

THE ROLE OF THE WEST IN THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT

Shota Otkhozoria¹

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ABSTRACT

This article offers an in-depth, multidimensional analysis of the role played by Western actors -the United States, the United Kingdom, the European Union, and NATO -in the full-scale Russia-Ukraine war, now widely regarded as the most consequential geopolitical rupture since the end of the Second World War. Although Western states are not direct belligerents, their strategic decisions, policy choices, and coordinated (or at times fragmented) actions have profoundly shaped the military, economic, and diplomatic trajectory of the conflict. The war has emerged as the principal arena in which the resilience of the so-called “rules-based international order” is tested against the revisionist ambitions of a nuclear-armed authoritarian state.

The study employs three principal theoretical frameworks -realism, liberal internationalism, and the collective security paradigm -to examine Western behaviour across key military, financial, political, and normative dimensions. Realism sheds light on shifting regional power balances and recalibrated deterrence principles; liberal internationalism highlights the imperative of defending sovereignty, territorial integrity, and democratic agency; and the collective security model elucidates NATO’s evolving role as it balances between non-escalation and robust deterrence.

The article provides a detailed assessment of Western assistance -ranging from the unprecedented scale of U.S. military and intelligence support, to the EU’s macro-financial and energy-sector interventions, the U.K.’s proactive defence partnership with Ukraine, and NATO’s reinforcement of the Eastern Flank. It also evaluates the long-term impact of Western sanctions, noting that although restrictive measures have substantially impaired Russia’s access to critical technologies and global financial markets, the Kremlin has partially offset these effects through alternative trade channels, third-country networks, and wartime economic restructuring.

A core part of the analysis examines the “28-point peace plan” associated with the Trump administration, which proposes a radically different model for a post-war settlement. The plan challenges several foundational principles of Western diplomacy, imposes extensive limitations on Ukraine’s long-term sovereignty, implicitly legitimizes territorial changes achieved by force, and diminishes NATO’s strategic role. As argued, such an approach establishes a dangerous precedent by normalizing territorial revisionism in the international system.

Ultimately, the study concludes that the role of the West in the conflict is both indispensable and structurally constrained. While Western support has been vital to preserving Ukraine’s statehood and preventing Russia’s rapid victory, internal divisions, delayed decision-making, sanction leakages, and growing societal fatigue pose significant challenges. The outcome of the war and the future architecture of European and global security will depend on the West’s ability to sustain a unified, proactive, and strategically coherent long-term approach.

Keywords: security; war; sanctions; peace plan; international order; energy; strategy.

¹ Assistant Professor of Bachelor’s Program in Defense and Security of LEPL David Agmashenebeli National Defense Academy of Georgia, Doctor of International Relations

INTRODUCTION

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 not only disrupted the regional balance of power but also evolved into the largest and most intense military confrontation in Europe since the end of the Second World War. The conflict extends far beyond a bilateral military contest between two states, affecting the structural foundations of European security, the fundamental principles of international law, and the normative framework underpinning contemporary international relations -the so-called "rules-based order". Within this crisis-ridden environment, the strategic behaviour and decision-making of the West -both as a collective bloc and as individual actors (the United States, the United Kingdom, the European Union, and NATO) -acquire particular significance.

Although Western states are not direct participants in the hostilities, their policies, military-legal decisions, financial assistance, sanctions regimes, and diplomatic engagement substantially determine both the course of the war and the direction of its potential outcomes. Western involvement is not limited to enhancing Ukraine's defensive capabilities; it also influences Russia's strategic calculus, the prospects for regional stability, and the future configuration of European security.

This article focuses on several key questions:

- ✓ How have Western policies and institutional responses evolved since Russia's invasion of Ukraine?
- ✓ What mechanisms -military, energy-related, financial, and diplomatic -are being used to deter Russia and support Ukraine?
- ✓ In what ways has Western action shaped Ukraine's defensive strategy, battlefield dynamics, and Russia's decision-making process?
- ✓ What structural constraints, internal contradictions, and strategic paradoxes characterise the West's role in the ongoing conflict?

The central argument advanced in this study is that Western involvement -particularly that of the United States, the United Kingdom, the European Union, and NATO -has been decisive in preventing Ukraine's rapid collapse and obstructing Russia's strategic objectives. Yet, at the same time, delayed decision-making, political disagreements within the

Western camp, and the partial effectiveness of sanctions considerably limit the West's capacity to achieve maximal strategic outcomes.

MAIN PART

Theoretical and Analytical Framework

Understanding the West's role in the Russia-Ukraine war requires a rigorous theoretical foundation, as the conflict extends far beyond a conventional military confrontation. It represents a complex process of power reconfiguration, normative contestation, and structural transformation in the international security system. From this perspective, three principal theoretical approaches are particularly salient: realism, liberal internationalism, and the collective security model.

1. Realism and the Structural Balance of Power

The realist school conceives international politics as a continuous struggle for power, security, and influence. From this standpoint, the war in Ukraine is both a manifestation of a disrupted balance of power and a classic illustration of the security dilemma. Russia's actions, viewed through realist logic, are driven by its aspiration to reassert dominance over the post-Soviet space, obstruct NATO and EU enlargement, and curtail Western military-political presence in its perceived geopolitical sphere of influence.

Within this context, the responses of the United States, the United Kingdom, the European Union, and NATO can be interpreted not merely as value-driven commitments, but also as a reactivation of traditional deterrence strategies. The war has become a crucial test case for realism: can the West maintain an effective deterrence posture in the twenty-first century, especially when facing a nuclear-armed revisionist state willing to deploy large-scale military force?

2. Liberal Internationalism and the Normative Order

Liberal internationalism interprets the conflict not solely as a power struggle but as a confrontation between democratic and authoritarian governance models. The public statements of Western leaders consistently reflect this normative framing: support for Ukraine is presented as a defence of sovereignty, territorial integrity, democratic agency,

and the foundational principles of international law -most notably the prohibition of the use of force and the inviolability of borders.²

Within this theoretical lens, a Russian victory would create a dangerous global precedent, emboldening other revisionist states -regional or global-to justify aggressive military action. Consequently, the fate of Ukraine is perceived as a litmus test for the future credibility of democratic norms and the stability of the “rules-based order”.

3. Collective Security and NATO’s Role

Based on the principle of collective defence, NATO’s security system faced extraordinary challenges from the outset of the invasion. As Ukraine is not a member of the Alliance, Article 5 does not apply to it; nevertheless, NATO’s Eastern Flank - particularly the Baltic States, Poland, and Romania -faces direct security risks emanating from Russia’s aggression.

In this environment, NATO has sought to maintain a delicate balance. On the one hand, the Alliance refrains from direct military engagement with Russia to avoid escalating the conflict into a nuclear confrontation. On the other hand, Western states have provided significant military, technological, and diplomatic support to Ukraine. This model of “indirect engagement” has effectively become a defining feature of the Western strategy.³

The Role of the United States

1. Military Assistance

The United States has been the most significant and strategically indispensable provider of military assistance to Ukraine. Between 2022 and 2024, Washington allocated tens of billions of dollars in military support, encompassing advanced weapons systems, combat platforms, intelligence capabilities, and operational technologies. These assistance packages

² Council on Foreign Relations, “Three Years of War in Ukraine: Are Sanctions Against Russia Making a Difference?”, 2025. <https://shorturl.at/ocxRr> (Accessed 08.12.2025).

³ NATO, “Relations with Ukraine,” 2025. <https://shorturl.at/KzxsU> (Accessed 08.12.2025).

supplied Ukraine with modern artillery, tanks, multiple-launch rocket systems, cyber-defence capabilities, and sophisticated air-defence systems.⁴

Patriot and NASAMS systems played an essential role in strengthening Ukraine's air-security architecture, establishing a protective shield that significantly reduced the impact of Russian missile and drone strikes. The HIMARS multiple-launch rocket system proved transformative in 2022-2023: its precision and range enabled Ukraine to degrade Russia's logistical hubs and alter operational dynamics on several fronts.⁵

However, the continuity of U.S. military support has repeatedly been influenced by domestic political disagreements. Increasing scepticism within segments of the Republican Party, technological and production-capacity limitations in the American defence industry, as well as growing societal fatigue, all created periodic obstacles to approving new assistance packages. As a result, temporary capability gaps emerged – periods during which the Ukrainian armed forces lacked the necessary resources for sustained military operations, particularly large-scale counter-offensives.⁶

2. Financial and Budgetary Support

American involvement extends far beyond the military dimension. The United States is one of Ukraine's most important financial lifelines, providing direct budgetary assistance essential for maintaining core state functions. U.S. decisions at both legislative and executive levels resulted in substantial multi-billion-dollar support packages used to finance public-sector salaries, pensions, social services, and the restoration of critical infrastructure.⁷

Such assistance enables the Ukrainian state to maintain a minimum threshold of administrative and social stability under wartime conditions. Without consistent budgetary support, the collapse of Ukraine's civilian governance mechanisms would be as strategically

⁴ U.S. Department of State, U.S. Security Cooperation with Ukraine, Fact Sheet, 2025. <https://shorturl.at/BoTPo> (Accessed 08.12.2025).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Congressional Research Service, *U.S. Direct Financial Support for Ukraine*, IF12305, 2025. <https://shorturl.at/pa3qz> (Accessed 08.12.2025).

⁷ Ukraine Oversight, *Funding for Ukraine*, Office of Inspector General, U.S. Government, 2025. <https://shorturl.at/arMqk> (Accessed 08.12.2025).

devastating as military defeat. The functioning of public institutions is indispensable for maintaining domestic order, political legitimacy, and societal resilience; thus, U.S. financial assistance has become one of the foundational pillars of Ukraine's wartime statehood.

3. Sanctions Policy and Global Leadership

The United States has spearheaded the strictest and most comprehensive sanctions regime against the Russian Federation. Washington introduced multilayered sanctions targeting key sectors of Russia's economy: partial exclusion of major Russian banks from the SWIFT system; restrictions on the export of high-technology components and microchips; and stringent limitations on the import of Russian hydrocarbons, particularly crude oil.⁸

These measures aim to erode the economic foundation of Russia's war machine by restricting access to advanced technologies, diminishing investment inflows, constraining financial operations, and undermining Russia's long-term economic stability. However, evidence shows that Moscow has partially mitigated the effectiveness of sanctions by reorienting trade towards alternative partners -notably China and Iran -and developing extensive parallel-import schemes and wartime industrial adjustments. Consequently, sanctions have shifted from an expected "shock measure" to a protracted strategic confrontation, with delayed and incremental effects.⁹

4. Domestic Political Debates

The Ukrainian question has become one of the most polarising issues in contemporary U.S. domestic politics. The majority of the Democratic Party view support for Ukraine not merely as a foreign-policy priority but as an investment in the long-term security of the democratic world. For them, Ukraine's resilience serves both strategic interests and normative commitments, reinforcing the credibility of Western security guarantees.

⁸ European Commission, "Sanctions Adopted Following Russia's Military Aggression Against Ukraine," 2022–2025. <https://shorturl.at/VAJq6> (Accessed 08.12.2025).

⁹ Council on Foreign Relations, "Three Years of War in Ukraine: Are Sanctions Against Russia Making a Difference?", 2025. <https://shorturl.at/dGikL> (Accessed 08.12.2025).

In contrast, a considerable faction within the Republican Party regards U.S. support for Ukraine as an excessive financial burden or as an unjustified “outsourcing” of a European problem to American taxpayers. The central sceptical argument is distilled around two themes: Why should American taxpayers fund a war on another continent?; Should U.S. resources not prioritise domestic challenges instead of external conflicts?

This political polarisation has repeatedly obstructed the timely approval of new assistance packages. Delays in congressional voting and recurrent procedural blockages reveal the extent to which Ukraine’s support has become intertwined with partisan competition and domestic electoral cycles.¹⁰

5. Attempts at Conflict Regulation and the Evolution of U.S. Peace Proposals

Efforts to formulate a peace framework around Ukraine have been among the most contested and politically sensitive issues within the United States. Although the Trump administration did not present a fully formalised, official peace document during its term, public statements, advisory-level messaging, and the rhetoric of allied congressional groups collectively indicated a distinct vision of conflict resolution.

Between 2023 and 2025, Donald Trump’s remarks significantly influenced global security debates, especially given the centrality of U.S. support to Ukraine’s survival. Against this backdrop, Ukrainian officials were presented with a draft identified as the so-called “28-point peace plan”.¹¹ While the document continues to undergo adjustments, its core architecture reflects the strategic preferences associated with the Trump political camp.¹²

This “28-point model” diverges sharply from traditional Western diplomatic doctrine. Rather than relying on collective security mechanisms, multilateral frameworks, or synchronised Western unity, it centres the peace agreement around a highly personalised,

¹⁰ Pietro Bompreszi et al., *Ukraine Support After Three Years of War: Aid Remains Low but Steady and There Is a Shift Toward Weapons Procurement*, Kiel Institute, 2025. <https://shorturl.at/0Fte1> (Accessed 08.12.2025).

¹¹ Mariam Khan, “Trump administration's 28-point Ukraine-Russia peace plan presented to Zelenskyy”, ABC News, November 21, 2025. <https://shorturl.at/XgNo7> (Accessed 08.12.2025).

¹² World Politics, “Trump orders peace envoy to meet Putin in Moscow to progress Ukraine plan”, November 25 2025. <https://shorturl.at/VUI8l> (Accessed 08.12.2025).

U.S.-dominated architecture. The plan proposes significant restrictions on Ukraine's future strategic choices, acknowledges portions of Russia's territorial gains, and re-conceptualises the role of NATO. It thus represents not merely a technical proposal but a conceptual departure from decades of Western security practice.

A. General Characteristics of the “28-Point Peace Plan”

The so-called “28-point peace plan” represents a document that fundamentally alters Ukraine's security landscape and restructures the trajectory of its long-term political development. Its architecture incorporates several critical dimensions:

1) *A drastic alteration of Ukraine's strategic orientation* -Under the logic of the plan, Ukraine would be required to formally renounce its ambitions for NATO membership (Point 7), while its armed forces would be subjected to strict quantitative and functional limitations (Point 6). Such constraints would effectively transform Ukraine into a “neutral state” with restricted security guarantees and limited strategic autonomy.

2) *De facto recognition of Russia's strategic gains* -The plan effectively legitimises territories annexed or occupied by Russia: Crimea, Luhansk, and Donetsk are recognised as de facto Russian regions (Point 21), while in Kherson and Zaporizhzhia the existing line of control is “frozen” and codified as a provisional status (Point 22). Added to this is a sanctions-relief mechanism (Points 13–14), which offers Russia substantial strategic relief.

3) *The unilateral dominance of the United States within the agreement's architecture* - According to the plan, the United States becomes the sole guarantor of Ukrainian security (Point 10), while U.S.-Russia economic and technological cooperation would be reintroduced in areas such as energy, natural resources, artificial intelligence, and Arctic development (Point 13). The proposed mechanism for managing frozen assets strengthens U.S. influence even further: 50 per cent of returns from the joint investment fund would go directly to the United States (Point 14).

4) *A significant reduction of NATO's strategic role* -The plan requires NATO to formally renounce Ukraine's prospect of membership (Point 7) and to refrain from

deploying any NATO military contingents on Ukrainian territory (Point 8). As a result, the Alliance is structurally excluded from Ukraine's long-term security framework.

B. Territorial Provisions (Points 21, 22, 28)

The territorial provisions represent the most sensitive and politically consequential part of the plan.

1) De facto legitimisation of annexed territories -Points 21 and 22 effectively endorse Russia's control over Crimea, Donetsk, and Luhansk, while freezing the status of the occupied areas of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia along the current line of contact. This would entail the loss of approximately 23 per cent of Ukraine's internationally recognised territory.

Such provisions violate one of the foundational principles of Western diplomacy -the norm that borders must not be altered by force. The precedent created by this plan would strengthen the logic whereby a nuclear-armed aggressor may ultimately secure international acceptance of territorial conquest.

2) Accumulation of long-term strategic risk -Territorial concessions provide Russia with a "strategic pause," granting the Kremlin time to rebuild its military capabilities and prepare for potential renewed aggression. In effect, the plan institutionalises a temporary cessation of hostilities rather than a durable peace.

C. Security Provisions

The security elements pose particularly severe risks to Ukraine's statehood and long-term resilience.

1) Strict limitations on Ukraine's armed forces (Point 6) -A 600,000-person cap on the armed forces would severely undermine Ukraine's defence capacity, rendering large-scale operations -either defensive or offensive -virtually impossible. This transforms Ukraine from an active security actor into one with markedly constrained capabilities.

2) A constitutional prohibition on NATO membership (Point 7) -The plan obliges Ukraine to incorporate into its constitution a permanent renunciation of NATO accession.

This eliminates the country's most credible long-term security pathway and denies it the protection of the West's most robust collective defence structure.

3) *U.S. as the sole guarantor (Point 10)* -Security guarantees become exclusively dependent on the United States, and therefore contingent upon the foreign-policy preferences of a single administration. This personalises security assurances and exposes Ukraine to significant political volatility.

4) *Russia's formal pledge of "non-aggression" (Point 16)* -The plan requires Russia to commit legally to "non-aggressive behaviour," yet such a commitment lacks enforceability. Given Moscow's track record of violating international agreements, this provision offers no meaningful security.

D. Economic and Energy Provisions

1) *Allocation of frozen Russian assets (Point 14)* -The plan proposes allocating USD 100 billion to Ukraine, an equivalent sum to the European Union, and transferring the remainder into a U.S.-Russia joint investment fund -half of whose profits would go to the United States. This unprecedented arrangement creates a unique geopolitical and economic asymmetry: Russia regains partial access to its frozen reserves; the United States acquires leverage over Russia through shared economic mechanisms; Ukraine becomes structurally dependent on Western financial channels.

2) *Restoration of U.S.-Russia energy and technological cooperation (Point 13)* -The plan envisages restoring cooperation in areas including energy, natural resources, the Arctic, artificial intelligence, and data infrastructures. Such a development would effectively facilitate Russia's economic reintegration into global circuits, undermining the purpose and credibility of Western sanctions.

E. Educational and Social Provisions

Point 20 relates to domains that directly influence Ukraine's internal identity and societal structures. It includes mechanisms for monitoring ideological processes, which could resemble external oversight of Ukraine's informational and educational space.

Particularly concerning is the inclusion of a broadly defined prohibition of “Nazi ideology,” a narrative long instrumentalised in Russian propaganda. Such wording could facilitate political manipulation, discredit domestic opponents, and erode Ukraine’s legitimacy, both domestically and internationally.

F. Legal Components

1) *Comprehensive amnesty* -Point 26 envisions a blanket amnesty for all parties, including individuals responsible for grave crimes during the conflict. This contradicts the core principles of international criminal law, undermines accountability, and entrenches a culture of impunity. It directly violates the rights of victims and obstructs prospects for justice.

2) A “Peace Council” chaired personally by Donald Trump (Point 27) -The plan establishes a “Peace Council” headed personally by Donald Trump. This renders the entire architecture highly personalised, reliant not on institutional mechanisms but on the will of a single political figure. Such an arrangement is inherently unstable and vulnerable to shifts in U.S. domestic politics.

G. Expected Outcomes

1) *For Ukraine*

The plan entails severe consequences:

- ✓ loss of approximately one quarter of its territory;
- ✓ weakened defence capacity due to armament limitations;
- ✓ long-term dependence on the United States;
- ✓ elimination of NATO prospects;
- ✓ Russia gains time and strategic space for potential renewed aggression.

Short-term benefits include a temporary ceasefire, humanitarian corridors, financial support, and retaining the possibility of EU accession.

2) *For Russia*

Russia emerges with numerous strategic gains: territorial legitimisation (Point 21), prospects for sanctions relief, renewed economic cooperation with the United States, and potential re-engagement with Western structures such as the G8.

3) For the West

The positive aspect is largely limited to the temporary cessation of hostilities and reduced financial burden. Negative consequences, however, are substantial:

- ✓ weakening of NATO's role;
- ✓ fragmentation of Western unity;
- ✓ erosion of international law;
- ✓ emboldening of authoritarian regimes observing that military aggression yields tangible rewards.

H. Summary of Advantages and Risks

Advantages -The plan offers a rapid halt to military hostilities, reduces casualties, and provides a short-term window for humanitarian and economic assistance.

Risks -The risks overwhelmingly outweigh the advantages:

- ✓ violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity;
- ✓ legitimisation of Russian territorial conquest;
- ✓ structural weakening of NATO;
- ✓ reduction of Ukraine's sovereignty;
- ✓ dangerous global precedent encouraging future aggression;
- ✓ long-term instability due to a personalised security model dependent on a single political actor.

In essence, the plan codifies many of Russia's wartime objectives into a formal agreement and represents a departure from long-established principles of Western diplomacy.

The Role of the European Union

1. Financial Assistance

The European Union has emerged as one of Ukraine's principal financial supporters, particularly in sectors essential for economic resilience and the functioning of state institutions. According to the European Commission, the EU has allocated multi-billion-euro macro-financial assistance packages, concessional loans, and targeted grants. These resources fund Ukraine's budgetary expenditures, the restoration of energy infrastructure, the enhancement of humanitarian assistance, and the implementation of state reforms required under EU conditionality.¹³

In this regard, the EU has assumed the role of a “financial super-donor”, complementing the United States, whose support is primarily military. This division of labour reflects a clear functional specialisation: the United States bolsters Ukraine's defence capabilities, while the European Union strengthens the country's economic foundations, social stability, and institutional resilience under wartime conditions.

2. The Multi-Package Sanctions System

The EU has implemented one of the most comprehensive sanctions regimes in its history, targeting Russia's financial, technological, transport, and industrial sectors. These sanctions include restrictions on the Russian Central Bank's reserves, the freezing of assets belonging to major state-owned enterprises, bans on the export of dual-use and high-technology goods, and sweeping limitations on Russian aviation, maritime logistics, and road transport.¹⁴

In addition, the EU imposed an embargo on Russian oil and introduced price-cap mechanisms aimed at drastically reducing the Kremlin's energy revenues. However, the sanctions also produced domestic “blowback” across Europe: energy price increases, inflationary pressure, and economic turbulence provided fertile ground for political debates and social tensions in several Member States.¹⁵

¹³ European Commission, “EU Financial Support to Ukraine,” 2024–2025. <https://shorturl.at/SUise> (Accessed 08.12.2025).

¹⁴ European Commission, “Sanctions Adopted Following Russia's Military Aggression Against Ukraine.” <https://shorturl.at/iFcZO> (Accessed 08.12.2025).

¹⁵ Ibid.

Although sanctions have weakened Russia's military-industrial capacity over time, they have become a protracted struggle rather than a short-term disruptive measure. Their effectiveness depends on sustained EU cohesion and continuous closure of sanctions-avoidance loopholes.

3. Reducing Energy Dependence and Building Strategic Autonomy

Prior to the invasion, a substantial portion of the EU's energy supply -especially natural gas -originated from Russia. The events of 2022 triggered a profound transformation of European energy policy. Measures included diversification of gas imports, expansion of LNG terminals, development of alternative pipeline networks, and acceleration of energy-efficiency initiatives.¹⁶

By 2024–2025, these efforts produced tangible outcomes: Russia's share in the EU's energy mix declined dramatically. This shift reduced Moscow's ability to deploy energy as a geopolitical coercive instrument and contributed to a more resilient long-term security environment.

At the same time, debates on European strategic autonomy gained unprecedented momentum:

- ✓ To what extent should Europe rely on external -particularly non-democratic -energy suppliers?
- ✓ How can the EU strengthen its own defence industrial base?
- ✓ What degree of technological and energy independence is necessary to ensure long-term resilience?

Such discussions reflect a growing European geopolitical self-awareness, in which the war in Ukraine has served as a critical catalyst.¹⁷

The Role of the United Kingdom

Following Brexit, the United Kingdom has sought to demonstrate that its departure from the European Union has not diminished its geopolitical weight, and that London

¹⁶ European Commission, *REPowerEU: Joint European Action for More Affordable, Secure and Sustainable Energy*, Communication COM(2022)108. <https://shorturl.at/Y5YOK> (Accessed 08.12.2025).

¹⁷ Ibid.

remains a central actor in European security. The war in Ukraine provided an opportunity to translate this ambition into practice: the United Kingdom has become one of Ukraine's most rapid, proactive, and consistent partners -militarily, diplomatically, and legally.

1. Early and Substantial Military Assistance

The United Kingdom belongs to the small group of states that supplied military assistance to Ukraine even before many other Western partners had made firm decisions. From the earliest stages of the war, London provided modern tanks, long-range artillery, air-defence systems, precision-guided equipment, and large quantities of ammunition. Official estimates indicate that British assistance amounts to several tens of billions of pounds, with military support constituting the majority of this sum.¹⁸

Britain's actions served not only as practical support but also as a political precedent. The UK's early and decisive contributions placed pressure on other European states - particularly Germany -to accelerate their own assistance. London thus helped shape a broader Western consensus, establishing a faster and more assertive tempo of support.

2. Bilateral Security Agreements

The long-term security agreement signed between the United Kingdom and Ukraine in 2024–2025 is among the most comprehensive arrangements that Ukraine has secured during the war. The agreement encompasses sustained military assistance, systematic training for Ukrainian forces, intelligence and operational cooperation, support for security-sector reform, and expanded defence-industrial collaboration.¹⁹

This partnership functions as a de facto security guarantee for Ukraine, bridging the gap until full NATO membership becomes achievable. British involvement strengthens Ukraine's defensive capabilities and demonstrates that Western support is not a temporary reaction to crisis, but a strategic commitment to long-term stability.

3. Legal Leadership and Political–Symbolic Commitment

¹⁸ Government of the United Kingdom, *UK Support to Ukraine: Factsheet*, Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, 2024/2025. <https://shorturl.at/E6nAx> (Accessed 08.12.2025).

¹⁹ Government of the United Kingdom, “UK–Ukraine Agreement on Security Cooperation,” 2024. <https://kntn.ly/aff9c8a2> (Accessed 08.12.2025). GOV.UK – “UK and Ukraine Sign New Defence Pact”. <https://kntn.ly/a80d04ff> (Accessed 08.12.2025).

The United Kingdom is one of the most active states advocating for legal accountability in relation to Russian aggression. London supports investigations into war crimes, crimes against humanity, and, crucially, the crime of aggression itself. It provides both financial and institutional assistance to the International Criminal Court, endorses the creation of a special tribunal, and contributes to the collection and documentation of evidence.²⁰

This reflects a value-based approach in British foreign policy: the war in Ukraine is viewed not only through the lens of geopolitical competition but also as a struggle for the preservation of international law and fundamental moral norms. By emphasizing accountability, the UK positions itself as a state committed to transforming justice principles into practical instruments of international security.

NATO: Efforts Beyond Direct Engagement, in Support of Ukraine

1. The Deep Evolution of NATO–Ukraine Relations

Cooperation between NATO and Ukraine significantly intensified after 2014, when Russia’s annexation of Crimea compelled the Alliance to shift from a posture of limited engagement to more robust and structured support. The full-scale invasion in 2022 elevated this partnership to an entirely new level.

NATO expanded joint training programmes, increased the scale and scope of military preparation for Ukrainian forces, established multi-year assistance frameworks, and designated Ukraine as a “global partner” within its official documents. This status reflects a strategic long-term perspective: Ukraine is treated as a future member of the Alliance, even though a precise timeline for accession has not yet been defined.²¹

Thus, NATO–Ukraine relations have evolved from peripheral cooperation to a structural, long-term strategic partnership, in which Ukraine is viewed not merely as a recipient of support but as an emerging pillar of European security architecture.

2. NATO’s “Red Lines” and the Strategy of Non-Direct Engagement

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ NATO, “Relations with Ukraine,” 2025. <https://shorturl.at/P9DwX> (Accessed 08.12.2025).

Since the outset of the invasion, NATO member states have maintained a clear position: the Alliance would not deploy troops directly onto the battlefield in Ukraine, nor would it impose a no-fly zone, as such actions could risk escalation into a direct confrontation with a nuclear-armed Russia.

This decision is grounded in a strict assessment of nuclear risks and reflects NATO's foundational principle that the Alliance's primary obligation is to its own members. Ukraine, despite its deepening partnership, remains outside NATO's collective defence guarantees under Article 5.

However, this does not imply NATO's disengagement. On the contrary, member states -whether individually, bilaterally, or through multinational coalitions -have supplied Ukraine with advanced military systems that have reshaped the operational environment: from long-range artillery to air-defence platforms and specialized training missions. In practice, NATO exhibits a dual nature: institutionally it is not a party to the conflict, yet substantively it is one of the central architects of Ukraine's defence capability.

NATO thus maintains a hybrid strategic posture: formal restraint combined with extensive operational support, ensuring significant assistance to Ukraine while avoiding direct military confrontation with Russia.

3. Strengthening the Eastern Flank

Following the invasion, the Alliance undertook an unprecedented reinforcement of its Eastern Flank. Additional battlegroups were deployed to Poland, the Baltic States, Romania, and Bulgaria; readiness levels of command structures were increased; stockpiles of military equipment expanded; and air and maritime patrols intensified.²²

These measures form part of a broader deterrence strategy: to send Moscow an unequivocal message that while attacking Ukraine may be a calculated choice, any aggression against a NATO member state would trigger a collective and immediate response. In this sense Ukraine functions as a strategic buffer, serving dual purposes: -

²² NATO Secretary General's press conference 23.09.2025, <https://shorturl.at/x59wa> (Accessed 08.12.2025).

protecting Eastern Flank member states from direct Russian aggression; reducing the likelihood of a direct military confrontation between Russia and NATO forces.

Critical Assessment of the West's Role

Evaluating Western involvement in the Russia–Ukraine war requires a balanced approach that takes into account both achievements and systemic limitations. The conflict highlights the strengths of Western strategic engagement as well as its structural vulnerabilities, each of which shapes the degree of support provided to Ukraine and the long-term effectiveness of Western strategy.

1. Assessment of Achievements

Preservation of Ukrainian Statehood -Western military, financial, and technological assistance has been indispensable to Ukraine's survival as a functioning state. This assistance prevented the rapid collapse of Ukrainian state institutions and halted Russia's initial strategic objectives during the earliest phase of the invasion.²³ Intelligence sharing and real-time operational information significantly enhanced Ukraine's defensive effectiveness.

Prevention of a Rapid Russian Victory -In the early stages of the war, it became evident that Ukraine's ability to sustain resistance relied heavily on Western-supplied advanced military systems -from HIMARS to sophisticated air-defence platforms. Without such support, Russia would likely have achieved key operational goals far more swiftly.

Constraining Russia's Economic and Military Capacity -The comprehensive sanctions regime, combined with the mass withdrawal of Western corporations from the Russian market, has weakened Russia's access to critical technologies, reduced investment flows, and forced the Kremlin into a wartime economic model. Although sanctions produce uneven and delayed effects, they have undeniably restricted Russia's long-term military-industrial development.²⁴

²³ Council on Foreign Relations, "Three Years of War in Ukraine: Are Sanctions Against Russia Making a Difference?", 2025. <https://shorturl.at/dGikL> (Accessed 08.12.2025).

²⁴ Pietro Bomprezzi et al., Ukraine Support After Three Years of War: Aid Remains Low but Steady and There Is a Shift Toward Weapons Procurement, Kiel Institute, 2025. <https://shorturl.at/0Fte1> (Accessed 08.12.2025)

Strengthening European Defence Structures -The conflict has catalyzed a renewed focus on European security, prompting the EU and NATO to expand defence budgets, modernize preparedness frameworks, and reinforce capabilities against hybrid threats.²⁵ Concepts that had long remained dormant regained strategic relevance through the impetus generated by the war.

2. Structural Limitations and Exposed Vulnerabilities

Consistent Delays in Strategic Decision-Making -Many critical weapons systems -tanks, long-range artillery, advanced fighter aircraft -were supplied only after significant delays, often when battlefield conditions had already deteriorated.²⁶ This reactive rather than proactive approach prolongs the war and increases its human and financial cost.

Multiple Channels of Sanctions Evasion -Russia has adapted to sanctions by rerouting supply chains through third countries, employing “shadow fleets,” and using re-export systems and offshore trading networks.²⁷ These mechanisms undermine the sanctions’ intended impact and reveal gaps in global enforcement.

Ambiguity in the Global South -Numerous non-Western states -particularly in Africa, Asia, and Latin America -have maintained a posture of strategic neutrality, declining to join sanctions or condemn Russia unequivocally. This has allowed Moscow to cultivate new economic and political partnerships, mitigating the effects of Western isolation efforts.

The West has struggled to universalize the narrative of “global justice” in relation to Ukraine; for many, the conflict remains a regional rather than a universal concern.

Growing Societal Fatigue in Western States -As the war endures, signs of “Ukraine fatigue” have become more pronounced in the United States and Europe. Inflation, rising energy prices, migration pressures, and domestic socio-economic issues compete with Ukraine for political priority. This creates the risk that long-term support may become increasingly vulnerable to domestic political pressures.

²⁵ NATO, “Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014–2024),” 17 June 2024. <https://shorturl.at/GAfyI> (Accessed 08.12.2025).

²⁶ Government of the United Kingdom, *UK Support to Ukraine: Factsheet 2024/2025*; Congressional Research Service, U.S. Direct Financial Support for Ukraine, IF 12305, 2025

²⁷ CSIS, Seth G. Jones, *Russia’s Shadow War Against the West*, 2025. <https://kntn.ly/f44d53d1> (Accessed 08.12.2025).

CONCLUSION

The Russia-Ukraine war has not only reshaped the security configuration of Eastern Europe but has also posed a fundamental question for the international system: will the world continue to operate on the basis of agreements, legal norms, and collective security, or will it regress into an era defined by coercive power, where the aggression of a nuclear-armed state produces tangible geopolitical rewards? Western involvement in the conflict constitutes an ongoing attempt to answer this question -an attempt that reveals both the maximum potential and the inherent constraints of Western strategic action.

The West successfully disrupted Russia's initial military calculations and prevented a rapid conquest scenario. The preservation of Ukraine's statehood was made possible not only through the determination and resilience of its armed forces, but also through the extensive military, financial, and intelligence support provided by the United States, the United Kingdom, the European Union, and NATO. Western assistance constituted the decisive counterweight that halted Russia's advance and forestalled a radical alteration of Europe's geopolitical landscape.

At the same time, the internal divergences within Western policy exposed structural weaknesses that continue to undermine strategic coherence. Repeated delays in critical decision-making, divergent national preferences, domestic political fluctuations, and emerging signs of societal fatigue illustrate that the West still struggles to uphold a unified, long-term strategic posture in response to major international crises.

The Trump administration's "28-point peace plan" symbolises many of these challenges. The plan departs from longstanding Western diplomatic principles and proposes a personalised security model that relies heavily on the decisions of a single political actor rather than collective institutional guarantees. Its logic - de facto recognition of territorial changes achieved by force, the granting of significant strategic benefits to Russia, the structural limitation of Ukraine's security capacity, and the downgrading of NATO's role - sets a dangerous precedent that could embolden other revisionist actors.

This scenario underscores that the West's principal challenge is not limited to assisting Ukraine militarily or financially. The deeper challenge lies in whether the West can adapt

itself to the geopolitical realities of the twenty-first century -a world in which authoritarian states make use not only of traditional military power but also cyber instruments, energy leverage, disinformation campaigns, and opaque economic mechanisms.

Unless the West formulates a unified, coherent, and multi-year strategy, it is highly likely that the pressure on Kiev will not diminish; indeed, every fracture in the security architecture will become an added burden in its confrontation with Russia and other authoritarian challengers. In such a scenario, the defence of Ukraine will no longer represent merely an act of international solidarity; it will become an essential component of Western self-defence.

Accordingly, the West must adopt several strategic measures:

- ✓ the permanent strengthening of NATO's Eastern Flank;
- ✓ the institutionalisation of military assistance to ensure that Ukraine's security is not dependent on electoral cycles;
- ✓ the achievement of full energy independence to prevent the use of energy resources as geopolitical weapons;
- ✓ the enhancement and global coordination of sanctions mechanisms;
- ✓ deeper engagement with the Global South to elevate the Ukraine crisis from a regional conflict to a universally recognised challenge to the international order.

If these objectives are met, the war in Ukraine could become a catalyst for the emergence of a more resilient international order -one in which the use of force by nuclear-armed states cannot produce legitimate political outcomes. However, if the West fails to respond effectively, the international system may slide back into a world defined by power politics, where law functions merely as an instrument of the strong rather than the foundation of global stability.

In sum, Ukraine's struggle is not solely the struggle of a single nation for survival. It is a test of Western political will, strategic capability, and the long-term viability of the "rules-based international order". The consequences of this test are likely to become one of the key factors shaping the geopolitical reality of the twenty-first century.

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