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RUSSIA AT WAR WITH THE WEST – STILL COLD OR ALREADY HOT?

ABSTRACT

This article aims to determine whether Russo-Western relations can be framed as a war and, consequently, if the concept of a ‘cold war’ could serve as a viable framework for further analysis. It will first briefly revisit the original Cold War and its defining traits. Secondly, the current general aims and goals of both Russia and the West will be described, with particular attention to the security environment and perceptions of national security. This approach will allow for a thorough examination of the main characteristics of the new Cold War. Finally, we will contextualise the war in Ukraine within a ‘cold war’ framework to illustrate how it works.

Keywords: Russia, Ukraine, Russo-Ukrainian War, the West, USA, Cold War, New Cold War

Since 2014, the Western world's relations with Russia have often been defined as the 'new Cold War'¹ or 'Cold War 2'.² This analogy may not be precise, but it certainly reflects the gravity of the problem and the potential dangers involved. Its emergence was also a clear attempt to frame the new situation challenging the post-Cold War order in settings somewhat familiar to decision-makers, pundits and the general public. Furthermore, tensions with Russia were not new, as an anti-Western, or at least Western-ward, approach had dominated Russian strategic thinking since the autumn of 1993. On the other hand, until the Russian annexation of Crimea and the creation of separatist entities in Eastern Ukraine, the Western public and most politicians did not consider Russia hostile or dangerous. Then came the events of 2014, which convinced at least some in the West that the Kremlin would eventually become a threat, leading to subsequent sanctions imposed on the Russian Federation. At the same time, though, the general attitude varied from the desire to continue mutually beneficial economic cooperation to the somewhat contemptuous *gas station masquerading as a country* approach, as the late Senator John McCain used to put it.³

Now, after almost two years⁴ of the full-scale war raging in Ukraine, which involved dozens of predominantly Western countries that provided up to \$250 billion (USD) worth of military and other aid to Kyiv authorities (as of October 31st, 2023⁵), it has become much more obvious that the persistent tensions between Russia and the West are a serious problem adversely impacting the global security environment. Thus, the Cold War analogy appears to be a convenient framework for understanding the current state of affairs. The contradictions between the two sides are undoubtedly significant and potentially extremely dangerous, yet they are not involved in direct military conflict.

This article aims to explore whether Russo-Western relations can be framed as a war and, consequently, if the concept of a 'cold war' could serve as a viable framework for further analysis. It will first provide a brief overview of the original Cold War and its characteristics. Secondly, the general aims and goals of both Russia and the West will be described, with particular attention to the security environment and perceptions of national security. This approach will allow the main characteristics of the new Cold War to be scrutinised. Finally, we will place the war in Ukraine within a 'cold war' framework to demonstrate how the current situation aligns with the theoretical concept.

The research leading to this article was conducted using qualitative methods, particularly historical and policy analyses. Content analysis in the form of desk studies

¹ R. Legvold, "Managing the New Cold War: What Moscow and Washington Can Learn from the Last One," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 93, no. 4 (2014), pp. 74-84.

² D. Trenin, "Welcome to Cold War II," *Foreign Policy*, 4 March 2014, at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2014/03/04/welcome-to-cold-war-ii/>, 28 August 2023.

³ B. Everett, "McCain: Russia Is a 'Gas Station,'" *Politico*, 26 March 2014, at <https://www.politico.com/story/2014/03/john-mccain-russia-gas-station-105061>, 4 September 2023.

⁴ This text was submitted for publication at the beginning of January, 2024.

⁵ P. Bompreszi, Y. Dyussimbinov, A. Frank, I. Kharitonov, C. Trebesch, "Government Support to Ukraine: By Country Group, € Billion," *The Ukraine Support Tracker*, 2023, at <https://www.ifw-kiel.de/topics/war-against-ukraine/ukraine-support-tracker/?cookieLevel=not-set>, 8 January 2024.

was undertaken. The theoretical framework is based mainly on the realist paradigm, as the main issues analysed are strategy, power and interstate conflict. Additionally, a constructivist approach will be implemented, where perceptions and the strategies based on them are scrutinised.

1. DEFINING A 'COLD WAR'

The term 'cold war' has been used (and misused) by scholars, analysts, politicians, journalists and the general public since its first widely acknowledged appearance in George Orwell's essay of 1945.⁶ It is, therefore, clear that there are numerous definitions of what it represents. For natural reasons, this paper cannot offer a compelling and comprehensive review of these definitions; instead, it will focus on the author's view, preceded by a brief encyclopaedic introduction.

Encyclopedia Britannica defines the Cold War as:

- *the open yet restricted rivalry that developed after World War II between the United States and the Soviet Union and their respective allies. The Cold War was waged on political, economic, and propaganda fronts and had only limited recourse to weapons.*⁷

The Cambridge Dictionary definition is similar but more general, and it states that 'cold war' is:

- *a state of extreme unfriendliness existing between countries, especially countries with opposing political systems, that expresses itself not through fighting but through political pressure and threats. The expression is usually used to describe the relationship between the U.S. and the Soviet Union after the Second World War.*⁸

The Merriam-Webster online dictionary generally adopts the latter view but adds an even more general aspect applicable to wider sets of circumstances, as it states that a cold war is:

- *a conflict over ideological differences carried on by methods short of sustained overt military action and usually without breaking off diplomatic relations;*
- *specifically, often capitalised C&W: the ideological conflict between the U.S. and the Soviet Union during the second half of the 20th century;*
- *a condition of rivalry, mistrust, and often open hostility short of violence, especially between power groups (such as labor and management).*⁹

Admittedly, there was only one Cold War in history, so generalised definitions, like those from *Cambridge* or *Merriam-Webster*, seem dubious. However, if we hypothesise

⁶ G. Orwell, "You and the Atomic Bomb," *Tribune*, 19 October 1945.

⁷ "Cold War," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, at <https://www.britannica.com/event/Cold-War>, 4 September 2023.

⁸ "Cold War," *Cambridge Dictionary*, at <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/cold-war?q=Cold+War>, 4 September 2023.

⁹ "Cold War," *Merriam-Webster*, at <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cold%20war>, 27 October 2024.

that there is a second one, we must move beyond explaining one historical precedent and propose a synthetic definition. To do this, we need to extract the most important features from historical events and combine them properly.

In short, the (First) Cold War was characterised by many distinct features, of which the most important were the following:

Bipolarity. There were only two sides to the conflict: the so-called 'West' and the so-called 'East'. Both 'poles' consisted of numerous international actors but were organised around the single greatest country of a given 'pole'. The actors within each bloc exercised various levels of independence in their actions, but they shared at least the most general views on the main security issues. Not all the countries in the world were involved in 'poles'; many of them did not accept crucial tenets of the leading cold warriors, so they were neutral to various degrees.

The global character of tensions and threats. Despite the aforementioned fact that not all countries in the world were directly involved in the Cold War, they were all – more or less – affected by the consequences of East-West contradictions. Both blocs had global influence and were engaged in conflict on every continent and in every region.

The existential nature of the conflict. The possible escalation into open hostilities threatened not only the direct participants, but also the rest of the world with nuclear annihilation.

The underlying irreconcilable ideological conflict. It was the core of the East-West confrontation reflected in political, economic and social differences. Both sides believed that the two distinct 'worlds' with their indigenous characteristics, existed on Earth and that it was impossible to bridge the differences. This feature also adds another dimension to the existential nature of the conflict mentioned above. The ideological differences essentially precluded accepting the other's distinctiveness, so both sides' ultimate goals were to transform the other's socio-political system into one's own, thus destroying the very essence of the adversary's identity.

The lack of direct military confrontation and abundance of indirect hostilities of various kinds. It was a very distinct, in fact defining, feature of the Cold War. The conflict was so adversarial and tense. The perceived stakes were so high that it resembled war in intensity – even though direct hostilities were scarce. Hence, the very concept of 'cold war' implies a very hostile situation with the adversaries' full application of a war-like mindset, but without open 'hot' warfare.

In consequence, the ***highly adversarial nature of relations between sides of the conflict*** manifested itself not only in politics, but in every dimension of human activities – including sports and culture.

It is not easy to produce a general definition out of all the features above, as they refer to one very specific situation. It is, therefore, necessary to make a choice to propose the synthetic term, which would be useful for explaining similar situations in current or future international relations. Firstly, the global dimension as a feature of a 'cold war' seems unnecessary in the definition, as this kind of relationship might be observed in other regional instances. For example, if we look at the Arab-Israeli conflict from this perspective, we will notice a smaller 'cold war', occasionally turning 'hot', with a lot of

'proxy warfare', particularly via terrorist and guerrilla actions – which have persisted in the Middle East since at least 1948. It is also unnecessary to consider a nuclear threat a constitutive factor of every 'cold war'. Extremely hostile attitudes and perceptions of existential threat may characterise interstate relations – even without nuclear weapons, like what used to happen between Pakistan and India before they built nuclear arsenals. Finally, it is worth underlining that while many nations may be involved in 'cold wars', they are unlikely to turn multilateral. It is challenging to conceive that, say, three sides could have sufficient differences and deep conflicts to create a 'cold war' scenario on every side of the triangle. It is more likely that numerous smaller 'cold wars' will emerge across various axes of multilateral relations.

Thus, in the opinion of this author, *a 'cold war' is a situation in which two or more nation-states are entangled in highly adversarial two-sided relations characterised by irreconcilable political, economic and social contradictions, an existential threat perceived by at least one of them and a lack of substantial military confrontation.*

2. THE EAST-WEST CONFLICT – *DRAMATIS PERSONAE*

It is rather unquestionable that there is a conflict between Russia and what is usually termed 'the West'. This conflict has a long history of heated confrontations and relative calms. If we want to analyse its current phase and possibly the future, we must describe the actors in the conflict along with their perceptions and motivations, which drive strategies and policies. This is no easy task within the framework of a single article, so this subject will be tackled in the most general way. However, before that, a short historical introduction.

For centuries, Russia developed in relative isolation from what constitutes Western civilisation, based on the post-Roman organisation and diverse cultural heritage of Gaelic, Anglo-Saxon, German and Slavic nations connected by economic, cultural and political relations, with the uniting role of the Christian religion. As early as 1054, the Christian church divided into its Western and Eastern factions, marking wider political and cultural divisions and serving as one of the important reasons the East developed in isolation. The other factors were the great distances between the Rus'¹⁰ and the West, the rule of the Mongols, which destroyed the Kievan Rus' and effectively moved it even further from the West in a political and organisational sense, and the Muslim expansion, which vanquished Byzantium, the centre of the civilisation organised around Eastern Christianity, spurring its relocation east to Moscow. Thus, the Grand Duchy of Moscow and the subsequent Russian Empire were developing their institutions and ideologies in very different ways compared to Western Europe. Furthermore, while the West expanded worldwide via the ocean, Russia was building its territory through

¹⁰ Rus' is the general term that refers very generally to the area populated by the Eastern Orthodox Slavic peoples and, at the same time, to their common history and heritage. Thus, Rus' exists both in time and space, and historically the term was used to denote individual political entities or to mark the most general distinction between this entity and the rest of the world.

continental conquest directed east, south and south-west. Its confrontation with the West was, therefore, limited to the prolonged tug-of-war with Poland over the territories of Eastern Europe. Finally, Russia prevailed and engaged in European politics in the 18th century; however, it remained a very different state compared to the European political entities. While in Europe the Enlightenment was about to bring great changes and a nation-state was emerging, Russia's internal organisation remained unchanged for centuries. The reforms undertaken by Peter the Great were of an organisational character, did not touch the essence of the state or the form of government, even if they managed to improve governance. In the 19th century, Russia remained an entirely different world, largely incomprehensible for Europeans who, like Marquis de Custine,¹¹ had just started to explore it. For the people in the West, particularly in the United States and England, Russia was an oppressive land of enslaved people who still had the Tsar as the owner of everything, while elsewhere there was a burgeoning democracy and societies were developing quickly. The subsequent Bolshevik revolution, which destroyed the seed of the modern political system established in Russia after the February Revolution of 1917, only deepened the mistrust and revulsion with which the West viewed Russia. On the other hand, since it had become entangled in European politics, Russia suffered massive incursions into its territory in the form of Napoleon's 1812 campaign, the German-Austrian WWI offensive and particularly the German WWII occupation. Additionally, the Crimean War of 1853-1856 and the Russo-Polish War of 1920 brought massive defeats to the Russian armies. After WWII, the nuclear threat dominated East-West relations, with both sides perceiving each other as the existential and ultimate threat. In summary, the so-called 'West' and Russia share hundreds of years of history marked by increasing cultural, structural and political differences, repeated armed conflict and a perception of existential threat, which existed even before the atomic bomb was invented and stemmed from the colossal difference between the Russians as a nation and their state and the Western world.

As the conflict evolved, its actors changed, taking into account not only the composition of the West as a collective entity, but also its organisation, governance, economy and ideologies, as was very briefly indicated above. To proceed with an argument about the nature of the current phase of the conflict, it is necessary to present its actors as they are in the autumn of 2023. Of course, this will be a very brief and general presentation due to the obvious constraints of a single article.

Russia

The principal actor in the conflict, which is its main reference point, is certainly Russia. It is characterised as a 'great power', 'kleptocracy', 'resurgent power', 'world's gas station', 'cunning adversary', 'reckless government' and by many other names. It is much too often considered powerful and menacing and equally too often presumed weak and inept. But, as the well-known proverb says, *Russia is never as weak as it looks and never as strong as it would like to look*. This approach will resonate in the description below.

¹¹ A. de Custine, *La Russie en 1839*, Paris 1843.

The Russian government is undoubtedly authoritarian in nature. Democratic institutions are only a façade, and freedom of the press and political expression is highly limited. There is only one niche of relatively free speech, the part of the blogosphere devoted to reporting the war in Ukraine, but it is populated by so-called ‘milbloggers’ of ultranationalist and pro-war orientation. Russian authoritarianism is deeply rooted in its past, and its character has remained essentially unchanged since the beginning of statehood. Short periods of experimentation with more representative forms of government in the 17th century – before the Romanovs came to power, when Duma had relatively important role in the political system, in 1917-1918 after the Tsar was dethroned and in the late 1980s and 1990s – did not alter the nature of the Russian government. In Russia, the highest authority rather owes the state than rules it, remaining practically above the law and unrestrained by any norms. Thus, the system is deeply personalised; everything depends on a single person or a small exclusive group, with obvious systemic consequences. On one hand, the system may act quickly and decisively, even if it means circumventing the formally binding law. On the other hand, it is very much prone to highly disruptive infighting, corruption and nepotism. What is particularly important is that Russian leaders are often detached from reality and make significant decisions based more on ideology and false assumptions than on proper analysis of facts. It is apparent that Vladimir Putin is also dependent on a web of courtiers, and his understanding of reality is highly distorted.¹² All in all, Russia is poorly governed internally due to the systemic deficiencies of its political system; its external strategies and policies are also often ineffective.

The above-mentioned form of governance determines the economy to a great extent. It is rigged to serve predatory elites who are servile to the political leadership. The lack of real guarantees of such basic tenets of an effective economy, like the right of ownership, causes huge capital outflow and disincentivises investment. The Russian economy is, therefore, underinvested as entrepreneurs favour short-term quick profits over long-term financial engagement. Extreme corruption¹³ in public administration and the judicial system also contribute to the poor performance of the Russian economy. Thus, generally speaking, the Russian economy is relatively weak,¹⁴ highly dependent on resource exports, underinvested and lacking in substantial innovation.¹⁵ Additionally, the drastic decrease in population¹⁶ and poor public health services aggravate

¹² P.K. Baev, “Putin’s Political Bubble Tightens Up,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, vol. 20, no. 58 (2023), at <https://jamestown.org/program/putins-political-bubble-tightens-up/>, 12 April 2023.

¹³ According to Transparency International, Russia holds 137th position among 180 countries, with a score 28 out of 100 points, “Russia,” *Transparency International*, October 2023, at <https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/russia>, 18 November 2023.

¹⁴ E. Ribakova, “Sanctions against Russia Will Worsen Its Already Poor Economic Prospects,” *Peterson Institute for International Economics*, 18 April 2023, at <https://www.piie.com/blogs/realtime-economics/sanctions-against-russia-will-worsen-its-already-poor-economic-prospects>, 18 November 2023.

¹⁵ G. Arcuri, “Lessons from Russia’s Dysfunctional Pre-War Innovation Economy,” *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, 11 April 2022, at <https://www.csis.org/blogs/perspectives-innovation/lessons-russias-dysfunctional-pre-war-innovation-economy>, 18 November 2023.

¹⁶ P. Goble, “Russian Demographic Losses Tighten the Noose around the Kremlin,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, vol. 19, no. 17 (2022), at <https://jamestown.org/program/russian-demographic-losses-tighten-the-noose-around-the-kremlin/>, 11 February 2022.

the country's problems. On the other hand, Russia sits on vast resources; its industrial base is huge, its workforce is skilled and creative and its research facilities are numerous. The great potential of the nation and its people is, therefore, wasted to a great extent; however, what remains after this waste still represents great economic power capable of producing large quantities of goods and services.

The war in Ukraine greatly exacerbated Russia's economic woes. Even some Russian experts acknowledge that the deep depletion of the workforce due to the mobilisation of army reserves and the flight of young men abroad,¹⁷ together with grim demographic prospects, poses a serious challenge for Russia.¹⁸ Furthermore, the increasing direct cost of conducting war¹⁹ and severe and biting economic sanctions imposed by the West²⁰ add up to the systemic deficiencies of the Russian economy. This way, it is even weaker than before the war, with limited prospects for improvement in the foreseeable future; on the contrary, it is highly likely that [...] *Russia's economy will permanently shift onto a less internationally connected and less technologically sophisticated development trajectory*.²¹ On the other hand, Russia has become accustomed to the new external environment and internal constraints, so it seems economically stable – at least in the interim.

Russian society, relatively well-educated and talented, is politically dormant. Russians are passive; they muddle through life without any hope of changing the system in which they live. The natural submissiveness of their society²² adds up with its dependence on the state and translates into predominantly passive attitudes.²³ Effective propaganda is based on hundreds of years-old perceptions regarding individuals' place in

¹⁷ Е. Тофанюк, Ю. Сапронова, "Россию после 21 сентября покинули около 700 000 граждан," [E. Tofanuk, Ů. Sapronova, "RossiŮ posle 21 sentâbrâ pokinuli okolo 700 000 graŹdan,"] *Forbes*, 4 October 2022, at <https://www.forbes.ru/society/478827-rossiu-posle-21-sentabra-pokinuli-okolo-700-000-grazdan>, 15 November 2023.

¹⁸ И. Меркулова, "Рынок труда: «сдвиг и шок»," [I. Merkulova, "Rynok truda: «sdvig i šok»,"] *Economy Times*, 21 November 2022, at <https://economytimes.ru/kurs-rulya/rynok-truda-sdvig-i-shok>, 17 November 2023.

¹⁹ P. Luzin, "Russia Struggles to Manage Defense and Security Budgets," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, vol. 20, no. 154 (2023), at <https://jamestown.org/program/russia-struggles-to-manage-defense-and-security-budgets/>, 6 October 2023.

²⁰ M. Snegovaya, T. Dolbaia, N. Fenton, M. Bergmann, "Russia Sanctions at One Year," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, 23 February 2023, at <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russia-sanctions-one-year>, 4 March 2023.

²¹ J. Kluge, "Russia's Economy under Sanctions: Early Impact and Long-Term Outlook," *Russian Analytical Digest*, vol. 285 (2022), pp. 7-9, at <https://css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/RAD285.pdf>, 5 July 2022.

²² A. Kovalev, "Wartime Russians Fall Back on an Ancient Survival Strategy," *Foreign Policy*, 10 September 2023, at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/09/10/russia-war-putin-prisposoblenchestvo-conformism-adapt-support-culture-history/>, 11 September 2023.

²³ А. Колесников, "Поза эмбриона. Почему российское общество смирилось с происходящим," [A. Kolesnikov, "Poza ěmbriona. Poěemu rossijskoe obšestvo smiril s proishodâšim,"] *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 26 January 2023, at <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2023/01/as-war-rages-russian-society-has-assumed-the-fetal-position?lang=ru>, 30 January 2023.

the system and Russia's place in the world. Thus, the nation generally approves of the ideologies and policies offered by the leadership out of a lack of choice and because it is accustomed to thinking in a certain way – at least for now.²⁴ Most Russians believe in the state's narrative that their country is endangered by the West and is defending its very existence; therefore, they generally accept military action against Ukraine.²⁵ They also accept the notion that Russia is, and should be, a world-class superpower; they cannot imagine their country not being among the biggest and most influential. And finally, Russians have simply got used to the war,²⁶ so social and structural stability seems ensured²⁷ – at least for the time being.

Summarising, Russia is a country with vast human, natural and material potential, which is relatively poorly utilised due to deficiencies in the political system exacerbated by the consequences of the present conflict in Ukraine. Its leadership and general society are highly influenced by a 'fortress under siege' mentality, which translates to [...] *a belief that dangers to the Russian state are external and ideological, instead of internal and structural.*²⁸ This approach determines Russia's external relations to the greatest extent.

The West²⁹

There are two most important features of the collective entity known as 'the West'. The first is its diversity, as it encompasses a great number of countries located on several continents, each with their individual interests, local entanglements and particularities of politics, society and economy. The second is the relative dominance of one nation – which is, in every measure, substantially stronger than any other country within the group – the United States. In effect, it is difficult to find common ground among

²⁴ D. Volkov, A. Kolesnikov, "My Country, Right or Wrong: Russian Public Opinion on Ukraine," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 7 September 2022, at <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2022/09/my-country-right-or-wrong-russian-public-opinion-on-ukraine?lang=en>, 10 September 2022.

²⁵ In October 2023, 76 % of Russians "basically approved" or "decisively approved" military action against Ukraine, according to the poll performed by Levada-Centr: "Конфликт с Украиной: оценки октября 2023 года," *ЛЕВАДА-ЦЕНТР* ["Konflikt s Ukrainoj: ocenki oktâbrâ 2023 goda," *LEVADA-CENTR*], 31 October 2023, at <https://www.levada.ru/2023/10/31/konflikt-s-ukrainoj-otsenki-oktyabrya2023-goda/>, 17 November 2023.

²⁶ A. Kolesnikov, "How Russians Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the War," *Foreign Affairs*, 1 February 2023, at https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/how-russians-learned-stop-worrying-and-love-war?utm_source=carnegieemail&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=announcement, 2 February 2023.

²⁷ I. Busygina, M. Filippov, "Regional Governors, Moscow, and the War," *Russian Analytical Digest*, vol. 295 (2023), pp. 2-5, at <https://css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/RAD295.pdf>, 5 June 2023.

²⁸ P. Berman, "The Intellectual Catastrophe of Vladimir Putin," *Foreign Policy*, 13 March 2022, at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/03/13/putin-russia-war-ukraine-rhetoric-history/>, 14 March 2022.

²⁹ This text was prepared in Spring 2024, well before Donald Trump started to dismantle the Western world.

the Western states, although the U.S. is capable of exerting a sort of leadership over the West – even though it is not commanding it. In short, the West as a whole has many common interests, but these are shaped more by the commonalities of the participants' economies and political systems than by the will of the dominant nation. The solutions are negotiated rather than imposed and there are many conflicts within the group, although they do not have substantial ideological dimensions; they refer to rather practical issues. In effect, if the West acts as one entity, it is able to achieve unity only on the most general issues, which leaves its members substantial freedom of individual action.

The West is a powerhouse of the world as far as the economy is concerned. Despite Chinese competition, the West remains the world's biggest economy and is highly integrated, even though it does not have a single governing body. The United States is certainly a leading economic power but does not dictate the terms of economic cooperation within the West. These terms are rather negotiated, and if solutions somewhat favour the U.S., it is because America usually has a better negotiating position; however, it is not a hegemon. The Western economy is highly innovative and diverse; the West absolutely leads in technological development as well. There are certainly bleak aspects of the Western economy, as capitalism – which funds the West – is in a sort of crisis. Widening income gaps, the ongoing concentration of production and capital in megacorporations, problems with regulating some of the new life-changing technologies and the environmental crisis pose serious challenges to the Western world. It is, however, worth noting that these challenges come mostly from within. The single, but certainly most important, external economic threat is the Chinese desire to rewrite the rules of global economic cooperation and make them more favourable to China. This is a grave danger because these Western-made rules form the backbone of the global economy and serve the West's interests well. That is why Western governments, for the most part, consider China and its policies to be the most important challenge in every dimension.

Summarising from a global perspective, the West is a leading, albeit somewhat amorphous, power. It cherishes this fact most because it is one of the crucial factors contributing to the wealth of the West. This world order is now being challenged on multiple fronts, with the most significant challenge coming from China. It is also crucial to understand that the West as a whole has global interests, while individual countries have their local concerns.

The Others

Many countries of the world do not participate in the East-West conflict, meaning that they do not explicitly take sides, although they routinely cooperate with the West or East, or both, in political and economic fields. These countries, in fact a majority of the world's nation-states, usually do not take ideological sides and refrain from condemnations or denunciations, though some remain somewhat critical towards the West. Nevertheless, they cannot be clearly framed within the bipolar scheme of the current East-West confrontation.

The motivations for staying out of the conflict vary; however, generally speaking, developing countries do not want to become embroiled in hostilities due to mistrust towards the West, which is perceived as exploiting poorer countries and hampering their development through selfish economic policies. Thus, they are susceptible to Russian propaganda and may even repeat some of the anti-Western narratives – but this does not compel them to choose sides, even if it appears that they do. In essence, Russia does not have much to offer, except for some incentives such as political backing for governments or limited arms shipments. On the other hand, there is the threat of punitive Western sanctions and likely disruption in lucrative relations with the world's largest economies. Therefore, despite appearances in various declarations, most developing countries remain neutral, asserting that the conflict is futile, disruptive and brings no benefit whatsoever.

Several of the strongest players outside the West take a more active stance towards the East-West conflict in general and the war in Ukraine in particular, but in essence, they also remain neutral. China, in particular, supports Russia's war effort to an extent, but this help is not decisive and is much smaller than the Kremlin would like it to be. Beijing is certainly interested in keeping Russia as a relatively strong supporter of its anti-Western stance (by the way, the West's relations with China increasingly resemble a 'cold war', but on the other hand, Beijing exploits the opportunity to increase its preponderance and make Russia more dependent). The Chinese are somewhat annoyed that the lack of a swift Russian victory, resulting in a prolonged war, has aggravated global economic woes, adversely affecting the Middle Kingdom's interests.³⁰ Some other countries, like India, Turkey and Brazil, use the opportunity to assert themselves as important and independent players and leaders of the developing world in their quest for equality in relations with the West, which they believe constantly blocks the rest of the world from developing. It is also an opportunity for them to extract some benefits from Russia, such as discounted oil; however, they are not ready to substantially help the Kremlin, particularly by directly supporting its war effort.

All in all, the rest of the world is trying to reap benefits from the existing situation, pursuing individual goals and attempting to avoid substantial direct involvement in the conflict.

3. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EAST-WEST CONFLICT AT THE CURRENT STAGE – THE NEW COLD WAR?

The description above naturally leads us to the question of what the characteristic features of the current state of the East-West confrontation are in light of the definition of a 'cold war' presented in the first section of the article. The answer will address the main point of this research: can we use the term 'cold war' in reference to the current state of East-West relations?

³⁰ B.G. Carlson, "The China Factor in Russia's War in Ukraine," *Policy Perspectives*, vol. 10/13 (2022), pp. 1-4, at https://ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/PP10-13_2022-EN.pdf, 15 November 2023.

Let us reiterate that the definition created for this analysis posits that a 'cold war' is characterised by four traits: a highly adversarial nature, irreconcilable contradictions, perceptions of existential threat and a lack of open military confrontations. Below, these points will be examined in reference to the current state of the conflict.

The expression 'highly adversarial relations' means, in essence, 'war', which broadens the understanding of this term in an attempt to reconcile its various uses. In International Relations and other political sciences, the term 'war' is used not only as a description of massive armed conflict, but also for other reasons. Thus, we have 'propaganda war', 'cyber war', 'hybrid war', 'guerilla war', 'information war', 'war of nerves' and others. These expressions refer to situations in which parties to the conflict are particularly deeply involved in adversarial relations, which constitute the vast majority of the overall relationship. It means that relations between these parties are decisively more adversarial (confrontational) than cooperative or competitive. In short, it means that enmity, not competition or other forms of relations, dominates the relationship in question. Therefore, the participants may be engaged in a 'propaganda war', which means highly adversarial information warfare, and remain cooperative in, for example, the economic field. Consequently, expressions have also been coined to cover situations in which 'war' in the traditional meaning occurs, such as 'full-scale war', 'open war', etc.

So, is the current East-West conflict a war? There is an abundance of hostilities in the political and military spheres. Cooperation within these spheres has been virtually halted, replaced by highly adversarial rhetoric and hostile actions. In the economic sphere, both sides cooperate to an extent, but the West has managed to exclude Russian entities from many international economic mechanisms in which it holds a dominant position. Unprecedented economic sanctions are also very much adversarial in nature. In the social sphere, there is ongoing information warfare regarding building perceptions and interpretations of nations' actions for the purpose of shaping respective societies' mindsets. It also refers to ideological values that are mutually questioned, so the process of creating the 'pictures of the enemy' is ongoing. The propaganda war-like actions and ideological struggle for values are much more prevalent in Russia due to hundreds of years of building an anti-Western stance and a 'fortress under siege' mentality. Additionally, the Kremlin's information war machine is working somewhat effectively to soften Russia's image in Western societies. In effect, Russia and Russians are more anti-Western oriented than Western societies are anti-Russian. Moreover, for many Westerners, the conflict with Russia is somewhat distant and irrelevant, so they are either neutral or even sympathetic to Russia. Still, the general attitude of Western societies is highly unfriendly towards Russia and Russians, which is supported by governments and the mainstream media.

All in all, the notion that East-West relations at the current stage can be termed as 'war', which is understood as highly adversarial relations as described above, is correct. However, it is much more so for Russia and Russians than for the West. The latter is also somewhat divided on the nature of the conflict; in some countries, it is more perceived as war (e.g., Poland, the Baltic states) and in others less so (France). But still, it is a war.

The second feature of our definition of 'cold war' refers to 'irreconcilable contradictions'. The essence of these contradictions manifests itself mostly in the attitude towards

the nature and state of the world order. In the view of the Western world, the cooperative rules-based world order, which is founded, generally speaking, on democratic political principles and economic freedom, is the best organisation that provides nations with the most viable opportunities to grow. It seems fairly idealistic; thus, it must be added that this order was established after WWII and greatly strengthened after the break-up of the Soviet Union by the Western states. Keeping it intact, expanding it and controlling it brings huge benefits to the Western community while serving the interests of other nations too, even though many non-Western governments are not exactly content with it. Russia is a particularly important and impatient contender in the Western-led world order. The Kremlin holds that, due to Russian potential, history and actual power, Russia should be among the powers that decide on the rules of the world order. Moscow was, however, never accepted as a fully fledged member of the modern 'great powers concert' due to its weak economy, undemocratic values of its political system and aggressive stance vis-à-vis its neighbours. Hence, the basis for contradictions – the West needs to conserve (more or less) the liberal rules of world order, while Russia wants to change them to reflect the Kremlin's views on international security. Moscow believes that the strongest countries should decide the security landscape and that their security interests should be respected as decisive. This is somewhat obvious to both sides, but the Russian version of the world order allows for the subjugation or even liquidation of sovereign countries as a normal procedure. This is unacceptable to the West, which bases its influence on co-opting other nations by way of attraction, not coercing them by force. A good example is the issue of NATO, its very existence and its expansion. According to the Western vision, every country has a right to choose its political and military allegiances. So, when Central European states declared at the beginning of the 90s that they would like to join NATO, the West could only agree, even if reluctantly and with reservations. According to Russia, the West should have declined the plea because Russia sought to coerce this part of the world into returning to its sphere of influence out of a long-standing fear of the West. Russia believes that global influence should be partitioned by the strongest in a somewhat Haushoferian way, which means that the strong have the right to coerce the weak. This is the foundation of East-West contradictions: the West builds its international position in economy and security by attracting others, with coercion as a last resort, executed only on special occasions of grave danger – as seen in some cases of the Cold War proxy wars. On the other hand, for Russia, coercion is a primary tool for building its international power in the economic and political spheres. This basic contradiction is irreconcilable as it reaches both sides' most fundamental patterns of international operations and their underlying ideological premises.

These contradictions lead to tensions, and tensions spawn a perception of threat. If this threat is existential, if it refers to the very essence of values, it becomes a part of a 'cold war' definition.

From the Western perspective, the gravest threats to its core interests, as described above, are of an economic nature and concern the Western societies' ability to sustain their wealth and growth, endangered by the crises mentioned above. Thus, the most important threats are mainly of an internal nature, except for the threat to the stability

of the rule-based world, which comes from outside. From the Western perspective, the gravest threat to the world economic and political order comes from China, a global economic power and an increasingly assertive international actor who does not hide aspirations to rebuild the world for its own benefit. If this threat is existential, it is not important from the point of view of this article. What is important is that Russia does not pose an economic threat of this magnitude; the Western economies have already proven to be resilient enough to withstand complications driven by the current conflict with Russia. On the other hand, there is a factor bearing characteristics of an existential threat to the West – the Russian weapons of mass destruction and the possibility that the current war in Ukraine will escalate into a nuclear confrontation. However, despite the Russian efforts, this problem does not loom too heavily over Western societies, as there is no widespread perception of an existential imminent threat.

Conversely, Russia – mainly the Russian government and elites – perceives existential threats primarily from abroad. In the traditional Russian understanding, the world outside is extremely hostile, particularly the West – which constantly conspires to destroy Russia. Hence, Russian sensitivity to security issues and a need for a vast sphere of influence, firstly to create strategic depth and secondly to support Russia economically. What Russia sees as encroachment into this sphere of legitimate security naturally spawns a perception of an existential threat, particularly because the West is considered a powerful entity capable of destroying Russia.

In short, as far as the West in general is concerned, there is no significant existential threat from Russia perceived. However, several countries located in the closest vicinity of Russia have an elevated threat perception well above the Western average. Poland, the Baltic states and Finland may feel far more insecure with Russian territory just outside their borders. It is a natural consequence of the diversity of the West that various countries have different perceptions of threat, but the general approach is important as an argument in this narrative. Additionally, the countries mentioned above are all NATO members, so their perception of existential threat is mitigated by that fact – even if some people there do not fully trust their allies. On the other hand, Russia's situation is much simpler. Its government, elites and society believe that the very existence of the nation hinges on its ability to retain its sphere of influence as a hedge against grave external threats.

The last feature of a 'cold war', the lack of open hostilities, seems obvious. Neither Russia nor the West intends to confront each other head-on, but for partially different reasons. The West fears the economic cost, the likely human toll – even if it would be limited to warfighters – and possible escalation into a nuclear holocaust. Russia basically fears the same, with the addition that it understands the superiority of Western militaries and economies. Thus, the Kremlin knows that even limited and defensive direct Western involvement in the war in Ukraine, in the form of, for example, air defence cover provided by Western assets, would greatly contribute to the defeat of the Russian military in Ukraine.

Summarising, the current state of relations between Russia and the West may be framed within the 'cold war' definition provided above – but not to the full extent,

as some elements on both sides do not exactly fit. In general terms, the relations may be termed 'war', as they are mutually highly adversarial and the confrontation revolves around irreconcilable differences. There is also an evident lack of direct confrontation; even Russians argue that the West is waging only a proxy war 'to the last of Ukrainians' against them. What does not exactly fit into our definition is the issue of threat perception. The West does not perceive substantial existential threats from Russia, save the distant possibility of the use of nuclear weapons. Thus, from its point of view, a 'cold war' premise seems incomplete. On the other hand, the Russians perceive the situation as a grave danger to the very existence of their nation, so from their point of view, the 'war' is very real and it is 'cold' as far as the West is concerned.

Thus, we can conclude that the state of relations between West and East amounts to a 'cold war' and may be called so, with the reservation that for the West, this war is not as important as for Russia. This fact forms an important asymmetry of views on the state of relations. On one side, we have a perception of an important but rather peripheral war. On the other, we have the perception of an existential threat.³¹

Finally, it is worth adding that this conflict is in its initial stage, which makes it particularly unpredictable and, consequently, dangerous. The original Cold War was highly institutionalised, with many safety mechanisms built in after years of shaping relations between Moscow and Washington. This time:

- *[t]here may exist some rationality on the level of Joe Biden and Vladimir Putin with regard to nuclear war (as well as from countries like Germany). But that is not enough. The rest of the institutional constraints that characterised the 'long peace' of the old Cold War have been gradually deconstructed since 1991. The discipline of the old Cold War, which the superpowers exercised both towards themselves and on their proxies, now appears to be gone.*³²

4. THE WAR IN UKRAINE AS THE FOCAL POINT OF THE NEW COLD WAR

The current stage of the conflict in Ukraine is certainly a part of the wider confrontation between Russia and the West described above, as Vladimir Putin's intention was always [...] *getting the West to treat Russia as if it were the Soviet Union, a power to be respected and feared, with special rights in its neighbourhood and a voice in every serious international matter.*³³ Thus, since 2014, the Western community has taken the

³¹ D. Trenin, "Two Worlds of Russia's Foreign Policy," *Horizons*, vol. 23 (2023), at <https://www.cirsd.org/en/horizons/horizons-spring-2023---issue-no23/two-worlds-of-russias-foreign-policy>, 3 October 2023.

³² E. Evriviades, "The New Cold War and Ukraine," *RUSI*, 30 May 2022, at <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/new-cold-war-and-ukraine>, 1 June 2022.

³³ A. Stent, "The Putin Doctrine: A Move on Ukraine Has Always Been Part of the Plan," *Foreign Affairs*, 27 January 2022, at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2022-01-27/putin-doctrine>, 28 January 2022.

Ukrainian side in Kyiv's struggle to enhance its independence from Moscow. Sanctions imposed at that time were a clear manifestation of this stance. The subsequent development of military, economic and political ties with Ukraine marked a gradually growing engagement, particularly from the United States and the United Kingdom. Expanding ties with the West also meant that Ukraine was moving away from the Russian sphere of influence.

On the other hand, Russia believed – and its authorities expressed this many times – that it could not allow it to happen. Particularly important is that the Kremlin considers Ukraine's territory a critical security resource – an indispensable strategic depth shielding the Russian economic, population and political core. Additionally, a multitude of other arguments refer to historical factors and national identity issues, which, in Moscow's view, form strong bonds between Ukraine and Russia – which the latter feels obliged to defend against external spoilers. There are also arguments that point to close economic cooperation between the two countries and their peoples, which was crucially important, particularly for Ukraine. Additionally, multiple conspiracy theories spawned by the propaganda machine support anti-Ukrainian and anti-Western narrative.³⁴

This way, Ukraine became an important part of the wider set of contradictions between the West and Russia. The increase in military threats in 2021 was intended to dissuade Western nations from aiding Ukraine and create conditions for the institutionalisation of a new Cold War at a level of intensity sufficient to maintain the sphere of influence while simultaneously ensuring safety for Russia. In short, Vladimir Putin wanted to strike a deal with the United States to delineate durable control zones, much like the Yalta and Potsdam Accords had done before. Certainly, Ukraine was meant to remain within the Russian sphere of influence.

The U.S. was not prepared to abandon Ukraine because it would mean a huge loss of prestige and credibility. Furthermore, Washington likely expected, as many analysts did,³⁵ that war with Ukraine would be potentially so costly for Russia that the Kremlin would not eventually dare to launch it. From the American and Western points of view, the Russians were making a trap for themselves by upping the ante throughout 2021, so it was natural that Washington allowed Moscow to walk into it. In short, it was a win-win situation for the U.S. – either Russia would back down and allow Western influence to grow in Ukraine, or it would send in its military and pay a very high price for the invasion with uncertain prospects. The Kremlin, however, understood the situation differently. After the first wave of military intimidation at the beginning of 2021 was unsuccessful in bringing the Americans to negotiate a 'grand bargain' with Russia,

³⁴ S. Radnitz, "Conspiracy Theories and Russia's Invasion of Ukraine," *Russian Analytical Digest*, vol. 299 (2023), pp. 11-14, at <https://css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-security-studies/pdfs/RAD299.pdf>, 4 September 2023.

³⁵ Ph.G. Wasielewski, S.G. Jones, "Russia's Possible Invasion of Ukraine," *Center for Strategic and International Studies Briefs*, January 2022, at https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/220113_Wasielewski_Jones_RussiaUkraine.pdf?VersionId=11uM1oad1HbgqtEL7bwkMjYzNHTHWW8I, 3 February 2022.

Vladimir Putin apparently decided to make one last attempt to force his vision of the institutionalisation of the new Cold War, this time in a maximalist version. If this attempt was unsuccessful, Russia was to be fully prepared to invade its neighbour and take what it wanted without hesitation. This decision was based on flawed political and military assumptions that Ukraine would be subdued within days or weeks and an equally flawed understanding of the West as weak and unable to act decisively.³⁶

Thus, it has been apparent from the beginning that manoeuvring around the Ukrainian issue in the run-up to the war, carried out by both Russia and the United States, was part of a wider mechanism of ongoing East-West confrontation. Therefore, the war in Ukraine is not a cause of the broader conflict – the New Cold War – but merely a part of it. It is another battlefield in an ongoing, multifaceted confrontation. However, its role and significance in the overall Russo-Western relations are not the same for both sides and it reflects, very well, the asymmetric character of this new iteration of a ‘cold war’.

The Western attitude towards the war in Ukraine reflects the general characteristics of the West as a side in the new Cold War. Generally, all Western countries acknowledge that they differ fundamentally from Russia. However, individual nations have various stakes in the conflict. For the United States, it is a matter of global leadership and a part of a struggle for the shape of the international system that serves the U.S. well, while Russia is working to undermine it. On the other hand, the conflict and, consequently, the war in Ukraine are rather marginal for the American public. China and economic hardships, along with pressing domestic political and social issues, are much more important to Americans. Additionally, some political forces view criticism of the expansion of assistance to Ukraine as a useful instrument in their internal struggle against the current government. For most other Western countries, the war in Eastern Europe is also a distant issue, far less important than a multitude of internal problems and, again, the Chinese economic and political threat. Still, almost all governments participate in the war by sending various forms of assistance to Ukraine, but in every instance, this help does not represent a significant effort in relation to government budgets and GDPs, except for the Baltic states and Poland. The scope and character of this help vary, reflecting the extent to which individual countries wish to engage in the war. Some provide substantial military aid, some offer only financial assistance and others contribute merely token gifts. Overall, for the Western community as a whole, the war in Ukraine is a peripheral issue, as is the new Cold War. Westerners also do not perceive any immediate short- or medium-term danger to their security stemming from the war in Eastern Europe, so there is no strong sense of an existential threat. In a nutshell, the highly adversarial nature of East-West relations allows us to refer to it as the new Cold War. However, at present, it appears relatively calm from

³⁶ F. Hill, “Amid the Ukraine Crisis, Looking again at Putin, the One-Man Show the West Doesn’t Understand,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 13 February 2022, at https://thebulletin.org/premium/2022-02/putin-the-one-man-show-the-west-doesnt-understand/?utm_source=Newsletter&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=MondayNewsletter02142022&utm_content=NuclearRisk_PutinTheOneManShow_02132022, 15 February 2022.

the Western perspective, as it is distant, relatively inexpensive and not life-threatening. Consequently, the war in Ukraine, although certainly 'hot' and significant, is currently not a critical issue for the West.

On the other hand, Russia is fighting for its very survival, as the foundation of Russian security seems endangered – at least as it is perceived in Moscow by Vladimir Putin, political elites and society. As Rose Gottemoeller put it brilliantly:

- *What's eating Putin is, therefore, a dangerous brew: part personal grievance, part bullying behaviour, part scorn for his adversaries, and part dictates for staying on top in the Russian system. Given his grave isolation, a part may also be his sense of genuine threat.*³⁷

However misplaced this perception may be, it determines the Russian general attitude and individual actions and strategies. Therefore, the New Cold War is as menacing for the Russians as the previous one, or even more so, mostly because Russia is weaker than the Soviet Union in comparison to its adversaries. Moreover, the war in Ukraine, which in the Russian view was imposed on Russia by the West, set conditions compelling Russia to defend itself; it is not a cold one. On the contrary, it is very 'hot', engaging much of the Russian military, industrial potential and vast human resources. Additionally, it is fought at the western border of the Russian Federation, located just five or six hundred kilometres from Moscow, which physically threatens Russian territory. All of these features add up to the perception of an existential struggle,³⁸ which engages the whole nation with its whole potential. But still, the war itself is a 'special military operation', as Ukraine is, in Russia's view, not a legitimate enemy; the real war the Russians fight is against the West.³⁹

Thus, for Moscow, the current stage of confrontation with the West is surely a 'cold war', as there are no direct hostilities between the two sides. On the other hand, the war in Ukraine is viewed by the Russians as a proxy war waged by the West, making the entire relationship very 'hot' from their perspective.

There is another factor that drives the Kremlin's strategy in the conflict with the West, which this author has described in detail several times before, and it is worth reiterating briefly. As mentioned previously, Vladimir Putin tried to institutionalise the new Cold War on a relatively safe level as a consequence of a long-standing policy to inflate threats from the West to support the legitimisation of the authorities. After the collapse of the so-called 'Putin's consensus', which meant that Russians gave up their

³⁷ R. Gottemoeller, "What's Eating Putin?," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 3 March 2022, at https://thebulletin.org/2022/03/whats-eating-putin/?utm_source=Newsletter&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=MondayNewsletter03072022&utm_content=NuclearRisk_What%27sEatingPutin%3F_03032022, 5 March 2022.

³⁸ E. Ferris, "How Russia's Narratives on Ukraine Reflect its Existential Crisis," *RUSI*, 27 July 2022, at <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/how-russias-narratives-ukraine-reflect-its-existential-crisis>, 20 July 2022.

³⁹ "Letter from St. Petersburg, a Year in: Russia Is Still Not at War," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 24 February 2023, at https://thebulletin.org/2023/02/another-letter-from-st-petersburg-a-year-after-its-invasion-of-ukraine-russia-is-still-not-at-war/?utm_source=Newsletter&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=MondayNewsletter02272023&utm_content=SpecialTopics_AnotherLetter_02242023, 3 March 2023.

freedoms for economic development and a rapid increase in wealth, the authorities needed a new source of legitimisation. Putin found it in rising international tensions and exploited inherent contradictions with the West to rally the nation around the flag and demonstrate that his authority was the one that could save Russia. This narrative fell on very fertile ground within the Russian mindset, which had been anti-Western for centuries and highly susceptible to manipulation. Thus, the new Cold War, as it began to emerge fully after 2013, was not only a result of inherent contradictions and threat perceptions, but also of deliberate Russian internal policies intertwined with domestic political issues and perceptions of the international security environment. Consequently, even a prolonged and costly war may have a positive impact on the legitimisation of the Russian authorities.⁴⁰

So, finally, for the West, the war in Ukraine is a proxy war within the framework of the wider, although peripheral, new Cold War. For Russia, it is not a proxy war because it is being fought by Russian forces for causes related to the nation's very survival (according to the narrative prevalent in Russia). It is, however, a part of the confrontation with the West, so it is also a part of the new Cold War. It makes this 'cold war' much hotter for Russia than it is for the West.

CONCLUSIONS

To summarise, it is necessary to note the following issues regarding the new Cold War and the place of the Russo-Ukrainian war in it:

Firstly, the term 'cold war', as defined above, is applicable to East-West relations, although with some reservations. It became apparent sometime in 2014, although the first symptoms of heightened tensions leading to the renewed confrontation were visible even earlier. Since then, tensions have steadily increased and the highly adversarial nature of the conflict has become increasingly evident.

Secondly, the new Cold War is highly asymmetric, presenting two distinct faces depending on the point of view. For the West, it is a 'cold war', albeit with a lack of perception of an existential threat, although this threat is real in the form of nuclear weapons. It is, however, a peripheral war, as most of the threats the West faces are of an internal nature (plus China). For Russia, it is also a 'cold war', but of much greater importance, as it is perceived as an existential threat to the very foundation of the Russian nation.

Thirdly, the war in Ukraine, as part of the new Cold War, is also an asymmetric conflict. For the West, it is a confrontation on the periphery of its interests – important but distant. For the Russians, the triumphant 'special military operation' has turned into a bloody, prolonged war of military and economic attrition, making it the nation's primary security issue, adversely affecting every facet of life. Thus, for the West, it is a typical proxy war, as it intends to saturate the adversary's resources without engaging

⁴⁰ K. Kirillova, "A Prolonged War in Ukraine Is Advantageous to Russia," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, vol. 19, no. 98 (2022), at <https://jamestown.org/program/a-prolonged-war-in-ukraine-is-advantageous-to-russia/>, 1 July 2022.

its full potential. For Russia, the war is believed to be about the very survival of the nation, necessitating deep engagement and a relentless, sustained effort from the whole country and its populace.

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