

CHAPTER 1

Setting the Scene

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*And you know what
together they will hunt down the bear
and this will be very easy to explain.¹*

Introduction

On 4th September, 2022 Ukrainian armed forces started an offensive to liberate the Kherson region in southern Ukraine. It progressed steadily but slowly. Two days later another offensive was launched in the Kharkiv region in northern Ukraine. Another two days later US Chief of Staff General Mark Milley credited ‘real and measurable gains’ to recently delivered M142 HIMARS rocket artillery systems. Two more days after that, the Russian Defense Ministry confirmed a withdrawal of Russian units from part of Kharkiv oblast ‘to regroup.’ On 11th September, as the Russian front collapsed, Russian missile strikes on critical infrastructure caused a total blackout and water shutdown. The next day Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky addressed Russia in a Telegram post reading in part: ‘Read my lips: Without gas or without you? Without you. Without light or without you? Without you. Without water or without you? Without you. Without food or without you? Without you.’

On 15th September, Ukrainian forces discovered mass graves in the woods outside recently liberated Iziium. When asked by reporters, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov claimed the massacres at Iziium and Bucha were lies. On 20th September, Russia’s parliament adjusted the Criminal Code on mobilisation, martial law, wartime and armed conflict, as well as on punishment for desertion. The next day, Russian president Vladimir Putin announced a partial mobilisation of reservists. Over the next few days anti-war protests broke out across the country, while thousands of Russians fled to escape the draft. Also on 20th September,

¹ Last sentences of ‘The Wolf Hour,’ a Ukrainian poem written and translated into English by Ela Yevtushenko (March 1, 2022). Available at: <https://humanrightsartmovement.org/lhraf-translates/the-wolf-hour-a-ukrainian-poem-written-and-translated-into-english-by-ela-yevtushenko>.

Zelensky delivered a pre-recorded video address to the United Nations General Assembly calling for Russia to be punished for its aggression. Two days later, the four Ukrainian oblasts under partial Russian occupation held sham referenda in which majorities of 87% to 99% were said to support annexation to Russia. The referenda were condemned by the UN, OSCE, NATO, EU and many states, including even Kazakhstan (where Russian troops had helped suppress protests in January the same year). On 26th September underwater explosions rendered the Nord Stream gas pipelines under the Baltic Sea inoperable.

This single month in the Russia-Ukraine war illustrates the many different aspects of the war. They range from fighting on the ground to high diplomacy, from domestic anti-war protests in Russia to international supplies of advanced weapon systems to Ukraine, from justification through sham referenda to coercion via economic sabotage, from operational misdirection to covering up war crimes. The events in this single month also show how these aspects are connected: the collapse of a front leads directly to the discovery of mass graves; the delivery of weapon systems depends on Zelensky's appeal to the international community; sham referenda followed by annexation enable accusations of unwillingly mobilised soldiers who refuse to defend the motherland.

This volume offers uniquely comprehensive and timely reflections on the Russia-Ukraine war. Bringing together the expertise of our colleagues at the Netherlands Defence Academy allows us to adopt a distinctively interdisciplinary approach, with which we explore this multitude of factors and their interconnections. Individual chapters draw from a variety of disciplines, such as military operational sciences, intelligence studies, international law, military management studies, history, international relations theory and military ethics, and from various bodies of knowledge, such as burden sharing, just war theory, Russia's new type warfare, and deterrence.

Collecting empirical data in an ongoing war is obviously difficult. The situation on the ground was too unsafe to do field research and interview large numbers of combatants or others involved. Still, the authors collected empirical data in many different ways varying from international databases such as ACLED and Eurostat, international media reports, numerous blogs and other open-source reports, Twitter feeds, as well as impressions from people directly involved in the conflict.

With this volume, we aim to contribute to the still fairly small body of academic literature on the Russia-Ukraine war. With 27 chapters analysing a wide range of aspects from a variety of perspectives, placing the war in a broader international and historical context, as well as giving significant attention to the operational aspects of warfare, including its conventional and new characteristics, we hope to fill a knowledge gap and set the scene for future research.

Structure

The volume is structured along five main themes: (1) narratives and intelligence, (2) warfighting, (3) international involvement, (4) rules and norms and (5) lessons to learn and the end of the war.

Narratives and intelligence

The first section centres around historical and contemporary narratives as well as intelligence issues. The chapters draw from historical perspectives, intelligence studies, moral theory, military operational sciences and anthropology to show how narratives and intelligence impact military operations and the human experience of war. Floribert Baudet's contribution, 'The War on Ukraine: A Warning from History,' places the Russia-Ukraine war in a historical perspective. In doing so, he emphasises the limited yet indispensable value of historical narratives: whilst the past has limited predictive value, it offers valuable insights into the minds of today's actors and helps anticipate developments and dynamics. Taking the analysis a step further, Baudet argues that historiography can identify areas of future conflict and so serve as an early warning mechanism.

Moving forward, Michelle Hogendoorn, Bram Spoor & Sebastiaan Rietjens delve into the intelligence challenges in 'Caught by Surprise: Warning for Russia's Invasion of Ukraine.' Why did so many experts fail to predict the Russian invasion, despite the obvious warning signs? This chapter assesses the complexities within the intelligence-policy nexus, discusses the warning process, and brings to light the factors that caused the 'surprise.' The section continues with Hannah van Beek & Sebastiaan Rietjens, who explore the increasing importance of open-source intelligence. In 'Open-Source Intelligence in the Russia-Ukraine War,' they distinguish four main functions: debunking and refuting false narratives; reshaping perceptions; informing military troops; and documenting potential war crimes and human rights violations. However, aside from the obvious value of open-source intelligence, van Beek & Rietjens also identify related challenges: the time-consuming nature of information verification; the potential ethical and legal problems; and the vulnerability of the open source community. Peter Schrijver builds upon these chapters by showing how intelligence services use digital communication to promote their own narratives while countering the narratives of the opponent. In 'The Wise Man Will Be Master of the Stars,' Schrijver analyses the use of Twitter by the Ukraine's military intelligence service (GUR). This chapter concentrates on how this service exploits sensitive communications intelligence (COMINT) on its Twitter feed and aims to maintain public opinion against the invasion.

The opening section concludes with some profound reflections on the human experience of war. In ‘Morale and Moral Injury among Russian and Ukrainian Combatants,’ Tine Molendijk emphasises the role of narratives in shaping morale, combat motivation, and moral injury. She shows how narratives such as ‘we fight for our existence’ or ‘us against the rest’ can boost the morale of combatants. Molendijk also draws attention to the risk of moral injury, showing how deceptive narratives can increase that risk. The end of her chapter takes us beyond the battlefield, as Molendijk suggests that, instead of a superheroes versus villains tale, a tragic narrative might be a more fitting frame for Western societies to understand the Russia-Ukraine war.

Warfighting

This section offers an in-depth discussion of the underexplored operational aspects of the Russia-Ukraine war. Each of the chapters offers a unique perspective on the way warfare has unfolded over the last two years. As such, this section highlights the various dimensions of the military operations, contributes to understanding the tactical, operational, and strategic aspects of the armed conflict, and provides insights into the functioning of various operational domains of warfare.

The section begins with Frans Osinga’s chapter ‘Putin’s War, A European Tragedy.’ Based on a reconstruction of the war, Osinga draws important lessons for NATO’s deterrence strategy. He argues that the West needs to shift towards credible deterrence by denial instead of by punishment, and that it must restore and exploit its qualitative asymmetric advantage so as to prevent being dragged down in costly conflicts. Han Bouwmeester continues with an analysis of Russian strategic deterrence. In ‘Putin’s Miscalculation’ he discusses Russia’s new-type warfare, i.e. the way Russia attempted to disrupt Ukrainian society through non-military means, revealing appropriate Ukrainian responses and Russian miscalculations. As a test case for the effectiveness of new-time warfare, Bouwmeester concludes that this deterrence strategy has led to disappointing results for Russia.

Moving from deterrence to logistics, Thijs Cremers et al. note that poor planning and a lack of logistic and sustainment capacity seem to have contributed significantly to the mediocre success of the Russian invasion. In ‘Russian Military Logistics and the Ukraine Conflict,’ they argue that effective logistics demands a comprehensive approach from the tactical to the strategic level, and highlight the intimate relationship between logistics and military success. The following two chapters draw on limited war theory to analyse the conflict. In ‘Explaining Stalemate from a Corbettian Maritime Perspective,’ Henk Warnar aims to understand how a regular large-scale attrition war has emerged in Ukraine. Warnar highlights the unexpected role of the maritime domain, and places the Russia-Ukraine war in

the context of great power competition. Maarten Rothman & Martijn Rouvroije's chapter, 'All Quiet on the Northern Front?' merges insights from limited war theory and research on covert action to examine military activities along the northern border with Russia, allowing us to see the military value of such limited cross-border actions.

How is digital and space technology used in the Russia-Ukraine war? Moving to the 'newer' operational domains, Kraesten Arnold et al. turn our attention to operations in cyberspace. In 'Assessing the Dogs of Cyberwar,' they note that Russian cyber operations are often merely seen as unsuccessful nuisances. Such a view, however, downplays the significance of such operations. The authors shed light on the digital dimension of warfighting, and argue that we ought to recognise its operational and strategic impact. Concluding the section on warfighting, Lonneke Peperkamp & Patrick Bolder highlight the crucial role of space technology in 'The Space Domain and the Russia-Ukraine War.' This chapter provides an overview of space capabilities and how these are used in war. Aside from the many advantages, e.g. in terms of intelligence and transparency, logistics, and precision targeting, Peperkamp & Bolder also identify related challenges. As space technology tends to blur military-civilian lines, this increases civilian risk *and* the power of companies providing essential space capabilities – both of which raise concerns. Together, these chapters shed light on the warfighting dynamics, deepening understanding of the nature of modern military operations, and how that plays out in the Russia-Ukraine war.

International involvement

The third section places the war in a broader context, reflecting on the ways in which the international community is involved. In doing so, this section covers topics related to direct involvement, such as sanctions, NATO contributions, and weapon deliveries, as well as the indirect implications of the war on international institutions and the world order.

Esmée de Bruin et al. discuss the effectiveness of economic sanctions in 'Does the Russia Sanctions Revolution Bring About Change?' While many states impose sanctions on Russia as a way to limit its ability to wage war in Ukraine, de Bruin et al. show how Russia's preparation and the non-universal application of sanctions negatively impact their effectiveness. Marion Bogers & Robert Beeres look at the broader spectrum of instruments that have been used to counter Russian threats since 2014. In 'NATO Members' Burden Sharing Behaviour in the Aftermath of Russia's Annexation of Crimea,' they discuss economic sanctions, NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence, defence spending and activities reducing dependency on Russian gas and oil. Interestingly, it appears that there are significant differences

in the way that NATO member states have aimed to counter Russian threats. International involvement can also take the form of weapon deliveries. Martin Fink shifts focus to the Russian perspective, and focuses on how Russia might try to counter international support by interfering with vessels that supply the enemy from the sea. In ‘Contraband of War at Sea,’ Fink analyses the legal limits of such actions by delving into the law of contraband.

Looking at the broader implications of the Russia-Ukraine war, Sabine Mengelberg & Floribert Baudet assess the impact of the war on the possible return to a bi-polar world with two rival blocs; the Europeans and Americans on the one hand, and Russia and China on the other. In ‘Between Multilateralism and Great Power Competition,’ they question that view, and emphasise the ongoing relevance of international organisations such as the UN and NATO, as they strengthen the normative framework, facilitate dialogue, and help foster international stability. Theo Brinkel & Carel Sellmeijer are somewhat more sceptical in their analysis of the role of the UN in their chapter ‘The Russia-Ukraine War and the Changing Character of the World Order.’ Drawing attention to failing efforts to restore peace and security in Ukraine, they suggest that any future UN involvement might be limited to a minimal role with traditional peacekeeping, which will have an impact on the international order as well. In terms of international responses to the Russia-Ukraine war, how do states determine their position? Jörg Noll & Sonja de Laat close this section with ‘The West Versus the Rest?’ In this chapter, they offer a fresh perspective by looking at the neutral positions of India and Brazil, who instead of ‘choosing sides,’ place trust in diplomacy and strong international institutions.

Rules and norms

What kind of warfighting is permissible? The normative framework that applies to the Russia-Ukraine war is the central theme of the fourth section. The chapters draw from both moral theory and international law to evaluate the conflict, highlighting the moral and legal boundaries within which combatants and other fighters ought to behave themselves. Peter Olsthoorn sets the scene in ‘Fighting Justly’ by observing that war is almost always conducted largely with restrictions. The rules and norms that govern warfare are grounded in the just war tradition; a body of thought on the rights and wrongs of warfare that has shaped the codification of legal norms in e.g. the Hague and Geneva Conventions. After reflecting on the usefulness of morality, Olsthoorn argues that a discussion of the war in moral terms allows us to see that Russia is waging an unjust war in an unjust manner. We then shift to the legal framework. ‘The “Technology War” and International Law’ specifically focuses on the new technologies that are used in the Russia-Ukraine war. Steven van de Put & Marten Zwanenburg examine how international law

applies to technologies employed on the battlefield, including, for example, cyber operations and artificial intelligence (AI). They analyse and categorise various important technologies and suggest how international law might ‘catch up’ with technological developments so that it can effectively regulate new forms of warfare.

The following two chapters, respectively written by Thijs Cremers & Han Bouwmeester and Allard Wagemaker & Karishma Chafekar, evaluate the role and activities of private military security contractors (PMSCs) such as Wagner and Redut. In ‘Russian Commercial Warriors on the Battlefield,’ Cremers and Bouwmeester analyse the thin line between mercenaryism and PMSCs, which is caused by unclear definitions and legal vagueness. They consider both the positive contributions to peace and stability as well as the negative consequences of outsourcing security tasks. While Wagner might violate rules and norms in Ukraine, the authors suggest that the prevailing negative connotation with PMSCs could also reflect an exaggeration of our Western moral conscience. Wagemaker and Chafekar specifically focus on the Wagner uprising and attempted coup. In ‘A Military Oath for Russian Private Military Security Contractors?’ they consider the meaning of loyalty for PMSCs, and relate that to the function of military oaths of office. Both chapters provide important insights into the dynamics and challenges of these ‘commercial warriors.’

Finally, Monica den Boer et al. shed light on the international crimes that have been committed in Ukraine. ‘Collecting Evidence of International Crimes in Ukraine’ explores accountability options and the challenges of international crimes investigations in an ongoing conflict. In their discussion of the relevant actors, they specifically focus on the role of the Royal Netherlands Marechaussee’s role in the collection of evidence.

Lessons and ending

What are the lessons to be learned from the developments of the last two years? Whilst we must acknowledge the limitations of trying to answer that question – the war is still unfolding at the time of writing – this last section reflects on key lessons that can be drawn from the Russia-Ukraine war in Ukraine. Martijn van der Vorm and Gijs Tuinman underline the value of learning from the first large scale conventional war in Europe in the 21st century. However, in ‘Lessons from Ukraine: Benchmark or Significant Exception?’ they show that observing foreign wars to derive lessons and successfully implementing these is not as straightforward as it seems. The chapter also takes a step back to reflect on military learning theory, adaptation processes, and how to optimise learning from others. Whilst Van der Vorm & Tuinman focus on what we can learn from military operations, Kramer et al. focus on the lessons to be learned for the organisational design of military organisations. In ‘Revisiting the

Synthetic Organisation,' they examine the challenges of organisational adaptation and responses in light of a dynamic and complex environment, where an armed force needs to respond before fully comprehending the crisis. Using the concept of the 'synthetic organisation,' Kramer et al. show how the Ukrainian military has adapted by using unconventional tools and tactics.

Lastly, this section looks ahead towards the ending of the war. How will the war end? And when will it end? Berma Klein Goldewijk tackles the first question. In her chapter 'War Diplomacy in Ukraine,' she distinguishes various potential endings; victory or defeat, an armistice or durable cease-fire, and a political settlement or peace deal. Shifting attention to the role of war diplomacy, Klein Goldewijk challenges the view that diplomacy is the opposite to war, and shows how war diplomacy can be linked to the causes but also the ending of this war. Robbert Fokking and Roy Lindelauf focus on the second question in 'When Will It End?' While it is hard to estimate the duration of an armed conflict, it is often determined by the availability of resources – manpower, ammunition and other supplies. Against that background, this last chapter uses mathematical models and open source data to estimate when and how the war might end.

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