

POLITYKA
INSIGHT

The second year of Russia's war with Ukraine



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POLITYKA INSIGHT

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Dear Readers,

February 24, 2024 marks two years since the beginning of Russia's full-scale military aggression against Ukraine. We report on the course of this war, the largest armed conflict in Europe since the Second World War, on an ongoing basis in Polityka Insight's services and podcasts, and discuss it at events organised by us or those attended by our analysts. Following the first year of the war, we produced a special report, „A Year of War”, available on PI's website. The second anniversary of the outbreak of the conflict is an opportunity to revisit the most important events of the past year, summarise the effectiveness of Ukrainian defence and assess the prospects for developments on the battlefield as well as the changes that have taken place in Ukraine's international neighbourhood. That is why we are publishing this publication today.

The word most often used to describe the strategic situation in Ukraine's fight against Russian aggression is currently stalemate or deadlock. The front lines of the conflict have not changed significantly over the past year. However, there is intense and bloody fighting at the local level - the war has turned positional. In this publication, we analyse the factors that have contributed to this and assess how this evolution of the conflict is affecting Ukraine and Russia. We show which military equipment supplied by the West was most effective. Separately, we treat the revolution on the battlefield brought about by the massive and manifold use of drones. We also provide an outlook on Ukraine's greatest hope - the acquisition of F-16 aircraft.

Notwithstanding the current situation on the battlefield, the most important thing for the effective defence of Ukraine is to maintain Western munitions, along with financial and political support. The past year has shown the downgrading of the priority that the war in Ukraine had for Western states and societies. Particularly important here is the breakdown of the political support mechanism of the US Congress, which holds the funds that the government can allocate for weapons and other purposes. The still unresolved crisis in America shifts the burden of helping Ukraine to Europe. Whether and how it will bear it will determine more than just the next year of the war.

We discuss the past months, the current state and the circumstances of the Ukrainian defence not just in this publication. You will also find a link to a special podcast of Polityka Insight, recorded with renowned experts following and analysing events related to the war.

We invite you to read and listen.



Marek Świerczyński
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Key events of the second year of the war

February 24, 2023

On the first anniversary of the Russian invasion, Ukraine received its first Leopard 2 tanks from Poland, and the US approved a USD 2 billion arms package.



March

Ukrainian Defence Minister asked for 250,000 artillery shells on a monthly basis. Heavy fighting near Bakhmut, several hundred soldiers a day are killed. Poland and Slovakia promised Ukraine MiG-29 fighter jets, the EU promised one million artillery shells per year. The first German Leopard and British Challenger tanks arrived in Ukraine.

April

The US announced a USD 2.6 billion arms package. Denmark announced the transfer of older generation Leopard 1 tanks to Ukraine. Germany delivered the first Patriot anti-missile system to Ukraine. Poland and Hungary announced a ban on agricultural imports from Ukraine (the start of the grain dispute).



May

The Patriot system first shot down a Russian hypersonic Kryugal missile. The UK and the Netherlands announced a plan to transfer F-16, Storm Shadow cruise missiles (and France Scalp-EG). Ukraine asked Germany for Taurus missiles. Wagner Group announced the capture of Bachmut.

June

Fighting began as part of the Ukrainian offensive. The dam on the Dnieper at Novaya Kakhovka was blown up. Ukraine liberated several villages in the Donbas and Zaporizhia. „Prigozhin Rebellion”: Wagner’s group took command in Rostov-on-Don and began a march on Moscow, aborted after less than a day.



July

Ukrainian forces began to attack the left bank of the Dnieper. Wagner Group announced partial relocation to Belarus. The US transferred cluster munitions to Ukraine. The Ukrainian President expressed dissatisfaction at not being invited to join NATO. G7 countries announced concluding military agreements with Ukraine. An „F-16 coalition for Ukraine” was formed, with the participation of the Netherlands, Norway, and Denmark.

August

Ukrainian forces reached the villages of Robotyne and Urozhayne as part of the counter-offensive in Zaporozhye. Germany delivered Iris-T SLM anti-aircraft kits. The Netherlands confirmed its intention to hand over 42 F-16 fighters. Ukrainian drones disrupted traffic at Moscow airports. Wagner Group leader Yevgeny Prigozhin was killed in a likely assassination.



September

Ukrainian forces broke through the first line of Russian fortifications in Zaporizhia. Rustem Umerov replaced Oleksiy Reznikov as Ukraine's new Defence Minister. Ukrainian drones and missiles damaged a Russian submarine and landing ship in Sevastopol. Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki stated that Poland is no longer supplying Ukraine with arms. Ukraine destroyed the Black Sea Fleet headquarters in Sevastopol.

October

The Pentagon announced the transfer of ATACMS missiles to Ukraine. Russia began to receive munitions from North Korea. The Ukrainian president named the commander of the territorial defence forces. Ukraine destroyed 21 Russian helicopters with ATACMS missiles at airfields.



November

In an interview, Gen. Valery Zaluzhny described the situation at the front as a stalemate and admitted mistakes in the counter-offensive. President Zelenskyy named the head of Ukraine's special forces. General Zaluzhny's advisor was killed in a grenade explosion. Ukraine announced mass production of long-range drones. A protest on the Polish-Ukrainian border began. Pilot training on Dutch F-16s began in Romania.

December

President Zelenskyy admitted in an interview that the counter-offensive had not achieved its objectives. Zelenskyy's visit to Washington did not bring new funding for weapons. The Pentagon announced the last arms package after exhausting available funds. Russia began massive air attacks on Ukrainian cities.



January 2024

The UK has signed a defence agreement with Ukraine. Ukraine shot down two Russian aircraft of strategic importance. The Bundestag blocked the transfer of Taurus cruise missiles to Ukraine. Donald Tusk in Kyiv announced the return of Poland as Ukraine's advocate and ally.

February

Zelenskyy fired General Zaluzhny and appointed General Oleksandr Syrsky as the army's commander-in-chief.

The war's third year begins

Ukraine is weakened, but strong enough to hold the defensive lines. As Russia shows no potential to break them, the positional war will continue.



In the second year of the war, the front line has solidified. It runs from the Dnieper estuary along the river to the remnants of the Kachovsky reservoir, crosses Zaporozhye and, west of Donetsk, turns towards the north of the Donbas to the Oskil River. The lack of significant change over the past year was due to the levelling of potential and the exhaustion of the fighting forces. Russia captured Bakhmut in eastern Donbas in May 2023, but did not advance deeper into Ukrainian territory. Ukraine did not break through Russian defences in the summer counter-offensive, conducted from June to October, but inflicted heavy casualties on Russia in terms of men and equipment. Both sides conducted air attacks from a distance, for which Ukraine gained more capability through the production of its own drones and supplies of cruise missiles from the West. The ground combat took on a positional character using small infantry formations with support from drones, artillery and tanks.

Kyiv is struggling to regain occupied territory. The summer counter-offensive extended Ukraine's control over its rightful territory only in some places and to a maximum depth of a dozen or so kilometres. The intention to recapture the strip adjacent to the Sea of Azov failed, and Ukrainian commanders realised that it was so heavily fortified and so fiercely defended by the Russians that conquering it would take much longer and require much larger forces than they had planned. However, this has not led to a redefinition of the political goal of the war - it is still to regain territory along the pre-2014 borders (before the annexation of Crimea and parts of Donbas). At the end of the second and the beginning of

the third year of the war, the most intense fighting is taking place around Donetsk, Bakhmut, at the mouth of the Dnieper and in the north around Kupiansk, but territorial advances are minimal, with Russia's current initiative and advantage.

Reduced supplies have reduced combat capabilities. According to the Kiel Institute for Global Economy, by autumn 2023, the level of arms supplies from the West had fallen by 90 per cent compared to the previous year. At the same time, Ukraine had used up most or all of its own ammunition stockpile for post-Soviet equipment, and was using more and more weapon systems supplied from the West, which meant an increasing reliance on ongoing supplies of ammunition and materials from NATO countries. This translated into a shortage of artillery ammunition, its rationing, reduced intensity of fire and uncertainty in operational planning. Faced with these facts, the Ukrainian command announced a shift to a strategic defensive operation, which does not require as much ammunition as offensive operations.

The Ukrainian army is feeling exhausted by the protracted war. To maintain defensive positions, Ukraine needs to have around 400,000 troops on the front line. This is roughly half of the armed forces. Some of them have been in the army since the beginning of the war and have so far only taken short leave. That is why the Ukrainian command is insisting on mobilisation, expanding the pool of recruits to include men under the age of 27 and enlisting those who have gone abroad. According to the military, 400,000-500,000 people need to be conscripted into the army in order to restore the state of the units after losses and to allow longer rest for frontline soldiers. The relevant legislation on this issue is in the process of being passed in parliament. The later it is passed, the longer it will take to rebuild the potential manpower and the greater the opposition from the families of frontline veterans.

Ukraine's internal and international situation has become more complicated. In the second half of 2023, a conflict between the presidential camp in Kyiv and the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, General Valery Zaluzhny, came to light. Zaluzhny published several texts abroad in which he described mistakes in the planning of the counter-offensive and criticised the authorities. Just before the second anniversary of the war, Volodymyr Zelensky dismissed Zaluzhny and appointed as his successor General Oleksandr Syrsky, formerly commander of the ground forces, known for his successes at the front but also his readiness for the bloody costs of relentless defence. The change of commander is expected to give the war a new impetus as Zelensky's political position has weakened. The Ukrainian president has partly lost his effectiveness in convincing foreign partners to maintain high levels of military support. In the country, his critics have begun to come to the fore. The backdrop to the revival of political debate in Ukraine was the indefinite postponement of the presidential elections, which were due to be held in spring 2024.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Ukraine enters its third year of war strong enough to defend itself for a long time, but without the ability to launch large-scale offensive actions. However, positional warfare consumes material and human resources, which hits Ukraine - less populous than Russia, with a weaker economy and dependent on Western aid - harder. As Russia does not currently demonstrate the ability to conclusively resolve the war in its favour, the coming months will see a continuation of local clashes, with the prospect of intensified action later this year or in 2025.

Marek Świerczyński

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Which Western weapons have proved most effective

Modern air defence systems gave Ukraine the biggest boost in defensive capability in the second year of the war. Tanks and combat vehicles did not have the chance to demonstrate their superiority.

SELECTED TYPES OF WEAPONS SUPPLIED TO UKRAINE FROM THE WEST

TANKS

528



ARMORED VEHICLES

654



ARTILLERY

475



PATRIOT SYSTEMS

4



ROCKET LAUNCHERS

81



STARLINK TERMINALS

> 100 thou.



Source: Ukraine Support Tracker, Kiel Institute for the World Economy.

Air defence systems significantly reduce the impact of Russian strikes. The Patriot medium-range missile systems from the US, Germany and the Netherlands along with the SAMP-T from France, which have been handed over to Ukraine, shoot down up to 90 per cent of ballistic and hypersonic missiles over key civilian and military sites and regions. Even older-generation Patriots are capable of downing Russian Iskanders and Kinzhals, confirming the superiority of Western anti-missile technology over Russian missile solutions. When it comes to fighting targets flying lower and slower - aircraft, helicopters, cruise missiles and drones - short-range missile systems perform well: NASAMS, Iris-T and the older generation Hawk. The most important role in combating drones, however, is played by simple pick-up-mounted shooting systems. Ukraine is also successfully combining Western missile launchers with its chassis (the so-called FrankenSAM).

Strike weapons inflict heavy spot losses and damage on Russia. Due to their high precision and high destructive power, both HIMARS land-based launchers, firing GMLRS and ATACMS missiles with ranges of 85 and 160 km, and Storm Shadow/Scalp EG airborne cruise missiles with a range of 250 km are weapons used to eliminate especially important targets. With them, Ukraine attacks command posts (including those fortified or in buildings), airfields and airstrips, field depots and warehouses in the rear, supply lines, bridges and crossings as well as ships in ports and docks. Ground-based launchers are proving difficult to target and destroy due to their high mobility, and Russian aviation is having trouble fighting Ukrainian aircraft firing long-range missiles. Nevertheless, Ukraine is pleading for this type of weapon capable of striking at 300 and 500 km to reach further into Russia.

Western artillery has shown its quality but lacks ammunition. Self-propelled and towed 155 and 105mm calibre guns have become the mainstay of Ukrainian frontline artillery as resources were depleted and post-Soviet systems were eliminated in the second year of the war. Systems such as the Krab, Paladin, CAESAR, Archer, Zuzana powered by modern ammunition and using drones to direct fire show higher precision, faster reach and high mobility, resulting in better shelling results with lower ammunition consumption. Western designs offer better comfort for crews. Over time, however, the technical superiority of Western artillery has begun to lose its relevance as a result of reduced supplies of 155mm main calibre ammunition, the stocks of which available from Ukraine's allies have been depleted and the production of new ammunition has not kept pace with demand.

Tanks and fighting vehicles did not have the opportunity to fully prove themselves. Ukraine received equipment from the West for nine armoured and mechanised brigades - part of which it deployed in offensive operations conducted from June to October mainly on the southern section of the front in the Zaporizhia and Donetsk regions. As a result of heavy mine coverage, numerous losses in equipment, the shortage of anti-mine equipment and the lack of even local air dominance, operations of Ukrainian manoeuvre subunits were limited and infantry was diverted to break through the minefields and fight. Ukrainian soldiers speak well of Western tanks, mainly German Leopards as well as combat vehicles, mainly American Bradleys. However, this equipment used locally and without gaining an advantage did not prove more effective than the Russian defence.

Starlink has become the backbone of the Ukrainian military's communications network. SpaceX's satellite communications terminals were donated to Ukraine at its request early on in the Russian invasion (the request was made on Twitter, with details agreed by Elon Musk in conversation with Volodymyr Zelensky). Starlink has donated 3,600 devices to Ukraine, with tens of thousands more purchased by international donors, including Poland. It is estimated that Ukraine currently uses more than 100,000 terminals. In 2022, there was a dispute with Musk over the scope of use and funding of the service - this was resolved with the involvement of the US government. Ukrainian military engineers have been able to connect their own command and control systems to Starlink, creating a one-of-a-kind, Russian-attack and disruption-proof network for information exchange and command transfer.

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Ukraine is waiting for F-16 fighters

Ukraine will receive fewer aircraft than it had hoped and later than it had anticipated. Therefore, in addition to waiting for F-16s, it is also talking about getting Swedish Gripens and French Mirage.

Ukraine is to receive aircraft from the Netherlands, Denmark and Norway. During Volodymyr Zelensky's diplomatic trip in August 2023, the commitment to deliver F-16 aircraft was confirmed by the governments in The Hague and Copenhagen. Earlier, on the margins of the NATO summit in Vilnius in July, the Netherlands and Denmark, with the agreement of the US, formed a coalition of nine more countries besides them (the UK, Romania, Poland, Canada, Sweden, Belgium, Norway, Luxembourg, Portugal), whose members pledged to supply aircraft and provide training. Zelensky said after talks with Prime Minister Mark Rutte that the Netherlands would provide 42 aircraft, while Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen announced that her country would donate 19 planes. Norway followed, offering 10 jets.

The US supported the re-export of the aircraft. The US government's approval was necessary as it holds the F-16 technology and the largest stock of weapons for these aircraft. This was a formality, as a positive decision in the administration of President Joe Biden was made in early 2023 and was not contested by the US political class. America will not itself participate in the deliveries; it is only allowing third countries to transfer the aircraft to Ukraine and for the US arms industry to participate in the project. Following the Pentagon's declaration, the US Air Force began familiarisation training for Ukrainian personnel - pilots and maintainers.

Training of Ukrainian pilots is ongoing in Romania and other countries. A training centre was launched at the Fetesti base in November 2023, equipped with five Dutch F-16 aircraft (single and two-seaters). Lockheed Martin and its subcontractors (Dedalus, Draken, GDF, Airbus, Ilias) are responsible for the training. The instructors there are former military personnel with combat experience. On the multinational coalition side, the training is coordinated by a Dutch aviation officer. The centre in Romania is also used by the country's pilots. Training of Ukrainian pilots on F-16s also takes place in the US and Denmark and auxiliary training also takes place in countries that do not have these aircraft in their own fleet, such as the UK and France.

Deliveries of the aircraft have been postponed until this year. Kyiv had hoped to receive the F-16s in autumn 2023. However, delays occurred already at the stage of candidate selection and training preparation. The selected pilots and mechanics had to obtain language certificates, which only allowed them to start learning the technical and tactical matter. The aircraft scheduled for handover also had to undergo technical overhauls and be stripped of electronics containing NATO countries' allied and national cryptography. At the same time, technical and maintenance facilities at Ukrainian airbases must be prepared for the F-16s, which will take many months. According to recent Dutch announcements, the first F-16s could be based in Ukraine in the second quarter of 2024.

Ukraine would like more than 120 multipurpose aircraft. Ukrainian Air Force spokesman Yuri Ihnat said this was the level at which the air force needs would be determined. However, he acknowledged that the 71 already promised jets would also make a significant difference in the war with Russia. The Netherlands, Denmark and Norway are not in a position to give more now, as they themselves are waiting for F-35s from the US. However, Ukraine is counting on the help of more F-16 users, including the US, as well as other aircraft. It is in the most advanced talks with Sweden, which has about 70 Saab JAS-39 Gripen aircraft and has declared the possibility of donating some of them. There have also been reports of a possible transfer of French Mirage 2000 aircraft to Ukraine.

THE BOTTOM LINE

F-16 aircraft have become the new myth of Ukrainian defence, largely as a result of an intense and emotional political and diplomatic campaign for their delivery. Even at an early stage, however, it is proving to be a more complicated and protracted undertaking to deliver them than donations to ground troops. Military officials argue that the effectiveness of the air force depends more than that of ground troops on service efficiency, training levels and logistics, and that the costs of cutting training short and transferring equipment without skills can be enormous. The commander of the US Air Force in Europe has stated that it will take four to five years before Ukraine fully masters the „F-16 system”, and that the effectiveness of Western aircraft in fighting Russia cannot be assessed before they enter combat.

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How the war in Ukraine changed the way UAVs are used

The widespread use of small UAVs has altered the dynamics of the battlefield, revealing that large drones are less effective on the front lines.

The second year of the most extensive drone war in the history of armed conflicts has passed. The role played by Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) on the Ukrainian battlefield has unveiled numerous advantages and disadvantages associated with these reconnaissance and attack tools. While drones have become ubiquitous, their varying degrees of usefulness have become evident. Below, we present the trends emerging from the experiences in using drones and defence against them.

A substantial fleet of UAVs facilitates continuous surveillance of the front lines. Ukraine and Russia employ a range of tactical, mini, and micro drones equipped with cameras mounted on aerial platforms with varying ranges - spanning from a hundred, through several dozen, a dozen, or just a few kilometres. The tiered deployment of UAVs at different altitudes, distances, and flight durations ensures round-the-clock reconnaissance, identification, classification, and target localisation for artillery, aviation, missiles, and infantry units. Nighttime reconnaissance poses challenges without high-resolution thermal cameras with extended observation ranges, potentially limiting capabilities based on their availability.

Kamikaze drones pose a level of danger comparable to missiles. While attacks from UAVs carrying small explosives may not penetrate a tank's armour, they have the potential to immobilise the vehicle by halting its progress, damaging external observation systems, igniting the engine, or even tearing off a track. This is enough to leave the disabled vehicle vulnerable to additional attacks from either air or ground forces. Given the significantly lower cost of drones equipped with grenades compared to anti-tank missiles or grenade launchers, they emerge as a cost-effective and frontline option in offensive and defensive operations against armoured and mechanised troops, alongside traditional tools such as mines.

FPV racing drones are particularly dangerous. First Person View (FPV) drones are small and agile, typically featuring four rotors and controlled through goggles, providing real-time camera footage. Operating at speeds between 140-180 km/h at low altitudes, they are exceptionally difficult to detect and destroy, offering precision in terms of flight path and impact points. Despite carrying small combat loads, their compact size, agile movement, and precision allow them to navigate into open hatches of combat vehicles, building windows, or trenches. Widely available on the civilian market and relatively inexpensive, these drones have become a standard means of combat.

Drones the size of aeroplanes require air dominance. Large UAVs are more susceptible to destruction compared to piloted aircraft, lacking inherent means of self-defence or enemy presence detection. A notable example is the Turkish Bayraktar TB2, which demonstrated effectiveness in detecting and engaging Russian columns deep within Ukraine but faced challenges in close proximity to aviation and ground-based air defence systems near the front line. To address this vulnerability, future strategies may involve integrating large drones into a group of combat UAVs designed specifically for destroying anti-aircraft launchers and countering enemy aircraft.

Simple defence measures are often as effective as simple attack methods. As early as the spring of 2022, Russia initiated the practice of equipping its combat vehicles with metal roofs to safeguard tanks and infantry fighting vehicles from attacks by kamikaze drones and missiles from above. Although less effective against missiles, this measure has proven to be successful in thwarting most small attack UAVs. The solution has been adopted by Ukraine and, more recently, by Israel during operations in the Gaza Strip. The implementation of basic metal roofs by a technological powerhouse like Russia underscores their notable effectiveness, offering protection at costs significantly lower than advanced active defence systems employed by Israel. Recently, the Russians have begun incorporating anti-drone roofs to shield the lines of their fortifications.

Maritime drones have proven to be as effective as their airborne counterparts. In numerous attacks on Russian warships and installations in Crimea, Ukraine strategically employed remotely controlled mini boats equipped with cameras and explosives. These maritime drones posed a greater challenge to detect and combat compared to air cruise missiles, as traditional air defence systems are primarily designed to repel aerial threats. Russia, like many other countries, currently lacks an equivalent system for detecting and countering floating drones. This absence makes maritime drones exceptionally effective weapons, considering their extraordinary effectiveness relative to the cost of development, production, and maintenance when deployed in combat formations.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The drone war in Ukraine showed commanders that UAV technologies, previously considered complementary, have become a basic combat tool. The most important conclusion from this situation is that the armed forces need to have a lot of drones, although they do not necessarily have to be very technically advanced.

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Ukraine is rebuilding its defence industry despite the war

Ukrainian industry is developing both simple and more advanced strike systems. There are also ideas to build heavy equipment factories.

The Ukrainian government and president have announced in the second half of 2023 significant investments in increasing their own defence production and in the arms industry. Volodymyr Zelenskyy organised the first defence trade fair since the outbreak of the war in autumn, which was devoted mainly to collaboration with foreign contractors and the promotion of Ukrainian products. PI presents the directions Ukraine is currently focusing on to rebuild its defence industry.

Production of drones is growing at the fastest rate and reaching a large scale. According to the government's announcement, Ukraine was supposed to acquire 200,000 flying drones of various types by the end of 2023, a significant part of which came from its own production. This means a hundredfold increase in production capacity compared to the pre-war period. The production of new drones and the conversion of commercial drones for military purposes has so far been carried out in a dispersed manner, without the involvement of large factories, although with the participation of Ukraine's Ministry of Defence and the state armaments company Ukroboronprom. The fruits of this work include strike unmanned aerial vehicles with a range of 1,000 km. The Ukrainian aviation tycoon, private corporation Antonov, announced industrial-scale drone production in September. This will mean a demand for the technology and drone competence from Western allies.

Ukraine is developing its own missile and artillery weapons and naval drones. The most significant are the long-range strike drones mentioned above, as well as the Neptune cruise missiles, which allowed the sinking of the Russian cruiser Moskva in April 2022 and systematic attacks on bases in Crimea. Ukraine is beginning to introduce its own-built Bogdan, a western 155 mm calibre cannon howitzer, onto the battlefield. Before the war, there was only one test prototype, today there are more of these guns and they have a revised design. Ukraine also continues to develop its own rocket artillery (Wilcha launchers) with an even longer range than the US HIMARS. A novelty that has only appeared during the war is naval strike drones (remotely operated boats filled with explosives), which Ukraine is using to attack the Kerch bridge, coastal installations in Crimea, and ships in ports and in the roadstead.

Armoured equipment is to be established in cooperation with Western companies. Two manufacturers have announced the construction of heavy equipment factories in Ukraine - German Rheinmetall and British BAE Systems. The German plan is to service, and in the future produce Leopard tanks

and other armoured vehicles. The British, together with the Swedes, have proposed to produce CV90 combat vehicles and 105- and 155-mm calibre artillery. The plants are to be located in the western part of the country, more distant from direct frontline operations (previously the main tank factory operated in Kharkov). Agreements to repair Leopard tanks outside the war zone were also signed by Ukroboronprom with PGZ (Bumar-Łabędy), and the Polish side agreed on them with Germany. The first vehicles came to Gliwice in July 2023 for overhaul.

The state-controlled arms company is undergoing reorganisation. President Zelenskyy appointed in June 2023 a new head of Ukroboronprom, Herman Smetanin, a young manager and former director of the Kharkiv tank factory. The president gave him three tasks: to increase arms production with a particular emphasis on strike capabilities, to curb corruption in the arms sector and to complete the reform of the defence industry. The company itself has changed its name and formula. The former Ukroboronprom has been formally called Ukrainian Defence Industry JSC (joint-stock company) and it is expected to carry out the process of transformation of subordinate companies and introduce a new corporate governance by the end of the year. The reform of the Ukrainian armaments industry follows the recommendations of the Independent Commission for Combating Corruption (NAKO) and in line with OECD and NATO guidelines.

THE BOTTOM LINE

When it comes to munitions, Ukraine remains heavily dependent on Western supplies for now. Despite possessing considerable capabilities (Antonov, Motor-Sich), it has not signalled ambitions to rebuild its aviation industry. In terms of land-based platforms, however, its industrial competence is significant and the declarations of cooperation from Western partners are promising enough to enable Ukraine to recreate this sector of the defence industry even in the midst of hostilities. The condition for this will be Western financial support enabling investment and purchases, as well as transparency of the procurement system.

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What non-military challenges does Ukraine face

In the third year of the defence war, the authorities in Kyiv will face growing public discontent. The challenge will be to better rally foreign partners.

Ukraine enters its third year of war following Russian aggression in February 2022. Ukrainian society has adapted to functioning under wartime conditions and the government in Kyiv has managed to partially stabilise the economy. However, there are first signs of President Volodymyr Zelensky's position weakening. The authorities in Kyiv face a number of challenges in the coming year.

Ukraine must find a way to engage foreign partners. On February 1, the European Council granted EUR 50 billion in aid to Ukraine for the 2024-2027 period. Kyiv was promised multi-year support in exchange for general commitments on preparing an investment plan and respecting democratic principles and the rule of law. Ukraine will aim for foreign funding to be based on multi-year instruments rather than - as has been the case so far - a maximum of one year. This will stabilise a budget that is half dependent on external aid. Kyiv sees Washington as a key partner, but Ukraine must prepare for a possible victory in the US presidential election by Donald Trump. Washington may then reduce support, already blocked by Republicans in Congress.

Talks on Ukrainian accession to the EU to begin. Initial talks will require the authorities in Kyiv to prepare an institutional reform plan. The European Commission's 2023 review of transition progress in Ukraine pointed to the need for further action on issues such as defending the rights of disadvantaged groups (such as people with disabilities, Roma), increasing transparency in the functioning of the administration, fighting corruption and organised crime, as well as on dismantling the oligarchic system and strengthening the fiscal independence of local authorities. The European Commission is likely to prepare another progress report on internal change at the end of the year - ensuring it is positive will require at least superficial progress.

The ongoing conflict will disrupt the election calendar. The presidential election is scheduled for March this year, but is unlikely to be held. Voting could only take place in areas not affected by military action, and would likely be hampered by Russian airstrikes. This could be used to undermine their results. For the president's camp, the election would be an attempt to consolidate Zelensky's legitimacy. However, the vote could undermine the political standing of the president by the popular General Valery Zaluzhny, dismissed on February 8 from his post as Commander-in-Chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. Publicly, the general has made no mention of political ambitions, but research by

the Kiev International Institute of Sociology in December 2023 shows that public confidence in the general (83 per cent) is higher than in the president (62 per cent). The media regularly reported on tensions between Zelensky and Zaluzhny.

The authorities will face reputational problems. Measures taken by the president's inner circle are being met with increasing public discontent. Tension persists between the central and regional authorities against the backdrop of Kyiv's centralisation drive, particularly in the implementation of infrastructure projects. Ukrainian journalists also point to the shady links between the head of the Office of the President of Ukraine, Andriy Yermak, and Ukrainian businessmen, especially those operating in the construction industry. These conflicts will increase as Ukraine's reconstruction progresses and funds are distributed for this purpose. The multiplying reports of corruption in the Ukrainian army will also be a problem. In January, abuses in mortar ammunition procurement procedures were revealed to result in the embezzlement of some USD 40 million.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The authorities in Kyiv continue to benefit from the popular support resulting from the war mobilisation. The coming year is unlikely to change this situation. However, with the lack of progress on the frontline, the preparations for a broader mobilisation, the growing news of corruption and the lack of transparency in the functioning of the Ukrainian administration, public discontent is likely to grow. The president's camp will try to counter this with limited reforms that will serve to showcase progress in negotiations with the EU, but will not change the oligarchic politico-economic system.

Kacper Wańczyk

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How Kremlin adapted to a long war

The Russian authorities have placed the country under martial law, allowing it to mobilise resources for a long-term war with Ukraine. However, Moscow wants to freeze the conflict.

Russia did not achieve a decisive victory in the aggression against Ukraine or, as Kremlin propaganda claims, in the war waged against Russia by the West, so the Kremlin has prepared for a long-term conflict. It is taking measures in the political, economic, military and propaganda spheres to serve this goal.

Kremlin is stabilising the political system. Russia will hold a presidential election in March in which no one will threaten Vladimir Putin's victory, but the authorities do not want the campaign to destabilise anything. Accordingly, spending on internal security has been increased by 6 per cent compared to the previous year and by 48 per cent compared to pre-war 2021. Some opposition figures have already been arrested or left Russia, ordinary citizens are being repressed. After popular opposition leader Aleksey Navalny was killed in prison, a number of people wishing to honor his memory were arrested. The Kremlin has channelled hostile sentiment by promoting Boris Nadezhin as Putin's main opponent. The politician spoke out against the continuation of the so-called „special military operation”, but made no mention of withdrawal from occupied territories, and supported the annexation of Crimea. In the end, the Central Election Commission questioned some of the signatures submitted by Nadezhin and did not register him as a candidate. In place of Nadezhin, the Kremlin has begun to promote as an ‚alternative candidate’ Vladislav Davankov, deputy speaker of the Duma (the lower house of the Russian parliament) put forward by the ‚New People’ party, created by oligarch Alexei Nechayev.

The authorities are systemically strengthening the defense industry. In the 2024 budget, defence spending will exceed 6 per cent of GDP (equivalent to USD 120 billion) and will be the highest since the collapse of the USSR. Production at weapons plants runs in three shifts. Western sanctions hindering access to high-tech components are effectively circumvented. According to Bloomberg, in 2023, Russia bought USD 1.2 billion worth of microprocessors made by US and European companies. These were used, among other things, in the production of drones. Defence companies face a liquidity problem, a lack of manpower (due to the mobilisation of some employees) and a shortage of high-tech components. The Russian authorities are supporting them with additional orders, modifying bankruptcy procedures or merging them with profitable companies. The Labour Ministry is subsidising temporary employment in defence companies, and their employees are to be given discounts on housing rentals.

Economic policy serves to support big business. The Russian authorities are extending financial support programmes for businesses initiated in 2022. Among other things, reduced loans for „systemic industrial enterprises” and preferential loans to support exports will be maintained in 2024. Despite the inflationary pressure growing - also under the influence of these programmes - the Central Bank of Russia is trying to delay interest rate increases. In this way, it is trying to postpone the increase in the cost of borrowing by Russian businesses and citizens. It has also created a system of circumventing sanctions used in particular to maintain oil exports, crucial to the Russian budget. In 2023, budget income from taxes and levies imposed on oil companies amounted to USD 99.4 billion, 24 per cent less than the year before. A transport fleet of vessels operating outside official registers and a system of intermediaries has been set up in places like Greece, India, Singapore and Turkey.

Moscow escalates its propaganda war against the West. Russian diplomacy is using international forums to promote the narrative of an „aggressive West” seeking war with Russia and a „Zelensky regime” that is dragging the US and the EU into a conflict with Russia - this was the narrative presented by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov at the UN Security Council in late January. At the same time, the Kremlin is trying to suggest to parts of the political establishment of the US and EU countries that it is in their interest to get Kyiv to conclude a peace agreement. Moscow is also making use of cooperation with China, India or Iran for propoganda purposes, suggesting that it can create an alternative to Washington in world politics. The ineffectiveness of economic sanctions is regularly highlighted.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Although officially martial law has not been imposed in Russia, in fact the country is economically and socially reoriented towards war. This allows for better control of economic and human resources. According to analysts, under the current conditions, the Kremlin has the means to maintain relative stability at least until the end of 2024. Hence, the most desirable scenario for Moscow is to freeze the conflict in Ukraine. Russia will seek to have the West force a ceasefire in Ukraine on Russian terms.

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Russia escalates anti-Western and anti-Polish rhetoric

Confrontation with the West has become the Kremlin's main ideology. The underlying aim is to integrate Russians around Putin's power and to unite countries reluctant to Western domination around Russia.

In December 2021, Russia presented the West with a set of ultimatums regarding a change in the European security order, based on a reduction of NATO capabilities on its eastern flank, the withdrawal of US troops, Ukraine's neutrality and the restoration of Russia's sphere of influence at its borders. The demands were accompanied by an intensification of anti-NATO and anti-Western rhetoric, portraying Russia as a victim of the West's expansive and hostile policies, against which it has the right and need to defend itself. Two months after the ultimatum was rejected, Russia invaded Ukraine. After almost two years of war, Russian rhetoric vis-à-vis the West has further escalated, and recent statements by Russian politicians show a particular intensification of hostility.

Putin has set out a vision of a global war against the West. Speaking at the 25th All-Russian National Council, the Russian president described Russia as a civilisation-state conducting an existential struggle for its own and the entire world's freedom. He said that „Russia stopped those who sought world domination, as it had already done in the past”. He stigmatised „Russophobia, racism and neo-Nazism”, which, in his view, had become „the official ideology of Western ruling elites”. He accused the West of planning to partition and plunder Russia. He emphasised that the „Russky mir” meant the heritage of the former Rus, the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union and modern Russia. Putin's speech was accompanied by an address by the Orthodox Patriarch of Moscow and All-Russia, Kirill, emphasising the religious context of the belligerent stance.

Lavrov accused the West of destroying Europe's security order. At the OSCE meeting in Skopje, which Sergey Lavrov was admitted to despite protests and a boycott by some member states, Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs called the OSCE an appendage of NATO and the European Union. He accused Western capitals of creating their own political community without Russia and Belarus, blocking consecutive attempts at agreement and rejecting Russia's December 2021 treaty proposals. In Lavrov's view, the gravest sin of this approach was the support it has given to the „neo-Nazi regime in Kiev” since 2014. Lavrov felt that in these circumstances there was not much chance of rebuilding a European security system based on the OSCE. However, he added that „life goes on” and „constructive formats of Eurasian cooperation” are progressing without hindrance.

Ryabkov said that war between Russia and NATO is likely. In an interview with the Izvestia website, Russian deputy MinFor Sergei Ryabkov, who is responsible for relations with the West, said that Russia's relations with NATO cannot be repaired in the foreseeable future, that dialogue in the current situation is unthinkable and that armed confrontation is possible. He said that it would be brought about by NATO's „encirclement of Russia” and the escalatory decisions of the Alliance against Russia. In his opinion, the West had failed to deliver a strategic blow to Russia. When asked about the possibility of an armed conflict, Ryabkov replied that it was not out of the question, but depended entirely on NATO. „We have shown that we are capable of defending our interests by all available means, and we are doing so,” said the diplomat.

Medvedev has again made threats against Poland. Former Russian president Dmitry Medvedev, now deputy chairman of the Security Council of Russia, published a lengthy text on the history of Russian-Polish relations in Rossiyskaya Gazeta, on the eve of the anniversary of the „expulsion of Poles from the Kremlin” in November 1612. In the section dealing with the present day, he concluded that Poland was one of Russia's most active opponents, which supposedly threatens the whole of Europe. He accused Poland of wanting to annex part of Ukraine and provoke a war between Poland, Ukraine, Russia and Belarus. He stated that „the collapse of the revanchist plans will lead to the death of Polish statehood”. Medvedev is known for the violent language of his texts and online posts, but his focus on Poland captures one of the main directions of the Kremlin's hostile propaganda.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Confrontation with the West has become the Kremlin's main ideology, surpassing the claims previously formulated against Ukraine in the Russian leadership's narrative. For the Russians, this approach positions the current war as a stage in a longer campaign, while allowing Russia to win over countries that, for historical, ideological or cultural reasons, are unwilling for Western domination to continue. Statements by Russian politicians are designed to get Russians and the outside world accustomed to the prospect of a prolonged conflict with Ukraine and the vision of war with NATO.

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Why the war in Ukraine ceased to be a priority for the West

Various conflicts around the world are diverting attention from Russian aggression. Support in Western societies for arms transfers to Ukraine is also gradually declining.

Western states provided assistance to Ukraine, which was attacked on February 24 2022, on a scale that exceeded other such crises after 1945. Thanks to Joe Biden's leadership, the West managed to achieve political unity, manifested in arms supplies but also in attempts to economically and politically weaken Russia. This effort was considered the West's most important challenge from 2022 onwards. However, after two years of war, one can observe a reduction in the importance of the priorities signalled by the West. We show why this is the case.

There is no agreed strategy for victory with Ukraine. At the start of the war, Joe Biden communicated an informal strategy towards Russia: to remove Putin from power and weaken Russia. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, thanks to the initial successes of the war, announced a strategy to regain Crimea and Donbas. However, the West saw a risk in these intentions - for a sudden loss of territory could put Putin in a political corner, the escape from which could be the use of nuclear weapons. So the West chose a strategy of slowly strengthening Ukraine, hoping that its pressure would lead to an end to the war. When the only prospect of such a change - Yevgeny Prigozhin's putsch - proved unsuccessful, the West reverted to gradual support for Ukraine and the expectation that the war would be ended by peace negotiations.

Global crises divert attention from Ukraine. The war in Ukraine has lost its position as the „key global conflict” due to increasing other risks, including the war in Gaza, which could spill over into Iran, Lebanon or Jordan, and the intervention in Yemen against the Huti. Earlier - in the autumn of 2022 - there was an escalation of the situation around Taiwan. These crises have their social and political repercussions within Western countries. The US siding with Israel in the war against Hamas and the bombing campaign on Gaza, at a cost of more than 29,000 lives, caused an internal discussion in the US about moral and political priorities in taking sides in a foreign conflict. The domestic crisis in the US, caused by increased irregular migration, directly threatened the Ukrainian cause by the Republicans' opposition to a bill tying military support for Ukraine to border security funding.

In the West, support for the Ukrainian cause is declining. The West's greatest interest in Ukraine was in 2022, when refugees were flowing into Europe and with them stories of Russian atrocities. Volodymyr Zelensky then became a global icon, and Ukraine's war successes fostered the popularity of its cause. The decline came with the discussion of the chances and then the failures of the Ukrainian

offensive in 2023. There were reports of Zelensky's conflict with the then commander-in-chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, Gen. Valery Zaluzhny, and disputes within the Kyiv government over allegations of corruption. These developments have been reflected in polls regarding support for arming Ukraine: according to a Pew Research survey, from January to December 2023, the number of people in the US who believe that US aid to Ukraine is „too much” increased by 5 percentage points (from 26 to 31 per cent). Meanwhile, according to Eurobarometer, from spring to autumn 2023, support for weapon transfers to Ukraine in EU countries fell from 64 to 60 per cent.

Russia has proved resilient in global competition. It would take a redoubling of political and economic efforts to force Russia to implement the political will of the West, i.e. to end the war in Ukraine and stop its threats against the West. Indeed, the assumption that economic sanctions would bring the war to a halt has proved incorrect. The International Monetary Fund forecasts that Russia's GDP will grow by 2.6 per cent in 2024, instead of the 1.1 per cent predicted in October. Russia bypassed some of the sanctions and found sources of military supplies both in its own industry and in North Korea and Iran. It managed to convince some Arab and African states to be neutral towards the war. It has maintained an economic partnership with China, strengthened by a shared desire to weaken the US on the global stage.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The beginning of the third year of the war will bring a correction in the West's support for Ukraine: the war will remain an important topic politically, militarily and in domestic politics, but will not be central to it. Ukraine will be persuaded to adopt a „hedgehog strategy”, i.e. to build up its defence capabilities with Western assistance and stop Russian aggression to take land. The recovery of the occupied territories will remain the subject of declarations of support in the West, but the chances of such a scenario being realised will depend on a myriad of factors, including the durability of power in the Kremlin.

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What is the danger of the US blocking support for Ukraine

The lack of US munitions and weapons is worsening the situation for troops on the frontline and could threaten Ukraine with strategic failure. Europe is unable to fill the gap left by the US.

The dispute between the Republican majority in the House of Representatives and the Democratic US administration continues to block Congress from passing a supplemental budget for Ukraine's military support (USD 61 billion). President Joe Biden wanted Congress to allocate money in one bill for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan, as well as for strengthening the southern border, totalling more than USD 100 billion. The Republicans first demanded a tighter migration policy and then began to create a legislative blockade. We outline the dangers of blocking US funds.

Declining supply levels are reducing Ukraine's defence capabilities. US aid in the second year of Ukraine's war with Russia first increased (with record packages worth USD 2 billion in January), but declined in the final months of the year. The largest arms deliveries from the US took place in Q1 2023. At that time, weapons worth around USD 5 billion per month were transferred. In the last quarter of the year, the monthly average dropped below USD 1 billion. In December, the Pentagon announced the last package of weapons and ammunition funded with legacy funds. Most of the ammunition for Western artillery systems and missiles for the Patriot and NASAMS air defence systems and HIMARS launchers, which were not manufactured by anyone else, came from US deliveries.

Lack of US supplies could affect Ukrainian morale. Slower, smaller or stopped deliveries of ammunition, arms and equipment to frontline units will lower confidence in Western support. This will accelerate the decline of Ukrainian troops' hopes for frontline successes and may translate into a collapse of faith in the recovery of Russian-occupied territories, and ultimately in the victory and survival of an independent and sovereign Ukraine. Ukrainians have so far assumed that the Americans would be their greatest ally in terms of military supplies and financial assistance. After Western equipment did not prove to be a determining factor in last year's offensive, its absence may lead to a further lowering of sentiment.

Russia is gaining a political argument against the West. The deadlock in Congress is perceived in Russia as a victory of sorts and evidence of waning Western support for Ukraine. The Kremlin may see this as a convenient moment to go on the offensive on the battlefield. The Kremlin's propaganda is using the current situation as an argument for another „betrayal of the West” towards its allies, following the US abandonment of Afghanistan and the Syrian Kurds. The US attitude may be used by

Vladimir Putin in his presidential campaign ahead of the March election. Putin will turn the possible seizure of the initiative on the frontline and the message of the collapse of the West's willingness to support Ukraine into evidence of his victory and to convince Russians that their country has withstood the hardships of war.

The prospect of Ukraine's EU and NATO membership is being pushed back. Although accession negotiations at the political level are not directly linked to the situation on the frontline, repelling Russian aggression by military means or averting armed conflict is an unofficially expressed condition for membership in both organisations. Meanwhile, a reduction in military aid as a result of the blocking of funds in the US will inevitably lead to a stalling of the conflict, which will be exploited by leaders reluctant towards Ukraine, such as Viktor Orbán at present or possibly Donald Trump in the future. If US aid to Ukraine is withheld and the war with Russia is prolonged or frozen, this will allow a veto on Ukrainian membership of the European Union and NATO to be sustained.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The uncertainty of funding from the US to support further combat will cause the Ukrainian command to want to protect its human and technical resources. This means moving to strategic defence and halting costly offensive and offensive actions. As a result, Russian-occupied territories will not be recaptured, Moscow will feel it is winning the war and morale will decline among the troops. This is why the unblocking of funds in the Senate is already being called by some US experts a critical issue for Ukraine's survival, and its failure to do so compared to the West's defeat in confronting Russia.

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