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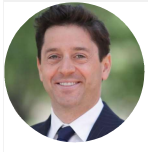
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# War in Ukraine, One Year On

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Tweet



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### 1. The Invasion of Ukraine, First 21st Century War without a Previous Conflict

Thucydides said 2,400 years ago that in any conflict, the difference between the pretexts and its true cause should be understood.

Vladimir Putin declared war on Ukraine on February 24, 2022, without any previous clash, disclosing the true motivations in [his address](#):

“Of course, the question is not about NATO itself. It merely serves as a tool of U.S. foreign policy. The problem is that in territories adjacent to Russia, which I have to note is our historical land, a hostile anti-Russia is taking shape.”

Therefore, he started to undertake an illegal expansionist project unrelated to the West, justified on a reactionary ideology, emotions and victimism; and to reprimand Ukrainians for allegedly being anti-Russian. It is legitimate at this stage to wonder whether that sentiment could have grown or decreased over the last twelve months.

Ever since, Putin’s reasons have been changing, because his “special military operation” destined to take Kyiv in “three days” was not as successful as predicted. Performance is far from matching aspirations.

He has justified before his compatriots through a systematic reversal of facts, blaming others of his own acts in order to divert attention. Furthermore, he has launched an effective storytelling of the ‘last crusader’ fighting the West, with an imperialist move paradoxically celebrated in African and LATAM former colonized countries.

However, the disconnection between his pretexts and what he is really seeking is still a struggle to discern, and makes the killing of Ukrainian and Russian soldiers’ immolation inexplicable.

### 2. Nationalism mixed with the ‘Lost Empire Syndrome’ and the ‘External Enemy’ Threat

Paraphrasing von Clausewitz, Russia’s war is a mere continuation of an ultranationalist and ethnic policy by other means.

The Wall fell in Berlin, but not in Putin’s brain: he has decided, firstly, to win the Cold War out of time, in a characteristic move among national populists who resist to accept new realities, imposing alternative and anachronistic narratives, manipulating the past and rewriting history.

Secondly, he follows self-serving emotions rather than international law prescriptions, whereas Russia highly benefits from the rules that it simultaneously violates as a UNSC veto member; thirdly, he ignores the democratic rationality of a sovereign state and the Ukrainian civil liberties and will.

The Kremlin demanded security when nobody threatened. Attacking a country based on apparent intimidation has not been a cause of war since the 19th century.

As the president of Russia has been running out of arguments to justify a fluctuating front line far from the objectives, NATO -a deterrence agreement- has been presented as a real threat, used to mobilize populations.

Moreover, in 1994 (the same year the Memorandum of Budapest was signed) Russia joined the Partnership for Peace, a NATO program characterized by President Clinton, [according to declassified records](#), as a “track that will lead to NATO membership” and that “does not draw another line dividing Europe a few hundred miles to the east.” Then, Putin conceded that “back in 2000, when Clinton was visiting Moscow, I asked him [how America would react to accept Russia in NATO?](#)” Including Russia in NATO seemed perfectly right to him.

There is also the controversy about the Russian hazy [claim that NATO promised not to expand to the East](#). Yet, in 2008 France and Germany blocked a proposal for Ukrainian and Georgian membership.

History explains why NATO grew up to 30 Member countries. The Warsaw Treaty Organization member states chose freedom and rule of law, did not want any form of Soviet control or colonialism, but to join democracy. As a matter of fact, all those countries have significantly developed since joining. They also remembered what happened to Hungary in 1956 or Czechoslovakia in 1968. The latter war in Ukraine endorses that these catastrophes are precisely what they intend to avoid.

### 3. Multifold Reactions to the War in U.S., Europe and China

Attention is focusing on the consequences of the unjustified war in Ukraine worldwide, but the predominant geopolitical clash continues to be between China and the U.S.

We can see the proof of the extreme concern caused by their competition in the global media attention devoted to the passage of a Chinese balloon over U.S. territory, a relatively trivial event in a world where every country spies on each other.

Conversely, as the world's two biggest superpowers, they have influenced the conflict in Ukraine from different approaches.

On one hand, the U.S. has built an alliance together with most European countries. The Kremlin's nuclear threat has backfired, uniting the West, which has sanctioned Russia with ten different packages of measures, has supported Ukraine with security assistance over \$40 billion USD, and recently promised to send heavier weapons (tanks) to the battlefield, according to the prescriptions of international law (article 51 UN Charter). Likewise, consequences of Putin's

announcement on February 21, 2023, about the New START temporary suspension remain to be seen.

The war was a geopolitical wake-up call for the EU, especially in countries with historical, political or cultural ties with the USSR, considering that Ukraine fights for the freedom and security of the whole continent. Furthermore, Europeans believe that letting Putin get what he desires by the use of force would send the wrong message to any other strongmen about where Europe stands on international law violations.

If Putin's objective was to divide the West, he has strongly failed. From "brain death" and its biggest existential dilemma to a sudden renovated unity, the cause of Ukraine has not only expanded NATO and further integrated the Europeans, but approached them again to the U.S.

The U.S. is also taking advantage of helping Ukraine by reshaping their global leadership position, developing closer ties with allies in the Indo-Pacific, and attempting to deter China from invading Taiwan.

On the other hand, China is carefully analyzing the war to seek understanding in what the "reunification" of Taiwan could look like, while facing some timid allegations against the one China policy for the first time.

Regarding Russia, China signed a "limitless friendship" a few days before the war, yet it was probably shocked by the subsequent Kremlin's violence and has not directly supported his efforts, and has defined the invasion as a "crisis." The course of the war and today's Russian incapacity call into question the relationship between China and Russia, although Beijing is getting cheaper energy, a trade volume record high and higher Russian dependency.

President Xi has been able to maintain a complicated ambiguity between the [Kremlin](#), with strengthened [economic and political cooperation](#) and the timeless compromise with the principles of national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

#### 4. China's Opportunity to Use Agency

The shift of responsibility is tilting towards China. Given the active China-Russia relationship, Beijing possesses the leverage to persuade Moscow, a move that would also serve in China's interest, committing as a global leader which benefits the whole world by means of soft power.

Xi's [speech at the 20th National Congress on October 16, 2022](#), anticipated part of the strategy: "We have safeguarded China's dignity and core interests and kept ourselves well-positioned for pursuing development and ensuring security." More recently, Wang Yi said to be ready for a "peace proposal".

Indeed, the war has disrupted the whole planet, impairing globalization and provoking different crises, including eight million refugees, food security, energy, inflation, disruption of global markets and supply chain. A longer war would increase the calamities. Nevertheless, whatever the final outcome, Ukraine will remain a sovereign state, depending on the final shape of the country in future negotiations.

It is time for China to display mainstream agency, being best positioned for it, and as the U.S. seems to avoid mediation. First, Beijing must help to stop war escalation; second, it should insist on its recent ceasefire proposal and emphasize reasonable measures; and third, it should play a definitive role to end the war by leading peace talks, and inviting other global powers to join (U.S., EU and India).

Leading the peace would be a defining moment for China to enhance its international influence, and to reshape a stronger and more proactive position in future global challenges as the global order revises, and to recover the stalemate with the U.S. Furthermore, assuming global duties could rebuild trust and relieve alleged international isolation. And, more importantly, it would foster the betterment of the world.

[Ukraine Crisis](#) | [Report on Russia-Ukraine Crisis](#) | [China-Europe Relations](#) | [China-U.S.-Europe Relations](#) | [China-U.S.-Russia Relations](#)