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## Putin's Invasion of Ukraine in 2022: Implications for Strategic Studies

Antulio J. Echevarria II

**ABSTRACT:** This special commentary examines critical issues for the field of strategic studies raised by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, including the waning of major war, strategic coercion, and "War Amongst the People." Drawing on previous scholarship and current events, this commentary considers the questions raised by the first major war of the twenty-first century. It provides recommendations for scholars and senior leaders on how to work together to address the questions of strategy and policy that have and continue to arise as the war progresses.

**Keywords:** Russia, Ukraine, strategic coercion, gray zone, compellence

Whatever its outcome will be, Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, has the potential to shape the defense policies of the United States, its strategic partners, and their rivals in decisive ways. It is, after all, the first major war of the twenty-first century, one that involves large numbers of conventional and irregular forces, and which has displaced millions of civilians. At the time of this writing, the unofficial second phase of the invasion—the battle for the Donbas and Luhansk oblasts—has only just begun. Yet many research efforts have already begun to discern whether, or how, the operational methods, the weapons, and tactics employed by the combatants will affect the future of warfare. While these efforts will employ similar methodologies—interviewing key Ukrainian (and some Russian) and other officials, gathering evidence of unit actions, assessing damage to personnel and combat vehicles—the better analyses will probe further than "Russian ineptitude" as the primary explanation for operational outcomes and will explore whether any new military technologies or techniques have irrevocably changed the conduct of war. Russian ineptitude, in any case, does not preclude an eventual victory for Moscow. The campaigns in Chechnya, Syria, and Georgia show the Russians can stumble initially but ultimately "win ugly" if given enough time and moral space.<sup>1</sup>

Besides informing contemporary defense policies, Russia's invasion of Ukraine will offer an intriguing case study for the rather broad field of strategic studies. To begin with, analyses of the war in Ukraine and all its preludes will shed light on the six principal explanations for the apparent decline in the incidence of major war since 1945. It will also add to the growing body of literature on strategic coercion, particularly with

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1. On the latter conflict, see Robert E. Hamilton and Ariel Cohen, *The Russian Military and the Georgia War: Lessons and Implications* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2011), <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/monographs/576>.

respect to the criticality of information flow as well as the effectiveness of extensive financial and cultural sanctions. Similarly, the war may reveal much about the continued usefulness of the popular paradigm, “war amongst the people,” advanced by British General Rupert Smith some two decades ago. Furthermore, it could tell us a great deal about those forces—enmity, chance, political purpose—commonly associated with the Clausewitzian model of war’s nature, especially the power of enmity as a strategic multiplier. This special commentary offers some initial thoughts about each topic in turn. But it is important to make clear this list is hardly exhaustive.

### The Waning of Major War

Russian President Vladimir Putin’s most recent invasion of Ukraine undermines the popular notion that large-scale, interstate wars have become passé. Some pundits have argued the declining occurrence of major wars since World War II is evidence that armed conflict itself is disappearing altogether.<sup>2</sup> While few scholars seem willing to go to that extreme, they do offer six explanations (discussed below) for what on the surface appears to be a marked decline in the frequency of large-scale conflicts.<sup>3</sup> But the interesting implication for strategic studies is half of these explanations functioned as accelerants rather than as deterrents for Putin’s act of aggression against Ukraine.

*The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.* According to this explanation, major wars have declined in number due to the risk such wars pose of nuclear escalation, which could well lead to unparalleled devastation if not mutual annihilation. Instead, states have opted to pursue limited conflicts that do not present existential threats to other regimes or to compete within the so-called gray zone, the realm of aggression short of war. As some sources have noted, however, Putin chose to launch large-scale operations against Ukraine precisely because his previous invasions led only to “frozen conflicts” in the Donbas and Luhansk oblasts and his gray-zone activities have not yielded the results he desired.<sup>4</sup>

*The spread of democracies and democratic values.* This explanation suggests the decline of major wars has occurred because the number of democracies worldwide is increasing, and democracies purportedly do not go to war with

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2. Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (New York: Viking, 2011); and for a critique, see Bear F. Braumoeller, *Only the Dead: The Persistence of War in the Modern Age* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

3. For a summary of the main arguments, see Raimo Väyrynen, ed., *The Waning of Major War: Theories and Debates* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

4. Michael Kofman and Ryan Evans, “Interpreting the First Few Days of the Russo-Ukrainian War,” War on the Rocks (website), podcast, 25:07, February 28, 2022; and on frozen conflicts, see Erik J. Grossman, “Russia’s Frozen Conflicts and the Donbas,” *Parameters* 48, no. 2 (Summer 2018): 51–62.

one another.<sup>5</sup> Yet, as multiple accounts have indicated, Putin perceived Ukraine's movement toward a fully democratic and representative government as a threat to his style of autocratic rule. Thus, he opted to arrest that progress with military force. In this case, therefore, the spread of democracy and democratic values increased, rather than decreased, the likelihood of a major war. Given the fact that autocratic regimes frequently see democracies as threats, the spread of democracy itself appears likely to cause more wars before it can be said to cause fewer of them.

*The growth of multilateral institutions.* Multilateral institutions, such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the United Nations (UN), and the European Union (EU), are believed to have reduced both the number and scale of armed conflicts by increasing security more collectively and by creating "new normative standards, communication channels, and institutional practices."<sup>6</sup> These new alternatives and customs have provided states with opportunities to enhance their security and to channel their competitiveness in less belligerent ways. Unfortunately, Putin saw at least one of those multilateral organizations, namely NATO, as a threat to his security. In 1946, George Kennan described the Russian mind as perennially suspicious and insecure, a characterization we may hope will one day be overcome by events.<sup>7</sup> But that day is not yet here. In terms familiar to students of Thomas Schelling, even an alliance built merely to deter must, by definition, be intimidating.<sup>8</sup>

*Increasing economic integration.* According to this explanation, governments refrain from choosing armed conflict to settle their grievances because war in general and interstate war in particular cause a high degree of economic disruption. Armed conflict clearly benefits some sectors of the global defense industry; however, it disrupts commerce and financial markets, driving up prices and increasing other costs even for parties not directly involved in the conflict. Even though the Russian economy is relatively small compared to many Western economies, the sanctions imposed on it by the West have started a ripple effect that some experts warn might halt globalization and separate the world's economy into three spheres: a Chinese-led one, a US-led one, and a European one divided between the other two.<sup>9</sup> Whether or not the effects extend that far, fears over the negative impact a major war might have on an integrated global economy are at least partially founded, as second- and third-order economic

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5. Michael E. Brown, Sean M. Lynn-Jones, and Steven E. Miller, eds., *Debating the Democratic Peace* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996).

6. Väyrynen, *Waning of Major War*, 19.

7. X [George F. Kennan], "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," *Foreign Affairs* 25, no. 4 (July 1947): 566–82.

8. Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966), 174–77.

9. Adam S. Posen, "The End of Globalization? What Russia's War in Ukraine Means for the World Economy," *Foreign Affairs* (website), March 17, 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2022-03-17/end-globalization>.

effects are notoriously difficult to predict. For his part, Putin gambled in two ways: that Russian financial institutions would find sufficient workarounds to remain effective and that the campaign in Ukraine would conclude before sanctions could take full effect. On the first gamble he was correct; however, it remains to be seen how much longer the Russian economy, the 11th largest in the world with a GDP of \$1.70 trillion in 2019, can endure such pressures as the conflict becomes more protracted.<sup>10</sup>

*The influence of international law and the law of armed conflict.* This rationale suggests the influence of international law and the law of armed conflict have restricted the reasons states may legally go to war, and how they may wage it. To be sure, to have legal restraints on the conduct of war is useful. But for this explanation to be persuasive, prosecutions of war criminals must occur in a timely fashion.<sup>11</sup> Historically, that has not been the case. For example, “It took two decades for the Nazi Adolf Eichmann to be called to account. It was two and-a-half decades for former Chilean President Augusto Pinochet, and four decades for Kang Kek Iew, Nuon Chea, and Khieu Samphan.”<sup>12</sup> Clearly, the existence of the International Criminal Court and the promise of post-conflict investigations into possible war crimes neither dissuaded Putin from invading Ukraine, nor from allowing his troops to attack non-military targets. In fact, attacking noncombatants appears to be one of the Russian army’s primary tactics.

The spread of anti-war norms. This explanation says the expansion of anti-war norms has made it much more difficult to “sell” a contemporary populace on the need to participate in an armed conflict. To be sure, anti-war norms have ebbed and flowed throughout modern history. Nonetheless, they represent an important measure of national will (or international will in some cases). They also have a critical downside in that aggressors can leverage such attitudes to bully states into policies of appeasement. Putin has successfully employed that tactic throughout much of his presidency. Fortunately, the situation reversed itself after his invasion of Ukraine. Most of the free world, with the assistance of a brilliant Ukrainian information campaign, bonded emotionally with President Volodymyr Zelensky and the Ukrainian people and came to see the Russian state as having brutally victimized its peace-loving neighbor.

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10. “Russia GDP 1998–2022, Macrotrends (website), n.d., <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/RUS/russia/gdp-gross-domestic-product>.

11. Oona A. Hathaway, “International Law Goes to War in Ukraine: The Legal Pushback to Russia’s Invasion,” *Foreign Affairs* (website), March 15, 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2022-03-15/international-law-goes-war-ukraine>; and Davida E. Kellogg, “Jus Post Bellum: The Importance of War Crimes Trials,” *Parameters* 32, no. 3 (Autumn 2002), <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters/vol32/iss3/8/>.

12. Michael Byers, “Justice Delayed: Why International Law Still Matters,” *Foreign Affairs* (website), September 22, 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/reviews/review-essay/2016-09-22/justice-delayed>.

In theory, all six explanations offer plausible reasons for the alleged decline of major conflicts since World War II. In practice, however, none dissuaded Putin from opting to launch a major assault against Ukraine. Indeed, of the six explanations, the first three functioned more as accelerants or enablers of Putin's plans for war rather than as decelerants. The fourth, economic integration, is in some ways neutral: it affects aggressors, defenders, and nonaligned parties alike, though certainly not equally. On the one hand, it demonstrates why sanctions and economic embargoes have become weapons of first resort in the modern era, at least for pro-Western democracies with robust economies. On the other hand, these measures require time and the cooperation of other parties to be effective, and such cooperation cannot be assumed regardless of the severity of the case.

Members of the international community have already begun to experience adverse effects from the sanctions and embargoes imposed on Russia, turning the process of economic punishment into a war of attrition and exhaustion in which all sides must endure some costs. Perhaps not surprisingly, the influence of international law and the law of armed conflict neither dissuaded Putin nor his top leaders. But perhaps they offer hope of exacting some form of legal justice in the future that might influence other actors. The last explanation, the spread of anti-war norms, clearly offers aggressors advantages during peacetime but quickly works against them in wartime. Anti-war sentiments transformed almost overnight into antipathy for the Russians and sympathy for the Ukrainians. Before the invasion, Putin's bullying tactics gave him a distinct advantage in dealing with heads of state who wanted to avoid war. But he lost that edge once the conflict started and then antipathy grew which led to a host of cultural sanctions, such as barring Russian athletes from competing in international events.

But this list is also instructive for what it omits. Oddly, a seventh potential explanation for the low incidence of interstate wars since 1945 is the relative balance of military power, especially regionally. Heads of state might indeed fear nuclear escalation and may have avoided armed conflict as a result, but they also might have been deterred by the fact that they possess little in the way of a decisive military advantage over their rivals. This contemporary "balance of power" is not the "balance of nuclear terror" that existed between NATO and the Warsaw Pact during the Cold War. But it might be as effective, and it might be one reason states have decided to compete within the "gray zone," below the threshold of war, rather than above it. Obviously, as Putin's current war in Ukraine proves, miscalculation is always possible, and deterrence, like any strategy, is only as stable as the pace of technological innovation permits. Yet something should be said for the possibility some would-be aggressors have been soberly calculating their odds of succeeding militarily, and have decided not to take the risk.

## Strategic Coercion—A Closer Look

The conflict in Ukraine offers an important case study regarding the exercise of strategic coercion—the “deliberate and purposive use of overt threats to influence another’s strategic choices”—within the context of a major war.<sup>13</sup> The literature concerning strategic coercion is substantial and is still growing. Most of it, however, deals with parties that are not significant economic or military powers armed with nuclear weapons. Assuming reliable insights will eventually emerge regarding Putin’s decision making, the concept of strategic coercion stands to advance in at least three topics: the critical nature of the flow of accurate information, the integral value of the dynamic of compellence and deterrence, and the efficacy of short- and long-term financial and economic sanctions.

For controlled coercion to take place, the target must receive reasonably accurate information about the strategic situation, including combat losses, and—to borrow Schelling’s words—the “pain yet to come” for noncompliance. Otherwise, reducing an adversary’s military power and strategic advantages lacks coercive value. If targets simply reject accurate (but perhaps unpleasant) information, as irrational actors sometimes do, that is one matter. If the targets are simply not receiving it, that is another matter, and it requires a different approach lest the attempt at strategic coercion fail for the wrong reasons.

Research on strategic coercion has been aware of the problem of irrational actors for some time and has made progress in tackling it. However, it has not completely separated the irrational actor problem from the “ignorant actor” problem. We know Putin was not receiving accurate information from his subordinate commanders and advisers; he eventually took some corrective measures, but the situation might not be fully resolved. At the same time, numerous theories surfaced—from “mad man” to “victim of stroke”—claiming Putin was an irrational actor and had to be treated as such.<sup>14</sup> But we would presumably treat a “mad man” differently than we would someone who is malevolent but ignorant because the latter would have thresholds he would not want to cross; whereas the former would not. To further complicate matters, Putin could be both irrational and ignorant. Nevertheless, the larger point is strategic coercion theory (and practice) would benefit from more research into how best to distinguish between the two.

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13. Lawrence Freedman, ed., *Strategic Coercion: Concepts and Cases* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3, 15; and Kelly M. Greenhill and Peter Krause, eds., *Coercion: The Power to Hurt in International Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

14. Michael Krepon, “Putin Plays the Mad Man Card in Ukraine,” *Forbes* (website), March 1, 2022, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/michaelkrepon/2022/03/01/putin-plays-the-mad-man-card-in-ukraine/?sh=6d58ef2a1405>; and Maggie Fox, “Why Does Vladimir Putin Walk Like That?” *NBC News* (website), December 15, 2015, <https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/why-does-vladimir-putin-walk-n480611>.



Research into strategic coercion might also address how the concept's two essential components, compellence and deterrence, could function as a synthetic dynamic. Separating the two has some value, particularly with respect to education. But it tends to obscure their complementary nature: they are interrelated counterparts, not complete opposites. Compellence often requires some form of deterrence, and deterrence typically involves some form of compellence. Together they round out strategic coercion, the aim of which is to make our adversaries do what we want—and not something else. Clausewitz and Schelling saw it the same way. They understood war to be an act of force to compel our adversaries to do what we want—which also implies denying our adversaries the ability to do something we do not want.<sup>15</sup> For example, an invasion aimed at compelling the capitulation of a head of state should also include measures for deterring an insurgency should the first aim be accomplished. Fortunately, Putin invaded Ukraine with forces insufficient to accomplish the first objective, and it is unclear he had properly considered the second. For their part, the Ukrainians and those supporting them want to compel Putin to give up his aggressive intentions, while also deterring him from escalating.

We find this synthetic, compellence-deterrence dynamic at work in nearly all conflicts short of Schelling's notion of "brute force," that is, those situations inimical to the bargaining model of war.<sup>16</sup> An example is using military force to perpetrate genocide, which eschews arriving at a negotiated settlement or a bargain of any sort.<sup>17</sup> Campaigns sometimes begin as exercises in brute force but then transition to the bargaining model if the defenders' resistance is too strong. Combining compellence and deterrence into a single dynamic will also facilitate gaining better control over adversaries and crisis situations. Modern articulations of strategies of control reach back to the 1950s and 1960s in the works of J. C. Wylie, Henry Eccles, and Herbert Rosinski; their concept of control should be reexamined and developed further for application in today's strategic environment.<sup>18</sup> The conflict in Ukraine will afford opportunities for strategic theorists and practitioners to study how the two components of coercion might function together and what their limitations might be. In short, the conflict in Ukraine, because of its strategic scale and operational scope, will offer new data which will improve the concept of strategic coercion. These data should justify fusing compellence and deterrence together more formally, rather

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15. Carl von Clausewitz, *Hinterlasseneswerk Vom Kriege*, ed. Werner Hahlweg, 19th ed. (Frankfurt: Ferdinand, 1980), bk. 1, chap. 1, 191–92; Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. and ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 76; and Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 2.

16. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 1–3.

17. For a broader definition of brute force, see Robert Mandel, *Coercing Compliance: State-Initiated Brute Force in Today's World* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015), 4, 6–7.

18. On strategy of control, see Antulio J. Echevarria II, *War's Logic: Strategic Thought in the American Way of War* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 130–42.



than informally or accidentally. Eventually, that process should be routinized in military training and execution.

Along similar lines, and to return to a topic mentioned above, Putin's invasion of Ukraine will shed light on the coercive power of financial sanctions on a large, modern state with strong economic ties, especially in terms of oil and gas, to the West. At present, the sanctions consist of a combination of targeted and comprehensive sanctions, which the West can increase or decrease as necessary but not without some unwanted secondary or tertiary effects. Research into the coercive power of sanctions (or economic coercion) suggests they work best under specific conditions: (1) when costs to the target are significant, (2) the senders' costs are minimal, (3) the issue of dispute is of low importance to the target, (4) the sender and target are closely allied, (5) sanctions are endorsed by an international institution, and (6) the target state is a democracy.<sup>19</sup> As readers will note, only three of the six conditions obtain with respect to Russia's current invasion of Ukraine.

While sanctions have become a weapon of choice for modern democracies, they also have a long and not entirely successful history.<sup>20</sup> They have the advantage of being flexible, able to serve in a deterrence or compellence role, or both. The West has used them against Russia in both capacities, including the erosion of Moscow's ability to manufacture war material and to resupply its forces over the long term. (Inept Russian logistical planning also added to the cost-imposing effects of sanctions in the short term.) By some accounts, the effect of sanctions may reduce Russia's GDP by as much as 12 percent in 2022.<sup>21</sup> It is unclear how effective Russian countermeasures will be. Economic sanctions may remain a weapon of first resort in the future. But, as with any weapon, adversaries and potential adversaries will have studied its effectiveness and adopted some countermeasures.

### War amongst the People—Still

In the early twenty-first century, British General Rupert Smith attempted to introduce a new paradigm of armed conflict which he referred to as "War amongst the People."<sup>22</sup> This paradigm, which was intended to shift defense thinking and

19. Daniel R. Drezner, "Economic Sanctions in Theory and Practice: How Smart Are They?," in Greenhill and Krause, eds., *Coercion*, 251–70; as the author explains, even post–Cold War and other data sets have not changed the contingent nature of the results.

20. Nicholas Mulder, *The Economic Weapon: The Rise of Sanctions as a Tool of Modern War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2022); and Juan C. Zarate, *Treasury's War: The Unleashing of a New Era of Financial Warfare* (New York: Public Affairs, 2013).

21. Elliot Smith, "Russia's Economy Is Beginning to Crack as Economists Forecast Sharp Contractions," *CNBC* (website), April 4, 2022, <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/04/04/russias-economy-is-beginning-to-crack-as-economists-forecast-sharp-contractions.html>.

22. Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005, 2007).

procurement in the West away from its preoccupation with force-on-force conflicts, or what Smith refers to as “interstate industrial wars,” to contemporary wars. These wars are characterized by six major trends. First, the ends for which wars were fought have changed from the “hard absolute objectives of interstate industrial war to more malleable objectives to do with the individual and societies that are not states.” Second, wars were now fought “amongst the people,” as exemplified by the “central role of the media,” which bring armed conflicts into “every living room,” even as they are being fought in streets and fields far abroad. Third, modern conflicts “tend to be timeless,” since they center on establishing conditions that must be maintained until treaties or peace agreements are reached, which can require years or decades. Fourth, fighting takes place in a manner designed “not to lose the force,” rather than employing the force and expending it as necessary in pursuit of the overall aim of the conflict. Fifth, “old weapons” designed for industrial war were of necessity being adapted to “new uses,” to accommodate “war amongst the people.” Sixth, the sides in contemporary conflicts consist mostly of nonstate actors, meaning multinational groupings, such as alliances or coalitions, were pitted against parties that were not states.

Smith can be faulted for attempting to use Thomas Kuhn’s framework of conceptual paradigms to describe different types of wars.<sup>23</sup> Paradigms are better at describing the systems of thought or ways individuals and groups think about things than the things themselves. Wars are notorious for the “contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous,” a phrase once popular among French and German sociologists to describe generational overlap, that is, when individuals of two or more generations occupy the same space and time. An example is Western society in the 1960s, when a younger generation embracing anti-establishment values clashed with an older, more conservative one hewing to traditionalism.

In short, classifying phenomena according to periods can be problematic because things can be in an era without being of that era. So, it is with wars. Industrial-age, interstate conflicts such as World War I and World War II occurred temporally with many of America’s “Banana Wars,” for instance, in which the US military often had to deal with violent nonstate actors. Yet the two types clearly differed. (The two world wars, incidentally, were fought by alliances, which Smith and others classify as nonstate actors.) The United States has participated in at least 10 times more noninterstate, nonindustrial-age wars than it has interstate, industrial-age wars.<sup>24</sup> Nothing about the twenty-first century thus far suggests this ratio will change in favor of interstate wars.

23. Smith, *Utility of Force*, 4–5; and Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1962).

24. Barbara Salazar Torreon and Sofia Plagakis, *Instances of Use of United States Armed Forces Abroad, 1798–2022*, Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report R42878, updated March 8, 2022 (Washington, DC: CRS, March 8, 2022), <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/details?prodcode=R42738>.

While his attempt to classify wars is problematic, Smith should not be faulted for having tried to persuade defense establishments in the West to develop better tools for fighting nonindustrial, noninterstate wars. That dream is both a noble one and a worthwhile goal. Not surprisingly, it remains both. Western defense establishments continue to resist investing in the requirements needed to deal with such wars, perhaps because the larger profits come with producing the military hardware necessary for interstate wars. This is not to say the West should forgo preparing to fight interstate wars, which have always been high-risk but low incidence. Rather, the West can, and should, commit itself to prepare for and, when necessary, to conduct both types of wars.

Most of the trends Smith identified are correct, though one might quibble about his description of the absolute nature of political aims; the Korean War and the Vietnam War, for instance, were examples of negotiated settlements. The salient characteristic Smith rightly ascribes to new wars, such as counterinsurgencies and peacekeeping operations, is they occur amongst the people. But as the conflict in Ukraine shows, that characteristic also holds true for major wars today. As of April 5, 2022, for instance, the UN migration agency reported some 11 million people had been displaced within Ukraine and more than 4 million had fled Ukraine.<sup>25</sup> Refugees would have impacted any conflict that might have broken out in Central Europe during the Cold War, though Smith's point is military doctrine and training exercises at the time rarely took account of the refugee flow and how its presence might impede operational maneuver.

In the current conflict in Ukraine, noncombatant populations are not only refugees but defenseless targets. Video evidence and personal testimonies have implicated the Russian military in war crimes because it directly targeted civilians in flagrant disregard of international law and the law of armed conflict. To be sure, populations across the globe are watching this conflict play out on their television sets, iPads, and computer screens. The suffering they have witnessed has caused them to put pressure on their governments to do more to support the Ukrainian cause. NATO, the European Union, and others have responded by increasing sanctions, and transferring more arms, money, and other support to Ukraine.

In sum, noncombatants have become participants in this war just as much as Ukrainian and Russian military personnel, and despite the law of armed conflict. This war is, thus, a war amongst the people in every sense, even though it is interstate and multinational in character. Western military strategy and doctrine

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25. Associated Press, "Live Updates: UN Says 11 Million Have Fled Homes in Ukraine, AOL (website), April 5, 2022, <https://www.aol.com/news/live-updates-ukraine-reports-russian-063640006-122004857.html>.

must account for this fact as this phenomenon is likely to manifest itself again in other theaters, regardless of the scale or political aims of the conflict.

### War's Changing Character and Dynamic Nature

The fact that the conflict in Ukraine is also a war amongst the people raises an important question about the relationship between war's character and its nature. To be sure, the US military believes war's character—the institutions that participate in armed conflict, the weapons and doctrines employed, and the whole process of warfare itself—changes over time and varies across cultures. However, the US military also believes war's nature is constant because every armed conflict, no matter how large or small, consists of political motives, human emotions, and the element of chance. While that point is demonstrably true, it merely tells us what the common denominators are that unify all wars without telling us that they, too, fluctuate and interact. They are dynamic, perhaps even more so than the institutions that make up war's character.

We can find an important example of that dynamism in the current war in Ukraine in which human emotions, especially enmity, have motivated the defenders to resist the superior numbers of the Russian invaders. They are essentially fighting what Clausewitz would have recognized as a war of national resistance or national liberation in which the citizenry often takes up arms. But in this case, the spirit of enmity has more than a tactical significance. It has become a strategic multiplier thanks in large part to the support most of the free world is showing toward Ukraine with massive amounts of military and other aid.

The Ukrainians have threatened to continue resisting by means of an insurgency should their regular military be defeated. Insurrections were one of the reasons Clausewitz saw the defense as the stronger form of war. By his reasoning the defender had the easier task, to survive; while the attacker, who must subdue the defender, had the harder mission. A military force can be defeated, and its government overthrown, but until its citizenry consents to the aggressor's terms, or is subdued, the fighting will not end. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the West's campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan during this century have shown us what insurgencies can mean for an occupying force.

So, while research efforts into the conflict in Ukraine examine what aspects of war's character might have changed, they would do well to consider war's nature as well. The result might have serious implications for policies of defense and deterrence in Eastern Europe where conventional forces backed by trained and equipped irregulars might prove cost-effective indeed.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

In sum, research into the conflict in Ukraine will offer a wealth of answers to some fundamental questions in the field of strategic studies. Paradoxically, it will also create more questions for academics to ponder. Moreover, each of the topics discussed above informs the general context of the war in Ukraine in important ways. Three of the explanations for the decline of major war, for instance, also contributed to shaping Putin's justifications for the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Theories of strategic coercion, in turn, influenced the quality of each side's thrusts and parries. "War amongst the people" is still a valid way to frame modern conflict, though it includes many more dimensions than its author originally conceived. Finally, the motivational element of war's nature has proven quite powerful indeed in favor of one side and to the obvious detriment of the other.

What should military staff colleges, war colleges, and civilian programs for strategic studies do while research is underway to determine what about the character of war might have changed? First, they should encourage the further exploration of these themes and others related to large-scale, interstate conflict by hosting conferences and seminars where participants can exchange views. Second, they should promote more research into the topic of major war by seeking funding for grants and collaboration opportunities; the US Department of Defense can help immensely by establishing or re-establishing a series of research grants and fellowship programs, such as the Minerva program. Third, they should encourage revisions to their core curricula to accommodate what some might describe as the "return of major war" and find ways to incentivize faculty to offer electives covering some of the aforementioned topics as well as other related themes. Fourth, all academic and military educational institutions can increase the value of modern war-gaming and simulations exercises by sponsoring or facilitating research that adds to historical databases on armed conflicts; analytics enhanced by artificial intelligence technologies can augment the cultivation of those databases. Finally, both academe and military educational institutions should look for ways to bridge the cultural gaps between them and to foster collaborative research; each has valuable insights to offer to the study of armed conflict in all its manifestations.

If only the dead have seen the end of war, only the living can study it. And the study of future war, to include its prevention and mitigation, can only take place in the present.

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Dr. Antulio J. Echevarria II had a distinguished career in the US Army and is currently the editor-in-chief of the US Army War College Press, which includes *Parameters*. He is a graduate of the United States Military Academy, the US Army Command and General Staff College, and the US Army War College. He holds a doctorate in modern history from Princeton University and is the author of six books, including *War's Logic: Strategic Thought and the American Way of War* (2021), *Military Strategy: A Very Short Introduction* (2017), *Reconsidering the American Way of War* (2014), *Clausewitz and Contemporary War* (2007), *Imagining Future War* (2007), and *After Clausewitz* (2001), and more than 100 articles and monographs on strategic thinking, military theory, and military history.

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