



Dimensions
for Strategic Studies

Analytical report



The war in Ukraine from the Israeli perspective

Scenario Prospecting and Lessons Learned

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Dimensions for Strategic Studies

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Introduction

About a month after the Russian attack on Ukraine, which began with the first missile launch on February 24, Israeli military and security services are increasingly convinced that the situation will be very bad before this war ends. Developments on the battlefield reflect a deep gap between the Russians' expectations of a short war and the reality in which the Israelis see a faltering Russian army, struggling against the stubborn and sudden Ukrainian resistance. The various war sides, however, are not quite sure how much time will play to the advantage of each party, whether directly in Moscow and Kyiv, or indirectly in Washington and Brussels, all the way to Tel Aviv.

Israeli military forums believe that one month after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, all plans have been derailed from the outset, with the parties entering a phase of uncertainty, knowing that the war is being waged at four levels: military, political, economic and intellectual. The longer this war lasts, the more complex it becomes; its developments reflect a sharp gap between Russian President Vladimir Putin's expectations of a brief military action that will lead to a rapid collapse of the government in Kyiv, the reality that mixed cards, and revealed the Russian army's poor performance despite its destructive power, in contrast with the effectiveness of its Ukrainian counterpart.

During the first month of the war, there emerged a remarkable Israeli preoccupation in research and study circles, which attempted to monitor the causes of that war and anticipate its expected consequences for Israeli military performance in any war confrontation that may occur in the region. Israeli media and think tanks have produced articles, research papers, and television interviews by selected senior Israeli generals, who have presented remarkable theses, worthy of study and reflection.¹

(1) Among them are Amos Gilad, former Head of the Political and Security Service at the Ministry of Security and Chairman of the Institute for Policy and Strategy (IPS) at the university of Reichman, Amos Yadlin, former Head of the Military Intelligence Service-Aman and Head of the National Security Research Institute at the University of Tel Aviv INSS, Michael Millstein, Chairman of the Forum for Palestinian Studies at the Diane Center at the University of Tel Aviv, Audi Ovental, an expert in military planning, and Tsavi Megan, former Israeli Ambassador in Moscow.



The uncertainty of the war is reminiscent of the Russian military theorist Karl von Clausewitz, who invented many of the combat military bases published in his book *War* in 1831. In his book, Clausewitz pointed out that "all operational plans deviate at the first contact on the battlefield, which is the world of uncertainty," and more importantly, he explained that "war is only a continuation of politics, by other means."

Today, Putin is relearning the wisdom of Clausewitz himself, as his war has been skewed since day one; and he has been able to translate his moves on the battlefield to achieve his political goals with great ambiguity, prompting the need to lay down possible endpoints for the fighting in Ukraine, while emphasizing the importance of those points for the political settlement to be reached.

Under the current circumstances, it is likely that the parties will be able to reach a ceasefire, and perhaps an agreed settlement, as the broad outlines have been on the table since the beginning of the crisis, but when the parties understand that the continuation of the war is much more expensive than a political settlement, they may resort to settlement.

After a full month with the war entering its second month, negotiations are taking place between Ukraine and Russia, in parallel with the fighting, as their positions change, depending on the development of their military and political situation, while the criteria for arranging their demands are linked to what Putin presented on the eve of the attack on Ukraine.

What are the Russians' demands in attacking Ukraine, and what are the expected scenarios? What are the possible policy options at the negotiating level? And what practical conclusions can be deduced from this war?



First: The demands of the Russians

1. Regional expansion

Several regional requirements appear before us, the most important of which is the transformation of the separatist provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine into independent republics, where Russia has already recognized them on the eve of the crisis, in a way that resembles the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Against the backdrop of the Russians' military achievements in the Azov Sea region, assuming the occupation of Mariupol, Putin may also demand the annexation of a regional corridor between Crimea and Donbas, or at least ensure freedom of movement between regions.

2. Neutrality of Ukraine

Another Russian demand is to reduce the security threat from Ukraine, including disarming it, dismantling military frameworks, imposing restrictions on defense industries, not obtaining weapons systems from the West, and adhering to the neutrality stipulated in the Ukrainian Constitution, which means in practice not joining NATO.

3. Replacement of Zelinski

It is true that Putin has always used the term "Nazism" to refer to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelinski, but this description is likely to be abandoned, with Moscow understanding that considering Zelensky's strong leadership position, he may be able exclusively to persuade the Ukrainian public to sign concessions that he may make to the Russians.



4. Demands from the West

The Russians do not hide that they have a list of demands that they make public in the face of the West in general, and in the face of NATO, including:

- Reconsider the deployment of NATO forces, limiting the United States military presence in Eastern Europe.
- Putin's desire to restore this region as a Russian sphere of influence.
- Security guarantees for Russia in Central Europe.
- Comprehensive arrangements in the fields of arms control and strategic balance between Russia on the one hand and the United States and NATO on the other.



Second: Potential scenarios

The period since the outbreak of the “Russian-Ukrainian” war presents a series of scenarios and possibilities for this dangerous confrontation, whose actual repercussions are unknown. Within this framework, Israeli strategists present five basic scenarios for a possible end to this war, as follows:

1- Russian decisiveness: The end may be Moscow's imposition of facts on the ground, albeit at a high price, and the appointment of a puppet government in Kyiv, with which it will sign a surrender agreement on Russian terms.

2- Benefiting from achievements on the ground: Putin knows that he cannot easily occupy Kyiv and is not interested in destroying it, as churches and historical sites are there. However, the invasion of Odesa, the completion of Ukraine's secession from the Black Sea, or the siege of the Ukrainian army in the east against the Donbas River, all give Moscow good bargaining chips for negotiations; so that it may agree to a cease-fire and reach stronger negotiations, allowing it to accept a large part of its demands.

3- Escalation, mutual attrition, and sinking into the 'Ukrainian mud': this is exemplified by prolonging the military confrontation for months and increasing Russian attacks. But the failure to break the Ukrainian resistance, and to confront a long guerrilla war, fueled by support and the flow of high-quality weapons from the West, may push Moscow "frustrated" at the time, to radical movements on the battlefield through random artillery, increasing the scope of inaccurate air strikes, launching rockets on a large scale against population centers, and finally, the use of chemical weapons, in which case international mediators may exploit the fatigue of both sides to promote a ceasefire followed by a compromise and a political settlement.



4- Defeat of the Russian army: this may happen considering its heavy loss of life, atrocities in Ukraine, harsh punishments, political isolation, and military failure on the ground. Here Putin may realize that he has taken the wrong step, especially with increasing internal pressure in Russia, and the clear demand from China to stop the war, prompting him to declare a ceasefire, and prepare to discuss a political settlement; but he will reach weak and with few cranes.

5- War expansion: This could happen through an armed conflict between NATO and Russia, so that we are on the verge of World War III, whether through a direct Russian attack on convoys transporting weapons to Ukraine on the territory of a NATO member state, or the use of chemical weapons against Ukrainians, which could lead to military intervention by this alliance.

These scenarios give unmistakable signals that, in the long run, Ukraine's resistance, which enjoys Western assistance, remains limited, despite its immediate effectiveness, knowing that Putin did not expect the rapid unification of Western countries led by the United States, and the magnitude of the sanctions imposed on him overnight, which threaten the collapse of the Russian economy. At the same time, however, it may cause the Russian president to increase the stakes, committing what might be called costly “fools.”



Third: Political Options

There are Israeli military and political convictions that these five scenarios will eventually lead to political moves to achieve a settlement between Moscow and Kyiv, but they remain dependent on the prevailing balance of power on the battlefield, pressure equations in various dimensions, including economic, the effectiveness of sanctions, and Western positions led by Washington, because all of this would affect the political outcome of the war.

A number of political options are expected to end the war at the negotiating level, including the withdrawal of Russian troops from the territories occupied by Ukraine since February 24, provided that Kyiv adheres to neutrality according to the Austria-Finland model, or through an implicit, unwritten international agreement on Russia's sovereignty over Crimea, or a creative and ambiguous formula that means a kind of de facto autonomy for the Donbas region, along with broad American understandings about security arrangements in Europe, and globally.

In parallel, it should be noted that the Russian war in Ukraine represents a dilemma for the United States in particular, and for the West in general, preventing it from throwing all its weight to try to push Ukraine and Russia to a political settlement. On the one hand, Washington seeks to defend the prevailing world order, which serves its unilateral interests, and not reconcile with the Russian political achievements accomplished after the invasion of Ukraine on the other hand.

The West fears the hypothesis that Russians seek to establish through their attack on Ukraine; for it could set a problematic global precedent, under which an aggressive player, under the auspices of a nuclear umbrella, could extort force, and achieve territorial breakthroughs that would constitute a gross violation of states' national sovereignty.



Those Western fears come, despite the fact that the West itself- headed by the United States- practices the same policy, and the same blackmail, in many regions of the world, whether in the Middle East, Latin America, or in the Far East and South-East Asia, and towards Israel, which has occupied Palestine and Arab lands, for more than seven decades, without requiring the international community to take the action that Ukraine has enjoyed in a few weeks.

On the other hand, the image of "introversion" projected by US President Joe Biden in front of Putin, could severely harm the possibility of American benefit from the crisis, and the leadership of the White House during it, in order to reap the expected results in the mid-term elections next November. In these circumstances, the US is concerned about Putin's collapse in Ukraine; it will weaken Russia, undermining its power.

In addition, should the fighting on the ground recede, civilian casualties will emerge, exacerbating the refugee crisis on the borders of European countries, thus deepening the global economic crisis, which will have an impact on the results of the upcoming elections that may be witnessed in some European capitals, considering the worsening energy and refugee crisis.



Fourth: The Destiny of War

After the first month of the war, it is clear that it is not only between two parties, Russia and Ukraine, although they are directly involved in it, it is a multilateral crisis, in which the United States, European countries, China, and the countries of the Middle East participate. Even if the latter did not fight on the ground, they are deeply involved in the crisis, through the flow of weapons, support for the Ukrainian army, and sanctions against Russia.

Under the current circumstances, the current bilateral negotiations between Russia and Ukraine, insofar as they can be judged without deep Western intervention, have little chance of leading to a breakthrough, returning to the status quo on February 24. Moreover, at this point, the United States seems to be still willing to risk, letting Putin “bleed out.”

The five Israeli military scenarios mentioned above will lead to political moves to achieve a settlement and may change according to the balance of power on the battleground, the pressure equations in various dimensions, especially the economic dimension of the conflict, the effectiveness of sanctions, and the Western positions led by Washington, which will also affect the political outcome of the war.

In conclusion, the possible end of the ongoing war may include a few field inferences, the most important of which are:

- 1- Withdrawal of Russian troops from the occupied territories of Ukraine since 24 February 2022.
- 2- The Ukrainian commitment to neutrality according to the model of Austria or Finland is established in one way or another.
- 3- Giving Ukraine international guarantees for its security, perhaps as part of a Security Council resolution to end the war.



- 4- implicit international agreement, without formal recognition, of Russia's sovereignty over Crimea.
- 5- A vague formula means a kind of de facto autonomy for the Donbas region, in the form of guarantees by Ukraine to Russian speakers, and the preservation of that formula in the separatist regions.
- 6- Broad U.S. Understandings about Security Arrangements in Europe, and globally.
- 7- Lifting of sanctions on Russia and a package of international assistance for the rehabilitation of Ukraine.
- 8- The possibility of side arrangements, perhaps with the participation of China, to reconnect the Russian economy with global markets.

Conclusion

As the Ukrainian-Russian war enters its second month, the Israeli military leaders continue to try to draw lessons from it, to exploit it in expected confrontations on hot fronts, with increasing convictions that the war in Eastern Europe is full of deep strategic lessons for Israel, which may face a similar war on any of the surrounding fronts. Thus, the Israeli leadership seeks to assess the reality of the current war on the one hand and explore the variables that may lead to it on the other hand, and thirdly to identify the mistakes that may occur in any future war.

The probability of any hypothesis being made by Israel's decision-making circles depends on a range of qualitative information about Russian movements, in particular the build-up of troops, their training for battle, and accurate intelligence about the Moscow invasion decision.

More than a month after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine; however, it is still surrounded by a thick veil of fog in front of the Israelis, making it difficult for them to formulate an accurate picture and clear assessments to make recommendations to their politicians. This is the challenge for decision-makers of a war whose picture is not yet fully understood.

In this context, Israeli intelligence officials have difficulty assessing the in-depth military operations in Eastern Europe, although strategic intelligence was supposed to rely on Moscow's historical sensitivity to the presence of "Atlantic" forces on its doorstep, which is true of Ukraine. However, it appears that Israeli intelligence, on the eve of the campaign and to a large extent today, has vague estimates of the strategic intentions of the Russians, so its scenarios remain unclear.

This ambiguity prompted decision-making circles in Israel to demand more humility in reading and understanding the enemies surrounding them from each side and to try to narrow the gaps between the information they possess about them, and their actual capabilities, while emphasizing the need to rely on external sources to formulate the strategic reality around.



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