



## **SAGE Intelligence Brief –**

### **Russia-Ukraine War Update**

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#### **Analysis of Russia-Ukraine Scenario:**

*Current Military Situation:* After two years of conflict, Russia has been unable to make significant territorial gains in Ukraine, holding approximately 19 percent of the country, including Crimea. Despite outnumbering Ukrainian forces 5:1, Russian forces face challenges in overcoming well-trained and equipped Ukrainian military units. The nature of the conflict, marked by extensive fortifications and tactical improvements by the Russians, has led to a war of attrition where mass alone has not resulted in decisive victories.

The war is taking on international dimensions. Since the time of writing, the West, led by the U.S. and the UK, have been key to supporting Ukraine. The U.S. has provided Ukraine the most in terms of military hardware, munitions and support which Ukraine's Continental European partners have provided less military equipment and munitions but more financial assistance.

On the other side, Russia has been supported by Iran with the provision of drones; North Korea through the provision of artillery shells and barrels; covertly by China through the provision of non-lethal, financial and technical assistance; India through clever sanctions relief efforts regarding Russian crude exports; covertly by Turkey sending banned technologies to Russia through black market operations joined by the Gulf States, which are also acting as a covert facilitators for Russian business and the export of banned products and technologies to Russia.

So, while this war is firmly centred on Ukraine, it is global in scope, involving many international players overtly or covertly supporting either Ukraine or Russia. Possible escalation of this conflict is rated as HIGH.

*Prospects for Negotiated Settlement:* The scenario suggests a potential for a negotiated settlement in the near future, either stabilizing the conflict or freezing it. The ongoing military stalemate, combined with international pressure, may push both parties toward diplomatic solutions. Unless there is a military breakthrough by one side or the other in 2024 which, under current circumstances seems unlikely, the prospect for some agreed pause to the fighting is rated as HIGH. Possibly towards the end of the year after the Northern Summer.

*NATO and U.S. Involvement:* The limitations in NATO's and the United States' defence industrial capacity hinder their ability to provide Ukraine with the required military support at the desired scale. With U.S. elections approaching, war-weariness among Americans may impact their willingness to sustain involvement in a distant conflict. The potential for a new Trump presidency introduces the possibility of a shift in U.S. policy, leading to reduced assistance to Ukraine and direct negotiations with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

*Political Ramifications for Ukraine:* A change in U.S. policy could have significant political consequences for Ukraine. The replacement of President Zelensky, who has been a key figure in resisting Russian influence, with a pro-Russia candidate may reignite political divisions within Ukraine. This shift could jeopardize the country's sovereignty and potentially result in a total Russian victory.

*European Balance of Power:* A successful Russian intervention in Ukraine would indeed alter the European balance of power. It could embolden Russia and potentially encourage further assertiveness in the region. The geopolitical consequences would likely extend beyond Ukraine, impacting the security landscape in Eastern Europe.

*Potential Scenarios:*

1. **Negotiated Settlement:** Diplomatic efforts may lead to a negotiated settlement, stabilizing or freezing the conflict without a clear victor.
2. **Shift in U.S. Policy:** A change in U.S. leadership and policy could reduce support for Ukraine, leading to direct negotiations between the U.S. and Russia.
3. **Political Changes in Ukraine:** The replacement of President Zelensky with a pro-Russia candidate could alter the country's geopolitical orientation, potentially aligning it more closely with Russia.

*Recommendations:*

- International actors should continue diplomatic efforts to seek a peaceful resolution to the conflict, but not one which disadvantages Ukraine's position in Europe as a sovereign state.
- NATO and the U.S. should assess their capacity to provide necessary support to Ukraine.
- Careful monitoring of the U.S. political landscape and its potential impact on foreign policy is crucial.

This analysis underscores the complex interplay of military, diplomatic, and political factors in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, with potential ramifications for the broader European security environment.

### **About SAGE International:**

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We provide research and analysis of international crises, power dynamics & security policy.

SAGE also trains and mentors university students in thinking about international relations, defence and security issues.

SAGE is partnered with Trends Research & Advisory in Abu Dhabi UAE, the International Development and Security Cooperation (IDSC) in Manila, the Philippines, AsiaPower Watch in Paris, France and the Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPSS) Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

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