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US Army War College Russia-Ukraine War Study Project

Eric Hartunian

ABSTRACT: The Strategic Studies Institute at the US Army War College is analyzing the operational events and activities of the Russia-Ukraine War to understand the war's strategic implications for the US Army and its role within the NATO Alliance. Analysis will further inform theater and national US strategy and may benefit Army doctrine and concepts vis-à-vis the Russian threat. It will also examine how US and allied defense policies should adjust to the current character of war. Lessons learned from Ukraine are relevant to the evolving challenge in the Pacific in the near term and are opportunities for the United States to progress in terms of integrated deterrence and the provision of assistance with and through partners.

Keywords: Russia-Ukraine War, NATO, Indo-Pacific, integrated deterrence, logistics, US Army, operations, strategy

There is no shortage of quality reporting and research on the now year-and-a-half-old war in Ukraine. The focus of these reports spans the range of political and military topics and the spectrum of tactical to strategic—everything from traditional deterrence and nuclear weapons use to weaponized drones and artificial intelligence and commercial space technology. So, do we really need another study on the Russia-Ukraine War? Of course we do.

The Strategic Studies Institute at the US Army War College embarked on an expansive Russia-Ukraine War study project in 2022 that will analyze operational events and activities—using appropriate evidence and information—to understand strategic implications for the US Army and its role within the NATO Alliance. Analysis will further inform theater and national US strategy and may benefit Army doctrine and concepts vis-à-vis the Russian threat. Importantly, the team's analysis will move beyond using “Russian ineptitude” to rationalize operational outcomes, instead examining whether the character of war itself has changed and whether or how US and allied defense policies should adjust.

Integrated deterrence is being put to the test in this conflict, and in many ways, Ukraine serves as a laboratory for the Army to see this concept

play out and to understand the Army's role in the integrated deterrence landscape. Clearly, deterrence activities preinvasion were insufficient to prevent the war. The critical part allies play in integrated deterrence, however, validates the Army's role in delivering capabilities to them in ways that enable success. Part of this ongoing study will look at how the Army strengthens integrated deterrence in Ukraine with intelligence sharing, training, and lethal capabilities and how these activities can translate to the Indo-Pacific theater.

As NATO member states contribute to Ukraine in various ways—with weapons and munitions, training, intelligence sharing, and so forth—some real shortcomings are being exposed, particularly in the weapons and ammunition space. While the United States and member states are cutting deep into their stockpiles, they must strike a balance with maintaining their defensive capabilities.¹ This problem has critical implications for the defense industrial base and the need to maintain sufficient quantities of munitions, particularly with the massive reliance on artillery by both sides.² Congress is already taking action to strengthen mechanisms to bolster production, but supply-chain issues increase difficulty on that front, and production timelines can take months, if not years.³

This is not a new problem—the war in Ukraine is only validating what researchers have been discussing for some time in relation to a Taiwan scenario.⁴ As Congress passes authorizations to increase the industrial base's capacity for materiel production, we still have questions about the ability to sustain prolonged large-scale combat operations in distant theaters. In addition to production challenges, the tremendous logistical challenges of shipping across the ocean in potentially nonpermissive environments create more issues. Despite a robust and long-standing network of European allies to assist in that endeavor, contested logistics remains a challenge and strategic vulnerability.⁵ This situation is further exacerbated in the Indo-Pacific.

1. Sanya Mansoor, "Why the West Is Getting Nervous about Ammunition Shortages for Ukraine," *TIME* (website), March 16, 2023, <https://time.com/6263802/ukraine-west-ammunition-shortages/>.

2. Cynthia Cook, "Reviving the Arsenal of Democracy: Steps for Surging Defense Industrial Capacity," Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) (website), March 14, 2023, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/reviving-arsenal-democracy-steps-surging-defense-industrial-capacity>.

3. Loren Thompson, "Ukraine, Taiwan Challenges Spur Efforts to Strengthen Munitions Industrial Base," *Forbes* (website), May 12, 2023, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/lorenthompson/2023/05/12/ukraine-taiwan-challenges-spur-efforts-to-strengthen-munitions-industrial-base/?sh=50057c49226b>; and David Saw, "Demand and Supply – The Complexities of Artillery and Ammunition Supply in the War in Ukraine," *European Security and Defence* (website), January 30, 2023, <https://euro-sd.com/2023/01/articles/29154/demand-and-supply-the-complexities-of-artillery-and-ammunition-supply-in-the-war-in-ukraine/>.

4. Seth G. Jones, "The U.S. Defense Industrial Base Is Not Prepared for a Possible Conflict with China," CSIS (website), n.d., <https://features.csis.org/preparing-the-US-industrial-base-to-deter-conflict-with-China/>.

5. Anna Dowd, Dominik P. Jankowski, and Cynthia Cook, "European Warfighting Resilience and NATO Race of Logistics Ensuring That Europe Has the Fuel It Needs to Fight the Next War," CSIS (website), June 28, 2023, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/european-warfighting-resilience-and-nato-race-logistics-ensuring-europe-has-fuel-it-needs>.

The West's continued supply of increasingly advanced and capable weapons systems is threading a strategic needle of sorts—attempting to increase Ukraine's capability and lethality all while seeking to avoid Russia's murky red lines and avoid unproductive escalation. This endeavor has been successful so far, but the balance between avoiding escalation and implementing incrementalism with capabilities raises questions about strategic risk and conflict termination. In addition to weapons and munitions supplies, training and interoperability are of particular importance to the Army. The West's weapons-system contributions to the Ukrainians bring respective training and maintenance requirements. The speed at which the Army can deliver on both is critical to enabling the success of our partners. There are some imperfect similarities here with US military hardware sales to Taiwan as well, albeit outside the context of an armed conflict.

With a focus on Ukraine and Taiwan, it is important to continue to keep in mind the strategic implications relevant to the Army. The lessons learned from Ukraine are relevant to the evolving challenge in the Pacific in the near term and are also opportunities for the United States to take evolutionary leaps in the way the military constructs integrated deterrence and provides assistance with and through partners.

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