



The Ukrainian Model: Existential Peril

Israel's 10 key takeaways from the war in Ukraine, chief among them: international guarantees are untrustworthy

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הביטחוניסטים IDSF
Research Department

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IDSF-Habithonistim – Israel's Defense and Security Forum, is a movement with over 5,000 members commanders, officers, and veteran combat soldiers from all arms of the Israeli defense and security forces. It was founded for the purpose defending Israel's defense needs in a manner that ensures its existence and prosperity for generations to come.

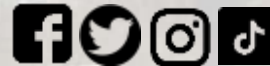
We follow a clear line: we uphold Israel's right to exist, within its safe borders – the borders of the Land of Israel. We believe that Israel's defense needs are at the top of the national agenda, and believe that the State of Israel cannot afford to lose any war. The IDF must operate freely throughout the territory to fulfill its responsibility and defend the State of Israel.

We would like to make it clear that we are not a political movement, but one that sees before it the values and vision that defines it.

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The above photo: IDF Spokesperson's social media

Our research department

IDSF-Habithonistim's research department has made its mission to serve as a resounding, forthright and relevant voice in the public debate in Israel, which through actionable research provides the public and the decision-makers with the necessary tools to tackle an evolving political-security reality, while instilling the State of Israel's principles and values of national security to ensure prospers for generations to come as the nation state of the Jewish people.

We promote a substantive, professional and inviting dialogue that views the principles and values of Zionism and Israel's national security as an unquestionable point of departure. These include Israel's identity as a Jewish and democratic state; its basis in the Zionist vision; national security that is built inside-out and from which the principles of governance and sovereignty are derived; full Israeli security command of the entire territory; peace through strength; the cultivation of human capital, and a people's army model.

The department operates on two complementary planes: research and its communication. We provide reports, research and position papers concerning our core issues, combined with professional recommendations. This research is made accessible to the public and to decision makers alike, on various platforms – from meetings with decision-makers through media appearances to open lectures and social media posts.

We see the illumination and training of the public – and the young generation in particular – as our guiding light.

Head of research department: Or Yissachar

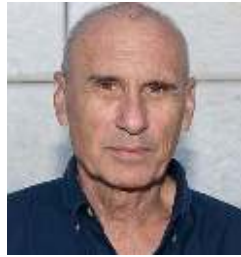
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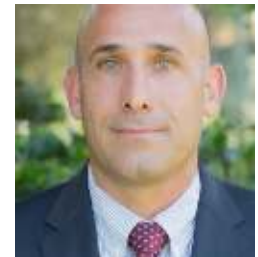
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The War in Europe: International Guarantees Proven as More Fragile than Ever

On February 24, 2022, **Russia has made good on its threat when its army embarked on a substantial combat campaign in Ukraine**, invading its sovereign territory in what has been framed as the largest-scale interstate act of conventional warfare in Europe since the end of World War Two (if the Yugoslavian War is to be considered as a civil war). Its forces have succeeded in taking control over large swathes of Ukraine including the Donbas region (in eastern Ukraine) and large cities such as Kherson and Mariupol, even besieging the capital Kyiv. The Ukrainian side has endured destruction of infrastructure on an unprecedented scale. Ukraine has suffered tremendous loss of life and has triggered a refugee crisis and humanitarian disaster impacting Europe, with its ripples reaching as far as Israel. The nation's total mobilization for battle and the steadfast resistance put up by the Ukrainian army have added an element to this dynamic, which has transformed what was expected to be a "blitzkrieg", or a "lightning war", into a much more complicated military campaign.

This war has been described as a **pivotal moment in time, disrupting the post-WWII world order** while calling for a rethinking of the European Union's defense strategy and security architecture. It has placed an ominous question mark over the West's resolve, under US leadership, to defend its allies as well as the resilience of the

NATO Alliance in case of a similar assault against one of its member-states. This is a complicated event, requiring caution on the part of all responsible parties in the international arena, particularly when nuclear-armed powers are taking center stage.

This war has taken a knock-on effect on the global economy due to the unprecedented sanctions the West has imposed on Russia, the disengagement from joint energy projects with Russia including the halting of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline project from Russia to Central Europe. This might also result in oil gradually being traded in other currencies than the US Dollar (such as the Chinese Yuan or the Russian Ruble). All these factors could lead to a **substantial degradation of the international leverage the United States currently holds**. The sanctions imposed on Russia have not only caused the value of the Ruble to plummet, although in the meantime it has recovered to its pre-invasion value, but they have also had a boomerang effect on the oil prices in the West, which might further exacerbate the already severe economic crisis in North America and Europe. These severe sanctions have placed Russia in a position where it has very little left to lose, and it is being maneuvered into a corner; Russian President Putin has already referred to these sanctions as a "declaration of war".

In this context it is important to note that aggressive use of international sanctions has been a dismal failure. This is a double-edged sword: not only does it fail to rein Russia in, it actually gives it the incentive to persist with its aggression. As far as Russia is concerned, it has already won the war. This war is not about the future of Ukraine. It has much more ambitious

goals: it is intended to disrupt the status-quo in Europe, to engineer a radical global shift and turn Russia into a world power the way it had been during the days of the Soviet empire. Projection of a forceful, provocative stance by the strongest power in Europe is what Russia seeks to achieve through this war and the West will ultimately be compelled to back down and re-normalize its relations with it, since it remains a major player on the world stage.

Two months into this conflict, the Russian economy is rebounding impressively and is showing signs of resilience which cast doubt on the effectiveness of the “West’s ultimate weapon” in the new age: the use of sanctions as an alternative to military response.

The war in Europe poses challenges as well as considerable threats to Israel alongside exceptional opportunities. These are as follows:

1. **Relationship with Russia:** Despite Israel’s moral obligation to stand beside a civilian population under attack, **Israel must put its own interests first.** Russia has remained an important player in the global arena, a world power with a regional presence that cannot be ignored. Most significantly this comes in the form of the coordination with Russia on all matters concerning the IDF’s freedom to take action in Syria to strike Iranian and Syrian targets.
Israel must take into its broad array of considerations must the preservation of proper, close relations with this superpower, particularly due to its

interests in the region. That, added upon the advanced weaponry it possesses, which is available for sale to Israel’s enemies - air defense systems, hypersonic missiles or bunker buster bombs.

2. **Relations with the United States:** Senior officials in the US State Department have already expressed their expectation that Israel take sides and join the international anti-Russian sanctions, as well as siding with those condemning Russia in the United Nations. This is where **Israel’s ability to tread cautiously and serve as a unifying factor between the superpowers** is put to the test.
3. **The genuine value of international guarantees:** Experience has shown that the guarantees given by the signatory countries to the 1994 Budapest Memorandum (the US, Russia, and the UK), which all committed to Ukraine’s independence, sovereignty and non-belligerence against it, have not been kept. **Ukraine has found itself begging for substantial international security-military intervention, which has failed to materialize.** Instead, Western countries have opted for the path of economic sanctions against Russia, making do with intelligence assistance and provision of weaponry on a limited scale.
The clear lesson for Israel is that **there is no international force that will vouch for Israel’s security:** the “law of the jungle” holds sway in the 21st century. Contrary to the “end of history” concept which has dominated Western academic elites following the end of the Cold War, war is a

human cultural act which has beset mankind since antiquity, and it is not going anywhere. **A country unable to guarantee its own security cannot exist, certainly not in a case like Israel.** Therefore, it has got to prepare itself for the prospect of a confrontation with Iran, which might involve a military option, all while assuming that other countries will not intervene to vouch for its security.

4. **The Iranian angle:** Iran can draw two main conclusions from the Ukrainian case.

In terms of their nuclear pursuits, it is evident that countries such as Ukraine and Libya, which relinquished the nuclear arsenal they had possessed, or the nuclear program they had been operating, also lost a meaningful security guarantee. In effect, they lost the key to the survival of their regime and for securing their national interests. From Iran's perspective, this is irrefutable proof that it is quintessential it accelerates its nuclear program.

The second conclusion is the inadequate international response, which is a de-facto green light for Iran to increase its aggressiveness in the region, in default of a "price tag" being exacted from it by the international community beyond condemnations or sanctions. Knowing that the implications are going to be marginal if not negligible, the West's "red lines" have proven to be pale and ineffective time after time - whether in the case of the chemical weapon attack in Ghouta, Syria in 2013, or in the case of the

war Russia has been waging against Ukraine.

Israel, on its part, can conclude that **Iran is going to expend tremendous resources to obtain nuclear weapons as its chief national objective. If obtained, this is going to be a strategic point of no return.**

5. **Strengthening regional alliances in the Middle East:** This is a clear signal for the moderate Sunni states, primarily Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, that Israel stands as a beacon of stability and that relations with it are guaranteed, being more stable than US guarantees on the one hand or Russian guarantees on the other.

6. **Window of opportunity for upgrading the Israel-China relationship:** China's unconventional approach, and the clever policy it practices toward President Putin and the Moscow regime, avoids both outrightly supporting the Kremlin leader and roundly condemning him. At the same time China, while maintaining its close relationship with its ally, also has an open relationship with Europe and the West, giving it the opportunity to differentiate itself from Putin and to highlight the all-too-obvious differences between it and Russia. This policy enables China to gain international prestige and clout, which pose a challenge to the United States and the West in general, rendering it well-positioned to vie for global hegemony.

This being the case, an immediate profound thought process is of the essence, by setting up a dedicated working group to analyze the properties,

risks and opportunities involved in strengthening the relationship between the two, primarily from the security aspect with all of the geopolitical, economic and military implications involved and how they reflect on the Israel-US relations.

7. **Strengthening Israel's global position:**

The European and American partial reliance on Russian gas, along with imposition of severe economic sanctions, presents Israel with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to increase its gas exports to Europe and the rest of the world from its Mediterranean gas fields. At the same time, Israel is positioning itself as a **regional economic power and a global technology-security hub**, comfortably placed within the European security space, which is being redrawn in view of the events in eastern Europe. This also provides Israel with **diplomatic leverage** toward Europe, which could be used to place political equations in return for energy and security aid.

8. **Opportunity for strengthening Israel's identity as a national homeland for the Jewish people:**

This far-reaching occurrence requires Israel to absorb thousands of Jewish immigrants (Olim) from Ukraine, Russia and East Europe, being the only place in the world that provides guarantees for the security and safety of Jews. This move would also bolster Israel's national resilience, in the same way as the transformative effect the immigration from the disintegrating Soviet Union had in the 1990s.

9. **Reaffirmation of the understanding that Israel has got to continue to rely on the "Citizen-Soldier Military" model,**

which is an indispensable prerequisite for our national resilience, allowing for mass mobilization and a steadfast footing to confront any existential threat.

The Citizen-Soldier Military is a vital organ of any nation state due to the injective symmetry between the military and the culture, between the military and society. The degree of motivation each citizen feels to take part in the sacred mission of defending the country is at its height, especially when compared with professional-volunteer militaries.

The war in Ukraine brings the strength of the popular resistance into extremely sharp relief: while the Ukrainian military relies on civil mobilization, most of it took up arms just shortly before the current flare-up.

The citizen-soldier military is clearly superior in comparison with professional-volunteer militaries:

1. Ability to mobilize a large mass of soldiers in an emergency
2. Reserves, which make up a decisive force both defensively and offensively
3. The principle of the "fight for our home, from our home", which is key to the willingness to mobilize

However, in this post-modernistic day and age, the concept of the "Citizen-Soldier Military" has lost a lot of ground in favor of the scaled-down, professional forces operating under the principle of mutual defense treaties. Add to this a prevailing

school of thought that a professional military is less costly in economic terms while operationally it is more highly-skilled.

The “professional military” concept has been exposed as irrelevant in the current war in Ukraine. While this country is fighting against a vastly larger enemy than itself - no other country in Europe has come forward to stand by its side with actual combat support. In effect, the fact that Ukraine has been left to fend for itself only reinforces the fact that it should have relied on its civilian citizens.

NATO, as an opposite example, requires its member states to rely on professional militaries. This way NATO supposedly maximizes its mutual defense treaty, however behind this concept is also a hidden motive - a professional military is an opportunity for a Western policy to make a state capable of withstanding an onslaught against it, if that country fulfills the terms dictated by the West. This way the West gains effective control over a country, over its political trends, and over its room to maneuver in the face of security threats: as long as that country does not toe the line of political interests as the West sees them - that country cannot be accepted into this “elite club of nations”.

The ability of a nation state to stand on its own is a paramount value: this is a cultural ethos of the highest order. Above and beyond this it is a prerequisite for social cohesion, which in turn is a cultural basis for robust national strength. The

intensity of the Ukrainian resistance, which relies on a broad base of civilian mobilization, is the “X-factor” in this current fighting - without mobilization of the citizenry Ukraine would not have been able to hold back the Russian onslaught with its military, which is superior in every conceivable way.

The war in Ukraine is an unmistakable example of the need for a citizen-soldier military, especially in a nation-state, and all the more so in a country which is subject to an existential threat. The “fighting people” ethos we are familiar with in Israel is the core of national strength in its military contexts. Thus, a country subjected to a substantial threat can quickly ramp up its order of battle to face any threat.

Another point this war highlights is the need for a well-trained, skilled military reserve. It does not have to be much more fit than the level enabling it to operate correctly from the tactical standpoint, where from the operative standpoint it can form a mass that can be translated into quality. The citizen-soldier military is a condition for coping with such challenges, and beyond that, it is also the most fitting model for a democracy - due to the very fact that the people are the military, and the military is the people. Ultimately, this is the most powerful force in the state, which is in the hands of the masses - **it cannot get any more democratic than that.**

The idea that a salaried or professional army can provide a solution in the face of

existential security threats is decidedly baseless. People are not going to take any meaningful risks with their lives for money. National resistance cannot be made with money - this is a values-based issue. It is reliant on social solidarity. Israel's experience has time and again proven that reliance on the citizen-soldier military has been an indispensable asset in its handling of such threats, overcoming them, while still enabling subsequent social growth. Whenever we have deviated from this precept - our achievements on the battlefield have diminished, and so has our social cohesion.

10. **Russia's classic use of brute force puts NATO at a disadvantage, and it puts the IDF's trend toward downsizing forces to the test.**

A look into the military characteristics of the Russian invasion of Ukraine raises questions regarding some of the assumptions which have become undisputed dogma in the West when it comes to the new nature of warfare in the 21st century. This concept was expressed in British General Rupert Smith's book, *The Utility of Force*. Smith, who commanded the British Division in the First Gulf War and was Deputy Commander of the NATO forces in the Kosovo War in 1999, wrote: "War no longer exists. Confrontation, conflict and combat undoubtedly exist all around the world and states still have armed forces which they use as a symbol of power. Nonetheless, war as cognitively known to most non-combatants, war as

battle in a field between men and machinery, war as a massive deciding event in a dispute in international affairs, industrial war--such war no longer exists."

This concept is realized in the depletion of military force buildup in Europe and in the war-readiness of the armies there - in stark contrast to the classical operational fitness on the Russian side: a mere 50 battle-ready tanks in the German military, compared with over 20 thousand new, upgraded tanks on the Russian side; the assumption that small, technologically-advanced armies are a match for the massive quantities on the Russia side, alongside its well-developed traditional ground order of battle and substantial artillery and rocket firepower; the focus on limited operations and on "peacekeeping" in the West, as opposed to the painstaking building of a large-scale military on the Russian side, all put NATO's armies at a distinct disadvantage. Russia has also invested heavily in building advanced military capabilities - hypersonic missiles, cyber warfare and psychological warfare - as yet another course above traditional military might.

Through the application of this approach in their war in Ukraine, the Russians have dragged the world back to the realm of classic 20th-century warfare, albeit augmented and accelerated by all the innovative dimensions existent in the Western militaries. The truths we have learned so far from the disparities between the forces in the arena, has

exposed the force-building concept of the West's militaries in all its weakness. The disparities, with the NATO forces on the losing side of the equation, amount to no less than a collapse of that paradigm.

Although the IDF has succeeded in bucking the European trend, it is no secret that over the past quarter-century its ground forces have undergone a continuing process of quantitative downsizing, primarily in the size of the armored force and in the fitness of the on-ground logistical infrastructure. Nonetheless, different voices are still expressed in the Israeli public discourse, calling for further reduction in the IDF's order of battle, and even calling for changes in the method of conscription. The Russian threat on the Ukrainian border provides, in this respect, a new reference point for supporting the argument that even in this new age, replete with technological innovation, the need for a military force, which benefits on the battlefield from the on-ground presence of a substantial mass of mechanized, diverse force, massive and efficient.

A renewed outlook at the fundamental assumptions regarding the readiness of the IDF's land forces for emergency time and war time, has only partially been tested in recent decades. In all the operations and wars since the end of the October 1973 Yom Kippur War, the General Staff has still had to be attentive to all theaters, however the main fighting

has focused on just one theater. This has also been the case in the last round of hostilities - Operation Guardian of the Walls in May 2021.

In a multi-theater combat scenario, the IDF is going to need sizable reserves, which might appear to be superfluous to the order of battle. The need for a multi-theater response underscores the perennial dilemma - particularly for the ground forces - between quantity and quality. As opposed to aerial force, which possesses rapid flexibility in retasking its aircraft from one arena to another, and which can therefore focus on cultivating quality over quantity, this same flexibility in the ground force is much more cumbersome and is critically dependent on the sheer quantity of units.

Ever since its establishment, the IDF has built its force in response to an emergency, seeking to strike the balance between an elite standing force, which will always be limited in size relative to its operational needs, and a quantitative mass, of medium quality and fitness, which would be based on mobilization of reserves. However, in recent decades, the downsizing processes the IDF has undergone with focus on the ground force have led to one expenditure cut after another, as well as to a continuing reduction of the order of battle, contrary to what is needed for the uniqueness and importance of the building of the military force.

Whereas a business enterprise is measured primarily through its competitiveness in the marketplace, which is present and evolves day by day, the main test of a military force buildup comes at times of war which, as long as it has not yet broken out - cannot be put to that test to find out the full extent of its implications. This being said, the events in

Ukraine afford the State of Israel a golden opportunity to revisit its basic assumptions regarding force building in the IDF, considering the real threat of war, which could be intense, protracted and wide-ranging, both in terms of its complex implications and its geopolitical impacts on the international arena.