



Russia's trade partners. Exports, 2022.

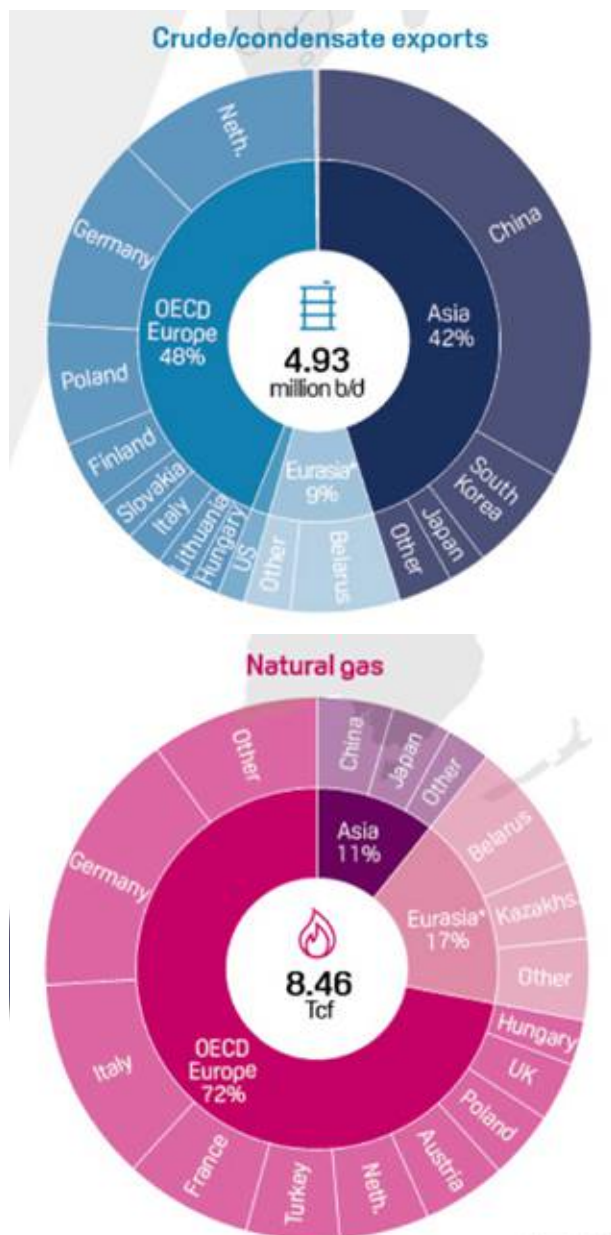
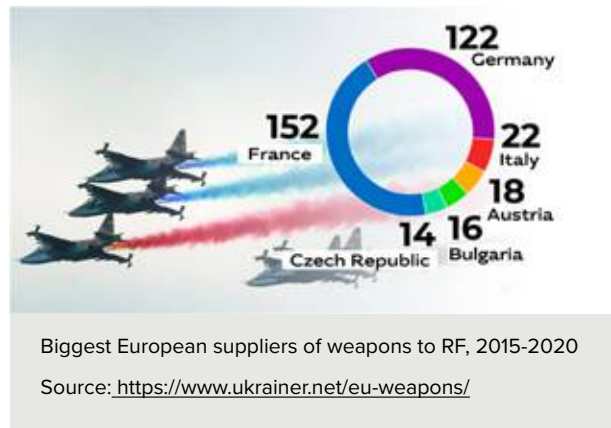
Source: <https://oec.world/en/profile/country/rus?latestDataNonSubnationalMonthSelector=202312>

Had Russia swiftly occupied Ukraine, it might have quickly repaired its international image due to mutual economic interests with primarily European states. One of the reasons for the invasion was the Russian leadership's calculation, heavily influenced by the extensive energy dependencies of several major European countries and the United States. While the EU dependence on Russian gas has put its whole energy security at risk, U.S. nuclear reactors remain reliant on Russian fuel supplies. In 2023 alone, the U.S. nuclear industry paid over \$800 million to Rosatom, Russia's state-owned nuclear energy corporation, and its subsidiaries.

Additionally, messages from Western leaders indicated a reluctance to engage in a direct confrontation with Russia over Ukraine. For example, before the full-scale invasion, [President Biden suggested](#) there was a split among NATO members on how to respond to Moscow's "minor incursion." Similarly, after the invasion, French President Emmanuel Macron emphasized the importance of finding ways to allow Putin to 'save face'.

Moreover, in an attempt to grasp the remnants of the illusion of sustainable peace based on economic benefits, the West tried to overlook Russia's ongoing hybrid war—a blend of information and psychological operations aimed at dismantling the EU project, hampering transatlantic cooperation, and spreading chaos to Russia's advantage. For this purpose, Russia has weaponized its energy sector, media, cultural influence, and the Russian Orthodox Church. When a country cannot become stronger than its enemy, sometimes the winning strategy is to weaken it while avoiding direct confrontation. This strategy is currently being employed by the West against Russia in Ukraine.

Russian propaganda reveals a distinct anti-Western narrative filled with not only antagonism but deep-seated hostility reminiscent of Soviet times. The Russian



Russia's main energy resources buyers, 2022
Source: https://www.spglobal.com/commodityinsights/PlattsContent/_assets/_images/latest-news/20220215-infographic-russia-standoff-global-oil-gas-supply-ukraine-crisis.jpg

regime appears to need an external adversary to consolidate domestic power through fear and national pride. Messages about an aggressive West is a 'daily meal' of Russian propaganda served to the public. In 2022, President Vladimir Putin's aide, Vladimir Medinsky, [stated](#) that the "very existence of Russia as a Russian civilization" is currently at stake. Medinsky added that the collective West is allegedly pushing Russia towards the destruction of its political system and the country itself.

While this anti-Western rhetoric may not benefit Russia economically, it serves to strengthen the regime's grip on power, aligning with the Russian very specific conformism-based [social contract](#). As [Boris Grozovskii observed](#), "In return for loyalty, the state offered not growing welfare, but the feeling of inclusion in a power that was rising from its knees. This powerful emotion allows the state to demand not only loyalty but also a readiness for sacrifice from its population."

Despite the claims of the [Russian opposition](#) that the conflict is Putin's war, not Russia's, and attempts to absolve the Russian people of collective political responsibility, these arguments also highlight the extent to which a society adheres to liberal values. Levada Center's polls in 2024 demonstrate that [more than a third of Russian citizens](#) consider the use of nuclear weapons to be "justified" in the war against Ukraine; despite 71% of Russians supporting Vladimir Putin if he decided to end the war "this week," [less than a third](#) would back his decision if it required returning the occupied territories. Even among liberals, such as some [Meduza readers](#), the sentiment persists that "the only thing worse than war is losing one."

These specifics are important for assessing the probability of Russia's shift to democratic values and cooperation with the West, as well as readiness for peaceful coexistence with the neighbors.

Currently, anti-western ideas fall on a well-prepared ground by the [Eurasianism](#) concept, which sought cultural and political separation from the West, promoting a unique developmental path for Russia and its neighbors, and heritage of Soviet 'greatness' and ability to impose its will through force. According to political scientist [Andreas Umland](#), Eurasianists supported the anti-Western and imperialist aspects of the early Soviet regime, viewing it as a partial continuation of the Tsarist empire. Russian propaganda often refers to "[Russian civilization](#)".

After a brief period in the 1990s and early 2000s, during which Russia, grappling with economic hardships and ideological crisis, explored closer cooperation with the West, its trajectory shifted significantly. This change was driven by economic recovery fueled by increased oil and gas prices, beneficial economic cooperation with Western countries, and the lack of Western resolve to enforce substantial reforms in Russia fostering its democratization, unlike in Ukraine. As a result, Russia made it clear that its values, conceptualized through the Russky Mir idea—reflecting a distinct set of principles and cultural narratives—are fundamentally at odds with those of liberal democracies and European identity.

Russky Mir Idea

The term “Russian World” is an ideological concept of Russian culture and its mission in the world. The foremost authors of its modern (1990s) interpretation are Petr Shchedrovitsky, Efim Ostrovsky, Valery Tishkov, Vitaly Skrinnik, Tatiana Poloskova and Natalia Narochnickaja. Once Putin rose to power, the concept was henceforth promoted officially as part of Russian state policy and propaganda. The main determinant of one’s belonging to the “Russian World” is belonging to a cultural-linguistic group, which allows Russian authorities to target their policy of “protecting interests” of Russian-speaking population at a broad group of foreign countries, flexibly adapting it to changing circumstances. Under the Russian Empire and the USSR, a comprehensive policy of Russification was pursued in historically Ukrainian territories. All former Soviet republics and countries that were in the sphere of influence of the USSR fell under the same policy. Currently, the Russian Federation uses the Russian language as a weapon and an element of justification for military aggression, so the language issue is also a security issue for Ukraine.

“The Russian World” expresses the desire of the Russian state to stretch its power beyond its borders. People supporting the concept believe that there is a mythical “Russian world” out there, which must be (re)conquered and annexed to Russia. This is a narrative aimed at restoring the imperial dominance of the Russian Federation, a concept born of a state in decline, delusional about its former greatness. Archaism is the biggest problem facing supporters of the “Russian world”.

“The Russian world” is a commodity for export, a concept seeking to justify external expansion. There are 25-30 million ethnic Russians and even more native Russian speakers outside of Russia. The fact that the number of such people is decreasing over the years is perceived by the Russian Federation as a threat.

Different approaches are taken to promote the “Russian world”. Some narratives are used for states with Russian ethnic or Russian-speaking minorities. First of all, we are talking about the countries that the Russians call the “core” of this world – in addition to Russia, these are Ukraine (termed “Little Russia” by Russian chauvinists) and Belarus (“White Russia”). Here, the greatest focus is on linguistic and cultural affinity. Completely different narratives are used for countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, which have nothing to do with Russian culture: the “Russian world” is promoted through nostalgic discourses referring to Soviet times, when the USSR supported these countries with weapons and money in the “struggle against Western imperialism and wild capitalism”. Some countries in these regions still perceive Russian politics and culture as anti-American, anti-Western, and anti-colonial. In countries not familiar with Russian culture, this is actually the only discourse they have available. If you look at the supporters of the “Russian world”, it becomes obvious that they gravitate towards Soviet nomenclature, which in fact has not disappeared. Alexei Gromyko, director of the Institute of Europe of the Russian Academy of Sciences, has written an article in which he describes the “Russian world” in structural terms.

The Concept promoted narratives about Russia’s role in maintaining security in the world, “opposing attempts by individual states or groups of states to revise universally recognized principles of international law; attempts to arbitrarily interpret the most important international legal norms and principles to suit the political situation and the interests of individual states; attempts to pass violations of international law for its creative application”. An important element in achieving the above tasks is “strengthening the position of Russian mass media and mass communications in the global information space, and bringing the Russian point of view on international processes to the broad circles of the world public.”

Russia is trying to create a new geopolitical pole, and the image is being created in Russian society that Russia is a unique state with its own civilization, which has an important goal, to restrain the West. If Russia claims the status of a pole therefore it needs satellite states. That is why the Russian-Ukrainian war and the “conquest” of Ukraine became Russia’s state strategic goal.

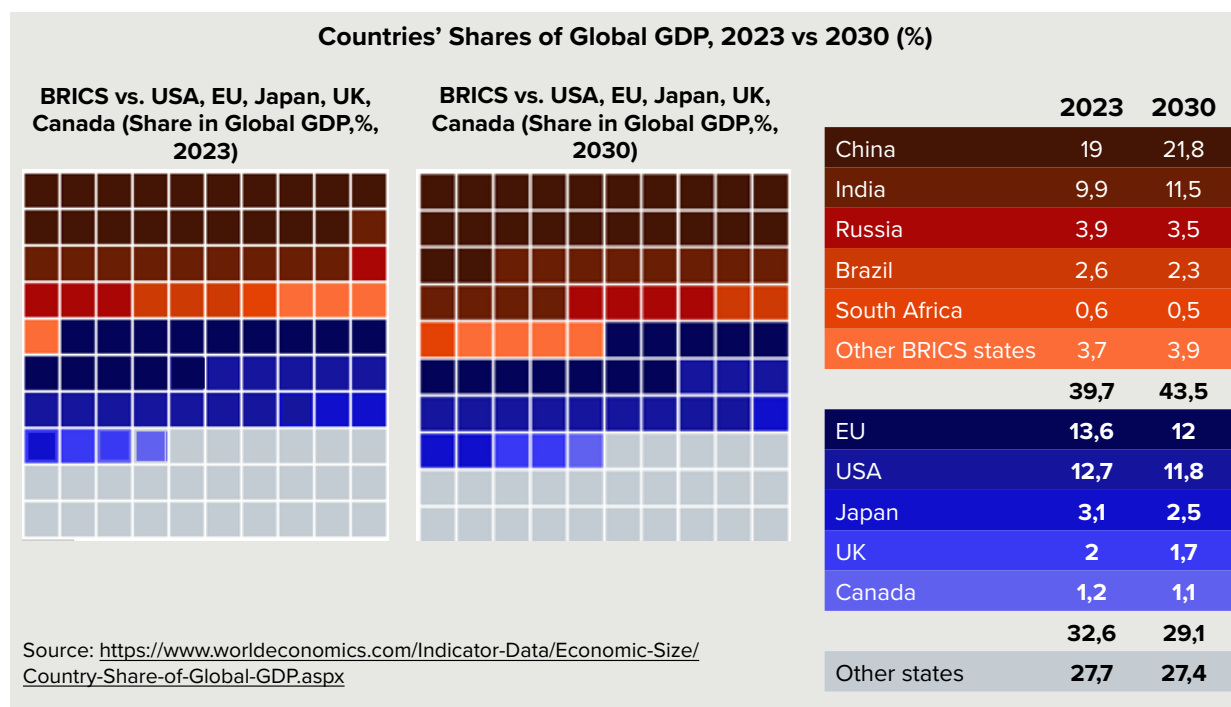
From the Analytical report. The War of Narratives: Ukraine’s Image in the Media / authors: O. Davlikanova, A. Kostenko et al – Kyiv: LLC «Vistka», 2023. – 146 p.

Amidst its imperialistic ambitions and the desire to rectify what it perceives as the “[the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the \(XX\) century](#)” (the collapse of the Soviet Union), Russia has sought to reassert itself as the successor to the USSR. The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) formed after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 was just the first step.

In this context, Russia spearheaded the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) in 2015, succeeding the Eurasian Customs Union. The EAEU, which includes Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia, aims to integrate the economies of its member states through a common market and coordinated economic policies, thereby enhancing regional economic integration and reducing reliance on the European Union.

Additionally, Russia has played a central role in the evolution and expansion of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), founded in 1992. The CSTO serves as a regional security alliance designed to counterbalance NATO's influence and bolster collective security among its members.

Russia's involvement in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and BRICS, which recently expanded to include new member states, demonstrates its strategic interest in countering Western influence and strengthening ties with the Global South, particularly China. Despite sanctions, Russia remains [the 8th largest global economy](#), with its share of [global GDP at 3.9%](#) in 2023. However, it relies heavily on cooperation with China, the world's second-largest economy. In 2022, [China alone](#) accounted for approximately one fifth of global GDP growth, while the BRICS countries collectively contributed about 40% of this growth.



Despite the strong ideological underpinnings of anti-Western sentiment, Russia's geopolitical maneuvers are primarily fueled by the elite's desire to prevent democratization and power-sharing. In order to do so, economic benefits and personal gains from cooperation with the West can be sacrificed, though not without regrets, for maintaining internal control of vast resources.

Overall, this category enables a reality check on the likelihood of a shift in Russian geopolitical strategies and societal moods, including the potential for a new “reset” with the West, and the resulting security risks. Moreover, the joint economic and military capabilities of the anti-Western

bloc should not be underestimated, as many in the West still cling to a unipolar mentality and the ideals of limitless globalization. This combination of carefree mercantilism and idealism in the West has essentially created its current adversaries.

Foreign Policy Orientations

This dimension explores how a state's approach to global engagement influences its foreign policy. Isolationist states prioritize autonomy and minimal involvement in international affairs, often emphasizing sovereignty and non-interference. In contrast, internationalistic states actively engage in international diplomacy, multilateral agreements, and global governance, seeking to influence and shape international norms and policies.

This is a key factor in determining the persistence of strong support from Western allies in deterring Russian aggression, as well as the quality of Trans-Atlantic cooperation. It also considers how Russia might realign its foreign policy if it were to abandon its imperialistic goals and efforts to reassert its sphere of influence.

The primary goal of this analysis, however, is to focus on the United States and its role in Transatlantic cooperation, as a leading contributor to NATO, the foremost defensive security alliance. For the sake of clarity in the analysis, we use only two categories, despite the political mindset map being much broader.

Analyst [Ash Jain](#) criticized the simplistic view of the U.S. political landscape as divided into just two camps—"hawks" and "doves." Instead, he identified six major camps regarding U.S. foreign policy, grouping them into two broad categories: internationalists and non-internationalists.

Table X. Classification of U.S. foreign policy camps by Ash Jain

Category	Type	Description	Examples
Internationalists	Unilateral Internationalists	Favor unilateral U.S. actions to achieve strategic interests, without being constrained by international alliances or agreements.	Dick Cheney
	Democratic Internationalists	Believe that protecting democracy is crucial for U.S. security and global order, emphasizing cooperation with allies to promote shared values.	President Joe Biden, Former President George W. Bush
	Realist Internationalists	Advocate for protecting narrow U.S. strategic interests and pragmatic engagement with all countries to maintain global stability.	Henry Kissinger, George H.W. Bush
	Multilateral Internationalists	Prefer achieving peace and global order through multilateral dialogue based on international institutions, such as the United Nations.	Barack Obama
Non-Internationalists	Isolationists	Support withdrawing from global commitments and maximizing financial benefits, believing that the world "exploits" the U.S.	Donald Trump's policy
	Restraining Internationalists	Essentially isolationists advocating for a significant reduction in the country's global influence.	Bernie Sanders

Only the first three camps believe that the U.S. should actively confront Russia and China. They justify this stance by arguing that demonstrating strength is essential for maintaining U.S. leadership on the international stage, protecting against revisionist autocracies, or acknowledging the inevitability of confronting the world's strongest states to preserve global order.

The other camps are more inclined to “extend a hand to adversaries”—even to autocratic regimes—and do not prioritize uniting around democratic values and international norms. Some even believe that the threat posed by Russia and China to the U.S. is overstated and that unnecessary conflicts should be avoided.

Of course, this is also a simplified categorization, as pure idealists focused solely on values rarely survive long in politics. Moreover, all these groups are driven by a desire to protect U.S. interests, though they see the means differently. They are also constrained by the realities of domestic politics, which sometimes necessitate decisions aligned with other camps' approaches.

These peculiarities are important to understand due to the U.S. contribution to collective security and [recent claims](#) to reconsider the role of the USA in collective defense. [Some see](#) America's role primarily as providing nuclear deterrence, while other members should contribute "the great majority" of the conventional forces needed to deter Russia, while the US is concentrated on China.

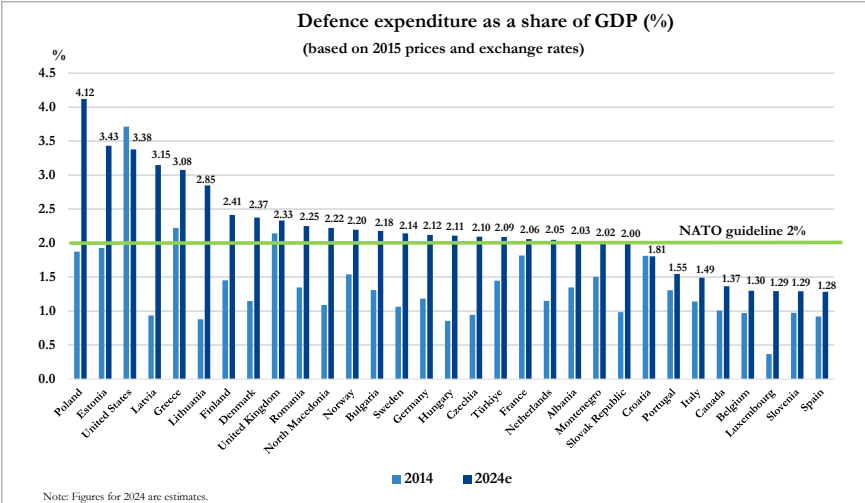
To mitigate the risks for Transatlantic cooperation, in 2023, Congress included a provision in the latest National Defense Authorization Act under [Section 1250A](#), which explicitly bars the president from withdrawing the United States from NATO or using any allocated funds for such a purpose without obtaining prior consent from Congress. This [legislative measure](#) not only restricts the president's legal authority to exit NATO to the strictest limits but also sets a precedent for potential legal action should a future president attempt to defy this restriction.

As of 2025, the primary concern is a volatile mix of U.S. isolationism and interventionism, where the new administration's commitments may become increasingly conditional—exploiting the vague wording of Article 5—while engaging in aggressive maneuvers not only in former spheres of influence, such as the Panama Canal, but even against allies, as seen in the Greenland and Canada episodes. This risks emboldening adversaries like Russia and China, accelerating the shift in the global order. While aid to Ukraine remains defensive, reaffirming NATO's role as a security alliance, any U.S. attempts to expand its borders risk justifying Russia's actions and anti-Western propaganda, further destabilizing an already fragile geopolitical landscape.

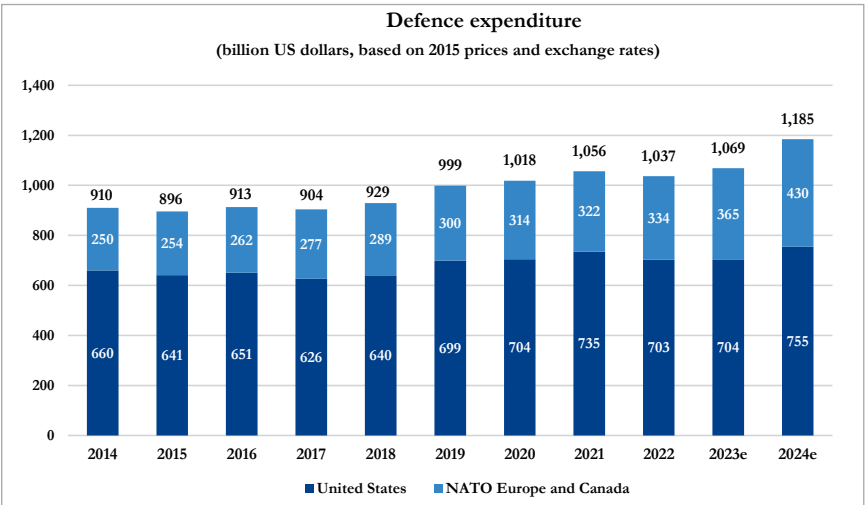
With regards to Ukraine, NATO's Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine was established, among other reasons, to reduce risks for Ukraine and NATO's eastern flank if the USA reconsiders its role. The NSATU, based in Wiesbaden, Germany, with key logistics hubs on NATO's eastern edge, will oversee planning, coordination, and delivery of security assistance for Ukraine.

The [contribution of the US](#) to European security is hard to overestimate, especially considering the drastic reduction of European states' military capabilities since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Ironically, median European states' contributions to collective security hit its lowest in 2014. Even a decade after the invasion of Ukraine, 8 NATO member-states do not meet the 2% GDP defense spending benchmark, which reflects a country's political commitment to NATO's collective defense efforts. Meanwhile, recognition of Russia as a strategic threat requires raising this indicator to 4-5% of GDP.

Moreover, with a GDP of \$28.78 trillion in 2024, the USA's economy, the largest contributor to NATO, is approximately 1.5 times larger than the EU's \$19.5 trillion GDP. U.S. also prevails in manpower and production capacities.

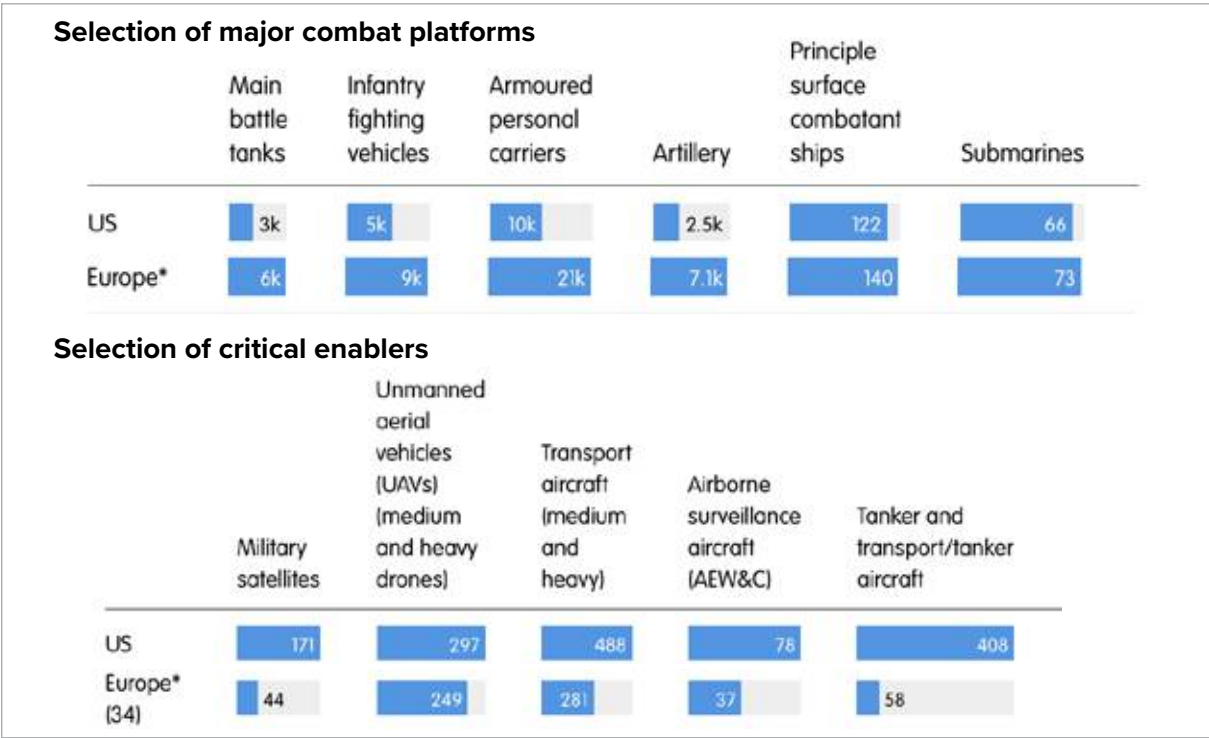


Source: https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2024/6/pdf/240617-def-exp-2024-en.pdf



Source: https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2024/6/pdf/240617-def-exp-2024-en.pdf

Approximate Assessment of USA and European NATO members' military capabilities



Source: <https://ecfr.eu/publication/defending-europe-with-less-america/>

Overall, it is clear that the EU could strengthen the alliance by building a more unified, efficient, and capable European pillar within NATO, thereby enhancing its partnership with the United States, as argued by [The Case for EU Defense: A New Way Forward for Transatlantic Security Relations](#). The EU's population stands at 449 million, while European NATO states collectively represent about 600 million people. In contrast, Russia's population is under 140 million, and its economy is ten times smaller than that of the EU. Given this disparity, it's imperative for Europe to adopt a more strategic and intelligent approach to its security policy.

The world would greatly benefit from Russian isolationism, but instead, Russia seeks to extend its influence beyond its borders, exacerbating global instability through military aggression and political interference. Similarly, China's strategic restraint—avoiding open military operations for now while expanding its influence through trade, investment, and coercion—has led the U.S. to prioritize deterrence, with the potential for military intervention in Taiwan remaining a serious consideration. Both nations pose significant threats to global stability, though through different approaches.

Geopolitical Power

This category refers to a state's capacity to influence global affairs, shape international policies, and project its strategic interests on the world stage. A state or an alliance with strong geopolitical power possesses substantial resources, including economic strength, military capabilities, and diplomatic leverage, enabling it to significantly affect global decisions and outcomes, advance its interests, and effectively counter opposing efforts. Conversely, a state or an alliance with weaker geopolitical power has limited ability to influence international dynamics and often struggles to assert their interests or shape global policies effectively. Their impact is constrained by fewer resources and less influence in global forums.

With the unipolar world order receding, the key question is what the new balance of power will require from the actors. In this context, two critical factors emerge: economic capabilities and military power.

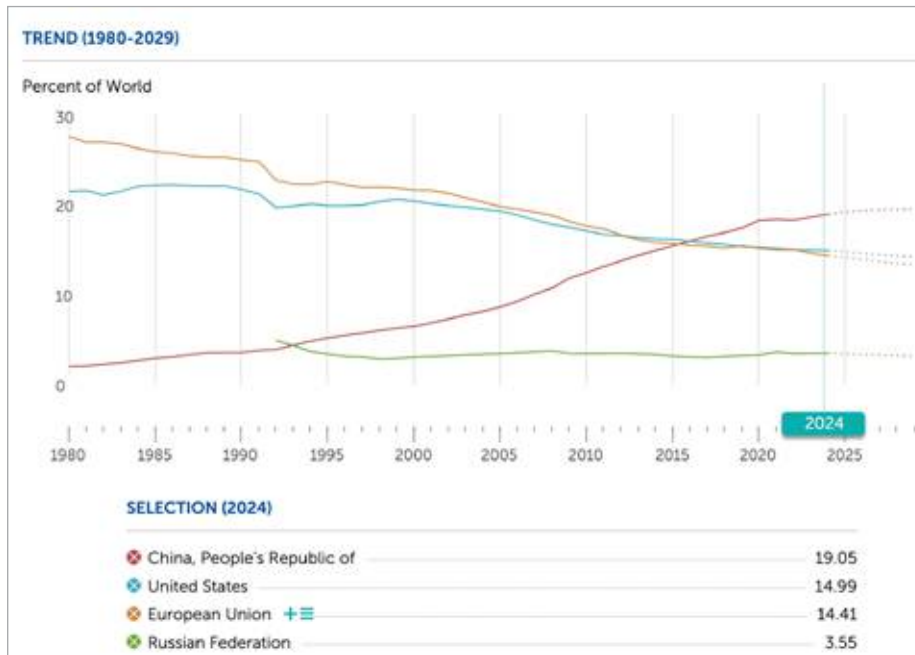
Economic capability refers to a state's economic strength and resilience. It encompasses factors such as GDP size, economic diversity, industrial base, trade relations, and financial stability. States with robust economic capabilities can sustain their own development, wield influence through economic diplomacy, and participate actively in regional or global economic alliances to advance their geopolitical interests.

Military capability denotes a state's strength in defense and offense capabilities. A state with strong military power can ensure regional security through defense capabilities or project power beyond its borders to assert geopolitical interests. Conversely, weak military power may limit a state's ability to defend its sovereignty or project influence internationally.

Currently, the economic capabilities of major global players indicate that, despite existing disparities and interdependencies, no single actor can fully impose its will on the others. To better capture this nuanced balance of power, we introduce a new category, "wobbling," alongside the traditional "strong" and "weak" classifications. This term describes scenarios where, despite significant economic and military strength, an actor is unable to completely dominate another, even a slightly weaker opponent. Instead, it can only counteract the rival's influence without achieving total control or a decisive victory.

In line with the above mentioned prognosis of the [World Economics Research](#), the IMF data shows that following trends in economic power change over the past four decades. And suggest that in the course of time China may become for Russia what the U.S. is to the EU.

GDP based on PPP, share of the world. Percent of World.



Source: <https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/PPPSH@WEO/CHN/USA/EU/RUS>

Military capacities can only be assessed approximately due to limited data on Russian army losses of personnel and weaponry in Ukraine, as well as the generally secretive nature of information on military R&D, weaponry and manpower. However, open data sources, though differ, allow us to get a rough picture of available resources.

Share of GDP spent on defense by major geopolitical actors, 2024

	 EU	 US	 CN	 RU
Military budget	295.8 billion \$	811 billion \$	236 billion \$	72 billion \$
Percent of GDP	1.7%	3.4%	1.6%	4.6%

Source: <https://worldostats.com/military-budget-by-country-updated-2024/>

Camille Gand, ECFR Distinguished Fellow, notes that European defense industries produce some of the world's most advanced weapons systems, with six European countries among the top ten global arms exporters. However, after decades of relying on "peace dividends" and the US military for leadership, many European armies have become "bonsai armies" due to limited defense budgets and dependence on the US security umbrella, possessing only small samples of major capabilities rather than large, robust combat-ready forces. Leaders Latvia, Estonia, and Finland stated that NATO is unprepared to face Russia without U.S. support, urging the alliance to stop debating and prioritize strengthening European defenses.

Apart from the issues with the scope of financial contributions, European NATO countries need to work on achieving more cost-effective and efficient military cooperation by reducing the variety of weaponry to enhance interoperability. Altogether, Europe manages [178 major weapon systems](#), while the U.S. operates 30.

China's true defense spending likely exceeds official figures, as experts note many defense-related areas remain off the books. These include its military-run space program, defense mobilization funds, provincial military base costs, military pensions, dual-use R&D, and

paramilitary forces like the People's Armed Police and Coast Guard. Meanwhile, Russia plans to spend approximately \$145 billion in 2025, amounting to 6.3% of GDP and 32.5% of federal spending—the highest share since the Soviet era. While raw figures don't fully capture military power, with key factors being allocations for weapon procurement, R&D, and stockpiles, they unmistakably signal a renewed arms race.

Comparison of military capabilities of major geopolitical actors, 2024

Category	NATO	Russia	China
Total military personnel	7,628,782	3,570,000	2,890,000
Active soldiers	3,390,797	1,320,000	2,375,000
Armored vehicles	849,801	161,382	1,290,000
Paramilitary units	797,820	250,000	660,000
Total aircraft	22,308	4,814	4,370
Main battle tanks	11,390	14,777	8,500
Total helicopters	8,950	1,547	1,600
Tower artillery	5,909	8,356	3,800
Ground attack aircraft	1,195	730	280
Special aircraft (e.g reconnaissance)	931	145	310
Tanker aircraft	655	19	52
Patrol boats	323	122	282
Minesweepers	151	47	47
Submarines	139	65	63
Frigates	134	12	49
Destroyers	95	14	15
Corvettes	57	83	34

Source: Statista. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1293174/nato-russia-military-comparison/>

(The numbers demonstrate balance of power but are approximate. They do not take into account Russian military losses since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine and RF military production capacities to substitute losses. Data also does not account for stocks and the revived capacities of the EU and USA defense sectors, given that since the full-scale invasion, NATO countries have provided Ukraine with 5.2% of their available tanks, 8.9% of their available howitzers, and 5.2% of their available MLRS units, etc.)

While assessing the real technological superiority of major powers can be challenging, the stagnation of Russian forces in Ukraine suggests a lack of dominance in high-end technology. Nonetheless, Russia has demonstrated the effectiveness of some of its weapons, such as the S-400 and S-500 air defense systems, glide bombs, and its capabilities in cyber warfare. On the other hand, Western weapons have proven highly effective. Experts particularly praise the Javelin, NLAW, ATACMS, Patriot, Mavic, Bayraktar, Abrams and Leopard 2 tanks, or F-16 fighters.

However, any comprehensive assessment of military power must consider the possession of nuclear weapons, where numerical superiority is less significant compared to the mere fact of possession. After Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and its ongoing nuclear blackmailing, the denuclearization efforts of various nations appear increasingly contradictory to the interests of those possessing these weapons.

The case of Ukraine is particularly illustrative: it is the only country that voluntarily relinquished its nuclear arsenal, which included around 1,900 strategic warheads, as part of the 1994 Budapest Memorandum. In exchange for giving up its nuclear weapons, Ukraine received security assurances from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Russia. Despite these assurances, the subsequent invasion by Russia and the threat of nuclear escalation have led to a reconsideration of nuclear disarmament policies globally. This has slowed down denuclearization efforts, as countries recognize the strategic value of maintaining nuclear arsenals for deterrence and security.

It is also important to recognize that a country's resilience to geopolitical pressure extends beyond mere economic and military factors. It also encompasses demographics, as well as societal attitudes, values, and the populace's ability and willingness to support or oppose state official policies and geopolitical objectives.

Ukrainian society has been a key actor in transformative events such as the Revolution on the Granite (1990) approaching Ukraine's Independence, the Orange Revolution (2004), and the Revolution of Dignity (2014), which both had the geopolitical vector of the country in sight. In 2014 it was the people who rejected the mitigating solutions proposed by Western partners with President Yanukovich staying in power, which would have had some drastic consequences both for Ukraine's civil society safety and overall fate of the country.

Furthermore, in 2022, Ukrainian society stood alongside UAF resolutely against a far larger aggressor and has successfully endured a genocidal war for over two years, defying all expectations and logical number-based predictions. The rapid threefold expansion of the Ukrainian army with volunteers in the early months following the invasion, coupled with Ukraine's transformation into a significant geopolitical actor, underscores the crucial role of its people in shaping the nation's geopolitical power.

An opposite example of 'resilience' is the Russian Federation, where people are resilient to economic hardships in exchange for 'stability' and mythology of the 'greatness of the state'. Despite mobilization, human losses and international sanctions, the International Monetary Fund estimated Russia's economic growth at 1.4% in 2025, which is a slow down from 3.2% last year. Though this growth is not sustainable and is driven mainly by investments into defense sector from income from energy resources, Russia's economy remains resilient, benefiting not only from its ability to adapt to and evade many sanctions, robust revenues from oil and gas, but also a social contract that grants the government wideranging authority, including engaging in conflicts with former 'brotherly nations' in exchange to order and very modest level of life.

This status quo is tolerable for a lion share of Russian society, provided it does not replicate the severe economic crises of the 1990s. While Russian elites have leveraged their connections with the regime for personal gain, historical memory and a lingering Soviet-era mentality bolster societal resilience to hardships for 'a greater cause'.

It should be noted, however, that Ukraine's historical tradition differs significantly from Russia's. Ukraine has a long history of resisting oppression, having been deprived of statehood for eight

Estimated Number of Nuclear Warheads

 EU	~200 (approximation for France and the UK)
 US	~5,800
 CN	~410
 RU	~6,375 (The number includes both strategic and non-strategic nuclear warheads, with Russia having the largest arsenal globally.)

centuries. Despite this, it preserved its identity as a (political) nation and, after an unsuccessful attempt at independence in the early 20th century, finally achieved sovereignty in 1991. In contrast, among the former Soviet states, only Russia felt the loss acutely, as its Moscow-centered power diminished with the loss of a quarter of the USSR's territory.

Thus, Ukrainians do not have an ingrained respect for authority, which has long been associated with external rule. They view change as a form of liberation, offering a chance for positive transformation and freedom. In contrast, the Russian nation has a tradition of submission to its rulers, oppression of minority groups, and a fear of instability and the uncertainty that changes or struggles for power may bring.

Unless Russia abandons its revanchist ambitions, Ukraine will likely remain a target for aggression in the future, regardless of the economic benefits that peace and trade might offer.

Framework Scenarios: Ukraine's Future in the Context of Global Trends

Overview of geopolitical framework influencing developments in Ukraine

<div><div><div>The Collective West</div><div>Russia</div></div></div>	Strong and democratic, internationalistic	Strong and non-democratic, isolationistic	Wobbling	Weak
Strong (economically and militarily), democratic, pro-western	<p>Wonderland /Utopia</p> <p>Due to economic hardships, the need to keep up in the technological race, growing influence of China, rapid change of elderly elites, etc., the change in power brings in new elites that reset relationships with the West. Russia becomes a true liberal democracy, aligning with Western norms of governance, fostering cooperation with the EU and the United States. A return to the European integration path undermines the newly formed axis of autocratic power.</p> <p>The old dream of Europe from Lisbon to Vladivostok comes to reality, with certain limitations. Democratization and liberalization of Russia significantly contributes to EU development and economic competitiveness, as it puts an end to Russian strategic efforts to destabilize and undermine European democracies and EU project. Economic cooperation based on shared values creates favorable grounds for stabilization of the situation in Europe and further dissemination of democracy in Eurasia.</p> <p>U.S. sees Russia as an ally in deterring China. NATO-Russia cooperation is restored. While RF transformation may mitigate China’s influence on Russia, Beijing and Moscow are likely to maintain pragmatic cooperation in areas like energy and technology, while combined military capacities of RF and Collective West guarantee mitigation of local or global wars risks.</p> <p>Russia’s well-established relations with the Global South bolster the West’s influence. This does not stop the shift to a multi-polar world order, which nevertheless is largely rule-based.</p> <p>For Ukraine, this scenario brings reduced threats of aggression and greater stability. Though RF still has significant interest in Ukraine, cooperation with the West and sanctions lifting overweight confrontation. Ukraine may even benefit from the return to multi-vector policy, even if finilizes the EU-integration process.</p>	<p>In parallel Universe</p> <p>The global order is shattered by a series of black swan events. The West turns inward, its liberal traditions eroded by the rise of nationalist and illiberal movements. The European Union fractures, its economic and political unity undone by clashing domestic priorities and the collapse of the transatlantic bond. U.S. isolationism dismantles NATO as a value-based defense force, replacing it with opportunistic alliances designed to secure and expand its global interests. These alliances, devoid of ideological grounding, are perceived by Moscow as direct threats, fueling proxy conflicts and exacerbating global instability. Nuclear confrontation is avoided, but local wars proliferate, including in Europe, dragging all sides into cycles of military and economic strain.</p> <p>The fragility of RF nascent democracy is evident, undermined by a lack of democratic tradition, persistent nationalist and imperialist undercurrents, and mounting geopolitical challenges. Still, it positions itself awkwardly as a nominal defender of liberal ideals for scattered democracies.</p> <p>Meanwhile, with its exit from the authoritarian axis, Russia finds itself caught between a China-led bloc of authoritarian powers and an illiberal, self-interested U.S.-led bloc, both competing for influence in a world where the rule-based order has collapsed.</p> <p>The Global South maneuvers opportunistically, shifting allegiances to maximize its benefits and complicating the geopolitical landscape further. Short-term gains are prioritized over long-term stability.</p> <p>Ukraine, once a symbol of democratic aspirations, is left adrift in this fractured world. Bereft of Western support and unable to benefit from European integration, it faces an existential dilemma. Remaining democratic but lacking robust allies, Ukraine cautiously engages with a democratic but self-interested Russia, despite the scars of war and decades of decoupling.</p> <p>If Ukraine succumbs to autocratic pressures, it might find itself in confrontation with Russia with the ideological sides flipped.</p>	<p>Swan Lake</p> <p>Due to a convergence of factors such as economic hardships, the necessity to compete in the technological sphere, and a generational shift in leadership, Russia embarks on a path of democratization. This transformative process sees the rise of new elites who, with personal and strategic benefits in sight, seek to redefine Russia's relationships with the West at large, particularly with the United States.</p> <p>Simultaneously, after decades of Russian efforts to undermine the EU project and the democratic aspirations of other European nations, the rise of far-right movements in Europe contribute to the internal turmoil within the EU, weakening its influence and slowing down its economic development. Isolationist moods in the U.S. and possible illiberalization amid growing instability of the EU further complicates Trans-Atlantic cooperation.</p> <p>In contrast, a democratic Russia emerges as a stabilizing force and a democratic stronghold in the region. However, lacking strong democratic allies, it might not be able to maintain its achievements under the influence of growing China, thus finding itself in the current role of Ukraine with a stronger position, though, as a nuclear power.</p> <p>As a democratic state, Ukraine may win from such changes in Russia, but only if RF democratization is based on deimperialization. Russia as an illiberal democracy with expansionist ambitions will always remain a threat to the country.</p>	
<p><i>Any scenario foreseeing genuinely democratic Russia in the next decade is an intellectual experiment rather than a real possibility. These scenarios are included as a response to the narrative of the Russian opposition trying hard to consider the West of such a prospect, and overoptimistic western opinion leaders/experts hoping for easy solutions. The democratization of Russia does not automatically lead to parity in its relationship with Ukraine (or other states in the scope of RF geopolitical interests) or respect for Ukraine’s geopolitical choices and territorial integrity unless accompanied by deimperialization and a fundamental shift in values. The lack of democratic tradition restricts hopes of RF becoming a liberal democracy in such a short time span, while Russia as an illiberal democracy contains just as much threat as an aggressive totalitarian/authoritarian one.</i></p>				

The Collective West Russia	Strong and democratic, internationalistic	Strong and non-democratic, isolationistic	Wobbling	Weak
	Strong, undemocratic and anti-western	Strong, undemocratic and anti-western	Strong, undemocratic and anti-western	Strong, undemocratic and anti-western
	<p>Battlefield</p> <p>Russia first successfully avoids some western sanctions and finally fully adapts to them, thanks to increased cooperation with the Global South and essentially backed by China. Systemic anti-western propaganda, weak civil society and resigning of habitual social contract with semi-new Russian leadership allows prolongation of aggressive opposition to the West overall and Ukraine as a pro-Western nation in the sphere of Russian interests. The war drags on with different level of intensity or fragile peace keeps Ukraine under constant threat. However, Russia persists in its efforts to dismantle Ukraine through hybrid operations while continuing its broader hybrid warfare against the West. Prioritizing short-term solutions and maintaining a policy of avoiding direct confrontation with Moscow, the West ultimately dismisses Ukraine's NATO accession as an unattainable prospect and may even delay its EU membership, citing the country's severe economic challenges and deep reliance on external aid. Depending on the level of Ukraine's resilience, the country either adapts to being a stronghold of the democratic world under constant threat with vital dependence on Western support but with strong defense sector, nationhood, state institutions and civil society, or degrades under mounting economic and societal problems resulting in democratic roll-back and disenchantment with the West as an ally.</p>	<p>Dystopia</p> <p>The continued de-liberalization of the West ushers in the rise of nationalist, populist and illiberal movements of all sorts, eroding the once-sharp ideological differences between Russia and the Collective West. With human rights, freedoms, and the rule-based order erased from the equation, the geopolitical landscape fractures into starkly different possibilities. One path leads to intensified competition for resources and spheres of influence among the West, China, Russia and their circumstantial allies, marked by heightened bloodshed due to a devaluation of human life. The other envisions a strategic, uneasy "frenmity," where a new global order emerges after a period of hybrid confrontation, accepting illiberalism as its foundation, where human rights and freedoms are relegated to history. In the first case, this system enables opportunistic power plays and territorial ambitions, resulting in conflicts even among the current western allies. Borders are no longer sacrosanct; they become malleable under the pressure of militaristic ambition and realpolitik. The Global South, opportunistic as ever, navigates this new order with pragmatism, aligning with whichever power bloc offers the greatest immediate benefit. Strategic alliances, while unstable, become essential for survival, creating a volatile balance of power where alliances shift with the winds of mutual advantage. For Ukraine, as for smaller states worldwide, this grim new reality offers no room for hope. Amid the U.S.'s overly rationalized yet not truly rational approach to securing its European allies—coupled with its own aggressive operations worldwide, which provide China and Russia with pretexts to justify their own aggression—even militarily weaker European states may reconsider their alignments.</p>	<p>West's Disgrace</p> <p>The world has shifted dramatically, and the balance of power tilts toward authoritarian regimes, amid significant erosion of values in the West. The once-dominant rule-based international order now exists only in western rhetoric, as institutions meant to uphold it falter under the weight of geopolitical fragmentation. While Trans-Atlantic cooperation is preserved, the West has undeniably lost rivalry for global domination. Russia, emboldened and resilient, has successfully adapted to sanctions through strategic alliances with the Global South and the backing of China. BRICS has grown into a formidable economic force, rivaling Western institutions and reshaping global trade with alternative systems that bypass Western financial mechanisms (including through de-dollarization and shift to cryptocurrencies). This coalition of authoritarian states is no longer merely defensive; it is actively redrawing the global order, carving out clear spheres of influence across the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, the Pacific and the Arctic. These regions, drawn by promises of investment and military cooperation, increasingly align with this authoritarian axis, eroding Western influence in the process. In the West, political and economic disunity hampers effective responses to this tectonic shift. The Western defense revival progresses at a plodding pace, sufficient only to prevent an outright Russian (and its allies') attack on NATO but inadequate to contain smaller regional conflicts. Proxy wars simmer, providing fertile ground for Russia and its allies to extend their influence while draining Western resources and attention.</p>	<p>Apocalypse</p> <p>Decades of calculated Russian interference unravel the European Union from within. Far-right and far-left movements, inflamed by disinformation and covert support from Moscow, topple centrist governments, dismantle democratic safeguards, and fracture the union. Eastern European nations, disillusioned by unfulfilled promises of security, unity and prosperity, or in search of economic gains and driven by their leadership looking for personal profits, pivot toward cooperation with Russia, leaving Western Europe paralyzed by political infighting. The EU, once the epitome of democratic values, first becomes a hollow shell, unable to assert influence or uphold the principles it was built upon, and later dismantles or significantly shrinks. Across the Atlantic, short-sighted pragmatism tightens its grip on the United States, leading to ill-conceived policies. Successive administrations, swayed by populist pressures and fiscal restraint, retreat from global leadership. The real source of public discontent lies in the widening income gap and the erosion of the middle class, yet foreign aid is scapegoated for domestic woes. Meanwhile, NATO, hollowed out and stripped of its vitality, degenerates into a mere 'paper tiger.' Its members, driven by wavering commitment to collective defense and the lure of economic cooperation with Russia and China, either neglect their obligations or consider abandoning the Alliance altogether as its ideological cohesion unravels. BRICS evolves into a geopolitical powerhouse, creating a parallel economic order that circumvents Western financial systems and dominates global resource flows. Fueled by advanced technological innovation, this authoritarian bloc pioneers the development of digital totalitarianism—a dystopian fusion of surveillance, AI-driven repression, and military-grade cyberwarfare.</p>

The Collective West Russia	Strong and democratic, internationalistic	Strong and non-democratic, isolationistic	Wobbling	Weak
Strong, undemocratic and anti-western		<p>Some may prioritize closer ties with Russia, particularly as the Russia-China axis solidifies, reinforced by other allies. Alternating periods of conflict and fragile ceasefires give way to renewed and more devastating violence, ultimately threatening the dismantling of Ukrainian sovereignty. In a world governed by the principle of “might is right,” Ukraine faces insurmountable odds without Western backing.</p> <p>Thus, the once-idealistic vision of globalization—centered on welfare, development, and human prosperity—will instead morph into a globalization of entrapment and coercion. Even if Ukraine itself transitions into an illiberal democracy or outright autocracy, its survival as an independent state remains precarious. The global fight for spheres of influence—now stripped of ideological pretense and driven solely by pragmatic, transactional interests—renders Ukraine unable to exist as a non-aligned nation.</p> <p>In this bleak reality, the erosion of ideological differences between Ukraine and Russia leads to a “natural” drift back into Moscow’s sphere of influence. Whether through coercion, manipulation, or outright absorption, Ukraine’s autonomy is steadily eroded. The absence of any meaningful ideological or institutional barriers accelerates this process, and even non-violent integration becomes a plausible outcome.</p> <p>In the second case, given the dystopian landscape, a kind of hi-tech feudalism takes hold, blending authoritarian governance with advanced technological control. Technological innovation becomes a tool of oppression, used to enforce control rather than empower societies. Surveillance, censorship, and militarization dominate.</p>	<p>Western societies are weary of prolonged crises (hybrid warfare) and unwilling to bear the rising cost of deterrence or defense demand compromises with Moscow and Beijing. Some western leaders advocate for complete resetting relations, or at least comprehensive strategic cooperation, despite Russia’s unabated aggression and hybrid warfare.</p> <p>Caught in this storm, Ukraine is left as a pawn in the West’s broader strategy to weaken Russia. Despite years of promises, NATO membership remains elusive, blocked under the pretext of prioritizing economic support. Even if some European nations deploy limited military contingents to support Ukraine, it is too late to make a significant impact, especially with the U.S. maintaining its position against direct involvement.</p> <p>Ukraine’s resources are depleted, its infrastructure shattered, and its population exhausted. The European Union extends breadcrumbs of assistance, insufficient to offset the devastating toll of a war that has dragged on since 2014. Western leaders, unwilling to risk direct confrontation with Russia, use Ukraine as a buffer, a policy that increasingly resembles abandonment. It marks a clear trajectory toward the gradual dismantling of the Ukrainian state in a longer-term perspective.</p>	<p>Freedom, privacy, and human rights become relics of the past, as the world descends into an era where might is not just right but absolute. Rare democracies, fragmented and weakened, are left to watch helplessly as the dream of a free and equitable world fades into oblivion.</p> <p>In this more chaotic world, Ukraine’s decades-long resistance against Russian aggression falters. Without decisive Western backing, Ukraine mirrors the tragic fate of the Ukrainian People’s Republic a century earlier.</p> <p>Its fall would deliver a devastating blow to the credibility of the West as a defender of democracy and human rights, fueling disillusionment with democratic values worldwide.</p> <p>The collapse of Ukraine would mark more than just a geopolitical failure; it would be the harbinger of the West’s decline.</p> <p>In the worst-case scenario, the West’s disunity and internal struggles embolden global powers, triggering a Third World War that defines the fate of nations globally.</p>

The Collective West Russia	Strong and democratic, internationalistic	Strong and non-democratic, isolationistic	Wobbling	Weak
Wobbling	<p>Grindstone</p> <p>The West's approach to containing Russia remains steadfast, aimed at draining resources from Moscow to hinder further aggression. The US designating Russia a state sponsor of terrorism or stricter sanctions against third parties for cooperation with RF further curtails Russia's economic ties with both Western nations and Russia's anti-Western allies.</p> <p>Despite continued covert support from China, North Korea, and other Global South actors, Russia lacks the resources for a full-scale war with the Alliance but maintains the capacity to continue attempts to destabilize Ukraine, mostly through hybrid warfare. Overall, Russia lacks potential to fully restore its regional dominance, not mentioning a global power status.</p> <p>While Ukraine is still not granted NATO membership, enhanced bilateral defense agreements and closer Ukraine-NATO cooperation force Russia to prioritize defense spending even more, echoing economic strains reminiscent of pre-Soviet Union collapse. These conditions might set the stage for Russia's potential democratization as a result of its economic collapse, yet even under these conditions such an outcome remains uncertain with Russia preferring to stick to its so-called 'unique path'.</p>		<p>Guidebook for Disaster</p> <p>The global order is reshaped due to the simultaneous weakening of both Western democracies and Russia's autocratic regime. Amid this geopolitical entropy, China emerges as the true benefactor, leveraging the 'controlled' chaos to solidify its position as the unchallenged global leader.</p> <p>Western democracies, once pillars of stability, now grapple with internal crises. Migration pressures, climate change, hybrid warfare, terrorism and the rise of far-right populism dominate domestic agendas. Several illiberal democracies continue eroding the EU's cohesion with the U.S. destroying its reputation as a stronghold of democratic values.</p> <p>NATO, once revitalized, struggles to preserve an image of a potent Alliance due to U.S. stance on limiting its commitments to collective security and European inability to ensure self-sufficiency. Europe falls short in an arms race with Russia. The EU abstains from further enlargement, effectively leaving its eastern neighbors in a vulnerable gray zone.</p> <p>Meanwhile, Russia, though weakened economically and strategically by a decade of confrontation, capitalizes on European weaknesses, while remaining disruptive as its geopolitical goals remain unchanged. Russia's military campaigns and hybrid operations continue. However, its inability to achieve decisive victories or reclaim its former sphere of influence limits its moves.</p> <p>Its dependence on China deepens, with Beijing capitalizing on Moscow's vulnerability to turn it into a pliant junior partner. Unchallenged by the disarray in the West, it promotes its model of state-driven capitalism and surveillance-based governance as the future. While authoritarian powers do not yet dominate outright, democracy steadily loses ground.</p>	
Weak	<p>Prometheus</p> <p>The shift in global dynamics driven by the emergence of a new axis of authoritarian regimes opposed to Western interests result in consistent and strategic policies not shaped by the fear of further escalation and instability within Russia.</p> <p>This geopolitical threat prompts the United States to overcome any isolationist sentiments, and the European Union to overcome pro-Russian sentiments and cut remaining economic ties with FR. Despite significant Russian investments, populist, right/left-wing parties or illiberal moods do not overtake decision-making in the West.</p> <p>The West reasserts itself as a true bastion of democracy. However, it revises its cooperation strategies, acknowledging that the belief in the inevitable global spread of democracy stems from excessive self-assurance; that trade is not the ultimate foundation of sustainable peace; that globalization should follow its historic pace and might have its limitations, while security risks need to be observed more carefully.</p>		<p>Multipolarity cements itself as the defining feature of the international system, with no single bloc strong enough to dictate global norms. Globalization, once the hallmark of the post-Cold War era, gives way to regionalization as nations retreat into self-interest.</p> <p>The United States flirts with an idea to weaken the Russia-China partnership by concessions to Russia. The West continues viewing a "managed" Russian-Ukrainian conflict as a safer alternative to an all-out war, being ready to 'sacrifice' Ukraine for ambiguous 'peace'. Political calculations may even prioritize ungrounded normalization with Russia, despite its ongoing destabilizing actions in the EU and further worldwide, culminating in the lifting of major sanctions and the rebuilding of economic ties.</p> <p>Ukraine becomes the ultimate casualty of this transformation. With no sufficient security guarantees in sight, a war-weary Ukraine is forced into signing an unjust and unsustainable peace deal, leaving vast swaths of its territory under occupation and its sovereignty permanently compromised. Bilateral agreements with Western allies remain hollow proclamations, as the prioritization of internal challenges and the rise of isolationist policies drain any political will to fulfill commitments.</p> <p>Amid this abandonment, Ukraine faces a grim choice: cling to its democratic aspirations while teetering on the edge of collapse or accept a precarious existence within Russia's sphere of influence. The fall of Ukraine would</p>	

The Collective West Russia	Strong and democratic, internationalistic	Strong and non-democratic, isolationistic	Wobbling	Weak
	<p>While democracy is widely seen as the most advantageous form of governance, it is also recognized that not all nations necessarily aspire to democracy, as economic benefits may not always outweigh the 'benefits of authoritarianism' for the few, if accepted by the social contracts.</p> <p>This perspective strengthens the West's resolve to impose consequences on regimes that flout global norms, making them pay a 'tax on non-adherence to international rules.' Russia, weakened by its authoritarianism, imperial ambitions, and reliance on a raw material economy, finds itself outdated and unable to compete effectively in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and AI boom. The diminishing global dependence on oil and gas, coupled with the rise of atomic and renewable energy sources and flexible gas markets, erodes Russia's economic leverage.</p> <p>The benefits of cooperation with the West increasingly outweigh any gains from perpetuating aggression against Ukraine or deepening ties with China. This growing disparity mirrors the conditions of Perestroika, where economic hardships and inefficiencies in state management outweighed ideological consensus. In response, Russia begins to rethink its geopolitical aims and aggressive means, initiating comprehensive reforms that include steps towards democratization. In this scenario, Ukraine may serve as a source of inspiration for democratic reforms in Russia as an outstanding example of post-Soviet state transformation.</p> <p>As part of the reset, Russia returns all or most of the occupied territories, pays reparations to Ukraine, and does not obstruct its NATO membership.</p> <p>As an alternative, after failed peace negotiations with Russia, NATO or select European armies intervene, aiding Ukraine in liberating its territories, while China maintains neutrality. Ukraine's victory over Russia, its territorial liberation, EU and NATO membership, have triggered a cascade of positive outcomes, including prompt economic recovery of Ukraine, strengthened international law and enhanced global stability. The defeat of Russian aggression reinforces the rules-based international order and deters future acts of aggression by potential adversaries. It also contributes to the liberalization in Russia as a result of the defeat.</p>		signal more than the failure of one nation—it would mark the beginning of the end for the West as a global leader and accelerate the rise of a new world order defined by authoritarianism and instability. The consequences would reverberate far beyond Europe, casting a long shadow over the future of human progress.	

Interim Conclusions

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has ushered in a seismic shift in global geopolitics, revealing the deep-seated vulnerabilities in the existing international system caused by decades of mounting misjudgments and miscalculations and reshaping global power dynamics in ways that will have far-reaching consequences. This war is another round of the global powers' dispute that was mistakenly believed to end with the collapse of the USSR.

For several decades now, the world has been structured around a unipolar system dominated by the United States and its allies, which prioritized economic growth, stability, and the promotion of democratic values. However, the ongoing events demonstrate that it is increasingly giving way to a more fragmented global system.

The idea that trade and economic ties could serve as a buffer against ideological and geopolitical conflicts has been proven insufficient. Russia's willingness to sacrifice economic gains for geopolitical ambitions has demonstrated that the doctrine of peace through trade is not a 'silver bullet' in the face of aggressive authoritarianism. The past and ongoing West's contribution to the economic growth of currently emerging rivals may ultimately backfire, potentially erasing decades of progress and leading to significant losses amid escalating regional conflicts or a major global confrontation.

This confrontation is unlikely to fade within the next decade unless it is prematurely resolved through either a devastating global war or compelled cooperation in response to more pressing global threats. These could include another, more severe pandemic, mass migration driven by accelerated climate change, or AI-related disruptions with far-reaching socio-economic and military implications.

The initial weak response to the 2014 invasion and undeniable hesitations of Ukraine's allies in 2022 have accelerated the rise of authoritarian regimes and illiberal democracies, challenging the spread of liberal values that characterized the post-Cold War period. The clear signaling of a willingness to find middle ground with the aggressor has sent a powerful message about the limits of Western commitment to its own values and its ability to uphold its interests and protect the interests of its allies. This stance raises questions about the reliability of Western nations as partners, a concern that is being closely observed by aspiring democracies worldwide and has also emboldened formation of the authoritarian axis of power.

While the memory of the hectic withdrawal from Afghanistan is fresh, the failure of Ukraine, driven by insufficient support from the West despite the country's strong commitment to democratic values and pro-Western aspirations, could not only jeopardize the broader democratic advancement and stability on the global stage, but encourage direct aggression against western nations.

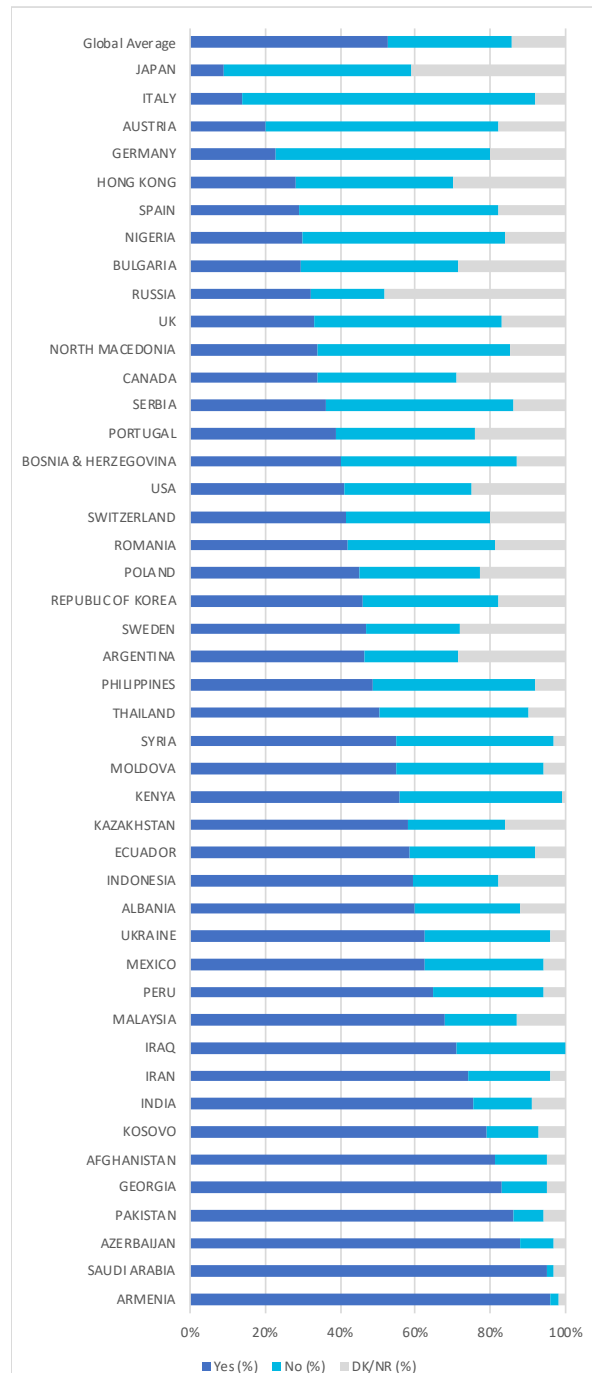
The unpopularity of the idea that pacifism could be deadly as evidenced by the tolerance to intolerance paradox has led to a reduced willingness among Western nations to defend their countries, according to 2023 [Gallup International research](#). In the Americas and Europe, a significant portion of the population remains undecided on their willingness to engage in defense of their countries in case of external aggression, while Asian countries show the greatest levels of readiness to do so. Ukraine exhibits the highest readiness to fight among European nations, both in words and through its actions. Its victory should inspire hope for a lasting peace in Europe, challenging the misconception that concessions can appease an aggressor.

Russia's actions are not isolated but part of a broader trend where authoritarian states are consolidating power and expanding their influence. Though non-western alliances are still weaker than the western ones, their potential should not be downplayed.

The alliance between democratic states must be reinforced, and countering the growing influence of authoritarian regimes should be tackled with all seriousness. This includes not only military and economic measures but also efforts to strengthen the ideological and normative foundations of international relations. The resurgence of power struggles emphasizes that Ukraine, located at the geographical and ideological crossroads of the West and the East, cannot maintain a non-aligned status. It must be integrated into Western economic and military alliances to ensure its security and stability.

In the most tragic case, when the West abandons its values and ideological divisions between Russia, China, and the collective West begin to blur, geopolitical alignment would be dictated primarily by geography and economic interests—potentially pulling Ukraine and other European states into Russia's sphere of influence by default.

If there were a war that involved (YOUR COUNTRY), would you be willing to fight for your country

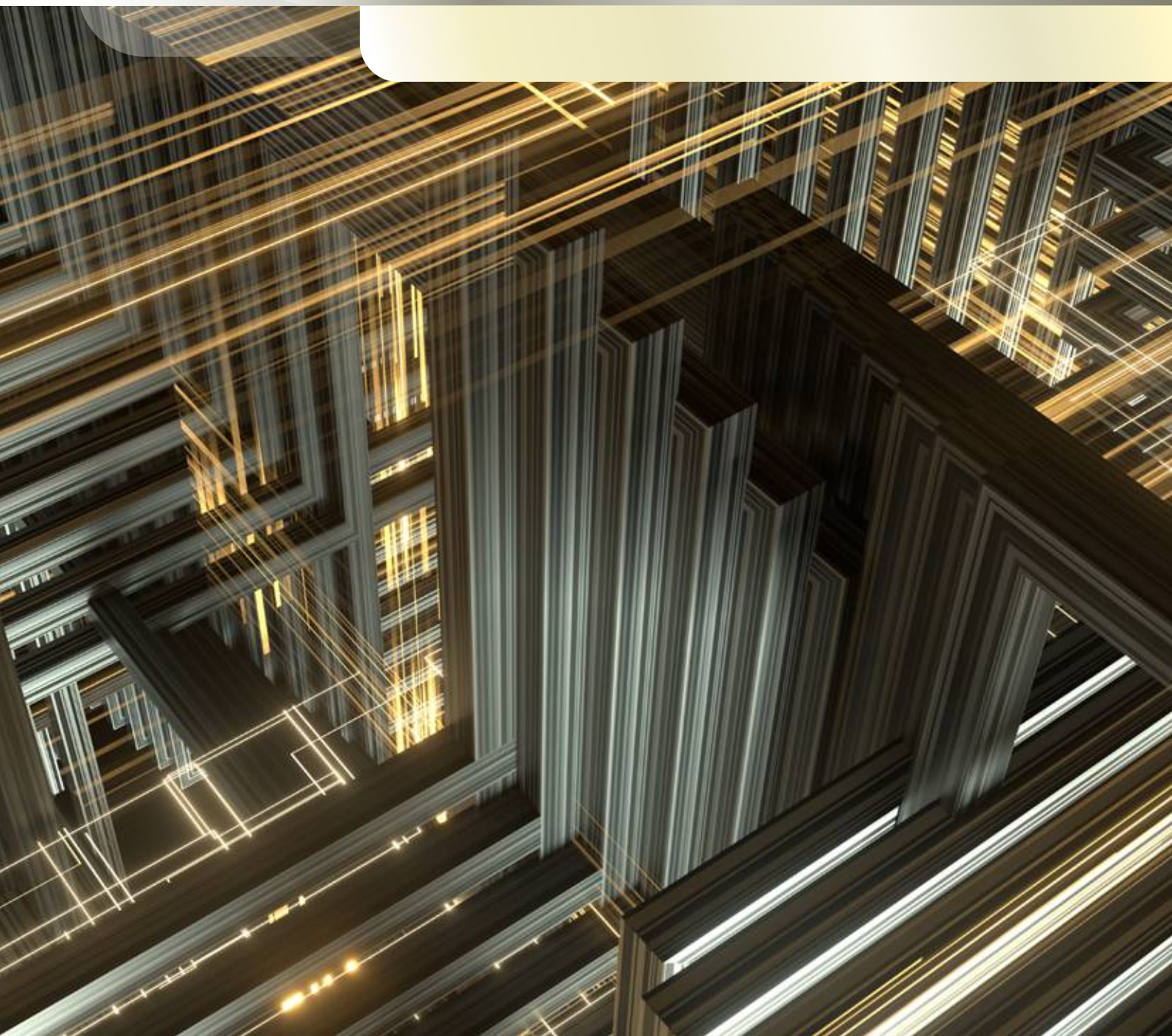


Source: https://ratinggroup.ua/files/ratinggroup/reg_files/23.04.24uk.pdf

Chapter 2.

DOMESTIC DEVELOPMENTS

**Internal Dynamics Shaping Ukraine's
Future**



Categories for Domestic Scenarios and Analysis of Current Trends

To forecast Ukraine's theoretical futures, it is essential to have a clear understanding of its history and current state. Ukraine's pursuit of freedom and justice has been central to its nation-building efforts. Despite being deprived of statehood for centuries, Ukraine has developed a rich history since gaining independence in 1991, with Kyiv's 1,500-year legacy playing a crucial role. Understanding this historical context is vital for predicting future societal dynamics, values, and national evolution.

By establishing baselines across key categories—ideological orientation, geopolitical orientation, and geopolitical power—we can better assess developments in Ukraine, taking into account the West's traditional focus on Russia. This framework allows us to draft ten possible scenarios driven by Ukraine's domestic developments.

The exclusion of foreign policy orientation (isolationism vs. internationalism) is justified by the persistent existential threat from Russia, which forces Ukraine to align with a specific geopolitical bloc and rules out a non-aligned status. Therefore, while the scenarios primarily focus on domestic developments, they also reflect certain aspects of the framework scenarios of global players such as the USA, EU, China, and Russia.

Ideological Orientation

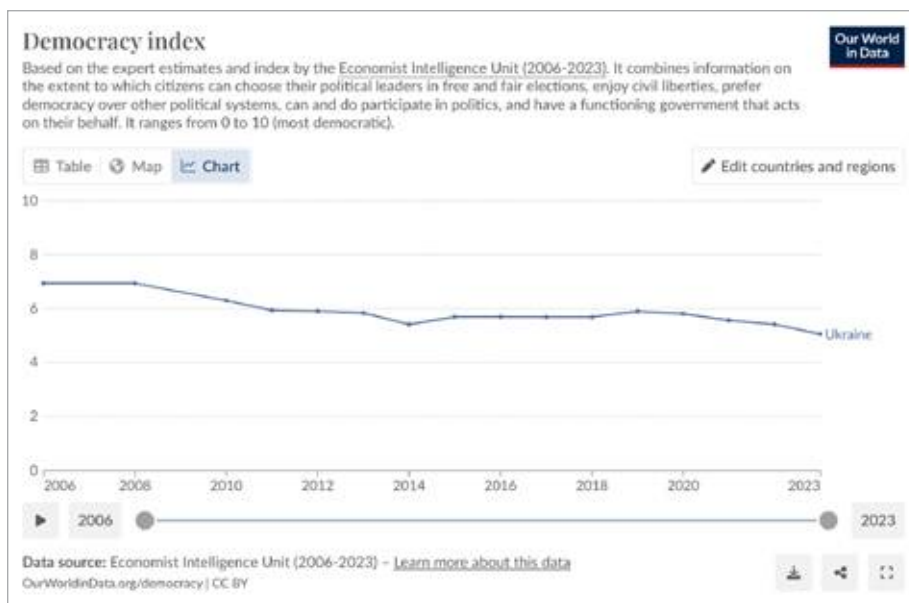
While Ukraine was last categorized in the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index (EIU DI) as a 'flawed democracy' in 2010, its current aspiration is to reunite with its European family as an undeniably democratic country. The European Council's decision on 14 December 2023 to initiate EU accession talks with Ukraine marked Ukraine's achievements on the path of reforms despite the most severe conflict in Europe after WWII.

Analyzing democracy in Ukraine is a challenging task. Simply referring to data from various democracy rankings, which are based on empirical measurements, does not fully capture the complexity of the situation. These rankings provide insight into the general dynamics of the transformation of political institutions and facilitate inter-country comparisons. However, they do not account for the nuances and unique aspects of Ukraine's democratic evolution.

It's important to remember that the Russian invasion, which began in 2014, was not solely a response to protests in Kyiv and other cities against the refusal to sign the Association Agreement (AA) with the EU. It was the fear that Ukraine, the biggest post-Soviet republic in Europe after Russia, would succeed as a democratic and economically thriving nation.

It should be noted that the AA, including the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), while being a mere trade and political agreement and not guaranteeing EU accession, became a symbol of Ukraine's return to the European family and a hope for life with dignity in a country governed by the rule of law. It is unimaginable to refuse to recognize that these events were perceived domestically as a step towards eventual European membership, as sacrificing lives solely for the right to trade with the EU seems exaggerated. The right to trade with the EU seems exaggerated. The protests were also deeply influenced by widespread dissatisfaction with the undemocratic practices and injustices of President Yanukovich's administration. This discontent culminated in the value-driven Revolution of Dignity, underscoring the Ukrainian people's aspiration for a democratic, just, and European future.

Ukraine's lowered score today may be partially explained by the limitation of martial law, however, it scoring higher in the times of President Yanukovich than after the Revolution of Dignity may only be explained by a grain of subjectivity in any assessments in social sciences.



Source:
<https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/democracy-index-eiu?tab=chart&country=~UKR>

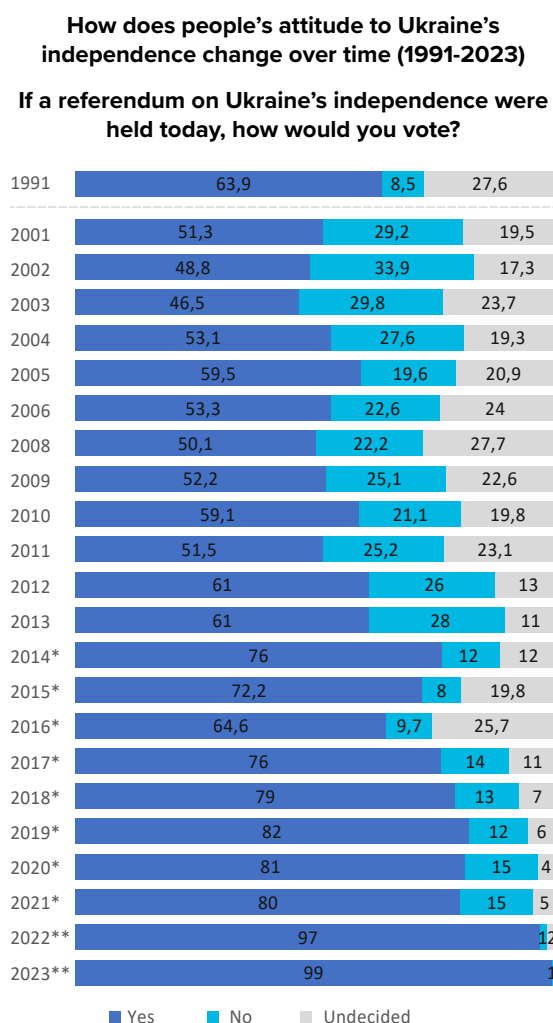
Ukraine's democratic backslides have often been used by Russia and its proponents. In reality, before the 2022 invasion Ukraine was working on strengthening its democratic institutions, enhancing the rule of law through a comprehensive reform, boosted by the Eurointegration, ensuring equality, and fighting corruption, showing progress but not an unquestionable success.

The V-Dem Institute [2021 report](#) listed Moldova and Ukraine among top democratizers from the last three years. These achievements are even more noticeable in comparison to the developments in Russia, which has continued its steady slide towards outright dictatorship.

Currently, the war is taking a toll on the country's democratic institutions and practices.

Though Presidential and Parliamentary elections are overdue, there is no possibility to conduct elections due to [a long list of reasons](#) from security risks to organizational and financial challenges. It should be noted that only free and fair elections, which Ukraine has become accustomed to, is a mark of democracy, in contrast to the ritualistic voting seen in Russia.

The martial law resulted in certain limitation of rights and freedoms, still in the scope of current legislation. Due to [security concerns](#), Ukrainian authorities are looking for ways to [ban religious organizations](#) associated with Russia. The initiative was followed by a



Source: <https://www.slovoudilo.ua/2023/08/24/infografika/suspilstvo/referendumu-vijny-yak-zminyuvalosya-stavlennya-ukrayinciv-nezalezhnosti-1991-roku>

discreditation campaign, primarily in the interest of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchy, which has long been connected to Moscow, while reports indicate severe limitations of religious rights in Russia.

While some underline concentration of power in the hands of Presidential Administration, civil society remains a strong pillar of Ukraine's development being a locomotive of legislative changes domestically and advocacy abroad.

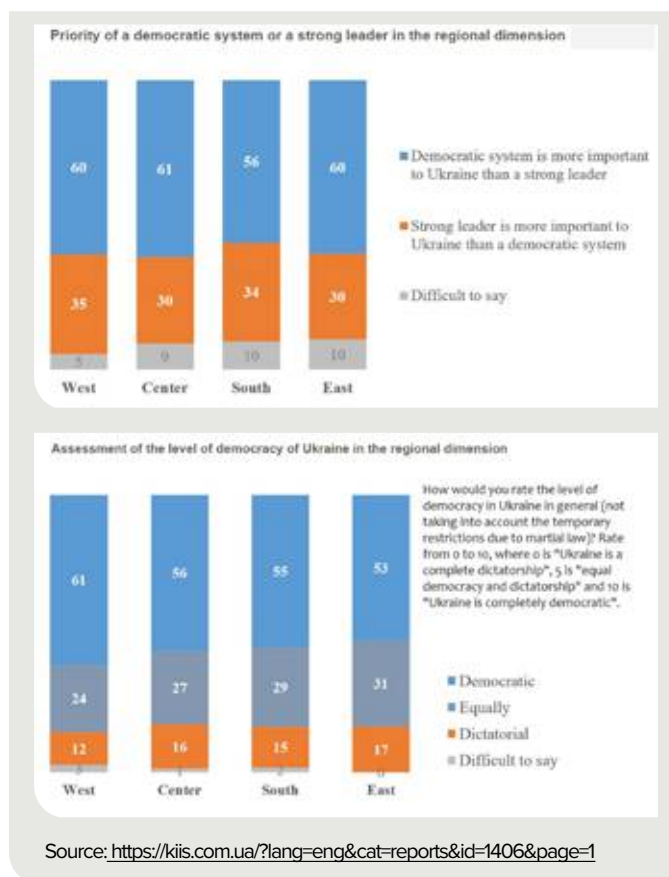
Ukrainians consistently demonstrate a strong commitment to democracy. According to a KIIS 2023 [survey](#) for the National Democratic Institute, 93% of Ukrainians want Ukraine to become a fully functioning democracy, with fair justice, freedom of speech, and free and fair elections as its most important aspects. While few Ukrainians currently see the collapse of democracy and the transition to authoritarianism as a pressing issue, the majority of Ukrainians ([57%](#)) [believe](#) that Ukraine is rather or completely democratic.

According to a 2023 poll by the Sociological Group Rating in partnership with [Gallup International](#), 68% of Ukrainians believe that democracy is the best system of government. Ukraine ranks sixth among the countries surveyed, with a significant majority supporting the statement: "Democracy may have its flaws, but it is the best system of government." The top five positions were held by Sweden, Austria, Germany, Spain, and Switzerland.

Additionally, about 44% of Ukrainians said their country is ruled by the will of the people, placing Ukraine in the top 10 of surveyed nations. Conversely, Russia ranked in the bottom five among respondents who did not believe their country was ruled by the will of the people.

Ukraine is one of the few countries among the 29 evaluated by Freedom House in the Nations in Transit [2024 report](#) that is successfully moving toward democracy amid growing anti-democratic trends. The report concluded that democratic governance in the region has declined for the 20th consecutive year, with few exceptions. Ukraine stands out as the only nation in the "hybrid regime" group to see improvement, while the ratings of five other members declined. Additionally, four countries with improved democratic governance ratings are already classified as democracies, highlighting the increasing polarization between the two groups.

Though, Ukraine may fail to meet some of the liberal democracy criteria, it can be described without reservation as an [aspiring democracy](#) that is at war.



Geopolitical Orientation

Ukraine has long been swinging between the East and the West. As Kyivan Rus, Ukraine was a distinct European entity, a heritage preserved through eight centuries of occupation by the Russian and European empires and later by the West-hostile USSR.

Upon declaring independence in 1991, Ukraine initially sought to balance relations between Russia and the West. However, since the early 1990s, Russia has been working to reassert influence on the post-Soviet space through the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership with Russia (1997) was a key early agreement, aimed at defining post-Soviet relations.

However, the evolving geopolitical landscape very early led Ukraine to pursue closer ties with Western institutions. Ironically, the Budapest Memorandum (1994), which provided security assurances to Ukraine in exchange for its commitment to denuclearization, was one of the conditions for Ukraine to build relationships with the West.

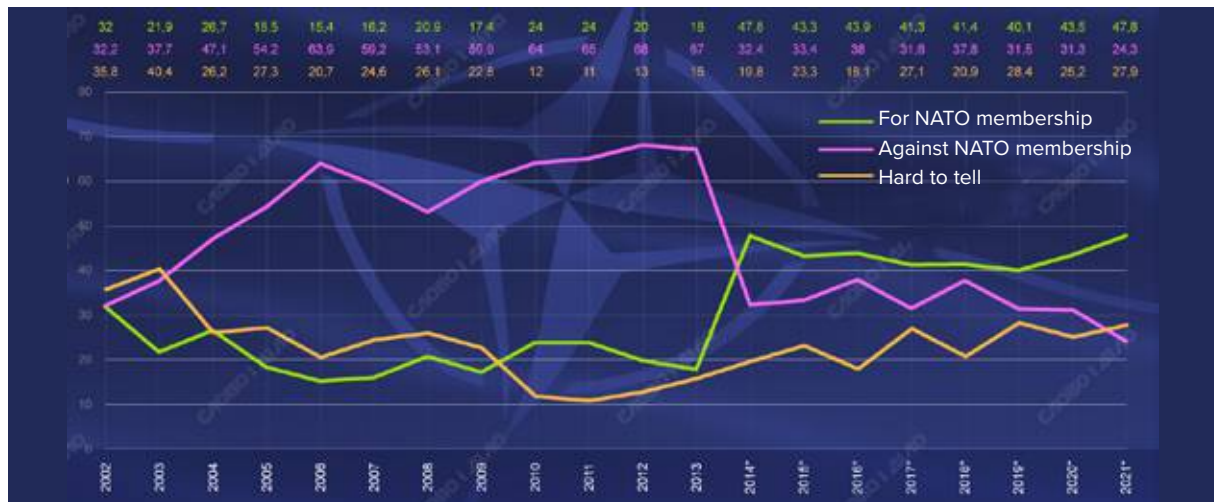
The early independence period also saw Ukraine engaging more actively with the European Union, culminating in the EU-Ukraine Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (1998), which laid the groundwork for closer economic and political relations.

Russia's attempts to steal Ukraine's elections to favor a pro-Russian candidate led to the Orange Revolution of 2004, the first serious debate about Ukraine's foreign policy orientation. Widespread protests against electoral fraud resulted in the election of Viktor Yushchenko, a pro-Western leader who advocated for stronger ties with the EU. However, the West did not view Ukraine as ready for full-fledged integration into Western institutions.

For the first time since the establishment of cooperation in 1992, Ukraine voiced its interest in NATO membership in 2002, around the time of the biggest wave of Alliance's enlargement to the East. In 2008, Ukraine's bid for NATO membership was rejected, reflecting concerns about the country's readiness and the broader geopolitical implications.

Partially, these views reflected the realities of the time. The idea of NATO membership had low support among the Ukrainian population. Economic hardships led to growing frustration with President Yushchenko, which, compounded by Russian information warfare, was framed as evidence that Ukraine could not survive economically without Russia and that the West was exploiting Ukraine. Additionally, Russian propaganda suggested that the West had malicious plans to separate "brotherly" nations, manipulate Ukraine, and use it against Russia and its own interests.

How does Ukrainians' attitude to joining NATO change over time (2002-2021)



Source: <https://www.slovoidilo.ua/2021/08/24/infografika/suspilstvo/30-rokiv-nezalezhnosti-yak-zminyvalosya-stavlennya-ukrayinciv-chlenstva-nato>

The election of the pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovych marked a significant shift towards closer ties with Russia. NATO membership was removed from the agenda. Though Ukraine managed to decline Russia's 'generous offer' to join the Customs Union, Ukraine signed the controversial Kharkiv agreements, which extended Russia's lease on the Sevastopol naval base and provided discounted gas prices to Ukraine, while strengthening economic cooperation with Russia.

Ironically, despite Yanukovych's pro-Russian stance, he led successful negotiations with the EU that should have culminated in the signing of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, perceived by many Ukrainians as a step towards greater European integration.

The pivotal moment came when Yanukovych, under pressure from Russian President Vladimir Putin, declined to sign the agreement having agreed to an offer of several billion dollars in unconditional support from Russia. This decision sparked the Revolution of Dignity, driven not only by pro-Western aspirations but also by a desire to reject a social contract reminiscent of Russian governance.

The revolution led to Yanukovych's ousting, triggering Russia's annexation of Crimea and invasion of Donbas. Russia made significant efforts to orchestrate a parade of separatist movements in many regions in the East and South of the country to create independent entities like the so-called Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) and Luhansk People's Republic (LNR), potentially paving the way for their eventual integration into Russia.

In an alternative scenario, these separatist regions could have remained parts of Ukraine with special status acting as disruptive forces within the Ukrainian parliament, particularly if federalization, which Russia promoted under the guise of protecting Russian-speaking populations, had been implemented. These events dramatically reshaped Ukraine's geopolitical trajectory and intensified its commitment to Western integration.

In response to these challenges, Ukraine undertook significant reforms aimed at aligning more closely with EU standards. In 2019, Ukraine's constitution was amended to enshrine its European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations, reflecting a formal commitment to EU and NATO integration. This constitutional change marked a definitive shift towards Western alignment.

Despite years of conflict with Russia, a significant portion of the Ukrainian population leaned towards normalization of relations with its eastern neighbor. The election of President Volodymyr

Zelensky was influenced in part by his [rhetoric of peace](#). In his campaign speeches, Zelensky promised to seek common grounds with Russia, support from the guarantors of the Budapest Memorandum and EU partners for Ukraine's efforts to end the war, and even reclaim some temporarily occupied territories. He genuinely believed in his ability to reach an agreement with Putin.

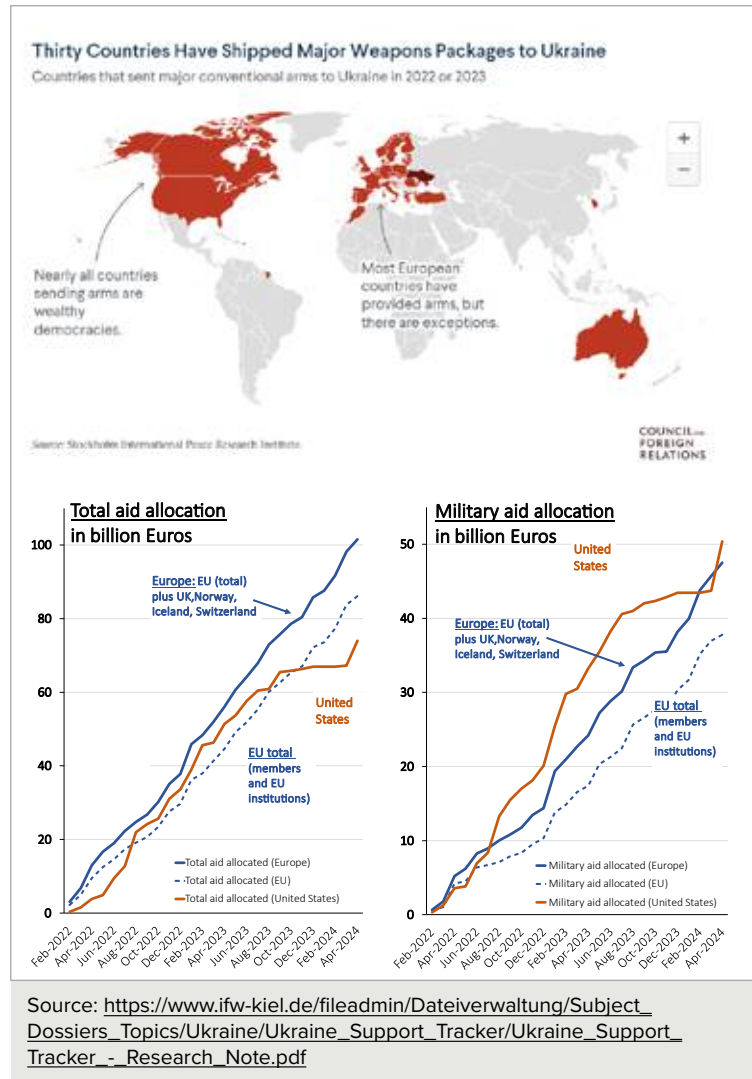
There was a widespread narrative that the war persisted primarily because the post-revolution Ukrainian government was allegedly profiting from the conflict. Many Ukrainians did not fully grasp Russia's revisionist ambitions regarding Ukraine or the extent and brutality of the tactics employed by the Russian military following the invasion.

The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 represented a critical juncture in Ukraine's history. The invasion prompted a surge in international support from Western countries, including substantial military and economic aid. This support has been instrumental in Ukraine's resistance against aggression and has further solidified its alignment with Western institutions.

In summary, Ukraine's shift from Russian influence to Western alignment has been a dynamic and even dramatic process. From early agreements and domestic upheavals to constitutional amendments and international support, Ukraine has navigated a complex geopolitical landscape, reflecting its enduring aspiration for sovereignty, democratic values, and integration with Western institutions.

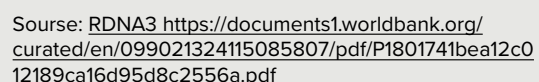
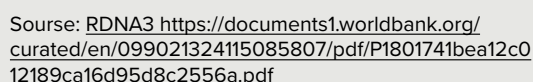
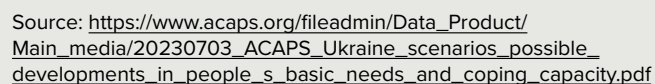
It would not be an exaggeration to say that by continuously posing an existential threat to Ukraine, Russia has significantly contributed to Ukraine's national renaissance and its reorientation toward the West. Moreover, considering Russia's past behavior and current objectives, it is evident that even if desired, Ukraine would not have been able to maintain a multivector policy as a country situated at the crossroads of East and West. Consequently, its rapid integration into Western alliances is not so much a promise of prosperity but rather a crucial hope for survival.

The Ukraine Support Tracker, Kiel Institute for the World Economy



The war launched by the Russian Federation has a profound [impact](#) on Ukraine's social and economic fabric. Almost 20% of the territory in 1991 borders are occupied. The country is striving to recover after its economy shrank by nearly one-third in 2022 due to Russia's further occupation of Ukrainian territory, the destruction of civilian and critical infrastructure, as well as enterprises, and the shrinking labor force caused by human losses, displacement and army conscription. The trauma caused to the people by the war of aggression has yet to be fully measured.

The 2024 [state budget](#) reveals a deficit surpassing [40 billion US dollars](#), expected to be covered by international loans and grants. Ukraine's

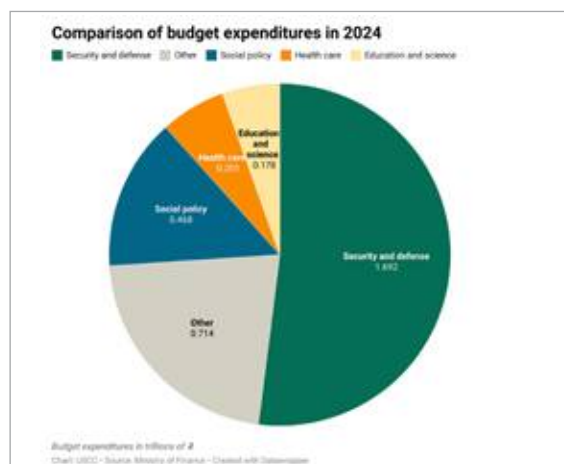


state debt peaked at 78 percent of its GDP. However, despite the war and the World Bank's prediction of 0,5% growth, Ukraine's economy grew by [5.3%](#) in 2023 and [4.1%](#) in the first half of 2024.

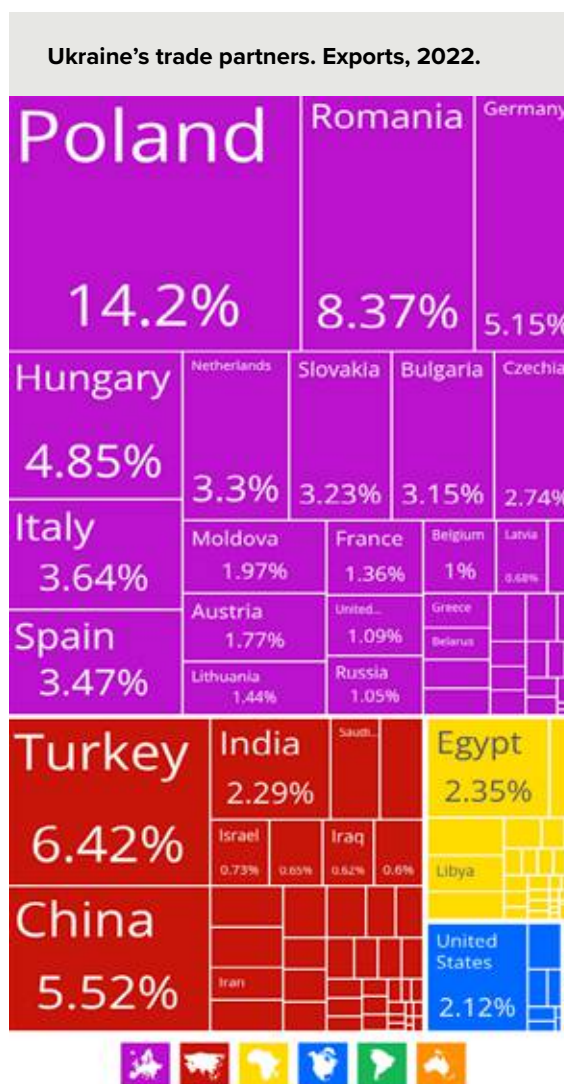
Expenditures on the military and defense sector accounting for 22.1% of the GDP will be covered by internal capacities, while international aid will be directed for non-military budget items. At Ukraine House in Davos, Minister for Strategic Industries Oleksandr Kamyshyn [reported](#) a significant increase in weapon production facilities, which rose from 50 to more than 200 in 2023. Ukraine has begun manufacturing NATO-standard artillery systems and has doubled its ammunition production. The country is also mass-producing FPV drones, thermal imagers, robotic systems, and hybrid air defense systems. About \$1.3 billion is allocated for domestic drone production, reflecting a focus on rapidly integrating new technologies.

[Sources](#) for the state budget include external borrowing (approximately \$40.2 billion USD), the issuance of government bonds (approximately \$12.7 billion USD), and privatization revenues (approximately \$96.4 million USD). GDP growth is currently forecasted at 4.6%, with inflation at 9.7%. Ukraine faces a 21 percent negative trade balance, among other factors, due to a severe reduction in its capacity to transport goods resulting from Russia's blockage of sea and avia routes.

The liberalization of freight transportation with the EU, which remained Ukraine's main trade partner in 2023, launch of an Alternative Black Sea Corridor and the implementation of the [Solidarity Lanes Action Plan](#) have helped Ukraine to export its goods and import necessary items via rail, road, and inland waterways. However, these measures do not fully resolve the issue. In the medium to long term, the EU plans to increase the infrastructure capacity of new export corridors and establish new infrastructure connections as part of Ukraine's reconstruction efforts. According to ITC, the total unrealized export potential for Ukraine stands at \$28 billion.

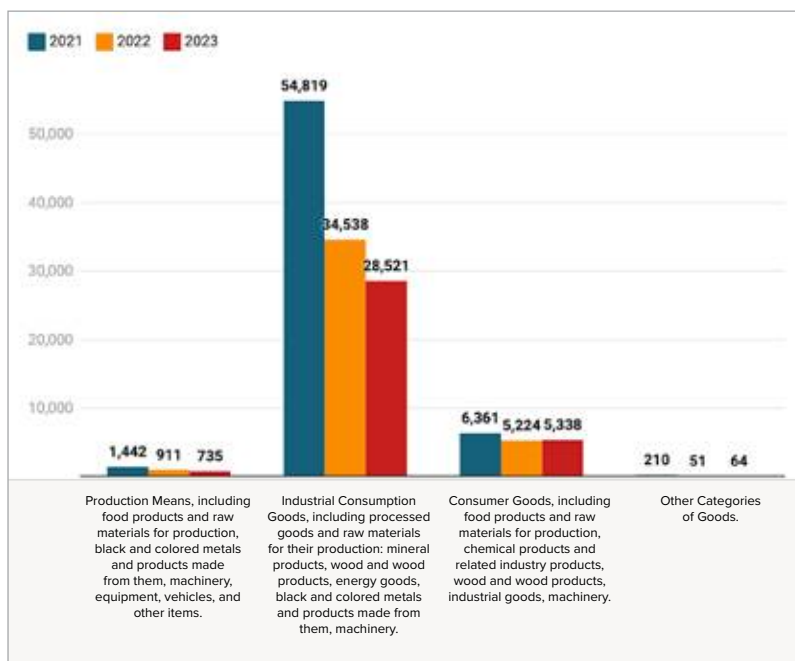


Source: <https://uscc.org.ua/en/ukraine-s-financial-capacity-and-projected-support-from-allies-in-2024/>



Source: <https://oec.world/en/profile/country/ukr>

The structure of exports by broad economic categories across commodity groups in Ukraine for the years 2021, 2022, and 2023 (in million USD).



Source: <https://voxukraine.org/tovarna-struktura-eksportu-ta-importu-ukrayiny-u-2021-2023-rokah-ta-sichni-lyutomu-2024-roku>

Ukraine plays an important role in ensuring global food security. According to the UN, grain from Ukraine fed more than 400 million people worldwide and accounted for 10% of all crops sold. Thus, its full reintegration into the world market goes beyond Ukraine's national interest.

The budget also emphasizes social needs, particularly pensions and social spending, amounting to 14.5 percent of GDP. With 50 percent of Ukrainian households at a subsistence level and a 20 percent

unemployment rate, continued social support and humanitarian assistance from Ukraine's allies are crucial. According to the [World Bank](#), in 2023 more than 9 million Ukrainians were living in poverty.

Ukraine's economic progress is hindered by severe infrastructure damage, notably in the [energy sector](#) with about two-thirds of Ukraine's energy-generating capacity destroyed, damaged, or seized. Challenges also include labor shortages due to migration and mobilization, adverse business conditions, hesitations of investors due to war-related and corruption risks, etc.

Ukraine has invested a lot of effort to negotiate provision of insurance for investment projects within the framework of the Export Credit Agency, guaranteeing loans from international financial institutions within the framework of the Ukraine Facility, and [war-risk insurance](#) infrastructure.

Seeking to create a much better investment climate, Ukrainian Government created a [National Investment Council](#) under the control of the President, [UkraineInvest](#), a promotion agency that works as a one-stop-shop to attract and support foreign direct investment (FDI), the [Business Ombudsman Council](#), which deals with complaints about unfair treatment, and a parliamentary commission on the [Protection of Investors' Rights](#). A [law on public-private partnership](#) with favorable terms was adopted.

A [National Strategy to increase FDI](#) by 2030 promotes Ukraine as an attractive destination for investments, while the ["de-oligarchization"](#) legislation, the [cleansing](#) of the judicial system and progress in the [fight against corruption](#) create framework for potential fast post-war recovery.

Total population of Ukraine in 2022
(before the full-scale invasion, excluding the occupied since 2014 territories of Crimea, Sevastopol, and parts of Donbas, accounting for 4,5 million people)

41,000,000

Source: <https://index.minfin.com.ua/ua/reference/people/2022/>

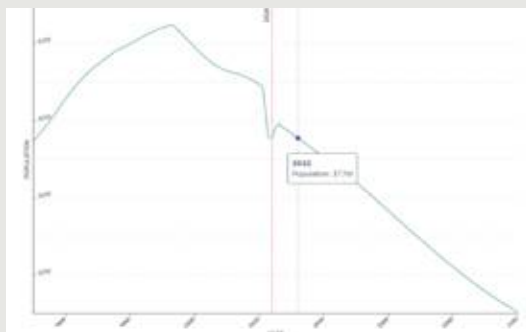
Total population of Ukraine in 2024 (in the government-controlled territories)

Given the lack of accurate data, estimates of the Ukrainian Institute for the Future, The Institute of Demography and Social Studies of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine and IMF differ

29/31,5/33,4 million people

Source: <https://bit.ly/41aei79> Source: <https://bit.ly/3EYfkRo>

Optimistic estimates of Ukraine's demography



Source: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/ukraine-population>

Refugee from Ukraine recorded in Europe

Last updated 15 Juli 2024 – Source UNHCR collation of statistics made available by the authorities

6,021,400

Including Refugees from Ukraine recorded in Russia

1,200,000

Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1312584/ukrainian-refugees-by-country/>

Refugee from Ukraine recorded beyond Europe

Last updated 1 April 2024 – Source UNHCR collation of statistics made available by the authorities

558,300

Source: <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>

Ukrainian population living under Russian occupation

6,000,000

Source: <https://english.nv.ua/nation/six-million-ukrainians-including-1-5-million-children-live-in-russian-occupied-territories-50430377.html>

Overall demographic situation has significantly deteriorated but is not critical yet. The Ukrainian Institute for the Future has identified a critical threshold for Ukraine's population, stating that a minimum population of [20 million people](#) is essential for the country's effective functioning. This threshold considers factors such as economic stability, social cohesion, and national security, suggesting that

War Impact on the Environment (2023)

\$61.3 bln

is the estimate of environmental damage to Ukraine caused by the full-scale war, as of May 24, 2024

\$29.3 bln

Atmospheric air

\$27.4 bln

Land resources

\$2.6 bln

Nature resilience fund

\$2.1 bln

Water resources

30%

of Ukraine's territory needs to be inspected for mines. This area is as large as two United Arab Emirates.

2.4 mln ha

were affected by fires that damaged forests, soil, and national parks. It is the same as 75% of Belgium's area.

\$2.8 bln

Damage caused by the blowing up of the Kakhovka dam.

180 mln tons of CO2-eq

Greenhouse gas emissions caused by the war for two years of the full-scale war. This is more than Romania or Austria emit in a year.

305

heavy industry facilities affected by the war. This causes water, land, and air pollution.

400 mln

people can be supplied with Ukrainian food excluding Ukrainians. The pollution and mining of agricultural soils threatens food security.

Source: <https://www.topleadprojects.com/environmental-project-main>

falling below this number could significantly impact Ukraine's ability to sustain its institutions and services.

The population of Ukraine is currently decreasing at an annual rate of 0.59%, a rate that has been rising each year since 2015. The United Nations projects that by 2050, Ukraine could lose nearly 20% of its population. So, the estimated population of Ukraine in 2032 within territories currently controlled by the Ukrainian government could be approximately **27.6-31.8 million**, if no major disruptors deteriorate the situation.

Another important aspect is the impact of the war on the environment. The ecocide conducted by the Russian Federation has caused severe environmental damage, including soil contamination, water pollution, habitat destruction, and increased carbon emissions. These impacts may in the future have an effect on public health, population displacement, and biodiversity loss. This ecological devastation will alter the economic landscape, especially in agriculture and industry.

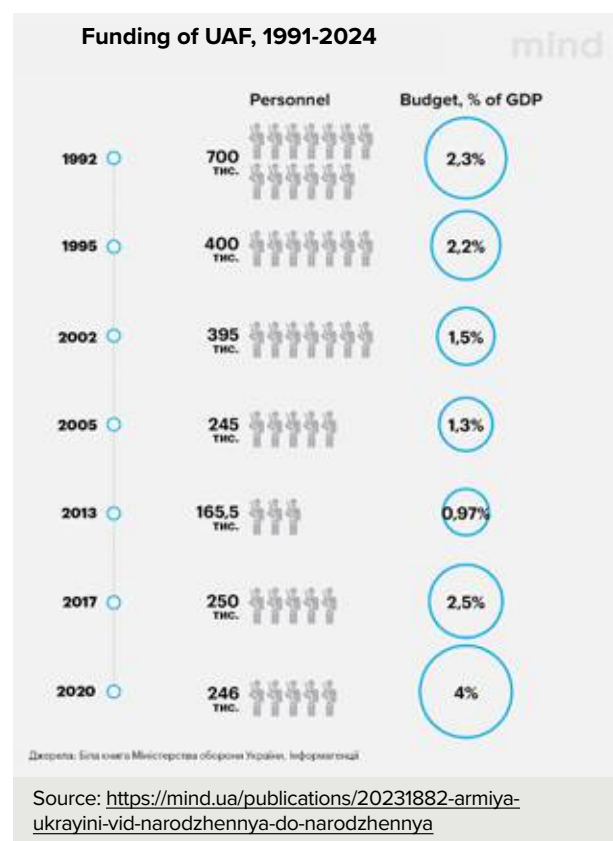
Ukraine remains heavily dependent on international financial aid. Since March 2023, Ukraine has had an IMF program aimed at ensuring economic and financial stability during a period of exceptionally high uncertainty, restoring debt sustainability, and promoting reforms. The size of the IMF program is \$15.6 billion over four years, with \$3.5 billion already disbursed to Ukraine.

Through the [Ukraine Facility](#), a financial support program from the European Union, Ukraine is implementing a series of strategic economic reforms and sectoral development measures. [Ukraine Facility Plan](#) 2024-2027 foresees 38 billion euro as direct budget support, 7 billion euro in investment fund, almost 5 billion as technical and administrative support.

After [a decade of reforms](#), in 2024 Ukraine officially started [accession negotiations](#) with the EU. Despite challenges on both sides, Ukraine hopes [to become an EU member by 2030](#). Meanwhile, NATO accession, despite Western promising rhetoric, [remains an “irreversible path without the end point.”](#) Thus, through [bilateral agreements](#) on security cooperation, Ukraine is trying to create a so-called “light-NATO”, which still leaves the country without real security guarantees—one of the reasons for low FDI, along political risks.

As for its military power, Ukraine's army has become one of the most numerous and capable in Europe. About 1 million people have joined UAF since 2022. Despite [decades of disarmament](#) and a decreasing number of personnel due to factors such as economic hardships and limited investment in defense, ratification of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, and Russian pressure seeking to undermine Ukraine's military capabilities, the country managed to withstand Russian aggression in 2022. As of 2023, the Armed Forces of Ukraine are the most trusted entity in the country, with 94% of Ukrainians expressing their [trust](#) in them.

The 2024 [Ukrainian Military Performance and Outlook](#) by the Congressional Research Service



highlights that the Ukrainian Armed Forces (UAF) benefit from high recruitment levels and strong motivation but face challenges due to high personnel losses. However, the latest mobilization waves and debates about the past and ongoing West's contribution to the economic growth round [new mobilization legislation](#), which did not foresee rotation, demonstrate the issue UAF are facing. Recruitment struggles are exacerbated by an average soldier age of around 40 and reluctance among younger Ukrainians to enlist. Western pressure to lower the conscription age to 18 is both politically dangerous and fundamentally unfair, particularly as Ukraine's Western allies continue to undersupply the Ukrainian Armed Forces with the weapons and ammunition needed to defend against Russian aggression effectively.

Overall, since the full-scale invasion, Ukraine has significantly enhanced its geopolitical influence, emerging as a prominent global actor. However, Western policy towards Ukraine has consistently been framed through a Russia-centered perspective. The country's ability to maintain its achievements will hinge on the success of its reforms, the pace of its European and NATO integration, its capacity to sustain military strength, and the extent to which larger global challenges might overshadow Ukraine's role in European and global stability.

Number of Essential Weapons, 1991-2021

Year	Tanks	Armored Vehicles	Aircraft
1991	~ 9 тис.	11 тис.	1.5 тис.
1994	~ 4 тис.	8.5 тис.	~ 1 тис.
2006	~ 3.8 тис.	~ 5.3 тис.	~ 350
2011	~ 3 тис.	~ 4.7 тис.	~ 300
2014	~ 2.4 тис.	~ 2.5 тис.	~ 220
2021	2.1 тис.	~ 3 тис.	~ 120

Source: <https://www.rbc.ua/rus/news/shchitom-shchite-menyalas-ukrainskaya-armiya-1628506401.html>

Scenarios

	Strong	Wobbling	Weak
Democratic and Pro-Western	<p>Atlants' Rise</p> <p>Ukraine has been receiving substantial military support from Western allies, enabling it to liberate all or most of its occupied territories. This support included advanced weaponry, intelligence sharing, and possibly some sort of direct military involvement from NATO forces. In case of Russian disintegration or democratization, Ukraine restores 1991 borders diplomatically.</p> <p>A sophisticated format of cooperation with NATO is enhanced, potentially involving a NATO presence in Ukraine (for example, on the border with Belarus or remaining occupied territories) and joint operations such as a no-fly zone enforcement and comprehensive demining.</p> <p>In an extremely favorable situation, by 2032 Ukraine receives an official invitation to join NATO or even becomes a full member. This milestone is accompanied by a significant overhaul of its defense infrastructure. Ukraine preserves a permanent army of 500,000 personnel trained to NATO standards, making it one of Europe's strongest and most experienced military forces. The defense sector receives heavy investment, fostering innovation and the development of cutting-edge military technology.</p> <p>Despite the challenges posed by years of martial law, Ukraine successfully preserves its spirit of democracy and democratic institutions. It holds free and fair presidential, parliamentary, and local elections, leading to the renewal of political elites. Implementation of comprehensive reforms continued, culminating in the completion of all EU integration requirements, resulting in Ukraine becoming a full EU member.</p> <p>Thanks to sustainable financial support from the West (maybe a sort of Marshall's plan for Ukraine), relevant political stability, and a business-friendly environment driven by European integration reforms, revitalization of the insurance, stock, and banking markets, the economy experiences robust growth, with an average annual GDP increase of 3 to 4%. This allows Ukraine to exceed the pre-full-scale invasion economic markers.</p> <p>The resumption of unobstructed sea trade through the Black Sea significantly boosts economic activity. A mechanism for ensuring reparations, in addition to the confiscation of Russian frozen assets, is potentially introduced.</p> <p>With enhanced political predictability, Ukraine becomes an attractive destination for foreign investment. A vast array of reconstruction projects generates numerous jobs and stimulates economic growth. A thoughtful approach to sustainable, green reconstruction attracts many Ukrainians who had emigrated due to the war but have not fully integrated into their new locations.</p>	<p>Sisyphus</p> <p>A prolonged stalemate arose due to the continued limited supply of weapons, restrictions on certain military operations on the Russian territory, and the exhaustion of human and technical resources on both sides. Although Western support included a limited amount of advanced weaponry and intelligence sharing, it fell short of direct military involvement from NATO forces, even in the form of a deterrent presence in Ukrainian government-controlled areas (along the border with Belarus) or intercepting missiles and UAVs crossing EU airspace.</p> <p>As a result, more than 20% of Ukraine's territory remained under Russian control, and the conflict either became frozen or ended up with a formal peace agreement. Both options only offered co-existence based on mistrust and preparation for a new cycle of aggression. Even if territorial losses were not officially acknowledged, this arrangement effectively preserved Russia's significant presence in the Black Sea.</p> <p>Ukraine did not achieve a just peace: there were no reparations, no tribunal for war criminals, and although the exchange of prisoners of war continued, some of them, as well as civilians and kidnapped children remained unreturned. Frozen assets were not transferred to Ukraine, except for accruing interest.</p> <p>Moreover, in another futile attempt to normalize relations with Russia — driven by a change in RF leadership rather than a genuine shift in its foreign and domestic policy — the West lifts some minor sanctions. This possibly occurred in exchange for Russia's security guarantees for Ukraine, which, while essentially empty proclamations, served as a bargaining chip in political negotiations, useful for RF.</p> <p>Despite the non-official consensus among key NATO members not to offer Ukraine membership, Ukraine's non-aligned status was not formally enshrined in any peace documents or its Constitution. By 2032, Ukraine had neither become a full member nor received an official invitation to join NATO, though its interoperability with NATO is extremely high.</p> <p>The overhaul of its defense infrastructure remained incomplete but advanced, with the defense sector being one of the most attractive for investments. Economic constraints allowed Ukraine to sustain around 400,000 military personnel, partly due to systemic stationing in EU countries as part of NATO comprehensive cooperation, which partially alleviated economic pressure in this area.</p>	<p>Lernaeen Swamp</p> <p>A stalemate led to a frozen conflict or a Khasavyurt-like agreement (Potemkin peace), which turned out to be nothing more than a pause in atrocities. For some time, territorial losses persisted. Russia ensures its presence in the Black Sea.</p> <p>Even though Ukraine's non-aligned status was not officially proclaimed, Western partners, despite their rhetoric about Ukraine's future in NATO, made it clear that membership was off the table. While Russian security guarantees were not to be taken seriously, bilateral agreements with Western partners and extensive NATO partnerships remained the crux of Ukraine's security, still fragile amid turmoil in Western states and rising global challenges.</p> <p>Though Ukraine did not agree to maintain a "peace-time army" capped at 350,000 personnel or limit its arsenal to 125 combat aircraft, economic hardships constrained its military capacities. The economy faced severe challenges, achieving only modest growth and lagging far beyond the pre-full-scale invasion level. Inflation and economic constraints further degraded living standards, which along with war-related migration and human losses exacerbated demographic challenges. Majority of Ukrainians who emigrated due to the war found it difficult to return, as sustainable reconstruction remained elusive.</p> <p>Civil society continued to push for reforms, but Ukraine lacked the human and economic capacities needed for rapid success. Preserving its democratic spirit but failing to formally qualify even as a «flawed democracy,» it emboldened those advocating for reduced support for Ukraine and a reestablishment of the full-fledged cooperation with Russia.</p> <p>An illusion that the West's potential rapprochement with Russia contributes to global stability emerges, reminiscent of past mistakes from the 1990s and 2010s. In another inexplicable attempt to reset relations with Russia, most sanctions were lifted. Western companies returned to the Russian market, boosting its economy. This miscalculation provided Russia with time and resources to strengthen its military capabilities and global influence, bolstering an anti-democratic axis and authoritarian regimes.</p>

	Strong	Wobbling	Weak
	<p>Due to the return of emigrants, a renewed sense of security, and a consequent rise in the birth rate (which dropped by 30% in 2022), along with increased immigration to Ukraine, the country's demographics improve significantly, exceeding 35 million.</p> <p>Civil society grows stronger, championing democratic changes and enhancing Ukraine's standing in the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index, elevating it to the level of a «flawed democracy.» Together with the government, it was successful in pushing a just peace agenda, securing the return of prisoners of war and civilians, and ensuring the punishment of Russian war criminals.</p> <p>Ukraine emerges as a respected regional power and a steadfast guardian of the European Union, contributing to regional stability and security. By becoming a stronghold at the border with the anti-democratic world, Ukraine, through its very existence, serves as a deterrent to further Russian aggression.</p>	<p>EU membership was ultimately achieved but was delayed due to a combination of factors. The pace of reforms was one of them, but the EU also faced challenges integrating such a large state because of internal pressure from some EU member states, concerned about losing their share of EU funding and redistribution of quotas.</p> <p>With about or more than half a trillion war related losses, Ukraine's economy faced significant challenges, achieving only modest growth with an average annual GDP increase of around 2%. This allows Ukraine to nearly, but not fully, restore its economy to the levels seen before the full-scale invasion.</p> <p>The fragile peace and lack of robust security guarantees resulted in limited foreign direct investments. High inflation negatively impacted living standards. Reconstruction proceeded at a moderate pace, hindered by a smaller than needed scope of investments, on the one hand, and significant level of corruption, on the other hand. Black Sea trade remained partially obstructed, impeding economic recovery.</p> <p>Many Ukrainians who had emigrated due to the war found it difficult to return, as peace seems too fragile and conditions for sustainable, green reconstruction remained underdeveloped. War-induced migration, human losses, and economic constraints keeping birth rate below 0.9, further exacerbated demographic challenges. By 2032, Ukraine's population on government-controlled territories makes about 30 million or less, which is 22 million less than in 1991.</p> <p>Years of war-related hardships and limitations caused by martial law did not affect the democratic spirit of Ukrainians, but slowed down the development of Ukraine's democratic institutions. Civil society remained a strong advocate for reforms, yet despite these efforts, Ukraine's standing in the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index remained below that of a «flawed democracy» or barely meets the minimum threshold. This situation provided grounds for those who advocated reducing support for Ukraine and even reestablishing cooperation with Russia, including lifting sanctions. However, Ukraine is not by any means a liberal autocracy or illiberal democracy.</p> <p>Consequently, Ukraine remained a regional player with limited influence, contributing to regional stability and security, as a guard of the European Union security. Most importantly, it remained on the political map as an independent, pro-western state with democratic spirit.</p>	<p>Russia did not oppose Ukraine's EU membership, but overall support for Ukraine's stability was inadequate. Even if Ukraine managed to become an EU member, its security risks remained undermining its development.</p> <p>By 2032, Ukraine faced a renewed full-scale invasion or a clear threat of one. Another conflict of higher intensity due to more advanced technologies and a renewed Russian military threatened the ultimate loss of Ukraine's sovereignty. Without NATO's full-fledged support, Ukraine risked being dismantled for decades or even centuries. Should NATO finally intervene, Ukraine might retain its independence, but the economic, demographic, and social toll would be devastating. The country would lose decades of development, grappling with mounting societal and economic problems, forfeiting its achievements in state-building and democratic development.</p>

	Strong	Wobbling	Weak
Anti-Democratic and Anti-Western	Belarusinization <p>This scenario foresees Ukraine as a country similar to Belarus under self-proclaimed President Alexandr Lukashenko. A prolonged war severely strains Ukraine's economy and military, causing significant infrastructure damage and escalating societal issues. Whether a low-intensity conflict drags on or ends with unfavorable for Ukraine peace terms, the risk of another escalation amid the Collective West's weak response makes a significant impact on Ukrainian morale. The West's reluctance to provide substantial security guarantees, a lack of NATO membership or even an official invitation, as well as adequate military and financial support (due to exhaustion, normalization of relations with Russia, eruption of other conflicts or shift of focus on global challenges like climate change, mass migration, AI-caused socio-economic disruptions etc.) leads to frustration with Western allies and growing doubts about their commitment to their own values.</p> <p>The politically active and value-driven share of the population decreased due to the losses on the frontline and shrinking Western funding for democracy development projects.. Facing economic hardships, such as potential default and soaring inflation, Ukrainians may prioritize stability over principles, leading to the rise of populism, a resurgence of a paternalistic mindset and a demand for a «strong leader» who consolidates power, reminiscent of Yanukovich's Presidential election in 2010.</p> <p>Though "strong (authoritarian) leadership" is not in reality the most effective solution, it mimics bold political decisions, including in foreign policy, stressing short-term economic benefits over strategic goals and true reforms. Unlike some middle-east countries, Ukraine is unable to preserve constructive relationships with the West turning into an authoritarian state. Instead, it might reset relations with Russia, becoming highly dependent on Moscow's political and economic backing. Despite the lack of a just peace or punishment for the previous stage of aggression, a change of people in Russian leadership—though the RF goals remain unchanged—could lead to manipulated perceptions of a new beginning, with Russia potentially feigning some sort of minimal (or no) redemption.</p> <p>In this scenario, Ukraine remains formally independent but falls within Russia's sphere of influence, prioritizing survival over development and missing another opportunity to reach its full potential.</p> <p>Ukraine's reform achievements disappear, and rights and freedoms regress. The remaining civil society either emigrates or faces oppression and imprisonment. The country forfeits its opportunity to rejoin the European family for decades and despite its drastic state strengthens the anti-democratic world.</p>		Capital Punishment <p>By 2032, Ukraine, shaped by the same factors outlined in the scenario for Belarusianization, drifts toward illiberal democracy or outright autocracy. As ideological divisions between the West and the East blur due to the West's own illiberal turn, Kyiv prioritizes economic pragmatism and security promised by RF. This shift paves the way for a renewed rapprochement with Moscow.</p> <p>This scenario would trigger another mass migration from Ukraine as a result of occupation and enable Russia to implement its genocidal policies: imprisoning and murdering dissidents, oppressing civil society, dismantling democratic institutions, enforcing Russification, and persecuting minorities. Under a formalized agreement, Ukraine assumes a subjugated role in its relationship with Russia, marking a geopolitical realignment. However, this provokes another wave of mass protests. Unlike in 2014, the Kremlin does not repeat its past "mistakes." This time, Russian forces swiftly intervene, crushing resistance and occupying Kyiv.</p> <p>The crisis culminates in a formal agreement: Ukraine is absorbed into the Russian Federation as a federal entity — either in its entirety or in major parts under government control. The remaining regions, unwilling to submit, declare sovereignty within reduced borders, while neighboring European countries may push for referenda to integrate these vulnerable and disoriented territories.</p> <p>This scenario not only represents a new tragedy for the Ukrainian people but also dashes their hopes for independence and self-determination for decades, echoing the tragic events of the 1920s.</p>
	Hungarization (Hungary's EIU DI in 2023 is 6,7 ranking it as a flawed democracy) <p>The "Hungarization" of Ukraine envisions a scenario where, by 2032, Ukraine undergoes a profound transformation toward a model resembling contemporary Hungary under Viktor Orbán. This shift would involve a centralization of power, erosion of democratic institutions, rise in populism and radicalism, and weakened checks and balances due to setbacks in reform progress.</p> <p>Although Ukraine becomes a member of the EU, it suffers a significant decline in democratic norms and institutions as a trade-off for a populist longing for a strong leader, reflecting a return to paternalistic sentiments after years of struggle. The internal EU turmoil caused by the review of funds and quotas to integrate Ukraine leads to tensions with the Ukrainian leadership, which turns into a disruptive force within the EU.</p>	Georgianization (Georgia's EIU DI in 2023 is 5,2 ranking it as a hybrid regime) <p>The "Georgianization" of Ukraine envisions a scenario where, by 2032, Ukraine undergoes a significant shift toward a model resembling contemporary Georgia under the Georgian Dream party.</p> <p>The main feature of this scenario is a complex interplay between European aspirations and growing alignment with Russian interests, driven by a lack of visible prospects for EU and NATO membership despite a pro-Western orientation among the population.</p> <p>After enduring years of attrition warfare, Ukraine finds itself economically and militarily exhausted. In contrast to the will of its citizens, a government influenced heavily by oligarchs emerges, steering state policy towards cooperation with Russia, despite maintaining pro-Western rhetoric.</p>	Serbinization (Serbia's EIU DI in 2023 is 6,3) <p>By 2032, Ukraine's struggle to integrate into the European Union and NATO has led to a strategic shift. The country's geopolitical positioning and internal issues have left it at a crossroads between global powers, with the West, China, and Russia vying for influence. In an effort to secure various concessions while avoiding full integration with any single power, Ukraine applies a strategy described as maintaining an 'interface periphery'.</p> <p>Ukrainian society is increasingly disillusioned with Western interventions. Not only the Budapest Memorandum, which was meant to guarantee Ukraine's security, is viewed as a failure, but Western approach to the war since 2014 as a 'controllable conflict', resulting in restricted aid within non-escalation policy that caused Ukraine significant human and economic losses.</p>

	Strong	Wobbling	Weak
Democratic and Anti-Western	<p>The prolonged conflict, which ended with unjust peace and loss of territories, increased disillusionment with the West, even as Ukraine remains heavily dependent on Western support. Changes of leadership in the Kremlin foster an illusion of possible normalization with Russia, leading to attempts to undermine Ukraine by further importing political corruption. Ukraine, in turn, becomes an advocate for normalizing West-Russia relations, lifting sanctions, and increasing trade, despite protests from a weakened civil society experiencing limited freedoms. Its criticism of the West helps somewhat improve relationships with some countries of the Global South.</p> <p>The country might revert to a presidential-parliamentary republic, with the President or Prime Minister using a majoritarian mandate and crises to amend the constitution, extend terms, and concentrate power. Legal reforms weaken the independence of the judiciary, similar to Hungary's judicial reforms that diminished the Constitutional Court's power and concentrated judicial appointments in the ruling party's hands.</p> <p>The government grips media outlets and restricts independent journalism, while minority groups face curtailed freedoms. Intolerance toward diversity is imposed as a social contract norm. Economic and social policies designed to appeal to populist sentiments include promises of economic revival through protectionist measures, infrastructure projects, and social welfare programs. These policies often involve increased state control over private enterprises and reduced freedoms for political opposition. The limitation of democracy leads to entrenched corruption and cronyism, with economic benefits concentrated among loyalists and government allies. Migration waves increase as citizens seek stability and better opportunities abroad, exacerbating the brain drain and undermining social cohesion.</p> <p>These developments strain relations with Western countries and institutions, leading to criticism and potential sanctions from the EU and the United States, similar to Hungary's strained relations with the EU over rule-of-law issues. This isolation impacts Ukraine's economic prospects and international standing.</p> <p>In response, Ukraine seeks closer ties with Russia, China, and other authoritarian regimes to secure economic support and political backing. However, Ukraine still might not fully qualify as an autocracy.</p> <p>If NATO membership is achieved, it does not improve domestic conditions; instead, Ukraine's increased military power enhances its role as a disruptive force.</p>	<p>This shift includes the resumption of direct confrontation, and increased economic cooperation with Moscow, including omitting remaining sanctions against Russia. Such concessions to Russian geopolitical ambitions raise concerns among Western partners, delaying EU membership even further.</p> <p>The ruling party justifies this shift as an analogue of the "strategic policy of patience," aimed at balancing peace and economic stability while avoiding direct confrontations with Russia. This approach, driven by a desire for self-preservation, curtails Ukraine's pursuit of a stronger European orientation and increases its vulnerability to Russian influence.</p> <p>Under this scenario, the political landscape would resemble the era of Viktor Yushchenko's presidency, marked by conflicts between a pro-European president and a pro-Russian prime minister. However, the specific roles are not predetermined, and the geopolitical orientations of the President, prime minister and the Parliament could be reversed, with either potentially aligning pro-Western or anti-Western.</p> <p>There is a significant setback in democratic reforms with possible Constitutional changes. Changes to the electoral process and the composition of the electoral commission could consolidate the ruling party's or President's control and diminish opposition influence.</p> <p>This realignment in domestic and foreign policies could lead to increased instability and potentially another revolution with unpredictable outcomes. If, by this time, Russia has strengthened its military and is firmly opposed to the West, it might intervene to suppress protests using its law enforcement or military forces. This could either lead to a new escalation akin to the 2022 conflict or result in the occupation of Ukraine. Alternatively, Russia may continue to enhance its influence in Ukraine through strategic investments in political elites, resulting in further destabilization and de-democratization.</p>	<p>The EU's inability to provide substantial support, refusal to provide Ukraine with frozen Russian assets or impose reparation mechanisms, as well as constant delay of membership has aggravated anti-Western sentiment. The government has used this discontent to justify stronger ties with China by means of state-controlled media and censorship on the Internet. The portrayal of the West as unreliable and exploitative has helped to solidify this stance.</p> <p>Economically, Ukraine has become heavily reliant on Chinese loans for large-scale infrastructure projects. Although these projects appear impressive, they often fail to deliver expected benefits and suffer from poor environmental and labor standards. Ukraine's economic growth remains sluggish, hindered by corruption and lack of meaningful reforms.</p> <p>Cooperation with China opens doors for restoration of cooperation with Russia, which expands its influence through energy ties and cultural outreach. This cooperation further impedes democratization of the country.</p> <p>Both anti-democratic powers exploit Ukraine's precarious position to further their interests, contributing to global instability. Ukraine's non-aligned status promotes military cooperation with Russia and China and facilitates arms trade with the Global South, including countries with anti-Western stances.</p>

	Strong	Wobbling	Weak
Anti-Democratic and Pro-Western	<p>Middle-Easternization</p> <p>Economic hardships, exhaustion of civil society and radicalization of society in general brings Ukraine through dramatic political changes. Once a prominent case of democratic transformations in a post-Soviet state, the country has shifted towards a sort of liberal autocracy, as societal contract changes to prioritization of security in exchange to freedoms.</p> <p>Internally, the lack of freedoms has led to sporadic protests and civil unrest, however they are not numerous enough to reverse de-democratization.</p> <p>However, the West that decided to not take any additional risks with regards to ensuring Ukraine's security through NATO or any other equivalent of Article 5, on the one hand, and being firm with no-direct confrontation with Russia policy but wanting to keep Russian border as far as possible from EU, on the other hand, prefers to ignore roll back from democracy and keep Ukraine close as a fortress on the border with anti-western world.</p> <p>Amid curtailed democratic freedoms, consolidation of power in the hands of a single leader or ruling party and dismantling of democratic institutions, strict controls over the media, judiciary, Ukraine continues getting western support without completion of the EU integration. Western nations have continued to provide significant economic aid and investment, and increased trade with Ukraine.</p> <p>Country leadership uses this support to bolster its position domestically, portraying its alliance with the West and capitalizing on Ukraine's prominent role in European security as a key achievement.</p> <p>It concentrates on militarization, enhances its own defense production for domestic needs and sales abroad, and continues strengthening ties with NATO without prospects of membership but in new hybrid formats. Ukraine's military has undergone substantial modernization and training. The country has become a key player in regional security dynamics and uses its enhanced military capabilities to assert its influence.</p> <p>Relations with Russia remain strained, despite similarities in approaches to governance, the threat of absorption by Russia outweighs any benefits of economic and political cooperation with RF. Moscow views Ukraine's alignment with the West as a pretext to continue its aggression on a level allowed by Ukraine's military capabilities - from manageable conflict in the East of Ukraine, characterized by sporadic skirmishes and a tense but stable front line, or a continued high-intensity conflict.</p>	<p>Dead End</p> <p>An anti-democratic, pro-Western, weak or wobbling Ukraine will not last long as an independent state. If Ukraine were to shift towards authoritarianism, the West may use it to cut Western support in hope to stabilize relations with Russia. RF could exploit this turn of events for its propaganda, justifying the need to eliminate weak anti-Russian 'Ukrainian regime'. This narrative would be bolstered by pointing out the flaws in Ukraine's governance, despite Russia's own regime being far more oppressive and deadly. Without the crucial support from Western nations, with damaged economy and poorly supplied army, Ukraine could quickly succumb to Russian military and political pressure.</p> <p>The consequences of Ukraine falling under Russian occupation would be severe. Historical precedents suggest that Ukraine would face widespread atrocities, including genocide and forced Russification. The fate of Ukraine could mirror its past under Soviet occupation, where dissent was brutally suppressed, and Ukrainian culture and identity were systematically eradicated.</p>	

Interim Conclusions

Ukraine stands at a crossroads, where its future will be shaped not only by geopolitical factors but also by the outcomes of the ongoing war, its ability to preserve and strengthen democracy, the success of its foreign policy, the pace of socio-economic recovery, the vibrancy of its civil society, demographic trends, and, most critically, its capacity to ensure long-term security.

Achieving lasting security, a critical pillar of economic development, will require significant investments in the defense sector, leveraging Ukraine's extensive experience as a weapons producer and its position as the most battle-hardened army in Europe. This security should be further guaranteed through not just alignment with NATO, but full membership in the Alliance.

The debate over Ukraine's NATO membership has been ongoing and intense, with much of the focus revolving around Russia. The arguments from both sides—those in favor and those against—have been captured in two open letters published just before and after the 75th NATO Summit.

Arguments against Ukraine's NATO Accession (based on an open letter published in the Guardian on the eve of 75th NATO Summit)	Arguments for Ukraine's accession to NATO (based on an open letter , an appeal to the one against Ukraine's NATO Accession, published in the Guardian after the 75th NATO Summit)
<p>Potential Escalation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> NATO's Article 5 requires members to defend each other if attacked. If Ukraine joins NATO, the U.S. and allies would be obligated to fight Russia if it invades Ukraine again. As of now NATO allies have shown limited willingness to engage directly, despite supporting Ukraine's resistance. NATO membership could exacerbate the conflict, potentially leading to a prolonged standoff between major nuclear powers. Current U.S. policy under both President Biden and former President Trump avoids direct military engagement in Ukraine, fearing direct confrontation with Russia and escalation to a broader conflict like "World War III". The primary goal of NATO is to defend its existing members; admitting Ukraine might undermine this objective and increase risks for the alliance. <p>Ineffectiveness as a Deterrent:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simply joining NATO would not necessarily deter Russia from future aggression. <p>Reverse Impact on Ukrainian:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promising NATO membership could incentivize Russia to continue its aggression to prevent Ukraine's integration into NATO. Ukrainians deserve to make strategic decisions based on realistic assessments, not on external promises that may not materialize. 	<p>Reasserting NATO's Role:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Russia's systematic war crimes, including massacres and torture in Ukraine, demonstrate its intent to annihilate Ukraine rather than address genuine security concerns. Extending security guarantees to Ukraine would reassert NATO's effectiveness and commitment to global security, reinforcing its role as a critical international alliance. Russia's acceptance of NATO expansions by Finland and Sweden in 2022 suggests that fears of provoking Russia might be overstated. A strong NATO stance could prevent further wars by demonstrating a united front. <p>Deterrence of Russian Aggression:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> NATO membership would provide Ukraine with stronger security guarantees, potentially deterring further Russian aggression. Appeasing Russia has historically emboldened its expansionism. As a result of its imperialistic endeavors Russia has historically invaded non-NATO countries such as Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, but has respected the territorial boundaries of NATO members. Strengthening NATO by including Ukraine would enhance the alliance's ability to counteract Russian militarism and expansionist ambitions. <p>Countering Global Anti-Western Alliances:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Russia is actively forming alliances with countries like China, North Korea, and Iran, all of which oppose democratic values and stability. NATO membership for Ukraine would counterbalance Russia's global anti-western efforts and protect democratic norms, reinforcing international law and human rights and showing a commitment to protecting nations from aggression.

Recent developments have debunked the myth of the Russian army's invincibility, the supposed inviolability of Russia's "red lines," and the notion that Russia is afraid of NATO's expansion, as evidenced by Finland's accession. Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2014 was not triggered by NATO enlargement; in fact, Moscow was aware that NATO had no serious intention or consensus to offer Ukraine membership, a stance that remains unchanged. This suggests that Russia's fixation on Ukraine is a more complex issue, rooted not in NATO but in Russian imperialism and revanchism. In the long run, Ukraine may struggle to achieve full development of its potential if it remains outside NATO, as it would continue to be a target for Russian open and hybrid aggression.

NATO

NATO in Europe

The world's **most powerful military alliance** has 32 members. **Russia opposes NATO bases near its borders** and has asked for guarantees that NATO's membership won't expand eastwards.



Currently, NATO favors a 'creative' approach to establishing new formats of cooperation with Ukraine, without extending a formal invitation or specifying a timeline for accession. As a result, Ukraine's relationship with NATO stands out as the most complex and developed among potential members.

Ukraine-NATO Relationships Timeframe

In 1992, Ukraine initiated formal relations with NATO by joining the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, which later became the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, and the Partnership for Peace program. It also developed its first Individual Partnership Program and established liaison officers at NATO headquarters.

In 1997, the NATO-Ukraine Charter was signed at the Madrid Summit, creating the NATO-Ukraine Commission and opening the NATO Information and Documentation Center in Kyiv. Ukraine's Mission to NATO was established, and in 1999, the NATO Liaison Office in Ukraine began operations to enhance cooperation.

By 2002, Ukraine shifted from non-aligned policies towards seeking NATO membership, adopting the "State Strategy of Ukraine towards NATO" and initiating the NATO-Ukraine Action Plan. The Verkhovna Rada ratified a Memorandum of Understanding in 2004, and the Joint Working Group Ukraine-NATO on defense-technical cooperation was formed.

In 2005, the Ukraine-NATO Commission in Vilnius marked the start of an Intensified Dialogue on membership and reform programs. However, the 2006 election of pro-Russian forces slowed progress, although Ukraine applied for the Membership Action Plan at the 2008 Bucharest Summit, receiving ambiguous responses. Later, Annual National Programs were introduced to replace the Membership Action Plan.

Under President Yanukovich (2010), Ukraine continued NATO cooperation but stopped pursuing membership, deepening ties with Russia. Following the Revolution of Dignity in 2014, Ukraine repealed its non-aligned status, intensified NATO alignment, and engaged in joint exercises. The Agreement on NATO Representation's status and the Ukraine-NATO Platform were established, and in 2019, Ukraine's Constitutional amendments affirmed Euro-Atlantic aspirations.

In 2020, Ukraine joined NATO's Enhanced Opportunities Partnership, boosting military dialogue and interoperability. The 2021 Summit affirmed Ukraine's future with NATO, though no specifics were provided. After the full-scale Russian invasion, NATO hesitated on decisive measures like a no-fly zone or fighter jets, with Stoltenberg citing ongoing support.

In late 2022, Ukraine applied for expedited NATO membership, but consensus within the Alliance was elusive, linking membership to conflict success. The Vilnius Summit in 2023 announced the Ukraine-NATO Council, allowing Ukraine to participate on equal terms with NATO members, and emphasized continued support for Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration.

2024 NATO Summit refrained from discussing Ukraine's invitation but reaffirmed support for its integration path. The Ukraine Compact was approved, enhancing security architecture, and NATO's NSATU mission was established in Germany for long-term partner assistance. The NATO Representation in Ukraine was upgraded to a Special Representative role, and Ukraine signed 22 security cooperation agreements with Western partners. NATO continues to focus on enhancing Ukraine's defense capabilities through the Comprehensive Assistance Package (CAP), evolving into a multi-year assistance program aimed at full operational compatibility with NATO.

From the Analytical report. The War of Narratives: Ukraine's Image in the Media / authors: O. Davlikanova, A. Kostenko et al – Kyiv: LLC «Vistka», 2023. – 42 p.

Another crucial task for Ukraine is to strengthen its democratic institutions. While Ukraine is undeniably an aspiring democracy, any slowdown in its democratization—though unlikely—could undermine support from its Western allies. Although the West has a history of cooperating with non-democratic but pro-Western countries due to economic benefits and regional geopolitical interests, Ukraine's geographic position makes it particularly vulnerable. Its proximity to Russia diminishes the likelihood of remaining independent and pro-Western if it drifts away from democratic values. Should Ukraine stray from the democratic path, it risks becoming a Russian satellite or even being absorbed into Russia. Thus, Ukraine's democratization is an existential matter.

Special attention should be given to the issue of nationalism, which has often been a part of Ukraine's future scenarios before 2022 and which we intentionally excluded. The issue remains misunderstood in the West and is actively used by Russian propaganda to misrepresent Ukraine's aspirations for independence and to discredit its efforts to sever ties with Russia. While Ukrainian nationalism has a liberating, decolonial nature, Russian nationalism is aggressive and colonial. Ukraine's anti-Russian stance is a natural reaction to Russia's genocidal actions, both in the past and in the present.

Ukrainians' aspirations for independence were labeled "nationalist", which carried negative

connotations. US President George Bush Sr., when speaking in Kyiv, called on the deputies to support Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms and abandon "suicidal nationalism".* "I come here to tell you: we support the struggle in this great country for democracy and economic reform. In Moscow, I outlined our approach. We will support those in the center and the republics who pursue freedom, democracy and economic liberty... Americans will not support those who seek independence in order to replace a far-off tyranny with a local despotism. They will not aid those who promote a suicidal nationalism based upon ethnic hatred."** The US president supported democratic developments in the USSR and emphasized the need for close cooperation between the USA and the USSR. This speech went down in history as the "Chicken Kyiv Speech" and in retrospect "may have been the worst speech ever by an American chief executive".**

The speech was labelled so disparagingly by New York Times columnist William Safire to underline its "colossal misjudgment", very weak tone and miscalculation. Linking the narrative of "Ukrainian nationalism" to the "nuclear danger" allegedly created by Ukraine initiated the wrong interpretation of Ukrainian nationalism – which is essentially a liberation movement from a repressive totalitarian empire – as a threat to collective security.

It should be emphasized that radical groups made up a very small share of the patriotic population.

Without denying the dangerous tendencies of ultra-nationalism, Ukrainian right-wing forces cannot be compared to Western European ones. Historical fascism, which was created in Germany, Italy, and Spain, seeks the hegemony of its own national state. Instead, Ukrainian nationalism is a rebel nationalism fighting against an occupying power, a totalitarian regime, for its own independence. In fact, radical groups enjoy approval only when their actions are designed to protect Ukrainian statehood.

As for the ideas about oppression of national minorities or other groups, the use of violence or the disruption of events, this part of the agenda contradicts the Ukrainian people's struggle for freedom – not only of Ukraine from the Russian Federation, but for the personal freedom of every single person in a democratic and inclusive society.

Without diminishing the need for a critical attitude towards right-wing radical movements, it is worth noting that in Ukraine, far-right ideas have never enjoyed popular support, unlike in the Russian Federation. In the entire history of Ukrainian parliamentarianism, representatives of the extreme right entered the Parliament only once, as a result of the elections in 2012, receiving 10.44 percent of the vote. This was a response to the strengthening of authoritarianism during the Yanukovich presidency.

* "Chicken Kyiv. How the USA and Bush Sr. tried to save the Soviet Union from collapse", Om TV. 2021.

Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wo_3-_UNgwU.

** Carafano, James (4 квітня 2011): How to be a freedom fighter. The Washington Examiner. Original archive, June 10, 2014. Available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20140610060102/http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P2-28353164.html>

Ukraine must carefully shape its foreign policy due to its significant dependence on its partners and continue information campaigns to close the mental-map gaps of its allies. Positioned at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, Ukraine will continue to be central for the strategic interests of global powers but it should be better studied and understood.

As for the outcomes of war, the fact that, after ten years of Russian aggression against Ukraine and three years of full-scale invasion, the West still fails to adequately respond to Ukraine's vision of victory—including restoration of the territorial integrity and reparations—and lacks far-reaching strategy to fulfill this vision, is a dangerous path. Instead, by remaining open to middle-ground agreements with Russia, the West risks undermining its own long-term security.

The range of peace plans and differing ideas among Western elites and other actors globally highlights a lack of unified position of the international community in response to undeniably unjustified aggression. Only Mike Pompeo and Borys Johnson's proposals reflect Ukraine's genuine interests.



Source: <https://rtvi.com/stories/stambulskie-soglasheniya-plyus-parad-mirnyh-planov-po-ukraine/>

Peace plans

West	Ukraine	Russia	Other plans
<p>Though Biden's Administration claimed that an official position is to support Ukraine for as long as it takes or as long as it can, there are other suggestions. On the eve of Presidential Elections, several peace plans were revealed for the public.</p> <p>RESEARCH REPORTCENTER FOR AMERICAN SECURITY "America First, Russia, & Ukraine"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement a formal U.S. policy to seek a cease-fire and negotiated settlement between Ukraine and RF. Future U.S. military aid would be contingent upon Ukraine's participation in peace talks with Russia. The US will increase its assistance to Ukraine if Russia refuses to negotiate. The U.S. would continue to provide military support to Ukraine to prevent further Russian advances and attacks as part of security guarantees. NATO membership for Ukraine is off the table for two decades in exchange for a comprehensive and verifiable peace deal with security guarantees. A long-term security architecture for Ukraine's defense, focusing on bilateral security arrangements, should be included in the peace deal. In line with Richard Haass and Charles Kupchan proposals, in exchange for adhering to a cease-fire, establishing a demilitarized zone, and participating in peace talks, Russia could receive limited sanctions relief. Ukraine would not be required to abandon its goal of regaining all its territory but would commit to using diplomacy rather than force. The full lifting of sanctions and normalization of relations with Russia would be contingent upon Russia signing a peace agreement acceptable to Ukraine. Additionally, levies on Russian energy sales could be used to fund Ukrainian reconstruction. 	<p>President Zelensky's Peace Formula</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Radiation and nuclear safety 2. Food security 3. Energy security 4. Release of all prisoners and deportees 5. Implementation of the UN Charter and restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity and the world order 6. Withdrawal of Russian troops and cessation of hostilities 7. Justice 8. Immediate protection of the environment 9. Prevention of escalation 10. Confirmation of the end of the war <p>President Zelensky's Victory Plan (while focused on the wartime period, it provides some insights into Ukraine's strategic needs)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ukraine's invitation to NATO now and guaranteed membership in a short-term perspective. Prevent buffer zones in Ukraine. Enhance air defense to protect cities and collaborate with neighboring countries for joint defensive operations. Real-time access to satellite reconnaissance and continued strengthening of Ukraine's defense forces. Deploy a comprehensive non-nuclear strategic deterrence package on Ukrainian territory to limit Russia's military capabilities. Encourage international investment in critical natural resources like uranium, titanium, lithium, and graphite. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> After the war, Ukraine may replace some U.S. military contingents in Europe, strengthening NATO's defense capabilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ukraine must enshrine a non-aligned status in its Constitution and not join NATO or any other alliance. Ukraine must enshrine in its Constitution the concept of a "peace-time army" with 350,000 personnel and have a limited range of weapons, for example, no more than 125 combat aircraft. No Western peacekeepers in Ukraine. However, if the option is accepted, Kazakhs, Chinese, and North Koreans may be involved as peacekeepers from the Russian side. Ukraine must completely withdraw from the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Russia will transfer control of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant and a demilitarized 100-kilometer zone along the Dnieper River to the Black Sea to Ukraine. Russia is prepared to discuss transferring full control of the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions to Ukraine. Crimea may be designated as a special demilitarized territory under dual control of Ukraine and Russia (suggestion is not on the table any more). Ukraine must commit not to cut off water supplies to Crimea. The US will lift restrictions on high-tech exports to Russia, as well as sanctions against the oil and gas sector and the banking system. Russia has no objections to Ukraine joining the EU. A ceasefire along the front line should be implemented immediately after the start of ceasefire negotiations in the format of Russia-US-China-EU-Ukraine. The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty should be revived, and Ukraine should sign it. 'Denazification' and 'protection' of Russian language, church and culture in Ukraine. 	<p>China</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respect for the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of all countries: All nations, regardless of size or power, should be treated as equal members of the international community. Rejection of the "Cold War mentality": Security for one country should not come at the expense of others. Military alliances should not be expanded or strengthened in ways that disregard the legitimate security concerns of all nations. Cessation of hostilities: All parties should support Russia and Ukraine in resuming direct dialogue to de-escalate the situation and work toward a comprehensive ceasefire. Resumption of peace negotiations: Dialogue and negotiations are the only viable solution to the Ukrainian crisis. Resolution of the humanitarian crisis: Civilian safety must be effectively protected, and humanitarian corridors should be established for the evacuation of civilians from conflict zones, with efforts to increase humanitarian aid. Protection of civilians and prisoners of war: All parties should strictly adhere to international humanitarian law, avoid targeting civilians or civilian infrastructure, protect vulnerable groups, and respect the fundamental rights of prisoners of war. Ensuring the security of nuclear power plants: Armed attacks on nuclear power plants and other peaceful nuclear facilities should be opposed, and all parties should comply with international law to prevent nuclear accidents. Reduction of strategic risks: The use of nuclear weapons and the conduct of nuclear wars should be unequivocally opposed. Promotion of grain exports: All parties should fully and effectively implement the Black Sea Grain Initiative to ensure balanced grain export operations. Termination of unilateral sanctions: Unilateral sanctions and maximum pressure do not solve problems; they only create new ones.

West	Ukraine	Russia	Other plans
<p>Former US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's «peace plan».</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unleash America's energy potential, restore ties with Saudi Arabia and Israel, and work together against Iran. • Implement real sanctions against Russia, including the removal of exemptions for Russian banks involved in energy extraction – a crucial revenue source for the Kremlin's military machine. • Expand the American defence industry and require NATO allies to spend at least 3% of their GDP on defence. • Establish a US\$500 billion «lend-lease» programme for Ukraine, which involves providing military aid on a loan basis rather than as a grant. • Remove all restrictions on the types of weapons Ukraine can receive and use. 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for the stability of industrial and supply chains: Joint efforts are needed to mitigate the impact of the crisis on international cooperation in energy, finance, food trade, and transportation, and to avoid disruptions to the global economy. • Assistance with post-war reconstruction: The international community should take measures to support post-conflict recovery in affected areas. <p>Vatican</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calls for Ukraine to wave a “white flag” and negotiate an end to the war with Russia. • Russian invasion is called “unjust”. • Russia “should first and foremost cease fire”.
<p>Borys Johnson's plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The West permits Ukraine to use ATACMS and Storm Shadow missiles, along with other advanced weapons, to target airfields within Russia. Once Russian troops are pushed back, a potential deal with RF is anticipated. • Russia retreats to the borders as of February 24, 2022. Ukrainian territory under Kyiv's control is recognized as an independent country with prospects for rapid accession to the EU and NATO. • After the war, some Ukrainian troops are stationed in European countries, replacing part of the 70,000 US troops deployed to deter potential Russian aggression. This arrangement allows for a reduction in US forces and encourages European countries to increase their own defense efforts. 	<p>Istanbul Agreements (2022)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russia is generally not opposed to Ukraine pursuing membership in the EU, but Ukraine is prohibited from joining any military alliances, including NATO. • Ukraine committed to adhering to the «three non-nuclear principles»: not to accept, produce, or acquire nuclear weapons. • Ukraine commits not to allow foreign troops to use its military infrastructure and not to host international military exercises. • Foreign weapons supplies to Kyiv or their acquisition by Ukrainian authorities are banned; • The Ukrainian military must be reduced to a specific size. Russia proposed limiting Ukraine's armed forces to 85,000 troops, 342 tanks, 519 artillery pieces, and restricting missile range to 40 kilometers. On the other hand, Ukraine demanded 250,000 troops, 800 tanks, and 1,900 artillery units. 		<p>Lula da Silva's proposal (not a detailed plan)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • collective efforts by a «group of peace-loving countries» will eventually lead to the end of hostilities. • an immediate ceasefire and the commitment of all involved parties to work towards a «just and durable peace plan.» • Ukraine should «cede the Crimean Peninsula to Russia» in order to achieve peace. <p>Turkey (alleged)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediate cessation of hostilities and freezing the war along the existing front line. • Joint security and territorial integrity guarantees for Ukraine from the U.S. and Russia, based on the actual borders at the time of the ceasefire. • Mutual commitment of the United States and Russia to the non-usage of nuclear weapons under any circumstances, along with the renewal of the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty, with a clause preventing unilateral withdrawal in the future.

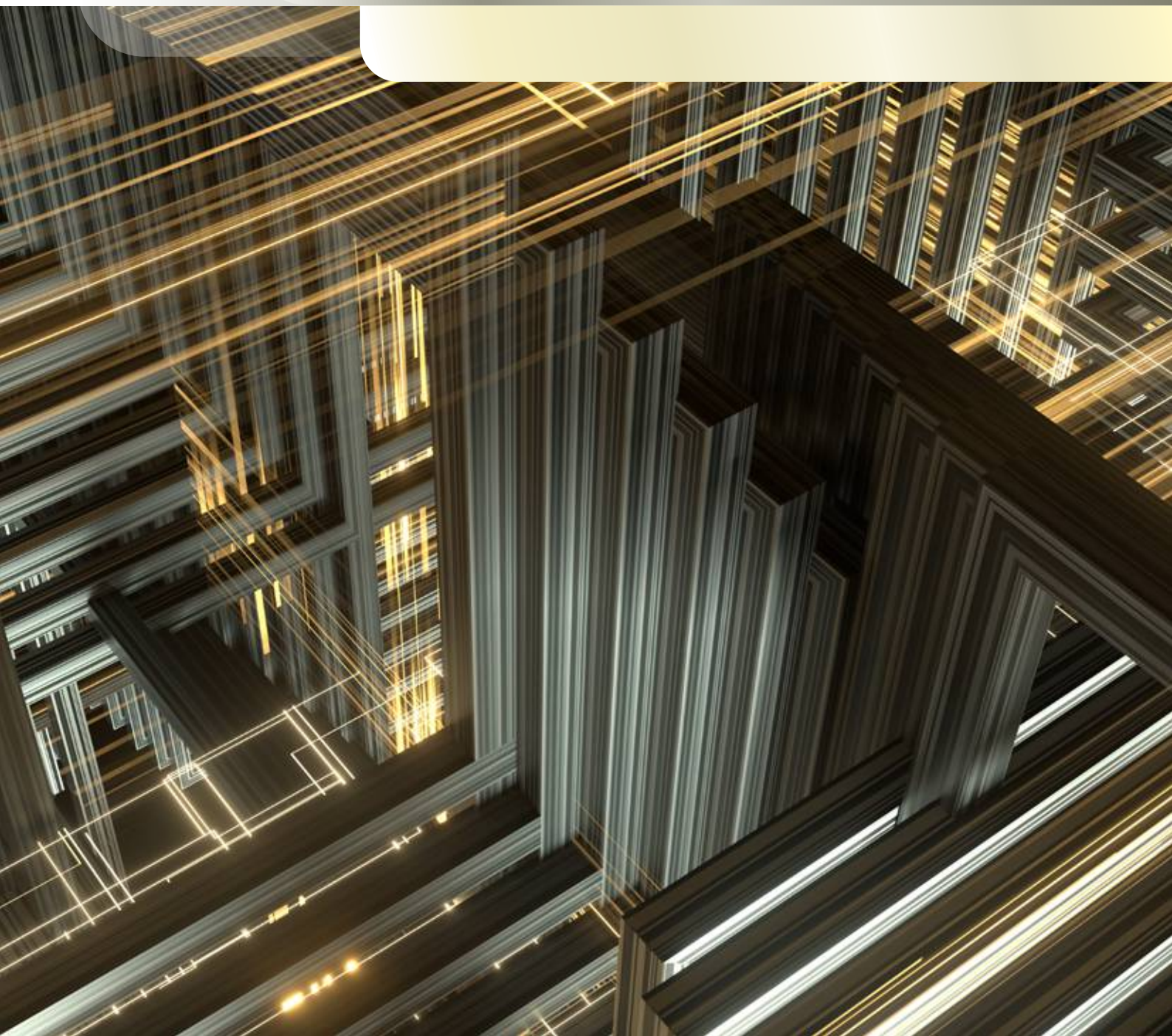
West	Ukraine	Russia	Other plans
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russia declares that the "special military operation" (invasion) has fulfilled its mission and "de-Nazified" Ukraine. Special protective measures may be introduced for the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine. • With a change in US leadership, there is a potential for global rapprochement with Russia and a return to the days when Russia was a respected partner of the G8 and even of NATO. However, achieving a favorable outcome is considered possible only from the position of force. 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ukraine's commitment to remain non-aligned, neutral, demilitarized, and unaligned until 2040, with guarantees of Ukraine's non-aligned status until that time. • A ban on interference in the internal affairs of another country in any way that could destabilize its government. • Commitment to hold referendums in 2040: an all-Ukrainian referendum on the country's foreign policy course, and referendums under international supervision in all Ukrainian territories annexed by Russia at the time of freezing the war. • Exchange of prisoners and other detainees under the "all-for-all" formula, including the exchange of the bodies of the deceased. • Support for Ukraine's aspirations to join the European Union from the U.S., Russia, and Turkey, while Ukraine is prohibited from joining NATO. <p>Ramafosy's Plan (African)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resolve conflicts peacefully through negotiations. • Initiate peace talks as soon as possible. • Both sides must engage in de-escalation. • Ensure the sovereignty of states and peoples in accordance with the UN Charter. • Provide security guarantees to all countries. • Facilitate the movement of grain and fertilizers from both Russia and Ukraine. • Offer humanitarian support to those affected by military actions. • Address the issues of prisoner exchanges and the return of children. • Rebuild and rehabilitate damaged areas. • Strengthen cooperation with African countries. <p>Indonesia Plan (2023)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement a ceasefire based on current positions. • Create a demilitarized zone by withdrawing Russian and Ukrainian forces 15 kilometers from the front lines. • Place the demilitarized zone under the supervision of UN peacekeepers. • Conduct a UN-supervised referendum to "objectively determine the preferences of the majority of residents in various disputed regions" (specific regions are not detailed).

Ukraine is one of the most experienced and capable military powers in Europe. It is firmly committed to democratic values and is a distinct nation, separate from Russian mentality and history, with its own rich cultural heritage. Additionally, Ukraine is abundant in natural resources containing about 5% of the world's mineral wealth despite covering only 0.4% of the Earth's surface, ranking in the top 10 worldwide for materials like titanium, ball clays, iron ores, gallium, and holding significant deposits of lithium, graphite, and magnesium.

Therefore, it is crucial for Ukraine and its partners to learn from past mistakes and implement policies that will secure Ukraine's future as a sovereign and prosperous state within the European family and under NATO-umbrella. That is why ensuring favorable for Ukraine outcomes of war, including just peace, is essential.

Chapter 3.

REALITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS



While the scenarios presented here result from a more ‘mathematical’ approach—driven by defined variables rather than specific realities—none of them can be dismissed as impossible. The arc of history has repeatedly shown that the unthinkable can become inevitable when hesitation and miscalculation align.

Ukraine’s path to becoming a stable and prosperous democracy is precariously narrow. The forces seeking to derail it are relentless, while those meant to safeguard it remain uncertain, hesitant, and often divided. The West, if it is to prevent Ukraine’s subjugation, must abandon the half-measures and illusions that have defined too much of its response. It must act with clarity, guided not by wishful thinking but by the stark reality of what is at stake—its own security, its own credibility, and the very integrity of the democratic world.

What unfolds in the next few years will determine the frontier between democracy and autocracy. That frontier could remain on Ukraine’s eastern border, or, should Western resolve falter, it may shift uncomfortably westward. If the West itself drifts from its principles, if its ideological foundations blur, the new world order that emerges will be neither stable nor benign.

The recommendations initially drawn for Scenarios: Ukraine 2032 have since evolved into a broader policy paper: *Firewalling the Future: Strategies for a Resilient Europe and a Secure Ukraine*. Below is a brief summary and key recommendations. The full text, however, outlines in detail the steps required to meet this moment—and to ensure that Ukraine’s fate is not sealed by default.

The paper addresses the global crisis triggered by Russia’s unjustified aggression against Ukraine, focusing on recent developments and actionable steps to prevent Ukraine from becoming a permanent “trolley problem.” The objective is clear: ensure Ukraine’s future as a strong Western democracy, not a devastated buffer state falling under Russian control due to wavering support.

Recent turmoil within the collective West—marked by isolationist currents, short-sighted «pragmatism,» rising populism and right-wing moods, and NATO’s vulnerabilities—has only reinforced the consequences of past half-hearted policies. Calls for «realism,» voiced since Ukraine’s independence, have repeatedly meant accommodating Russia at Ukraine’s expense. The result: hundreds of thousands dead and wounded, millions forcibly displaced, the loss of 20% of Ukrainian territory, and over \$400 billion in economic devastation.

Beyond Ukraine, Russian aggression has accelerated the formation of a multipolar world, jeopardized global security, and exposed weaknesses in the West’s strategic posture. Repeating past mistakes in even graver circumstances will yield far worse results. The trajectory is clear: unless reversed, the war threatens to escalate into a larger European conflict by 2030, with World War III no longer an implausible scenario.

The paper issues a stark warning. It outlines immediate steps to break this cycle, ensuring Ukraine’s survival and strengthening the democratic world before it is too late. Echoing Winston Churchill’s famous words on the choice between war and dishonor, sacrificing Ukraine will not secure peace—it will only invite a ceaseless hybrid war against the West or an even greater reckoning.

Key Recommendations:

Defense and Security

- **Strengthen NATO's Unity and Readiness:** NATO must address vulnerabilities exposed by Russia's aggression against Ukraine and avoid escalating tensions.
- **Provide Unwavering Military Support to Ukraine in the Face of Aggression:** Continue supporting Ukraine with both defensive and offensive military aid, ensuring it remains a robust partner in NATO's strategic defense.
- **Address Alliance's Fears:** NATO must reshape its mindset by recognizing Ukraine as an asset to European security, not a liability. Ukraine, with its largest and most capable military in Europe, already contributes significantly to NATO's defense readiness, particularly in modern hybrid warfare. NATO should apply a forward-looking approach, integrating Ukraine as an indispensable part of its future security, and developing its defense capabilities as NATO's eastern flank stronghold. The Alliance already uses Ukraine's combat experience for NATO's operational effectiveness improvement.
- **Ensure European Defense Readiness:** Strengthen Europe's ability to defend itself, including Ukraine, ideally with U.S. support but independently if necessary. Expand defense industry, increase defense spending to minimum 3 % or strategic 5% of GDP, boost European and Ukrainian defense production, expand procurement from the U.S. and allies, and strengthen deterrence capabilities.
- **Enhance Intra-Industry Cooperation:** Streamline and make more effective European defense industry cooperation by reducing bureaucratic barriers. This will ensure a more agile and responsive defense ecosystem capable of supporting Ukraine and NATO's strategic needs.
- **Invest in Ukraine's Military-Industrial Complex:** Explore and expand investment opportunities to increase defense manufacturing in Ukraine. Strengthening Ukraine's military-industrial complex will not only ensure long-term self-sufficiency for European security but also enhance cost-effectiveness.
- **Secure the Black Sea Region:** Reinforce littoral states' military capacity and reinforce diplomatic engagement of Mediterranean partners.
- **Reframe Europe's Role:** Lead European security efforts with U.S. backing, integrating Euro-Asian security considerations.
- **Enhance NATO's defensive posture:** Consider deploying NATO forces in strategic locations, including Ukraine, to deter future Russian aggression.
- **Deploy a European deterrent force:** Once a true ceasefire is established and European forces are stationed along the line of separation, they should be ready to intervene militarily if Russia breaches the terms of the agreement.
- **Consider security guarantees:** If NATO membership is delayed, Ukraine should be able to make full use of meaningful bilateral security pacts and deterrence measures. If Ukraine is left in geopolitical limbo, risking gradual erosion of its sovereignty through imported destabilization or creeping occupation, it should reconsider its nuclear status.
- **Counter Russian Influence:** Take adequate measures to disrupt the authoritarian axis of power—Russia, China, Iran, North Korea—and their potential allies. Counter Russia's malevolent propaganda across the Global South, as well as in Europe and the U.S.

Sanctions and Economic Deterrence

- **Confiscate and Redirect Frozen Russian Assets:** Allocate \$300 billion in frozen Russian assets to Ukraine's defense and reconstruction efforts.
- **Strengthen Sanctions Enforcement:** Strengthen sanctions by closing loopholes that allow Russia to access high-tech goods and continue benefiting from energy resource sales. This loophole enables Russia to allocate significant resources to its military, with defense spending projected to reach \$145 billion in 2025.
- **Impose a War Tax on Russian LNG:** Redirect revenues from Russian energy exports into Ukraine's defense and recovery.
- **Enhance Energy Independence from Russia:** Reduce European reliance on Russian LNG by diversifying suppliers and increasing investments in renewables.
- **Prevent Premature Sanctions Relief:** Sanctions should remain in place until Russia fully withdraws from occupied territories and pays reparations. Premature desanctioning is an investment in European instability and new aggression. A stringent export control regime to prevent Russia from developing or significantly increasing high-tech weapons production should remain in place for several years or even decades to ensure that Russia's intentions can be reliably verified before any trust can be established regarding its compliance with international security norms.

Ukraine's Recovery and Reconstruction

- **Continue Strengthening Democratic Institutions and Rule of Law in Ukraine:** It is critical not to reduce support for Ukraine's democratic development, especially from the United States. Continued assistance is essential to ensure the country's progress toward a more robust democracy. The rise of populism and right-wing sentiments in the West, coupled with economic challenges and a shift toward internal priorities, poses a risk of abandoning Ukraine at its most vulnerable—during the recovery from the largest war in Europe since WWII.
- **Continue Strengthening Civil Society Efforts:** Ukrainian civil society has proven its resilience and courage, playing a pivotal role in supporting the Ukrainian military right after the full-scale invasion and advocating for the country's interests. Strengthening civil society will be crucial for ensuring long-term stability and democratic resilience in the years ahead. This includes efforts to achieve sustainable peace, support the revitalization of the democratic process before and after the lifting of martial law, and facilitate societal healing. Given the protracted nature of the war and Russia's unchanging geopolitical goals, these efforts should not be contingent on the war's conclusion.
- **Support Ukraine's EU Accession Process:** Accelerate Ukraine's integration into the European Union for long-term stability of the region.
- **Implement Strict Oversight on Reconstruction Funds:** Ensure purpose-compliance, transparency and accountability in the allocation of aid for rebuilding Ukraine
- **Secure Long-Term Economic Stability for Ukraine:** Implement policies to attract investment, rebuild infrastructure, and create sustainable economic growth of Ukraine.
- **Enhance Historical and Cultural Resistance to Russian Narratives:** Combat Russian propaganda by reinforcing Ukraine's national identity and historical accuracy and actively promote them among allies to counter Russia's malignant narratives around Ukraine.

- Refrain from Immediate Initiatives on Ukraine-Russia Reconciliation: Any attempts to foster reconciliation initiatives by the West should be postponed until significant political and societal reforms are undertaken within Russia to ensure that any engagement does not undermine Ukraine's sovereignty or security. Without such shifts in government and society, only a coexistence marked by minimal trust, respect, and shared values, is feasible. Historical precedents indicate that Russia has consistently pursued an agenda of regional/global domination, fueled by renewed imperialism, over the past 30 years. Premature initiatives will damage Ukrainian societal healing, which is already a challenge given the variety of war-affected groups and lacking funds to provide well-tailored support to millions of people.

Source: Firewalling the Future: Strategies for a Resilient Europe and a Secure Ukraine, (2025).

Acknowledgements

We are deeply grateful to the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, the Center for Geopolitics as well as the Cambridge Ukrainian Studies at Cambridge for enabling this intellectual endeavor to project scenarios for Ukraine a decade after the full-scale invasion. A special acknowledgement goes to Professor Brendan Simms, a Professor of the History of International Relations in the Department of Politics and International Studies at the University of Cambridge, for his steadfast support throughout this process as well as Professor Rory Finnin, Professor of the Cambridge Ukrainian Studies. Special thanks to Olesia Ogryzko, Director of the Sahaidachnyi Security Center, for her valuable contribution.

About the Authors



Olena Davlikanova, Ph.D., is the FES-Ukraine project coordinator, researcher, and Associate Professor at Sumy State University. She is a non-residence Democracy Fellow with the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA) and has authored articles for Western think tanks and media. Her research focuses on the Russo-Ukrainian war, Ukraine's domestic policies, and global shifts affecting Ukraine. Among her publications, she co-authored the book "100+ Stories of Women and Girls from Russia's War against Ukraine" (2022) and analytical papers such as "The War of Narratives: The Image of Ukraine in Media" (2023) and "Containing Russia, Securing Europe" (2023).



Victoria Vdovychenko, Ph.D., Associate Professor at Kyiv Borys Grinchenko University and researcher. She is working on the challenges of the European Union, Euro-Atlantic integration, hybrid warfare, strategic communication, collaborating with different institutions and media, including "Evropejska Pravda" and "Ukrainian Interest" outlets. She is one of the key experts on Italy's foreign policy in the Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian Prism".

The Ukraine-2032 Scenarios have been developed with the support of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.
The views presented in this paper are not necessarily the views of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

