

Geopolitics of the Russia-Ukraine War and Russian Cyber Attacks on Ukraine-Georgia and Expected Threats

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The Russia-Ukraine war has become an important geopolitical event in the world, and it affects the formation of the modern world order and international security. The world will not be the same as it was before the war; the West will better understand Russia's tough policies and continue to treat it more cautiously. Russia has used many of the means at its disposal during the war, including hybrid warfare, cyber warfare, soft power, elements of asymmetric warfare, and ultimate rigid power in the context of symmetric threat. Cyberspace in the modern era is an important measure of producing a new generation of war. Russia is actively using its cyber capabilities in the Russia-Ukraine war. It is in Russia's main interest to restore vectors of influence in the territories of the former Soviet Union. For

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this, it uses various combat methods, cyber warfare, hybrid warfare, information warfare, hard and soft power combined. Russia has carried out and continues to carry out cyber-attacks on Ukraine's strategic facilities, government websites, as well as infrastructure, etc. The article discusses the threats and risks posed by Russia from cyberspace to Ukraine and Georgia; the cyber capabilities of Ukraine and the role of the West in strengthening its cyber security; NATO and EU policy in the development of Ukraine-Georgia cyber security in the context of risk response and management. The paper also focuses on Russian military aggression, the Russia-Ukraine war, and the resulting threats to Ukraine and the world at large.

Keywords: Cybersecurity, Cyber Attacks, Cyber War, Armed War, Armed Conflict, Global Security, Ukraine, Russia, Georgia, NATO.

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Introduction

It must be said that the states of the world face many dangers and challenges, which are growing with the development of modern technologies and methods of war production. The root causes of conflict and war have remained the same in modern times. In particular: territorial expansion, the struggle for resources, the battle for regional and world hegemony, and the weakening of neighboring states so that threats do not emanate from them.

What has the 21st century brought us? It depends on how we look at this issue. For example, technological advances have brought many benefits to humanity – there has been an opportunity to access information easily, straightforward communication, and comfort, but everything has two sides. The development of technology has also posed many threats to humanity. There are aggressor countries in the world, such as Russia. Hacker-terrorist groups have been formed that have mastered technological advances and used them for evil purposes. Of course, this process contributed to the strengthening of security mechanisms. Still, the defense turned out to be an expensive pleasure, on which leading countries and international organizations (NATO and the European Union) spend hundreds of billions of dollars around the world. The development of technology has given rise to the virtual world, and the virtual world has created alternate spaces of reality, allowing aggressors to launch cyber-attacks, cyber espionage, and cyber warfare.

For a while, researchers in this field believed that it would be possible in cyberspace to change many pernicious directions for the better – for example, to replace real convention war with cyber and to give countries a virtual space to fight against each other. However, this opinion turned out to be completely detached from reality. On the contrary, today's reality shows that aggressor countries like Russia have not changed their strategy at all. On the contrary, they have made cyber warfare an additional tool for conventional warfare. We have been looking at this for the last few decades. Georgia has repeatedly experienced a digital attack from Russia in parallel with a real war. What was already happening in Georgia from 1993–to 2008 is happening in Ukraine today on a large scale. It is true that in 1993 when Georgia lost Abkhazia, technology was not developed at such a level, but the methods were the same – information war in television space, real attacks, destruction of infrastructure, population collapse, and unprecedented bloodshed.

Geopolitical aspects of the Russian-Ukrainian war

On the night of February 24, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced the start of a war against Ukraine, calling it a “special military operation.” The whole world has rallied in opposition to the aggressive plans of the Kremlin, showing unprecedented solidarity with the Ukrainians. Before discussing the topic directly, let us explain the essence of armed conflict, military operation, and war.

It is essential to explain the essence and nature of the armed conflict. Armed conflict between states or between social spheres within states is a type of armed confrontation. All this aims to resolve economic, political, national-ethnic, and other conflicts using military force. The peculiarities of the armed conflict compared to the war are:

- a) Limiting the political goals of opposing parties;
- b) In the foreground, not rooted but more private, situational factors;
- c) Quantitative and qualitative limitations on the use of military force;
- d) Controversy, relatively small territorial scale;
- e) Depending on the time, short-lived or explosive character;
- f) In this case, the conflict usually involves the participation not only of the whole society, but only of the armed forces of the state;
- g) Rejection of international legal norms characteristic of a state of war in a conflict situation;

It should also be noted that armed conflict can escalate into war, and the latter, on the contrary, have been reduced to the level of conflict as a result of de-escalation. It should also be noted that it may be perceived as a war, in addition to the limited armed conflict for a large state by a small territory country. In the 20th century, great powers used armed conflicts for geopolitical and other advantages, as well as for local testing of forces. In the aftermath of World War II, in the Cold War era, many armed conflicts became a testing ground for the economic and military capabilities of the two opposing camps. At the beginning of the 21st century, predicting armed conflict has become even more difficult. All this has led to the disappearance of the balance of restraining factors of the great powers. The new centers are actively using force to gain influence in the regions. It should also be noted that the actions of extremist forces and the threats of nuclear blackmail, which used armed conflicts for their interests, have intensified. All this makes even armed conflict a threat to international peace. And it must also be said that it requires active action to prevent and address them (Georgian Military Encyclopedic Dictionary, 2017: 236).

Explanation of what a special military operation is: “A military operation is the coordinated military actions of a state, or a non-state actor, in response to a developing situation. These actions are designed as a military plan to resolve the situation in the state or actor’s favor. Operations may be of a combat or non-combat nature and may be referred to by a code name for the purpose of national security. Military operations are often known for their more generally accepted common usage names than their actual operational objectives” (Armstrong, 1994: 13). Military operations can be classified by the scale and scope of force employment and their impact on the wider conflict. The scope of military operations can be: Theater; Campaign; Battle; Engagement; Strike (Armstrong, 1994: 13).

Let’s also explain what war is, “War, in the popular sense, a conflict between political groups involving hostilities of considerable duration and magnitude. In the usage of social

science, certain qualifications are added. Sociologists usually apply the term to such conflicts only if they are initiated and conducted in accordance with socially recognized forms. They treat war as an institution recognized in custom or in law. Military writers usually confine the term to hostilities in which the contending groups are sufficiently equal in power to render the outcome uncertain for a time. Armed conflicts of powerful states with isolated and powerless peoples are usually called pacifications, military expeditions, or explorations; with small states, they are called interventions or reprisals; and with internal groups, rebellions or insurrections. Such incidents, if the resistance is sufficiently strong or protracted, may achieve a magnitude that entitles them to the name “war” (Frankel, 2022: 1). From the terminological definitions, it is clear what we are dealing with, and this is actually the Russia-Ukraine war and not the so-called military special operation.

In January 2022, having concentrated numerous troops on the border with Ukraine, Russia demanded legal guarantees from NATO and the United States that Ukraine would not join the North Atlantic military bloc. Having received a refusal of their demands, a month later, Russia invaded Ukraine, thereby demonstrating that it would not allow Ukraine to be outside the Russian sphere of influence. Moscow sees Ukraine integrated with the West as an existential threat to its interests and security. Russia’s actions are changing the geopolitical and geostrategic situation globally, which is reflected in international security.

It should be noted that the Russia-Ukraine war is the largest in Europe since 1945, and it is clear that the military on the battlefields of Ukraine is trying both new weapons and military equipment that already has some combat experience. And there is another essential factor that will affect the “new armament.”

Russia is one of the most considerable nuclear powers to have waged war on the country, Ukraine, which has voluntarily renounced nuclear weapons. Therefore, it will be complicated to talk about nuclear non-proliferation since Russia, by its actions, is virtually wholly destroying these principles; it is coming out against non-proliferation. In the light of all this, the Western intelligence agencies should also be warned to take seriously the “threat of the use of tactical nuclear weapons or small-scale nuclear weapons” by Russia against Ukraine, which poses a threat not only to Ukraine but also to Europe and international security.

In the new international environment, where the global situation is taking a sharp turn, the Russian-Ukrainian war causes anxiety and fear for all world participants. Threat-based demands have led to indecision-vigilance even among countries not directly involved in the problem. As a result, they will have to seek security, which means that the existing balances and status quo will change in the world.

In this chaotic environment, where the threat of a third world war and nuclear war can be easily exploited, and the fact that this factor is turned into a showdown, irrationality and a mood that cannot be considered healthy, not amenable to containment, and this undoubtedly violates the world order. This reduces the chance of dialogue and the desire for diplomacy. In fact, the difficulty of peaceful construction stands as the most fundamental problem.

The Russian-Ukrainian war has undoubtedly created geopolitical rifts along a broad line stretching from Europe to Asia. The current frozen crises in question also provide important clues about the future, especially the war’s outcome. When we look at these events, we see that the following problems occur: Germany’s decision to allocate an additional 100 billion euros to the defense budget and to strengthen its army; the Rapprochement of Europe, the European Union (EU), and NATO; Iran talks in Vienna; The essence of relations between China and Russia; New research in the field of energy supply; New swap agreements; Issues

of Taiwan and the Kuril Islands are back on the agenda; more significantly, sanctions and their consequences.

Undoubtedly, these points can and will increase. However, these possible problems, each of which requires a separate large analysis to understand the problem. As we look at these issues, we are witnessing the intense return of a new Cold War. We see the beginning of the cold war, and the methods, tools, and actors have changed. It should also be emphasized that the confrontation between Moscow and Kyiv has increased the geopolitical significance of Ankara to NATO.

Russia's Cyber War against Ukraine

Russia is waging a cyber-war with Ukraine, an information war, using all the components of a hybrid war. It did not start yesterday or today, neither before the war nor during the war. The so-called Russian strategy has become a historical event. Humankind hoped that the conquest cataclysms would end at least in the 21st century, ending the Cold and Hot Wars era after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In fact, nothing has changed. Russia has taken over all the vices that even the Soviet system had. If we blame the misfortune in Georgia in 2008 for a bit of misunderstanding, coincidence, and diplomatic weakness, the brutal war in Ukraine has shown that there is no misunderstanding, mistake, or diplomatic weakness in this regard. It is a Russian strategy and attitude towards the rest of the world. What the Soviet Empire did after the end of the Second World War (we mean redistribution-appropriation, rearrangement of territories), today this result gets the modern world, and these problems will probably continue for a long time.

What claims does Russia have specifically against independent Ukraine? “No NATO, no West, no United States, this territory is Russian property” “I will take any city, any settlement, destroy any infrastructure and exterminate the population.” Everything is disguised with elements of information warfare, the primary conductor of which is Vladimir Putin. Do you remember how he propagandized before the war and still does today, formulating in the form of theses that the people of Ukraine were taken hostage by the fascist government led by Volodymyr Zelensky? Fascist organizations have revived and developed in Ukraine, and some so-called documentaries have been shot depicting the rise of fascism. Anyone who sees this will surely believe that Putin is not an aggressor but a merciful liberator.

In terms of the producing information war, Ukraine duly resisted the disgusting Russian propaganda and even won one period, but that was the first month after the start of the war. Unfortunately, the Ukrainian government got into a quarrel with Georgia and Moldova – we mean a lot of undeserved claims to these countries about the opening of the second and third fronts. In this case, the Ukrainian government really believed (or just wanted it to be so) that a large part of the Georgian population supported a resumption of the war with Russia or a return to the war in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region. Moreover, the Ukrainian “boys” believed that the Georgian government was not doing what the population wanted. This is a complete lie, and today the government expresses the desire of 98% of the population. Oleksiy Arestovych (born in Georgia), an adviser or assistant to the head of Volodymyr Zelensky's Chancellery, even went so far as to call the members of the Georgian government “bunnies” and threatened that the “Georgian Dream” would not win the elections. We believe that the people of Ukraine, and even more so President Zelensky, should not believe the Arestovych and others. They are waging a disinformation war against our country and Moldova. Unfortunately, we do

not see any signs of this; in fact, the season was opened by Zelensky when he accused the Georgian government of immorality as if it was negotiating with Russia over the import of dairy products. This accusation turned out to be a lie; no one apologized. On the contrary, new accusations were made, and it even went so far as to recall the ambassador from Georgia. Yes, this is totally unacceptable behavior, and it is also intolerable when the Ukrainian leadership has sheltered Georgian wanted persons and appointed criminals to high positions. A man who is also wanted and who helped former President Mikheil Saakashvili sneak in to aggravate the situation in Georgia was appointed as First Deputy Chairman of the Counterintelligence Department during the war – this is Giorgi Lortkipanidze, nicknamed “Evil.” It seemed that Ukraine was at war with Georgia and not with Russia for a while. This is where the successful propaganda of this country and the won information war deviated from the true path, and the situation was aggravated by “commanders” like Arestovych and Arakhamia. Nevertheless, Georgia will not stop sending humanitarian aid to the Ukrainian people, politics is distorted by individuals, but we have historical friendship with the population.

Objects of Russian Cyberattack – Ukraine – Georgia and the Expected Challenges

Russia has carried out and continues to carry out combined military and cyber-attacks against both Georgia and Ukraine, using various components of a hybrid war. The Kremlin did not change the Soviet methodology, and it only changed the technologies. If we look at the issue in terms of crimes committed by Russia and still “not committed,” everyone probably admits that we are dealing with an unpredictable state in this regard. Nevertheless, the world’s leading countries are obliged to bring the actions of this unpredictable country into a unified system and resist it.

During the Russian-Georgian war of 2008, Russia carried out the largest cyber-attack on the websites of the Georgian state, television, and news agencies. An example of this can be seen in the Russian-Ukrainian war of 2014, when the military war was accompanied by various components of a hybrid war, the use of so-called unidentified “titushki” and cyber-attacks on state structures.

A few years later, in 2017, the internal system of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine was hacked. The Vice Prime Minister of Ukraine, Pavlo Rosenko, tweeted and posted a snapshot: “It looks like the Secretariat of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine has been hacked. The network is currently down” (Perlroth, 2017: 1).

At that time, the object of hacker attacks was not only the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine but also the work of energy companies and the National Bank. The cyber-attack victims were the media holding “Lux,” the Kyiv metro, the Ukrainian Post, and others. Among the targets was the Boryspil airport system, through which flights can be delayed. In fact, one of the most dangerous cyber-attacks is when an attacker launches cyber-attacks on a country’s critical infrastructure, which can even paralyze the country, Russia really does not shy away from trying to paralyze the country it is attacking.

Ukraine became a testing ground for Russia even before the war – in fact, the disintegration of one of the largest states in Europe had begun. Since the beginning of 2022, almost two months of siege and martial law have shown the world a lot. Since Vladimir Putin deployed 150,000 troops and military equipment along Ukraine’s borders, cyber-attacks on government systems have been repeated. The largest of these attacks took place on February 16, when the

websites of almost all structures were blocked. It is difficult to determine whether this fact was the beginning of a military war or a signal, but what happened in Georgia in August 2008.

Russia has an open demand: NATO should not expand to Eastern Europe, Ukraine and Georgia must not become members of this organization. According to Vladimir Putin, the United States and the leaders of the North Atlantic Alliance pledged 30 years ago that they would not take a single step toward Eastern Europe. What is really going on? Russia is slowly being besieged. This country always has its own law, approaches, specifics, and programs, plans, and objectives. Most importantly, chauvinism and the desire to conquer foreign lands flow endlessly from this vast state. Understandably, Ukrainians and Russians are related nations, but this does not necessarily interfere with good neighborly relations and living with independent interests. Russia has strongly demanded that the United States and Europe reconsider their decision at the Brussels summit and change their enlargement strategy towards Eastern Europe.

Russia has great potential in terms of cyber warfare, and some events prove it. Russia used cyberweapons against Georgia during the 2008 war. In 2019, the same method was used to launch cyber-attacks on the websites and television infrastructure of the state bodies of Georgia. According to foreign media, at the closed meeting of the UN Security Council in 2020, the United States, Britain, and Estonia assessed this fact as a cyber-attack by Russia. The same handwriting was observed during the attack on Ukraine in early 2014 (Evansky, 2020: 1).

Due to the specific geopolitical situation, Russia has successfully adapted cyber-attacks to expand its interests. One of the cyber-attacks of 2007 is against Estonia. It was a simple DDoS attack that did not cause significant damage but had a positive impact on strengthening Estonia-NATO relations in terms of security. As we have already mentioned, the same thing happened in 2008 during the Russian-Georgian war, also against Ukraine, where the cyber-attacks turned out to be more “sophisticated” and destructive. Cyber-attacks carried out by Russia are mostly used in conditions of asymmetric conflict. Although the 2016 US presidential election hack was notable for not launching a cyber-attack by Russia, it was not a punitive measure, and it was intended to test cyber-capacity to influence elections. Naturally, the possibilities of Russia also have a limit. When conducting a cyber-attack with a specific strategy, potential opponents have the opportunity to prepare in a defensive direction. Russia’s cyber-attacks on Georgia and Ukraine may be considered experimental, but it allows leading countries to fully explore so-called Russian methods from a technological point of view. And then it becomes easier to improve defense mechanisms. For example, the interference of Russian hackers in the elections in France, Italy, the Netherlands, and Germany was not as effective as it may have been in previous cases (Zengerle, 2015: 1).

The NATO Summit in Brussels was held on June 14, 2021. NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg spoke about Russia’s aggressive policy. He said they only saw the threat from Russia for many years: NATO has increased its defense spending in the eastern Baltic states, Europe, Canada, and Ukraine. It is now more possible to have more air patrols, use the navy, etc. This is a powerful message to Russia. We are here to protect the allies, not provoke a conflict, but avoid it. Peace must be maintained so that what was done against Ukraine and Georgia does not happen again.

The statement was made by Jens Stoltenberg before Russia invaded Ukraine and launched a large-scale conventional war. Admittedly, in this case, NATO was unable to keep the peace as it had set out in its plans. Sure, NATO, the EU, and leading countries are helping Ukraine, but

is that enough? We think not. Because there is still a war on the territory of Ukraine, there is a victims and infrastructural damage (Bochoidze, 2021: 1).

At the Brussels summit, Jens Stoltenberg also focused on the hybrid attacks that Russia is carrying out in parallel with the conventional war today against Ukraine: “This is a new challenge for us. We have already faced various forms of aggression. New formation and adaptation of joint work are now needed. We are working intensively to strengthen cyber security.” Jens Stoltenberg says that today NATO is focused on reforms. Their goal is for the Alliance to continue supporting Georgia and modernizing its defense and security forces. Russia has no right to interfere in this process. Any sovereign country has the right to choose its own path of development” (Bochoidze, 2021: 1).

NATO has issued a communiqué saying that the 2008 Bucharest decision remains effective. The communiqué emphasizes that Georgia and Ukraine will become members of the Alliance (Akhalaia, 2021: 1).

It was a decision taken at the Bucharest summit that Russia could not tolerate. On February 21, 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed the recognition of two separatist regions of Ukraine – Donetsk and Luhansk – as independent republics and then signed peace or military agreements with these “republics.” Exactly the same scenario as with Georgia happened in August 2008. However, there is one “mistake” and the Ukrainian government did not succumb to the provocation laid down by Russia, and did not repeat the mistake of Mikhail Saakashvili. While this doesn’t change much, the result is the same, but on a larger scale. It should be noted that a continuous information war preceded the preparation of the provocation and the so-called recognition process against Ukraine and the whole world – Russian TV channels and news agencies spread disinformation that the provocation was held not by Russia but by Ukraine. We repeat, cyber-attacks also preceded all this on the systems of state structures, which continue to this day.

The attack of Russian hackers on Ukraine began just a few minutes before the full-fledged invasion of the army. According to Reuters, the United States, Britain, and the European Union officially blamed the Russian Federation for a large-scale cyber-attack that disrupted the ViaSat satellite Internet service an hour before the start of the war on February 24. This destroyed “tens of thousands” of satellite terminals.

It should be noted that Russia has suffered significant losses both in real and virtual space. According to experts, the war that began on February 24, 2022, destroyed the myth of Russia’s military invincibility and cyber warfare. At the beginning of the war in Russia, hackers hacked video platforms Wink and IVI, and several Russian channels – “Nastoyashchee Vremya” (“Current Time”) and “Dozhd TV” (“Rain TV”) broadcast videos of explosions in Ukraine instead of serials.

Russia has launched massive cyberattacks on Ukraine’s strategic infrastructure since the start of the war. Ukraine has faced multiple “wiper” attacks, including ones that have targeted computers in Ukraine’s government, financial institutions, and internet service providers. Those attacks also look to mass-delete files from hacked computers. Russia has succeeded in hampering some of the country’s internet providers (Collier, 2022: 1).

Anonymous announced on Twitter the release of a video of the war on Russian channels and shared the video. It is true that the broadcasting of Russian channels soon resumed, but it remained a strong signal that Russia is not invincible in this area either.

Anonymous, a free, decentralized hacking organization that brings together so-called hacktivists worldwide, has issued a statement claiming that they have infiltrated Russian

security systems and extracted lists of Russian agents, which they would publish in stages. If Anonymous hackers really infiltrated Russia's security systems and extracted something valuable from it, publishing it would be significant.

It is still unclear what kind of attacks were carried out on Ukrainian and Russian state websites or military systems and what damage was done to one side or another. It will probably take years to record and analyze this accurately.

NATO member states actively provide political, humanitarian, or military assistance to Ukraine (Burt, 2022: 1), vital for Ukraine. Along with NATO, it is assisted by various states and regional or international organizations, which is very important for Ukraine. Even after the war, this assistance must be considerable for Ukraine to recover from the damage caused by the war.

Conclusion

Now all the world's efforts should be aimed at ensuring that Ukraine is somehow freed from the shackles of Russia. The continuation of the war will physically and morally destroy this country. The fact that NATO and the United States cannot help Ukraine with offensive weapons and provide only defensive weapons is no guarantee of final victory. Ukraine and the Ukrainian people can endure Russian aggression for years, but it will only be endurance and not profit. Georgia has been under pressure from Russia from 1801 until today. We have studied all the nuances – it is a rampant plague for the whole world, and it is also a blank wall that must be destroyed in different ways. In our opinion, a direct confrontation with Russia is still connected with a tactical mistake – if someone hoped for the opening of the second and third fronts, this had to be negotiated and coordinated from the very beginning. If anyone did not expect such crushing aggression from Russia, they should ask us, the Georgians, and we would definitely share our “experience.”

Today, the Russian government often mentions nuclear weapons. If they are used, it will be a small-charge nuclear bomb. Everyone in the world is well aware that this will be a complete disaster for humanity. It is possible that in this case, we are dealing only with propaganda aimed at intimidation, but we know that the character and nature of Russia cannot be trusted. Kremlin will indeed do so. The Russian leadership prefers territories to be useless, lifeless, and called their own rather than flourishing and being someone else's. It can be said convincingly in the Russia-Ukraine war that Ukraine is coming out victorious, albeit with great sacrifices and losses in the form of people or infrastructure. But the fighting spirit, self-sacrifice, and love of the Ukrainian people in the modern period is the best example of what a resilient and respectful country should be like with its nation. The role and involvement of the West in the context of Ukraine's assistance is paramount, leading to Ukraine's eventual victory. It will rebuild the destroyed infrastructure and strengthen its statehood, and the time will come when it will finally annex the territories temporarily occupied by Russia.

As a result of the Russia-Ukraine War of 2022, Europe, the United States, and the civilized world have finally seen the true face of Russia. When they took a passive stance in the 2008 Russia-Georgia war, they woke up to the modern era and became convinced that Russia was indeed an aggressor. Russia poses a significant threat to global security, which requires effective containment.

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