

Russia Has Won the Ukraine War and 'Defeated' NATO

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Key Point and Summary – *The war in Ukraine is effectively over, with Russia on a clear path to achieving its objectives through a grinding war of attrition that has exhausted Ukraine and outlasted Western and NATO resolve.*

The Ukraine War Is Over – Russia Just Hasn't Declared Victory Yet

The idea that Russia might still lose the war in Ukraine has become a kind of security blanket for Western elites – a comforting illusion clutched in think tanks, editorial pages, and official briefings long after the battlefield realities have changed. We are now well past the phase where optimism could be excused as ignorance. The facts are in. Ukraine is exhausted. The West is demoralized. And Russia, despite its many internal challenges, is grinding toward its war aims with brutal consistency.

Let's be clear: if by "lose" we mean military defeat on the battlefield, collapse of the Russian economy, or regime implosion in Moscow, then no – Russia is not going to lose. Not this year, and not under the current trajectory. All the major structural forces – military, economic, political—are now moving in Russia's favour. The war is not over, but the outcome is no longer up for grabs.

Start with the military situation, because that's the foundation of everything else. On the ground, Ukraine's strategic position is deteriorating by the month. Mobilization efforts have stalled. Recruitment has collapsed. The average age of a frontline soldier is now nearing 45. Desertion and draft-dodging are spreading, and Western aid – though still flowing – is increasingly mismatched to Ukraine's real needs. You can send as many artillery shells and drone kits as you like, but you cannot manufacture trained infantry out of nothing. And that's what Ukraine is short of: not resolve, not hardware, but men.

Meanwhile, Russia's army has evolved. It's no longer the chaotic, overstretched force that stumbled out into Ukraine in February 2022. It has absorbed its losses, adapted to the terrain, and reverted to what it does best: attritional warfare, backed by overwhelming firepower and deep reserves of manpower. Russia doesn't need to stage flashy counter-offensives or overrun all of Ukraine. It only needs to advance slowly, dig in, and bleed Ukraine white –

while maintaining pressure long enough to outlast Western political will. And that's exactly what it's doing.

Which brings us to the economic front. There's a persistent myth in Western capitals that Russia is teetering under the weight of sanctions –that the ruble is crumbling, the oligarchs are restless, and the economy is one shock away from implosion. This is wishful thinking. Sanctions have hurt, yes, but they have also catalyzed a strategic decoupling from the West that was probably inevitable anyway. Russia has reoriented its economy toward Asia. It's selling oil to India, natural gas to China, and arms to anyone willing to pay in non-Western currencies. The parallel financial system is crude but functional. And the state is compensating for consumer losses with heavy military-industrial spending – spending that, unlike in the West, is tied directly to battlefield outcomes and regime survival.

The IMF projects modest growth for Russia in 2025. Inflation is high, but not catastrophic. Unemployment is low. And industrial output – especially in arms production – is booming. Yes, living standards have declined. But the state has managed the pain selectively, shielding key groups – soldiers, pensioners, the security apparatus – while letting the rest of society absorb the shock. It's crude economic triage. But it works. And it buys time.

So what about regime collapse? Could some internal crisis – a palace coup, a wave of protests, a sudden loss of elite cohesion – bring the war to a halt? Again, highly unlikely. Not impossible, of course. But deeply implausible.

Putin's regime is more secure now than it was two years ago. The failed Prigozhin mutiny, far from exposing weakness, served as a loyalty test that flushed out the reckless and the wavering. The security services are fully mobilized. The political elite is terrified of instability. And the Russian public, despite some signs of war fatigue, remains either supportive or apathetic. This is not a revolutionary moment. There is no Lenin in exile, no mass discontent, no split in the ruling class. There is only war – distant for most, tragic for some, but not regime-ending for anyone.

Even in the long term, regime change is a mirage. Putin's system is designed not for flexibility or innovation, but for endurance. It absorbs shocks. It represses dissent. And above all, it adapts slowly but effectively to strategic realities. This is not a brittle autocracy. It is a modern authoritarian state with deep reservoirs of control – and a clear sense of geopolitical purpose.

The real fantasy is not that Russia might lose the war. The real fantasy is that anyone in the West still believes in a path to Ukrainian victory. That moment passed long ago – somewhere between the collapse of the 2023 counteroffensive and the current artillery shortages. What we're witnessing now is not a war of liberation or defense, but a war of inertia. Ukraine is fighting because it cannot stop. The West is funding it because it cannot admit failure. And Russia is advancing because it has no incentive not to.

The grim truth is that Russia is winning the war – methodically, incrementally, and without apology. It is winning not by blitzkrieg, but by attrition. It is not trying to take all of Ukraine, only the parts it considers vital: the four annexed oblasts, the land bridge to Crimea, and a neutralized rump to the west. And it is succeeding – not because it has outmaneuvered NATO, but because it has outlasted the illusion that victory was ever going to look like the restoration of Ukraine's 1991 borders.

What About the Drone Attack? It Won't Change Things

So is there any way Russia could still lose? Only at the level of fantasy. Only in the realm of narratives unmoored from facts – as with the delusional fantasies regarding Operation Spiderweb. The battlefield favors Moscow. The economic sanctions have failed to break its will. The regime has stabilized. And the West has no plan – none – for reversing any of this.

Which means it's time to start thinking like realists. The question is no longer how to defeat Russia, but how to limit the damage of a war we have already lost in everything but name. That's not a message anyone in Washington, Brussels, or Kyiv wants to hear. But it's the only honest one left.

The tragedy of Ukraine is not that it fought. It's that it was led to believe victory was possible – when all along, the most it could hope for was survival. And even that now hangs by a thread.