

12 Lessons in 12 Months of Russian War

Commemorating one year of the Big War
“Ukrainian Prism” experts suggest 12 lessons
that Ukraine and the world should learn
from these 12 months.

12 Lessons in 12 Months of Russian War



1. National resilience: unity of people and armed forces
2. Decentralization is a pillar for state resilience
3. Kremlin must not be trusted
4. Propagandists must be punished
5. "Europe whole and free" is not possible with today's Russia as a neighbor
6. The key to European security is in Kyiv, not in Moscow
7. The reports about death of HUMINT and country studies are greatly exaggerated
8. Only with Ukraine the US could win the new Cold War
9. From "no way" to "sorry for not having done it earlier"
10. Don't be a Menace to CEE
11. Global South appeared to be important for our victory
12. Willing to survive? Diversify!



Hanna Shelest

Security Studies Program
Director

1. NATIONAL RESILIENCE: UNITY OF PEOPLE AND ARMED FORCES

One of the main lessons from the year of Russian aggression against Ukraine is the importance of national resilience. The practice demonstrates that real resilience, in addition to the procedures, protocols, frameworks and resources, also needs a proper level of unity between the Armed Forces and society. In September 2021, Ukraine adopted its “National Resilience Concept”, which is largely in line with NATO’s baseline requirements on resilience with the addition of financial and information spheres.

The ability of the government and parliament to stay in the capital and continue their functions brought a vital impetus to the defence. A resilient transport system has been crucial for evacuating civilians and military logistics. The readiness of cyber systems to withstand attack allowed key government functions and financial services to continue. The digitalisation of state services facilitated operations and allowed communication with people in and out of Ukraine. Protection of critical infrastructure and measures to quickly restore electricity supplies and other services became an important test when Russia intensified civilian shelling.

The introduction of Territorial Defence Forces has been the main element of the military and military-civilian response in terms of national resilience. While volunteer’s movement have played an important role in the Armed Forces supply, including vehicles, weapons, generators, medical supplies, etc. The population’s willingness to actively provide support to the defence sector means that the people are an important part of national defence.



Yirii Vdovenko

European Studies
Program Expert

2. DECENTRALIZATION IS A PILLAR OF STATE RESILIENCE

Decentralization in Ukraine gave more power, resources and responsibilities to local communities and became a crucial advantage during full-scaled aggression. Heads of communities stayed in their positions and continued to deliver services to local residents despite threats and abductions.

Decentralization provided better results for local development. Invaders were shocked because of the infrastructure and private property they saw even in villages in comparison with their native conditions. All the world was able to see photos of microwaves, toilet bowls and dog houses, which were stolen by soldiers of the “second army in the world”. It was a colorful illustration of how differently people live in decentralized Ukraine and in authoritarian Russia.

The very important though non-evident result of decentralization is the high ability of Ukrainians to self-organize. We could see many examples when people helped each other during occupation and evacuation. And the Ukrainian volunteering movement has become one of the crucial bricks in resisting the invaders.

Finally, the decentralized approach is also a significant advantage of the Ukrainian army over the Russian overwhelming control system.



Iaroslav Chornogor
Russia and Belarus
Studies Program Director

3. KREMLIN MUST NOT BE TRUSTED

Repeated violations of international agreements, disregard of international law, and lies have long been Russian state policy. But only after a year of the war against Ukraine, the world is coming to understand that the Kremlin must not be trusted. KGB officer Putin, taught to lie and mislead in every sentence, has never learned to be a real politician, able to stand by his own promises and commitments.

It is obvious now that Russia and its leadership have been openly lying starting from the assurances to President Emanuel Macron and Chancellor Olaf Scholtz that there would be no war, just a few days prior to the offensive. Russia claimed it had no intent to “recognise” the so-called republics and later newly occupied territories of Ukraine, on the eve of fake “referendums”. Moscow assured its own people there would be no mobilisation before it drafted more than a hundred of thousands to the army. Russia launched a missile strike at Odesa port just a few hours after agreeing on the grain deal and shelled peaceful Ukrainian cities during the Christmas ceasefire it declared itself.

Sitting at the negotiation table with the counterpart that can't be trusted seems useless at this point as any promises made by the Kremlin will prolong the war and cause many human casualties. Any agreements with the Kremlin will be used exclusively to improve its position and further aggressive actions, therefore negotiations are possible only after Putin's defeat.

**Olga Chyzhova**

Communication Director

4. PROPAGANDISTS MUST BE PUNISHED

The war is being basically broadcast live. With videos from eyewitness' phones, civilian security cameras and drone footage, technology allows Ukrainians to identify not only units, but specific soldiers responsible for atrocities and collect evidence for criminal courts. While at the same time those calling for all these crimes on air go unpunished.

Weaponising information is nothing new in the history of the armed conflicts, but the scale at which Russia uses it against Ukraine is unprecedented. Disinformation and manipulation campaigns are not only anti-Ukrainian, but also anti-EU, anti-NATO and anti-democracy as such. They are targeted not only at Ukrainian audiences, but more and more at the Western ones as well as the Russian domestic public.

Furthermore, what has been going on live in Russian media is not just spread of disinformation, hate speech and aggressive rhetoric, it is clear incitement to genocide of Ukrainians. Just a few examples include Margarita Simonyan's (editor-in-chief of the RT) calls for more attacks on civilians and critical infrastructure. Or Timofey Sergeytsev's (RIA Novosti) appeals for the destruction of Ukraine's national identity and a campaign of brutal punishment of its people. Or Anton Krasovsky's (then director of the Russian-language segment of RT) statement that Ukrainian children should be drowned and burned alive.

Ban of Russian state TV channels and personal sanctions against some propagandists is not enough. Kremlin media faces must be tried precisely as war criminals as they are part of the Russian military machine. Those who are behind justifying civilian killings and incitements to genocide are equally guilty as those who give the orders and carry out actual physical atrocities. Responsibility for informational aggression is a must. Convincing victory of Ukraine is impossible without undeniable victory on information field and holding all the “information war” criminals accountable for their crimes.



Yuliia Kazdobina
Associate Fellow

5. "EUROPE WHOLE AND FREE" IS NOT POSSIBLE WITH TODAY'S RUSSIA AS A NEIGHBOR

The end of the Cold War gave birth to a vision of the European continent as a “Europe whole and free”. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has put an end to the illusion that this is possible with Russia in its current state.

The Russian view of its security is incompatible with the European Union's. It wants to control its neighbors and create a buffer zone. In addition, it does not shy away from trying to impose its views by force.

Liberal domestic order is not acceptable to the Russian leaders since to them it will mean losing power. It's not acceptable to the Russian people either. In September 2021 only 16% of Russian citizens believed that western-style democracy was the best political system for Russia.

Despite ample diplomatic efforts on the eve of the full-scale invasion, Russia proceeded to attack and still continues to escalate. Its army has committed unimaginable atrocities with the full approval of its government. It's now putting its economy on a war footing and continuing to stoke hate and use hybrid methods.

This means that “Europe whole and free” will remain impossible until Russia is either changed domestically or stripped of its capacity for further aggression. Before that, Europe needs to have a realistic defense plan.



Yevgeniya Gaber
Associate Fellow

6. THE KEY TO EUROPEAN SECURITY LIES IN KYIV, NOT MOSCOW

One year into what experts have called a system-transforming war in the centre of Europe, the global implications of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine are difficult to overestimate. Since February 24, Russia has turned from a never-trusted yet overwhelmingly feared and respected regional power into an increasingly isolated and sanctioned pariah state. The West, with rare exceptions, has reinvented its unity and solidarity to stand in defence of its moral values and pragmatic interests – both of which demanded clear support for Ukraine. Ukraine, often seen as an ambitious yet underperforming state on the margins of the EU and NATO, has become a catalyzer for both: the demise of Russia, and the rise of the West.

Unexpectedly for many, this war has moved Russia to the sidelines of history, and placed Ukraine at the core of European and transatlantic security. The miracles of Ukrainian military art on the battle-field and of civilian resilience in the rear, have become textbook examples in areas from operational planning to information security to electronic warfare.

With no prospects for peace on the horizon, the key to reinforcing European security is in building closer ties with Kyiv and strengthening defence capabilities in Europe, not in negotiating post-war rules of play with Moscow. Simply because from the Russian perspective, there are no rules and no “post-war”.



Hennadiy Maksak
Executive Director

7. THE REPORTS ABOUT DEATH OF HUMINT AND COUNTRY STUDIES ARE GREATLY EXAGGERATED

This full-scale aggression has revealed the “blind spots” of modern spycraft. Despite wide technological progress, intelligence services appeared ill-prepared to read precisely the intentions and capabilities of each other. Numbers of tanks and jets, counted via super high-res satellite lenses, do not provide a holistic picture without eyes and ears in inner circles.

We must be grateful to the self-profanation of Russian spies and analysts, who fed the Kremlin with a totally distorted picture about the state of hearts and minds in Ukraine. It helped us to withstand invasion for more than “three days”. The FSB and SVR were also unable to predict the level of Western solidarity in response to the aggression.

But, while predicting the prompt start of the full-scale aggression, the US intelligence community totally misread the Russian military capability, on one hand, and readiness of Ukrainians to fight tooth and nail for their soil, on the other. Some European information services happily shared Russian projection of the “second-largest army” and small glorious victory over Ukraine instead of trying to look in-depth. Such misperceptions and distortions eventually led to this catastrophe.

Ukrainian intelligence services, even possessing some evidence from partners and their own sources, fell victim to political reasoning not to disclose it domestically in order to preserve control over public governance of the country.

In this grim light, NATO partners have to boost their “pooling and sharing” capacities, pursue a balanced human-tech approach to collecting and processing intelligence, cultivate a new generation of “narrow but deep” country or region studies specialists.



Oleksandr Kraiev
North America Studies
Program Director

8. ONLY WITH UKRAINE THE US COULD WIN THE NEW COLD WAR

The struggle of ideologies and systems was considered a relic of the last century. However, after the full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation, the return to the bipolar system became a de-facto completed act of the world political system. A new border of two systems has been drawn along the line between democratic, capitalist and free societies, and societies with autocratic and dictatorial rule. Ukraine, which since 2014 defends its independence and defends the security of the whole of Europe, has become the cornerstone of this new struggle. It was in Ukraine that the principles that embody the West and Western civilization found their armed defenders.

The confrontation between the USA and China reaches the level of a political and ideological Cold War. As last time, the political confrontation sometimes spills over into a direct military clash on the outskirts of the two big blocs. And it was Biden who, during his visit to Seoul, declared that both Ukraine and Taiwan are part of a single front - the front for the defense of democracy. And this is what we need to clearly understand - our defense is not only a matter of our security. Ukraine is indeed a key element of the new big game, and it is the victory of Ukraine that will be the only guarantor of the victory of democracy, the West, and the United States.



Maryna Yaroshevych
European Integration
Program Director

9. FROM “NO WAY” TO “SORRY FOR NOT HAVING DONE IT EARLIER”

Over the decades the EU has promoted its image of the peace project conveniently leaving military agenda up to NATO.

Russia’s full-scale invasion has made the EU totally rethink both its perception and projection. The Union has for the first time in its history provided lethal equipment to a third country - Ukraine - under the European Peace Facility. In one year it has mobilised **€3.6 billion**.

In addition, the EU set up a two-year **Military Assistance Mission**, providing training to the Ukrainian armed forces and coordination and synchronisation of member states’ own training support for Ukraine. In the words of EU High Representative Josep Borrell “the purpose is to train 30,000 soldiers, including the crews of the battle tanks” and “what I am sorry about is not to have done it before the war started”.

Question of who is to take credit for such a drastic shift is debatable. The undeniable fact, however, is that Ukrainian armed forces enabled this by showing utmost commitment, professionalism and resolve on the battlefield.



Sergiy Gerasymchuk
Neighbourhood and
Regional Initiatives
Program Director

10. DON'T BE A MENACE TO CEE

In 2022 in the State of the Union the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen admitted that the EU leaders should have listened to those who know Putin: to Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, and to the opposition in Belarus as well as to the voices inside the Union – in Poland, in the Baltics, and all across Central and Eastern Europe. And indeed, not only CEE and Eastern Neighborhood countries raised awareness of Russian growing assertiveness before the Russian full scale invasion and labeled it as a war against the EU.

Now, alongside Ukraine, the CEE states are the first to support Ukraine's EU and NATO membership, demonstrate readiness for personal inconveniences or economic difficulties in order to strengthen defense of the European frontier, drive regional efforts to ensure Russian responsibility for the war crimes. Common history, common vision of the future and common threat coming from Russia are the corner stones of CEE regional identity and actorness of the region to which Ukraine also belongs. This fact is already taken into account by the EU and will play an important role in deterring Russia in the future.



Natalia Shevchenko
Latin America and the
Caribbean Studies
Program Director

11. GLOBAL SOUTH APPEARED TO BE IMPORTANT FOR OUR VICTORY

In the context of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, the role of the Global South in international political conflict settlement is noticeably growing. These countries gradually overcame regionalization of the consciousness of local political elites (in particular, in Latin America and the Caribbean), their overwhelming focus on local issues and the initial misunderstanding of the nature of the current global military threat, imposed by Russian aggression against a sovereign state, Ukraine. Finally comes the painful realization of the current security threats to all mankind. Effective work of Ukrainian diplomats, their cooperation with colleagues, including from the countries of the Global South in international organisations, shows its results.

All this is resulting in a steady increase in support for all resolutions on condemning and countering Russian aggression against independent Ukraine. In particular, the results of voting in the UN General Assembly during 2022 in comparison to resolutions on the “Ukrainian issue” of previous years (on the situation with human rights in the temporarily occupied of Crimea in 2016-2021, and the threat of militarization of the Black Sea and Azov Seas in 2018-2021) testify to this.

However, despite the condemnation of the encroachment on the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine, the overwhelming majority of States in the Global South are still in no hurry to call the Russian Federation an aggressor and do not join the anti-Russian sanctions. The position of representatives of the Global South in the G20 (Argentina, Brazil, India, Indonesia, China, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and South Africa) is demonstrative in this regard.



Mariia Koval-Honchar
European Studies
Program Expert

12. WILLING TO SURVIVE? DIVERSIFY!

Every armed conflict or war may have global political and economic consequences. Tremendous shortage of grains supply experienced by some countries in Asia and Africa, caused by Russia’s blockade of a free passage of merchant ships, could have led to a food crisis in these countries, including Egypt, Senegal, DRC or Eritrea. 400 million people have waited for grains supply from Ukraine. Grains deficit on the world market means a sharp increase in prices, first of all for food products, which combined with a severe drought of 2022 might have led to catastrophic consequences.

Another example, pertinent to Russia’s war, was Ukraine’s dependence on the import of oil and petroleum products from Belarus (65% as of 2021). After the supply chain was disrupted, Ukraine needed to establish new import routes with key supplies coming from Romania, Lithuania, Slovakia, Greece, Bulgaria, and Poland.

Germany’s dependence on Russian energy resources presents another interesting case in this regard. Russia proved to be an unreliable partner by decreasing gas supplies to Germany via Nord Stream I and later allegedly blowing it up. Besides, the EU had to react to Russia’s war in Ukraine with economic sanctions. All these circumstances caused a pivotal change in Germany’s energy policy and resulted in Germany sourcing alternative energy supplies to wean itself off Russian gas and cut its energy reliance on Moscow. As construction of permanent LNG-terminals is a lengthy and costly process while Germany’s industry needs gas right now, official Berlin boosted gas imports from Norway and Netherlands and started construction of floating LNG-terminals.