

# PISM REPORT

## DEFINING UKRAINE'S VICTORY



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## SUMMARY: CONCEIVING A UKRAINIAN VICTORY

**Political objective:** To preserve strong, secure, and independent Ukrainian statehood on as much territory of the country as possible while also preparing a framework for future reunification of the country. To uphold the fundamental principles of the European security architecture and pave the way for lasting peace in Europe.

**Military objective:** To enforce a ceasefire without Ukraine having to make political concessions that would infringe on its sovereignty.

**Conditions enabling Ukrainian victory:**

- Political self-determination – Ukraine preserves its sovereign, legitimate government; secures popular acceptance for war outcomes;
- Military deterrence – Ukraine deters Russia from restarting the war or engaging in disruptive behaviour to destabilise the country;
- Economic reconstruction – Ukraine rebuilds its economy to the point where it can function without international assistance;
- Social justice – Ukraine reintegrates its post-war society;
- Informational control – Ukraine protects its information sphere from Russian interference through a post-war settlement; and,
- Diplomatic respect – the international community maintains a non-recognition policy on Russia-occupied territories; upholds sanctions on Russia until its full withdrawal from Ukraine.

## INTRODUCTION

It has been three years since Ukraine bravely stood up to Russian aggression, thwarting the Russian leadership's plans for rebuilding regional hegemony. Ukraine's success remains grossly underestimated, paradoxically due to its own initial military victories that raised expectations high. Ukraine withstood the Russian assault and then regained control of a large part of its territory from the Russian forces, even though the sheer difference in military potentials favoured the aggressor and most of Ukraine's foreign partners<sup>1</sup> had written it off as a lost cause well before the war broke out. The doom and gloom surrounding the international discussion on ending the war does not do justice to Ukraine's actual accomplishments and has turned into a self-fulfilling prophecy. That is, Ukraine is not succeeding in the war against Russia because it is commonly believed that it cannot do so. Which could not be further from the truth.

The great majority of the international debate today revolves around the conditions for bringing the war to an end, and very little concerns the conditions for a Ukrainian victory. While these may not be mutually exclusive, the difference is not just theoretical, but has major political significance. Perceptions of victory or defeat influence international alliances, bargaining, and the ability of policymakers to use force effectively. "Perceptions of victory can make or break the careers of leaders, shape relations between countries, and skew the historical lessons that guide future policymaking."<sup>2</sup> Whether world leaders are willing to spend their political capital on continuing to support Ukraine in its defence against Russia depends on whether they see it as an investment in potential success or a failure. And that is a matter of framing the discussion itself.

A theory of victory does not merely serve hypothetical purposes. History proves that if decision-makers are unclear about what victory means, they are simply less likely to achieve it. The lack of a theory of victory is neither strategic, nor a deliberate policy of unambiguity, rather it represents a dangerous conceptual vacuum. "Inadequate understanding of the complexities surrounding victory can result in decision-making paralysis, loss of internal and external support, escalating post-war violence, pyrrhic triumphs, and, ultimately, foreign policy failure."<sup>3</sup> Formulating a precise notion of victory in Ukraine is thus of sheer practical importance and will provide decision-makers with clear guidelines for their actions.

This paper is therefore not only an analytical exercise but also a contribution to the ongoing political debate around ending the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and it does so by putting forward specific, attainable conditions for Ukraine's victory. The author does not aspire to outline a comprehensive strategy of victory but rather suggests a concept of political victory in Ukraine, which could subsequently be used as a reference point for formulating a coherent policy towards Ukraine, and, by extension, also Russia. Put simply, this paper aims to outline where Ukraine's foreign partners could be as of spring 2025. How exactly to get there is a subject for a separate publication.

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<sup>1</sup> Here and thereafter: a coalition of countries that have supported Ukraine in its defence against Russia.

<sup>2</sup> D.D.P. Johnson, D. Tierney, *Failing to Win: Perceptions of Victory and Defeat in International Politics*, Cambridge-London: Harvard University Press, 2006, pp. 5.

<sup>3</sup> R. Mandel, "Defining postwar victory," in: J. Angstrom, I. Duyvesteyn (ed.), *Understanding Victory and Defeat in Contemporary War*, London-New York: Routledge, 2007, pp. 13.



## I. WHY UKRAINE'S VICTORY MATTERS

In December 2021, Russia put on paper its long-held demands that Europe's post-Cold War security architecture effectively be dismantled. The Russian ultimatum assumed the practical withdrawal of U.S. and NATO troops from Central Europe, a renunciation of NATO's enlargement policy, and a legally binding limitation on NATO's ability to conduct collective defence on its Eastern Flank.<sup>4</sup> Were these to be rejected by the U.S. and Europe, Russia argued, it would attack Ukraine, eventually launching the invasion in February 2022. The assault on Ukraine was not therefore an end in itself but a specific mean to impose Russia's previous demands regarding revision of the European security architecture. Russia started the war against the transatlantic alliance with a view to *de facto* neutralise NATO and push the U.S. out of Europe.

The invasion of Ukraine represents Russia's struggle to revise the rules of the international order towards a great powers bargain. Hence, it is a system-transforming conflict, one meant to reconfigure the strategic picture in Europe.<sup>5</sup> The Russian regime indicates that only great powers enjoy full sovereignty, while smaller states inherently have limited sovereignty and are subject to the great powers' control and influence. Consequently, Russia strives to impose its hegemony on neighbouring countries, with Central Europe a security grey zone, vulnerable to Russian coercion. From the Russian perspective, defeating Ukraine would naturally pave the way to the latter. Ukraine's victory in the war against Russia is therefore not only in the best interest of Europe but also ultimately a prerequisite for re-establishing a European security architecture based on sovereignty, the inviolability of state borders, and other basic principles governing relations between states as spelled out in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act and the 1990 Paris Charter for a New Europe. Russian success in Ukraine would trigger the final collapse of the current order in Europe and would be inevitably followed by the expansion of Russian influence across the continent. Securing Ukraine's victory is the quickest—and the cheapest—way to tame the Russian revisionist plans for now. It is also the only way to uphold the European security architecture as we know it while paving the way for a lasting peace in Europe.

Russia, however, is steadily building military capabilities disproportionate to its war against Ukraine. It is preparing for a much bigger confrontation with a stronger opponent, and this adversary is Europe. Ukraine's resistance to the Russian invasion has bought European partners much needed time to raise its own defences, but so far few of them have genuinely taken advantage of it in terms of building concrete military capabilities or expanding military production. Europe still can hardly assume responsibility for its defence alone or match the Russian war industry capacities. The risk of the U.S. limiting its military presence in Europe puts further stress on the European security architecture. For this reason, only Ukraine's victory against Russia would give the European partners the additional time necessary to generate credible deterrence and defence potential against Russia.

Finally, Ukraine's victory remains essential for depriving Russia of its future offensive capabilities. The Russian regime has forcefully mobilised Ukraine's population from the

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<sup>4</sup> For more, see: M. Terlikowski (ed.), "Point of no Return? The Transformation of the Global Order after the Russian Invasion of Ukraine," PISM Report, May 2023.

<sup>5</sup> A. Michta, "Mass still matters: What the US military should learn from Ukraine," Atlantic Council, 3 October 2023, [atlanticcouncil.org](https://atlanticcouncil.org).

occupied territories to sustain the war effort.<sup>6</sup> In the current circumstances, one must proceed from the assumption that, if victorious in Ukraine, Russia would to the largest extent possible mobilise Ukraine's vast human resources and modern defence industry to create a military force destined for the fight against European countries. Effectively at stake is therefore whether Ukraine's overall capabilities would be available to the side of the European partners in a potential confrontation with Russia or they would constitute a part of the Russian force posture. It all starts in Ukraine, but will not stay in Ukraine.

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<sup>6</sup> P. Schwartz, D. Gorenburg, "Russian Military Mobilization During the Ukraine War: Evolution, Methods, and Net Impact," The Centre for Naval Analyses, July 2024.

## II. A FRAMEWORK FOR UKRAINE'S VICTORY

Total victory has been rare in modern warfare. Few wars are now won or lost with decisive military battles, and hence war outcomes come across as less and less definitive. The same holds true for the conflict in Ukraine today. Absolute victory over Russia, understood in a traditional way as the permanent elimination of the Russian threat to Ukraine's sovereignty, is not feasible after three years of war. It is doubtful whether this has ever been possible, since even pushing the Russian troops out of Ukrainian sovereign territory at the initial stage of the invasion would not have completely eradicated the threat to Ukraine's independent existence. Russia would have stayed where it is anyway, even if its capabilities had been severely impaired. This begs the question whether a limited Ukrainian victory over Russia is at least possible and what it would actually entail. Modern strategic thought defines victory exactly in limited proportions, as "neutralizing and deterring the enemy's armed forces, with a strong emphasis on preventing future aggression by one's foes and their sympathizers."<sup>7</sup> The annihilation of the opponent's forces is no longer necessary to achieve victory, but the bottom line is effectively depriving it of the ability to achieve its objectives.

Winning a war is not a matter of pure military victory, though. Wars are a political endeavour, therefore achieving victory in war is also defined in political terms.<sup>8</sup> As the notion of the theory of victory implies, success in war is not determined by measurable criteria, such as military losses and territory conquered or liberated, but ultimately is a matter of perception, a subjective appreciation by the warring parties of the political situation after the hostilities end.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, there will never be a single definition of victory in Ukraine. This has certain political consequences—the lack of a strategic vision makes it "difficult to maintain two consensus: internal (on the necessity to continue the fight in order to strengthen negotiating position) and external (on the necessity to provide assistance to Ukraine in exercising its right to self-defence)."<sup>10</sup> That is, the absence of a clear notion of victory hinders the ability of both Ukraine and its foreign partners to mobilise the political and material resources necessary to achieve it.

The lack of a concept of victory in Ukraine has clearly manifested itself in the public debate at least twice over the past year.<sup>11</sup> First, in the spring of 2024, when the U.S. administration under then President Joe Biden was repeatedly accused of lacking a strategy for the war while Congress kept debating the adoption of a new assistance package for Ukraine. Second, with Donald Trump's victory in the election, when the new U.S. administration quickly filled the conceptual void and took over the discussion about the conditions for a war settlement between Ukraine and Russia. On both occasions, the absence of a concept of victory negatively affected Ukraine's diplomatic position. However, if victory in war is a political matter, then defining it as such also raises considerable political challenges. This is because setting the bar too high, or too low, eventually risks a loss of political support from partners that deem the effort in

<sup>7</sup> R. Mandel, "Defining postwar victory," *op. cit.*, pp. 36.

<sup>8</sup> R. Kupiecki, "The Meaning of Military Victory. In Search of a New Analytical Framework," *Security and Defence Quarterly*, vol. 3, no.2, 2014.

<sup>9</sup> M. Provoost, "What is Russia's Theory of Victory in Ukraine?" Modern War Institute, West Point, 31 March 2023, [mwi.westpoint.edu](http://mwi.westpoint.edu).

<sup>10</sup> M. Bielieskov, "Yakoiu maie buty stratehiia peremohy? Potribno pochaty suspil'nu dyskusiiu," *Texty*, 16 May 2024, [texty.org.ua](http://texty.org.ua).

<sup>11</sup> One may argue that Ukraine's Peace Formula and Victory Plan were an attempt to present the Ukrainian concept of victory. However, both focused primarily on means, not ends, so as such they were more of an attempt to present a strategy, rather than a theory of victory.

Ukraine either a lost cause or unworthy of fighting for. That means that the failure to develop a concept of victory or developing an inadequate one puts the international community on a path to Ukraine's eventual defeat.

This paper proposes a more conservative approach to the concept of victory in Ukraine. Following modern strategists, we assume that more powerful and dominant parties tend to consider victory through offensive parameters, as a way to establish hegemony and control, while weaker and more peripheral parties tend to see victory through defensive parameters, as a way to retain sovereignty and resist external interference.<sup>12</sup> That is, "victory for one side may require winning; for the other side it may merely require surviving and enduring."<sup>13</sup> Consequently, if the traditional concept of winning an offensive war is based on reducing the enemy's means of resistance in order to impose one's will,<sup>14</sup> then winning a defensive war is based on exactly the opposite premise—preserving one's means of resistance so that the enemy is ultimately unable to impose their will. Applying these principles to Ukraine, we therefore propose a concept of a relative political victory for Ukraine, one meant to deny Russia its strategic objective in Ukraine.

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<sup>12</sup> R. Mandel, "Defining postwar victory," *op. cit.*

<sup>13</sup> W.C. Martel, "Victory in scholarship on strategy and war," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, vol. 24, no. 3, September 2011.

<sup>14</sup> J.B. Bartholomees, "Theory of victory," *The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters*, vol. 38, no. 2, 2008.

### III. WINNING THE WAR: THEORY OF UKRAINIAN VICTORY

To operationalise the concept of denying Russia its strategic objective in Ukraine, we start with examining what the Russian objective has actually been. Speaking in the early morning of 24 February 2022, in justification of his decision to invade Ukraine, Vladimir Putin laid out the following war aims himself: “to demilitarise and *denazify* Ukraine, as well as bring to trial those who perpetrated numerous bloody crimes against civilians.”<sup>15</sup> The list was soon expanded further to include “the permanent neutral status of Ukraine,” as well as “the consolidation in the Constitution of Ukraine of the new outlines of the country’s border.”<sup>16</sup> All these should not be taken literally, though, but instead considered through the prism of official Russian rhetoric towards Ukraine.

In the hours leading up to the invasion, Putin demonstrably denied Ukraine its right to exist as a sovereign state, arguing that Ukraine “never had stable traditions of real statehood”<sup>17</sup> and “is an inalienable part of [Russian] history, culture and spiritual space.”<sup>18</sup> On top of which, he eventually articulated his absurd claim of “Nazism” as that which essentially opposes any Russian efforts to impose conditions on Ukraine. Per Putin, “aggressive nationalism and neo-Nazism (...) have been elevated in Ukraine to the rank of national policy,”<sup>19</sup> and “neo-Nazis (...) will never forgive the people of Crimea and Sevastopol for freely making a choice to reunite with Russia.”<sup>20</sup> From the Russian standpoint, therefore, whoever resists their attempts to bring Ukraine back under Russian control is to be considered “a Nazi,” so, ultimately too were the new ruling elite in Ukraine with Volodymyr Zelensky at the helm.

Getting to the bottom of the Russian war rhetoric, the Russian leadership have set four primary war aims:

- Regime change in Ukraine—overthrowing Zelensky and installing a puppet government in Kyiv under *de facto* Russian control, followed by purges of the Ukrainian political elite, intellectuals, and civil society (“denazification”);
- Dismantling Ukraine’s defence capabilities under the pretext of an alleged threat to Russia’s security, namely that Ukraine supposedly plans to acquire nuclear weapons and deploy NATO troops on its territory (“demilitarisation”);
- Changing Ukraine’s foreign policy orientation to prevent Ukraine from closer integration with, and potential membership in NATO and the European Union (“neutrality”);
- Partition of Ukraine’s territory, which initially entailed Russian recognition of the independence of the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk “People’s Republics”; but ultimately turned into *de jure* annexation of four Ukrainian regions of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia, including territories that Russia does not even control (“recognising realities on the ground”).

Put together, these four war aims effectively constitute the Russian strategic objective—to subjugate Ukraine through a combination of military and political means.<sup>21</sup> Following from

<sup>15</sup> “Address by the President of the Russian Federation,” 24 February 2022, President of Russia, en.kremlin.ru.

<sup>16</sup> “About the special military operation in Ukraine,” 27 April 2022, Russian Embassy in China, pekin.mid.ru.

<sup>17</sup> “Address by the President of the Russian Federation,” 21 February 2022, President of Russia, en.kremlin.ru.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>20</sup> “Address by the President of the Russian Federation,” 24 February 2022, *op. cit.*

<sup>21</sup> It is worth underlining here that such an objective was articulated by Russian leader Vladimir Putin already in 2008, during his speech at the Munich Security Forum, which points to the long-term character of the Russian objectives towards Ukraine.

that is an understanding of the nature of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in functional, instead of territorial terms. That is, Russia went to war to dismantle Ukraine's statehood rather than to acquire an additional piece of Ukraine's territory.<sup>22</sup> This, in turn, implies that denying Russia its strategic objective in Ukraine needs also to be considered primarily in terms of safeguarding Ukraine's statehood. What amounts to Ukraine's political victory in the ongoing war is, therefore, to preserve **strong, secure, and independent (from Russia) Ukrainian statehood on as large a territory of the country as possible**. Each of the three elements is equally relevant: a *strong* Ukraine that maintains internal order and exercises effective control over its territory, an *independent* Ukraine that retains freedom (from Russia) over its domestic and foreign policy choices, and a *secure* Ukraine that is able to defend itself from another Russian attack in future. Such a political objective needs to be underpinned by a military theory of victory that would presuppose forcing the Russian leadership to eventually end the war on political terms favourable to Ukraine, either through bringing Russia to the negotiating table (more likely) or through the collapse of the Russian forces on the battlefield (less likely), or a combination of both. Below, we draw on a typology of five universal theories of victory as structured by the RAND Corporation<sup>23</sup> and apply them to Ukraine (see: Table 1).

TABLE 1. POTENTIAL THEORIES OF VICTORY FOR UKRAINE

Mechanism	Variant	Logic	Limitations
Brute force	Dominance	Defeat the Russian army and push it out of Ukraine's sovereign territory	Currently implausible without foreign partners entering the war on the side of Ukraine
Decrease benefits	Denial	Deny the Russian leadership the possibility to successfully subjugate Ukraine by degrading the Russian offensive capabilities (attacks on depots and logistics, command centres)	Requires increased supply of Western long-range weapons and removal of restrictions on their use; still unlikely to significantly change the Russian war objectives in the short term
	Devaluing	Convince the Russian leadership that the benefits of subjugating Ukraine are too small by destroying or evacuating Ukraine's economic/industry potential	Unacceptable because of Europe's strategic interest in maintaining a strong and sovereign Ukraine; impractical because of Russian interest in political control over Ukraine, not in acquiring its economic potential
Increase costs	Brinkmanship	Threaten to escalate by moving hostilities further to the Russian territory and/or expand the conflict beyond Ukraine with direct military engagement of foreign partners	Requires increased supply of Western long-range weapons and removal of restrictions on their use; impractical because of a lack of willingness of foreign partners to enter the war; risk of losing support of some of the partners
	Military cost-imposition	Further increase Russian military and financial losses so that they become untenable	Requires increased supply of Western arms to Ukraine, expanding Ukraine's defence industry, strengthening of the sanctions regime against Russia, addressing mobilisation problems in Ukraine; still unlikely to have short-term effect

Source: Author's compilation, based on RAND's typology.

<sup>22</sup> Although territorial gains would in themselves constitute an instrument to destroy Ukrainian statehood.

<sup>23</sup> J.L. Heim, Z. Burdette, N. Beauchamp-Mustafaga, "U.S. Military Theories of Victory for a War with the People's Republic of China," RAND Corporation, February 2024.

We start with dominance, which assumes using brute force to leave the enemy physically incapable of continuing the fighting. This would require Ukraine to deliver a series of devastating blows to the Russian army on the battlefield, neutralise much of the Russian forces on Russian territory itself, as well as render a large part of the Russian materiel base inactive, to the extent that Russia is left with no other choice than to stop the war. Considering the asymmetry of military potentials between Ukraine and Russia, along with the current dynamics on the frontline, as well as continuous weapon and technology supplies to Russia from its allies,<sup>24</sup> achieving this goal is not feasible without the direct military involvement of Ukraine's foreign partners against Russia, which is unlikely. More importantly, however, this would be highly likely to push Russia to use nuclear weapons against Ukraine. The opportunity to inflict the greatest possible losses on the Russian forces was missed over the course of the summer and autumn of 2022 when Ukraine's forces went on the offensive, but its partners ultimately failed to deliver adequate military support, primarily long-range weapons. While this window of opportunity irreversibly closed, supporting Ukraine for "as long as it takes" has also proved unsustainable in the longer run. Subsequently, pursuing a costly military offensive today risks for Ukraine a pyrrhic victory in which even regaining its full territory would fail to significantly alter the Russian intentions and would leave Ukraine weak and vulnerable to Russian influence, thus paving the way for Ukraine's eventual strategic defeat. This conclusion necessitates the use of alternative theories based on coercion, which, unlike dominance, assume persuading the enemy to stop fighting even though it still remains capable of continuing.

There are two primary approaches to dissuade an adversary from continuing a war—decreasing the potential benefits or increasing the potential costs. Regarding the benefits side of the Russian calculations, denial assumes persuading the enemy that it is unlikely to achieve its objectives. This would require Ukraine to erode the Russian offensive capabilities, including through decisive strikes on Russian depots and logistics and command centres, both on the occupied territories and deep inside Russia. A precondition for success lies primarily with an increased supply of Western long-range weapons to Ukraine and removal of restrictions on their use. Even if effective, though, these may still be insufficient on their own to alter the Russian war objectives in the short term due to the Russian leadership's political attachment to Ukraine.

Devaluing is persuading an enemy that, even if securing its objectives proves successful, the benefits would be much smaller than initially expected. This would essentially require applying "scorched earth" tactics, that is, evacuating or even physically destroying Ukraine's economic potential, notably its defence industry, which needs to be ruled out for two obvious reasons. First, Europe has a strategic interest in maintaining a strong and sovereign Ukraine, never in weakening it even further. Second, and most importantly, the Russian war against Ukraine is driven by political and ideological, but not economic considerations. The Russian aims assume specifically destroying Ukrainian statehood as it is, and therefore devaluing not only would not discourage Russia from pursuing its objectives in Ukraine but also would actually contribute to a Russian strategic victory.

On the other hand, regarding the costs side of the Russian calculations, brinkmanship assumes persuading the enemy to stop fighting by threatening escalation if it does not cease the fighting. First and foremost, this would require Ukraine to be capable of moving hostilities much further onto Russian territory, thus ultimately threatening the stability of Putin's regime. Again, this

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<sup>24</sup> P. Dzierżanowski, M. Przychodniak, *China's Economic Support for Russia Since the Full-Scale Invasion of Ukraine*, PISM Report, February 2025.

necessitates an increased supply of Western long-range weapons to Ukraine and removal of restrictions on their use, while also addressing the manpower problem within the Ukrainian army. Still, the Kursk operation by Ukraine's forces indicates the limits of such an approach, proving the relatively high pain threshold the Russian leadership are willing to accept. Brinkmanship could potentially take a horizontal form by inducing third parties directly into the fighting on one's side, although it remains unattainable due to the unwillingness of Ukraine's foreign partners to enter the war against Russia. While opting for brinkmanship, Ukraine would also have to factor in the risk of losing the support of some of its partners who would eagerly exploit the situation to accuse Ukraine of escalation.

Finally, military cost-imposition assumes using the military instrument to persuade the enemy that the costs of continuing the war outweigh the benefits. This would require Ukraine to effectively pursue a war of attrition against Russia, that is, to wear down the Russian forces on the frontline, while further degrading the Russian materiel base through deep strikes on defence facilities, energy infrastructure, and logistics. To do so would necessitate continuous weapon supplies from Ukraine's foreign partners, along with increasing domestic arms production, on top of addressing the manpower problem within the Ukrainian army, and would yield better outcomes if it were combined with a further tightening of the current sanctions regime. Given the asymmetry of military potentials between Russia and Ukraine, such an approach also has its limitations, although these could be partially mitigated by technological advantages.

Consequently, a **plausible military theory of victory for Ukraine represents a combination of denial and military cost-imposition**, which, underpinned by increased international political and economic pressure on Russia,<sup>25</sup> should eventually allow for enforcing a sustainable ceasefire without any Ukrainian concessions to Russia that would infringe on Ukraine's sovereignty.<sup>26</sup> Key enablers involve steady weapons supplies to Ukraine, a further build-up of Ukraine's defence industry, and tackling management and personnel shortages within the Ukrainian forces. However, due to the exceptionally high political attachment of the current Russian leadership to Ukraine, even these may not guarantee that the Russian war objectives would be permanently abandoned.<sup>27</sup> Ultimately, that will depend primarily on whether the international community takes greater responsibility for securing and upholding a post-ceasefire settlement in Ukraine—that is, whether Ukraine not only secures a preferable military outcome on the battlefield but also wins the peace once the war is frozen.

<sup>25</sup> For more, see: M. Menkiszak, *Winning the war with Russia (is still possible): The West's counter-strategy towards Moscow*, OSW Report, October 2024.

<sup>26</sup> This corresponds with an outline of the Ukrainian strategy, as proposed by Mykola Bieliesskov: to guarantee a sustainable ceasefire for at least 5–7 years, preserve Ukraine as a functional state within the territories under its control, prevent social unrest and maintain unity on key objectives in the war against Russia, and preserve Ukraine's demographic potential to the maximum extent possible. See: M. Bieliesskov, "Yakoiu maie buty stratehiia peremohy?," *op. cit.*

<sup>27</sup> For details, see: A.M. Dwyer, W. Lorenz, A. Legucka, "The Impact of the War in Ukraine on the Political Stability of Russia," *PISM Strategic File*, no. 3 (124), February 2023.



#### IV. WINNING THE PEACE: POST-CEASEFIRE SUCCESS IN UKRAINE

Wars are fought in two phases, first on the battlefield and then subsequently through the post-war settlement. It is the latter, in particular securing an advantageous and enduring settlement that results in a stable equilibrium between the previously warring parties, a better peace, which is now commonly referred to as “strategic victory.”<sup>28</sup> Military successes may set the stage for strategic victory, but they are not sufficient in themselves. On the contrary, “what is won on the battlefield can be lost entirely thereafter if the countries (...) are not turned into better and safer places.”<sup>29</sup> Therefore, political victory ultimately depends on the ability to shape post-war conditions in accordance with one’s own strategic interests.

Post-war (strategic) victory necessitates achieving interrelated informational, military, political, economic, social, and diplomatic objectives, which when combined make for a better peace. Complete success in each of these domains is not imperative, especially as there are no precise criteria for their evaluation. However, reaching certain minimum thresholds in all of them may be required, since they remain closely intertwined.<sup>30</sup> Somewhat of an analytical hurdle has been that the parameters of a strategic victory have been developed in the literature in regards to the country that initiates the war and then wins it, which is exactly the opposite of Ukraine defending itself against the Russian invasion. Therefore, we have matched the six objectives to the Ukrainian situation and discuss each of them below (see: Table 2).

TABLE 2. CONDITIONS FOR POST-WAR VICTORY IN UKRAINE

Objective	Indicators
Information control	Protecting Ukraine’s information sphere from Russian interference with winning the peace; taking offensive information operations to target the international community and Russian society
Military deterrence	Deterring Russia from restarting hostilities and/or engaging in disruptive behaviour in Ukraine
Political self-determination	Preserving a sovereign, legitimate government in Ukraine that determines its domestic and foreign policy according to its own national interest; securing popular acceptance for war outcomes
Economic reconstruction	Rebuilding Ukraine’s infrastructure and economy to the point where the country can function without international assistance; securing its integration into the European and global economy
Social justice	Successfully reintegrating Ukraine’s war veterans, internally displaced persons, and returning refugees back into the civil society
Diplomatic respect	Maintaining international non-recognition of Russia-occupied territories; upholding sanctions on Russia until the full withdrawal of the Russian army from Ukraine

Source: Author’s compilation.

The basic precondition for Ukraine’s strategic victory lies in the preservation of a sovereign government, which retains the freedom to determine the country’s internal and foreign policy according to its own national interest. Ukraine’s success would be anchored specifically on sovereignty in relative terms, that is, the ability to shape its own policy choices independently from Russia, which is exactly what would represent Russia’s strategic defeat in Ukraine. Importantly, a self-determined government in Ukraine would also have to secure its post-war

<sup>28</sup> W.C. Martel, “Victory in scholarship on strategy and war,” *op. cit.*

<sup>29</sup> R.C. Orr, “After the War: Bring in a Civilian Force,” *International Herald Tribune*, 3 April 2003.

<sup>30</sup> R. Mandel, “Defining postwar victory,” *op. cit.*

legitimacy with the people, not so much in an electoral sense, since a sustainable ceasefire would inevitably restart the election cycle and bring renewal of the political landscape, as by means of securing popular acceptance for eventual war outcomes, which would assume freezing of hostilities and, consequently, temporarily suspending efforts to recover the Russia-occupied territories. Whether the Ukrainian population takes ownership of war outcomes will ultimately be conditional, first and foremost, upon the wider security environment, that is, if the ceasefire really holds on the ground and Ukraine possesses credible means to ensure its security from Russia.

Hence, the second basic precondition for Ukraine's strategic victory presupposes establishing effective deterrence preventing Russia from restarting the war and/or engaging in other disruptive behaviour in Ukraine below the threshold of an open conflict to destabilise the country from within, like sabotage or political assassinations. Conventional deterrence in the form of a strong Ukrainian army would constitute an absolute minimum, underpinned by an expanded national defence industry that will meet the demands of its military as much as possible, especially in munitions, artillery, drones, and short-range missiles. For deterrence to be credible against Russia, however, Ukraine's efforts on its own will likely not be enough, but would require further military supplies from foreign partners,<sup>31</sup> their investment in Ukraine's materiel base, and possibly also their military presence on the ground in Ukraine. Notably, Ukraine's membership in NATO would represent the most cost-effective security guarantee against another future Russian attack,<sup>32</sup> yet this is neither likely to happen in the short-to-medium term due to the lack of consensus among the members of the Alliance, nor does it really constitute a prerequisite for Ukraine's eventual success. Its absence, though, will noticeably hinder the Ukrainian leadership's ability to secure a wider public buy-in for a post-war settlement.

Apart from political and security considerations, achieving strategic victory in Ukraine would require socio-economic objectives to be fulfilled. Post-war success cannot be narrowed down to a Ukraine that merely exists as a sovereign country—it must be rebuilt from the war's destruction and reach a strong enough position to prosper economically, unhindered by Russian interference, primarily when it comes to secure and undisrupted access to Black Sea ports.<sup>33</sup> For that to happen, foreign partners would need to support Ukraine's post-war reconstruction and recovery until the country eventually functions without international financial assistance and facilitate its integration with the regional and global economy. The success of Ukraine's economic transformation would depend primarily on systemic reforms, as well as the large-scale involvement of private capital, with the transfer of both technology and business culture. The more so that economic and security issues will be closely intertwined as part of Ukraine's post-war settlement, and the presence of major foreign investors will be considered as a *de facto* economic tripwire—an offer for the Trump administration to secure access to Ukraine's minerals in exchange for security guarantees is a case in point. Whereas confiscation of immobilised Russian assets would considerably underpin Ukraine's modernisation, it would also be challenged on legal grounds by Russia, which will not suffer a decisive defeat.

Along with economic recovery, Ukraine's strategic victory would draw heavily on successful reintegration of the war-affected society. Hundreds of thousands, if not millions of war

<sup>31</sup> For details, see: M.A. Piotrowski, *Military-Technical Assistance to Ukraine: An Assessment of Its Short- and Medium-Term Needs*, PISM Report, December 2022.

<sup>32</sup> See: E.A. Cohen, S. Dębski (ed.), "Ukraine Strategic Futures," *PISM Policy Paper*, September 2023.

<sup>33</sup> See: M.A. Piotrowski, D. Szeligowski, "Options for Securing Free Trade Navigation in the Black Sea," *PISM Strategic File*, no. 12 (133), August 2023.

veterans, internally displaced persons, potentially also refugees from abroad, will return home and seek a new place in their communities, many of which will be in need of acute financial and/or psychological assistance. War veterans and civil activists, the ones who have made a special contribution in defence of the homeland, will likely demand for themselves social privileges and a greater say in policymaking. To what extent the state accommodates all of these concerns will affect both domestic stability and prospects for securing public buy-in for a post-war settlement. Foreign partners would need to go the extra distance to help Ukraine build a just and inclusive society in the midst of a demographic crisis, and ensure that legitimate expectations for post-war accountability for collaboration with Russia do not turn into political revenge. It is especially important to make the society aware that holding responsible the Russian perpetrators of war crimes committed in Ukraine will be particularly difficult due to the lack of effective international mechanisms, and Ukraine's leadership will unavoidably face the challenge of how to conclude a new social contract if justice is not rendered for all victims—especially wartime prisoners and the parents of abducted children. This makes the seizure of Russian assets for the purposes of war compensation all the more important.

On top of these issues, Ukraine would need to maintain the initiative in the information domain once a ceasefire has eventually been reached. This one should be easier since, by successfully resisting the Russian invasion, Ukraine has never lost control of its national information sphere, and so there is no need to re-establish it from scratch. The key objective, therefore, will be to protect the Ukrainian information space from Russian—and Chinese—penetration aiming to provoke a sense of betrayal among the Ukrainian society that a ceasefire is a demonstration of Ukraine's failure. This is one way the Russian propaganda machine will seek to de-legitimise the Ukrainian authorities in the eyes of the public, hoping to provoke social divisions and, consequently, trigger political infighting in Ukraine. To what extent the Ukrainian leadership succeeds in convincing their own people that preserving the country's sovereignty in the face of the Russian invasion represents Ukraine's victory will determine whether a post-war victory is achieved after all. Such a defensive posture may further be strengthened by an offensive information campaign targeting both the international community and the Russian people with the message of Russia's strategic failure in Ukraine, and the more the perception of Russia's defeat becomes embedded in the global public debate, the easier it will be for Ukraine's government to engage in the post-war dialogue with its own people.

Finally, the external dimension must not be disregarded while pursuing a post-war victory in Ukraine. For a country whose borders are internationally recognised, diplomatic respect assumes, at minimum, that Ukraine's territorial losses to Russia would not be legally recognised, while Russian-occupied territories would remain subject to international isolation. Foreign partners would be expected to uphold sanctions on Russia unless Russian troops fully withdraw from Ukraine's territory, and they should assist Ukraine in developing a framework that would provide for the future unification of these areas when the circumstances allow. Inherently built into Ukraine's strategic victory concept also must be political recognition of Ukraine's sovereign right to choose alliances, which requires that both the European Union and NATO maintain their open-door policy for Ukraine, regardless of the actual longer-term perspectives for membership. That is, Ukraine's inability to quickly join NATO by no means necessitates its neutrality and absence of close military cooperation with foreign partners.

Two additional criteria need to be considered in analysing Ukraine's post-war victory. The first one is the durability of a peace settlement—for victory to be strategic, not only must it secure

a better peace for Ukraine but also it must be sustained over time.<sup>34</sup> A ceasefire, which would eventually allow Russia to prepare for a new round of warfare against Ukraine in future and leave Ukraine devoid of support from its foreign partners, does not satisfy this condition.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, a post-war victory can only be validated over time, and, since it effectively represents a political judgement, it is also subject to revision.

The second criterion is recognition of the post-war settlement by both sides. Strategists often point out that a victory needs to be recognised and accepted by the opponent.<sup>36</sup> For Ukraine's post-war victory to be strategic, therefore, the Russian elites would have to eventually accept their state's failure to subjugate Ukraine, and recognise Ukraine as an independent state. It is doubtful, however, whether, and to what extent, the current Russian regime would ever come to terms with its failure in Ukraine, let alone officially acknowledge it. For this reason, Ukraine would likely never be able to achieve a textbook strategic victory without effectively breaking the Russian perception of war as an instrument that brings political dividends. The criteria for post-war victory, however, should not be considered purely within a simple yes or no framework, but rather constitute a best-case scenario towards which Ukraine's partners should strive. That is, Ukraine's post-war victory is possible without Russia recognising it, even though in this case it would not be a strategic one.

Whether Ukraine's partners themselves recognise Russia's political defeat will have an impact on Russian post-war reckoning. One may therefore assume that what would constitute a tipping point in developing Ukraine's notion of victory is actually the moment when its foreign partners recognise that the collapse of Ukraine poses a greater threat to European security than the collapse of Russia, that is, that not only is Russia not too big to fail but that it eventually should fail.

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<sup>34</sup> R. Kupiecki, "The Meaning of Military Victory: In Search of a New Analytical Framework," *op. cit.*

<sup>35</sup> As former NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg put it: "We need to ensure that we break the cycle of Russian aggression. We need to prevent Russia from chipping away at European security." See: "NATO's Stoltenberg: Ukraine war must end Russian 'cycle of aggression'," Reuters, 23 February 2023.

<sup>36</sup> J.B. Bartholomees, "Theory of victory," *op. cit.*; M. Provoost, "What is Russia's Theory of Victory in Ukraine?," *op. cit.*

## V. TRAJECTORIES FOR POST-WAR UKRAINE

Considering the multitude of the challenges ahead, securing a post-war victory in Ukraine is by no means given. This requires both that certain objectives be achieved and that certain domestic conditions materialise for them to be eventually achieved. Namely, success would depend on maintaining a high level of social mobilisation aimed at, first and foremost, strengthening the post-ceasefire Ukrainian statehood. Social mobilisation was a key factor in repelling the Russian invasion at its early stages, effectively buying time for the international community to step in and provide military assistance to Ukraine. It does have its limits, however. There are four main preconditions for successful mobilisation—opportunity, interests, infrastructure, and dynamics<sup>37</sup>—of which only the first one would certainly be met in the case of a ceasefire, that is, political momentum would arise from a potential ceasing of hostilities. The other three would have yet to be formed through domestic processes in Ukraine, with the support of foreign partners.

Building on the ceasefire momentum, the way in which the Ukrainian people accept or reject the fact that the conflict has been frozen would subsequently determine whether a sense of shared interest is emerging across the majority of the society, or whether these interests would become fractured. Accepting a freeze of the conflict would increase the likelihood of the focus being put on state-building processes, whereas rejecting a ceasefire would likely turn the focus on seeking a revision of war outcomes. Therefore, strong political leadership would be essential to harnessing social energy and channelling it towards state-building, and foreign partners could, and should, play a major role in legitimising the perception of shared interest. Finally, to maintain the momentum over the long term, social infrastructure would also need to be developed that would mobilise people across divides and prevent the society from fragmentation.

TABLE 3. BASIC TRAJECTORIES OF A POST-CEASEFIRE UKRAINE

ATTRIBUTE	DEVELOPMENT	REVISIONISM	POPULISM
Political momentum	Ceasefire	Ceasefire	Ceasefire
Shared interests	State-building	Revenge	Fractional
Organisational infrastructure	Civil society	(Para)military	Fragmented
Leadership	Strong	Strong	Weak
Foreign partners	Committed	Disinterested	Disinterested
Social mobilisation	High	High	Low

Source: Author's compilation.

Whether, and to what extent, these four preconditions for social mobilisation would eventually be met would shape Ukraine's future trajectory (see: Table 3). We differentiate three basic pathways for post-ceasefire Ukraine—development, revisionism, and populism—which we outline below.

### Trajectory I: Development

With the assistance of foreign partners, Ukraine eventually secures a sustainable ceasefire and starts working towards establishing effective deterrence against another Russian attack

<sup>37</sup> G.F. Davis, T.A. Thompson, "A social movement perspective on corporate control," in: *Administrative science quarterly*, 1994, pp. 141–173.

in future. A freeze of the conflict is recognised by the Ukrainian people as a strategic success, one that has allowed them to preserve their country's sovereignty in an existential struggle against a much stronger adversary. It also is a crisis-opportunity moment to correct previous mistakes and finally take a leap forward towards successful state-building. The renewal of the political scene breeds strong political leadership that is capable of taking advantage of the social mobilisation and provides momentum for transformational change across the country. Consequently, systemic reforms take place to build robust state institutions resilient to external interference and strengthen democratic oversight, even though a certain degree of militarisation and centralisation of the governance remains in place. Party politics resume, but a consensus emerges across the political spectrum regarding key objectives—further consolidation of statehood, upholding the Euro-Atlantic vector of foreign policy, and preparedness for the long-term challenge posed by Russia.

The international community steps up its long-term commitment to Ukraine's post-war stabilisation and economic recovery. While a new "Marshall Plan" for Ukraine fails to materialise, a broad multilateral coalition of willing countries under the aegis of the G7 takes a leading role in coordinating financial support for reconstruction and provides a political umbrella for private investors ready to get involved. Technological and structural changes in the national economy move Ukraine up the ladder of value chains and turn the country into another "start-up nation," especially when it comes to defence technologies and IT solutions. As the great powers' rivalry for resources intensifies, Ukraine's raw material potential attracts international attention and leverages its global position. Economic revival helps mitigate the financial burden of, but cannot compensate on its own for the painful social adaptation to the post-war environment, in which new winners and losers appear. Some war veterans struggle to re-establish themselves in civilian life, while many refugees and internally displaced persons still have no home to return to, finding themselves on the margins of the economic transformation.

Ukraine maintains an active foreign policy and advances regional multilateral formats to maximise both economic opportunities and security commitments from its partners. Membership negotiations with the European Union are progressing and Ukraine steadily moves towards eventual accession, although some tensions subsequently arise with several of the Member States, especially neighbours, over economic competition. Bilateral relations with Russia remain frozen until there is a change of power in the Kremlin that opens up a window of opportunity to recover the occupied territories through meaningful negotiations. Until then, Ukraine pursues a policy of diplomatic and economic isolation of these areas and is working with its partners on a mechanism for their future reintegration.

### Trajectory II: Revisionism

Trilateral negotiations between Ukraine, Russia, and the U.S. conclude with a shaky ceasefire at the cost of Ukraine being forced to formally abandon its aspirations for NATO membership. The U.S. limits its assistance to Ukraine, while European countries struggle to significantly step up their own military commitment, and discussion on security guarantees for Ukraine eventually collapse. The Ukrainian people experience a growing sense of betrayal from their Western partners, akin to Weimar syndrome, and the determination arises to revise war outcomes when the opportunities appear. The public sentiment elevates to power a strong-hand leader who consolidates the authority and channels social mobilisation towards preparations for another phase of a hot war with Russia. Under the umbrella of semi-martial law, the government takes a course towards the rapid militarisation of the state and society,

bolstering military infrastructure, acquiring weaponry, and increasing the combat readiness of the wider population. Political competition revives, but is characterised by taboos and group-think, and the military encroaches on the political and civil space to dictate the tone of the discussion. The rationale for taking revenge on Russia is exempt from the public debate and deemed treasonous.

The international community assists Ukraine with post-war stabilisation and economic recovery, but increasing militarisation of the state affects its financial condition and constrains development potential. The government prioritises the expansion of the domestic defence industry, successfully attracting Western capital and technology, which not only builds a strong deterrence against Russia but also improves the country's position on the international arms trade market. Consequently, a new class of Ukraine's defence oligarchs is born over time. The post-war reintegration of the society is necessarily postponed as Ukraine maintains a large standing army and decides to introduce the institution of private military companies to accommodate war veterans. In the absence of prudent social policy, the public increasingly demands accountability for the war they believe Ukraine has unduly lost, and the country's leadership responds occasionally under pressure with politically motivated allegations against military commanders and officials.

The Ukrainian leadership is taking an assertive stance on the international arena and puts responsibility for the fate of the war on foreign partners. Establishing a new regional military alliance in Central and Eastern Europe—with Ukraine in the lead—becomes a foreign policy priority, which sets Ukraine at odds with its neighbours, who favour maintaining their NATO membership. While formally still in progress, accession negotiations with the European Union become *de facto* stalled as several Member States accuse Ukraine's government of introducing semi-authoritarian rule. Alternative directions of foreign policy are therefore gaining importance, notably Turkey and the Arab countries. Bilateral relations with Russia remain openly hostile, Ukraine carries out diversion and sabotage actions deep inside Russia, and plans for future military recovery of the occupied territories.

### Trajectory III: Populism

While an attempt by the U.S. to arrange Ukrainian-Russian peace talks fails, exhausted by years of hostilities, Ukraine and Russia eventually accept a *de facto* ceasefire. The U.S. considers this a convenient moment to reduce its commitment to Ukraine and shifts the burden of further supporting it to Europe. After lengthy deliberations, a European coalition of willing countries finally agrees on the deployment of a minor military contingent to Ukraine to strengthen deterrence, but foreign partners are slowly becoming disinterested. Tired of the war effort, Ukrainian society is losing the mobilisation impetus and suffers from indifference and fragmentation. Meanwhile, a charismatic, populist leader accurately depicts the public sentiment and rides to power promising to hold predecessors accountable for "wartime mistakes." Plagued by internal conflicts, the government quickly proves incapable of decision-making and needs to buy the favour of the biggest interest groups. Party politics is fully revived, and polarisation between the two main political camps of "populists" and "patriots" divides the political scene anew.

While foreign partners struggle to mobilise sufficient resources for Ukraine's post-war stabilisation and recovery, China steps in and partially fills the gap, albeit at the cost of buying out Ukraine's critical infrastructure and securing access to its defence technologies. The government aims to turn post-war Ukraine into a regional business hub and extends numerous

preferences for multinational corporations, which eventually refrain from bringing major investments to merely benefit from cheap labour. Chaotic cuts in national defence spending are designed to finance pompous modernisation programmes but result in major corruption scandals, and the growing defence industry focuses primarily on export, attracting buyers of low-cost lethal weapons from various conflict zones. The post-war reintegration of society rests primarily in the hands of international organisations and donors, discouraging refugees living abroad from returning home. Whereas the authorities are trying to win the sympathy of war veterans using social payments to deflect from their criticism for co-opting people from the previous ruling camp, and therefore failing to hold them responsible for war outcomes.

The Ukrainian leadership declares a move towards a transactional approach in foreign policy and announces their plans to become an independent player in the region, serving as a bridge between east and west. The course towards membership in NATO and the European Union is officially upheld, and the accession negotiations with the European Union continue. Mutual relations, however, are loosening up in practice, and partnership with the transatlantic community becomes increasingly balanced by rapprochement with China. While bilateral relations with Russia remain frozen, the government is trying to work out a new *modus vivendi* with Russia, and eventually renounces the isolation of the Russia-occupied territories under the pretext of providing support to the Ukrainian people still living there.



## VI. THE WAY AHEAD

Ukraine has successfully stood up to Russia, but in the long run it cannot prevail on its own. Foreign partners will have to eventually scale up their assistance to Ukraine if they want it to win the war, secure the peace, and put Ukraine on a post-war development trajectory. While this will inevitably require European countries to take greater responsibility for the future security of Ukraine, even if only within a framework of the coalition(s) of the willing, keeping the U.S. engaged will remain an essential piece of the puzzle, albeit increasingly difficult to achieve. Looking ahead, there are three major challenges that Ukraine and its partners need to face.

**Enforcing a ceasefire.** Every war ends at some point, but what really matters is under which conditions. Ukraine's partners should drastically increase political and economic pressure on Russia and step up military assistance for Ukraine to enforce a ceasefire at the expense of denying Russia its strategic interest, instead of trying to negotiate a ceasefire with Russia at the expense of undermining Ukraine's sovereignty. This would require sensitive planning, for it may—and likely would—take some time, but also it cannot be stretched out, since the Ukrainian horizon for ending this war is shorter than the Russian one.

The Trump administration's diplomatic efforts to achieve a ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine are commendable, but European partners must brace for the possibility that this process may ultimately produce conditions that neither they nor Ukraine will be in a position to accept. Europe will hold little influence over bilateral U.S.-Russia negotiations, still it has capacity sufficient to derail an outcome it deems detrimental to its own strategic interest. A coalition of willing European countries should urgently build up effective spoiling potential, that is, an autonomous—independent from the U.S.—capability to keep Ukraine in the fight against Russia, as well as maintain economic pressure on Russia.

**Deterring Russia.** Ukraine's partners should proceed from the assumption that the first day of a potential ceasefire will also be the first day of a new arms race between Russia and its allies, notably China, on one hand, and a broader coalition that helped Ukraine withstand the invasion, on the other. It is unlikely that the current Russian regime would accept its failure to subjugate Ukraine, but it may not need to have the means to achieve that goal. It is possible to effectively deter Russia after the conflict has been frozen, but it will require considerable financial investment from Ukraine's partners to maintain, modernise, and reform a large standing Ukrainian army, provide it with continuous training, as well as develop the Ukrainian domestic defence industry. Eventually, it may also require making unpopular political decisions regarding the deployment of European troops on Ukrainian territory, especially if that were to be the price of a continued U.S. commitment to Ukraine.

The post-ceasefire period will also require Ukraine's partners to maintain sanctions pressure on Russia. The sanctions were introduced for violating Ukraine's territorial integrity and thus should remain in force until it is eventually restored. Their role, however, will be different than during the wartime. The key objective should be restricting and delaying as much as possible Russia's ability to reconstitute its military force by further limiting Russia's energy revenues and access to technology, thereby buying time for Ukraine to improve its relative military position vis-à-vis Russia. In this context, greater pressure on China will also be significant, which has become a lifeline for Russia's economy, thus effectively enhancing Russian ability to continue the war.

**Winning the peace.** Freezing the conflict will unavoidably provide favourable political momentum to those countries that long opposed helping Ukraine and are seeking normalisation of their relations with Russia at Ukraine's expense. A coalition of Ukraine's committed foreign partners should do their utmost to not only maintain but also further increase their assistance to Ukraine after the ceasefire, aiming to consolidate Ukrainian statehood and put it on an irreversible path towards social reintegration and independent economic development. Left on its own, Ukraine would be easy prey for Russian interference and destabilisation, nullifying all previous efforts of the international community.

Foreign partners should play an active role in Ukraine's post-war political transformation. Their commitment bears potential to catalyse social mobilisation and impede partisan political gridlock, and therefore would be a major factor in determining the overall direction of Ukraine's political reforms. However, one should be vigilant to blindly applying liberal political models to Ukraine in a one-size-fits-all manner. The hypothetical end of the war would by no means mark the end of the political conflict with Russia. With the Russian threat still omnipresent, post-war Ukraine would have little choice but to retain a certain degree of militarisation and centralisation of power to secure war outcomes.

Ultimately, however, victory begins with a clear understanding of the end goal. While diplomatic efforts to end the Russian invasion of Ukraine intensify, this paper represents a modest attempt to comprehensively define that goal.





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