



UNIVERSITY OF
OXFORD



Escaping an Escalatory Spiral Can Europe Avoid a War With Russia?

Maksim Samorukov

Policy Paper
October 2026



About the Author

Maksim Samorukov is a fellow at the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center. Samorukov's research is focused on Russia's relations with the states of Central, Eastern, and South-Eastern Europe. From 2015-2022 he was a fellow at the Carnegie Moscow Center based in Russia, until the center was closed down by the Russian authorities. Before joining Carnegie in 2015, Samorukov worked at independent Russian media outlets including Slon.ru as an international correspondent and columnist.

The word 'war' has long ceased to be a taboo in discussions of the prospects of Russia-Europe relations. Nowadays, the term is widely used not only in the traditionally vigilant Baltic states and Poland but also in Western European capitals as well as in Moscow, where the Russian leadership visibly relishes its menacing overtones. Still, Europeans tend to treat such a war as a distant and mostly theoretical possibility that should be relatively easy to prevent by virtue of its utmost absurdity.

This scepticism appears well grounded. Europe has zero intention of attacking Russia, while the prospect of the opposite looks too preposterous, even for the unscrupulous Kremlin. No matter how aggressive today's Russia may be, it is difficult to conceive of its rationale for attacking the world's largest economic bloc. Russia's previous attack on the militarily far weaker Ukraine has turned into a protracted disaster that has been dragging on for over four and a half years with no end in sight. And even if the hostilities in Ukraine were to stop because of mutual exhaustion, it would be suicidal for Moscow to immediately embark on another war against an opponent that enjoys a manifold advantage in terms of economy, population, and military strength.

Despite Russian President Vladimir Putin's growing detachment from reality, the Russian leadership largely shares this outlook. Nobody in the Kremlin entertains the illusion that the Russian army, decimated by years of fighting in Ukraine, would be capable of marching triumphantly to Berlin or Paris, vanquishing European armed forces along the way. Nor do they buy into the idea that Russian-speaking minorities or pro-Russian fringe parties constitute a significant enough power to tilt the balance in Moscow's favour in the event of a direct confrontation with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). The differences in perception are far more nuanced, though no less impactful.



The Russian and European leaderships do not diverge greatly in their assessments of the current state of affairs, except for one crucial difference. Europe justly sees Russia's 2022 attack on Ukraine as an act of unprovoked aggression that warrants a proper response in the form of improving European defence capacity, while the Russian leadership treats the war in Ukraine as a Western provocation intended to undermine Russia's power. No matter how counterfactual, this belief frames the European precautions that followed the invasion of Ukraine as hostile and menacing to the Kremlin, pushing both sides into a vicious circle of mutual fear.

The more Europe views Russia as a threat, the more the Russian leadership responds in kind. In flagrant defiance of causality, the Kremlin suspects Europeans of harbouring aggressive intentions towards Russia. The leadership in Moscow reads every European statement on the need to boost defence capabilities as further confirmation of Europe's envy of Russia's riches, territory, global influence: the list is endless. Every military exercise, every increase in defence spending is seen in Moscow as betraying Europe's desire to take advantage of Russia's entanglement in Ukraine and cut it down to size for good.

As a result, the Kremlin is bracing for a war with Europe as something inevitable. Initially a vague fear, it is quickly morphing into gospel truth. And why would it not, if those few in the Russian leadership who dared to argue against it have either been sidelined or assented to the new dogma, while every European word in favour of defence improvements is interpreted as a clear argument in support of this fear?

What is more, a plethora of developments both inside and outside Russia dovetail to endorse the war's ostensible inevitability. The enormous economic and political challenges of returning Russia to peace make another military escalation the easiest if not the only way forward for the Russian regime domestically. Meanwhile, the current eagerness of the United States (US) to pressure Kyiv into making concessions and to renege on its security arrangements with Europe vindicates the Kremlin's chosen path as far as it is concerned, proving the efficiency of brute force and aggression.



The US stance also conveys the urgency of the situation, in which neither Russia's advantages nor favourable global conditions are likely to last forever. Russia's time is short, tempting Moscow to use it in accordance with Putin's infamous maxim: if a fight is inevitable, it is better to land the first blow.

Dismantling the European project

It is virtually impossible to exaggerate the magnitude of the change that Russia-Europe relations are undergoing. The war in Ukraine, in which Kyiv enjoys massive European support in resisting Moscow's aggression, has long passed the point where things could have returned to business as usual after the end of hostilities. Even though the fighting is taking place mostly on Ukrainian territory, it has also been profoundly transformative for Russia. The change inflicted by the war is not confined to such self-evident spheres as foreign trade and narratives in state-run media. It goes much deeper, upending everyday habits, education patterns, and the global outlook of society as a whole.

Essentially, Russia is in the process of abandoning the European project it had pursued for over three centuries, ever since Peter the Great 'opened a window to Europe' in the early eighteenth century. Even in the darkest periods of the Cold War, Russia never seriously doubted that it was, at its core, a European country. Nowadays, this self-perception is being dismantled with staggering swiftness and efficiency.

Perceptions of Europe

Once embodying much-coveted modernity, Europe is increasingly seen in Russia as nothing less than an existential enemy—up to the point that it has unprecedentedly overtaken the US in polls of perceptions of Russia's leading geopolitical opponent. In a study conducted by the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) in late 2025, 51 per cent of Russians called Europe an 'adversary', while only 37 per cent said the same about the US.^[1]



Multiyear polls by the Levada Center, an independent Russian pollster, confirm this dynamic.

^[iii] While in the 2000s the share of Russians with negative feelings towards the EU was well below 20 per cent, since 2022 it has been oscillating around the record high of 70 per cent. What is more, the fluctuations in these views mirror those in attitudes towards Ukraine, offering further proof that Russian society now sees both Kyiv and Brussels as its adversaries in the ongoing war. For decades, Russians accused Washington of spinning anti-Russian intrigue in Europe to sabotage the rapprochement between the two natural partners. Now, they locate the main centre of anti-Russian plotting firmly in Europe, which is supposedly conducting its war against Russia through a Ukrainian proxy.

Since it is hard to simultaneously be part of something and wage war with it, it is little wonder that the share of Russians who believe their country does not belong to Europe has spiked from around one-third in the 2000s to two-thirds in the 2020s.^[iii] The widening gap is especially striking in the domain of politics. In the 2025 ECFR poll, as many as 77 per cent of Russians said Russia was not part of Europe when it came to its current political values, while just 9 per cent said the opposite.^[iv]

To be sure, this sentiment is to a certain extent a top-down phenomenon. The war with Ukraine has brought about extremely conducive conditions for brainwashing in Russia. The Russian regime has used its own aggression as a pretext to crack down on the remaining opposition, independent media, and public freedoms. With the efficiency of the Kremlin's internet restrictions increasing by the day, most of Russian society risks being completely sealed off from any uncensored information about European reality.

Still, the rise of anti-European sentiment goes beyond the regime's propaganda, which has its limits. Driven by the instinct to support one's country when it is at war, most of Russian society may approve of the Kremlin's actions in Ukraine. But the regime has failed to rally genuine massive support for the hostilities. The share of Russians in favour of ending the fighting through negotiations has been gradually rising and currently stands at around 65 per cent, while those in favour of continuing the war now number below 30 per cent.^[v] The same is true for attitudes towards veterans of the war. Even though the Kremlin-controlled media spare no effort in portraying them as 'the new national elite', most Russians treat them warily.^[vi]



Turning East

The spectacular rise of anti-European sentiment in Russia would not have been possible had it not been reinforced by two other factors: European sanctions and the availability of an alternative source of modernity—Asia. Understanding that Russia's aggression is the sole reason for the horrors of the ongoing war proved too uncomfortable for most Russians, who eagerly stamped it out of their consciousness, assisted by Kremlin propaganda. And if there was no aggression in the first place, the following Western outrage turns—in their perception—into a malevolent campaign of humiliating and undermining Russia. Nor has it helped that sanctions primarily affect the urban middle class, which used to be the most pro-European and anti-regime part of Russian society.

As a result, many Russians see financial restrictions, tougher visa requirements, and the withdrawal of Western brands as unfair punishments meted out to them by an arrogant Europe simply for being Russian. It has also become easy to blow out of proportion any anti-Russian step in Europe, as both Russian and European governments have introduced a plethora of new obstacles to mutual contacts, from stopping direct flights to blocking messaging apps. With estrangement breeding mistrust and suspicion, the Kremlin finds it easy to persuade Russian society that Europe is bent on opposing not Russia's aggression but its very identity.

Even most sophisticated Russians see little point in continuing to knock at the closed door of Europe when the same and even better goods and benefits can be obtained elsewhere. For the first time in many centuries, Russia has at its disposal an alternative source of modernity in Asia. Despite greater cultural differences than with Europe, Asians appear to care little about events in Ukraine and are eager to offer Russians many perks of the modern world that a moralising Europe is trying to withhold from them via sanctions.

For many years, the Kremlin laboured in vain to reorient Russia's economy and society away from Europe to Asia. But it took the war to really kick-start the process, which is now going at breakneck speed. This tectonic shift is not confined to Russia's foreign trade, of which the EU's share collapsed from 37 per cent in 2021 to around 10 per cent in 2025,^[vii] while China's share spiked from 16 per cent to 34 per cent over the same period.^[viii] Almost all aspects of Russians' everyday lives are undergoing a transformation that is hard to reverse.



A few years of war were enough to take the proportion of Chinese cars in new sales in Russia from 4 per cent in 2020 to almost 60 per cent in 2025.^[ix] It is the same story with mobile phones, with Chinese brands now accounting for around three-quarters of new sales.^[x] Laptops, household appliances, and even fashion are all markets now dominated by Chinese produce, even though Russians looked down on it as inferior to European goods just a few years ago.^[xi]

The change in travelling habits is no less salient. The number of visas for the EU's passport-free Schengen Area issued to Russians collapsed from over 4 million in 2019 to a mere 620,000 in 2025.^[xii] That is just a quarter of the 2.5 million visits Russians made in 2025 to China, which lifted visa requirements for Russian nationals in September that year.^[xiii] Geographically, Europe remains much closer to most Russians, but a closed land border and a lack of direct flights have made a trip to Shanghai or Hong Kong a quicker and cheaper option.

As a result, millions of Russians have been surprised to discover that cities in today's China look and feel far more modern than European ones. Combined with the grudge against European sanctions, this makes Russians believe that the future belongs to Asia, not Europe.

The resulting life choices are already there. China now hosts twice as many Russian students as Germany does (21,000 vs 10,500).^[xiv] In the meantime, the number of Russians studying Chinese has soared to 113,000 from just a few thousand at the turn of the century, while Germany's Goethe Institute, which used to teach the German language to almost 2 million Russian students, was closed down by the Russian authorities in 2026 in retaliation for the closure of the Russian cultural centre in Berlin.^[xv] It is increasingly common for Russian elites to hire Chinese nannies for their children to furnish them with the language skills deemed indispensable for future success.^[xvi]

At the end of the Cold War, the allure of Western democracy was greatly reinforced by the West's material superiority. Now, when the latter element is challenged by authoritarian China, Russians see few benefits in adopting the values of Europeans, who are humiliating them with bans and restrictions. Instead, they lump together Europe's current economic



difficulties with social issues, like gender equality, LGBTQ rights, and even democratic freedoms, nonchalantly writing off the whole continent as hopelessly decadent. The conclusion Russians draw is that Russia would do better to stay away from this sick man of humanity if it intends to have any future.

Drivers of aggression

The anti-European resentment that has crystallised in Russian society since 2022 makes it much easier for the Kremlin to double down on its aggressive policies. The Russian regime has long become accustomed to regularly boosting its legitimacy with military adventures of ever-growing magnitude and insolence. Now, when the mobilising effect of the invasion of Ukraine is starting to peter out, the need to upstage old domestic problems with new international ones is already looming on the horizon.

It is not that the Russian leadership is oblivious to the risks inherent in proceeding up the escalatory ladder. Rather, it realises that both the political and the economic costs of abandoning this trajectory would be prohibitively high.

A militarised economy

War is now the backbone of the Russian economy. It generates gross domestic product (GDP) growth, industrial development, and well-paid employment. Even strictly defined military expenditure quadrupled in 2021–25 according to official data, reaching around \$150 billion.^[xvii] Meanwhile, the overall level of defence-related state spending is estimated to have soared to the equivalent of 8 per cent of GDP—an unprecedented level since the Cold War^[xviii]

Nurtured by the state's preferences, Russia's war-related sector has sucked up people and investment from civil industries, flourishing amid the demise of the rest. In addition to over 1 million people whose incomes skyrocketed as they signed up to the Russian army to fight in Ukraine,^[xix] another 700,000 moved to work in the military-industrial complex,^[xx] where blue-collar salaries have surged three- to fivefold since the start of the war.^[xxi]



Similarly, the output of the industries that produce for the war kept growing at 20–30 per cent for several years, while production for civil needs stagnated at best.^[xxii]

As the economic boom of the early war years levelled off in 2025, it is the massive defence spending that keeps Russia from diving into recession.^[xxiii] Should the government try to rein in this expenditure through demilitarisation, this would knock several per cent off Russia's GDP, eradicate hundreds of thousands of jobs, and slash the incomes of millions of Russians.

Mounting sanctions, intensifying Ukrainian strikes, and dislocations due to the war are already stretching Russia's economic resources to the limit. But the Kremlin is eager to save on anything—including infrastructure and social programmes—except the military sector.^[xxiv] Of course, such cuts risk sparking a social backlash, but this can be staved off by presenting the public with a new wave of external threats.

Emboldened security services

The political costs of a hypothetical demilitarisation would be no less momentous for the Russian regime. The invasion of Ukraine has conveniently given the Kremlin and the security services a free hand in sorting out a host of domestic issues to their liking with little resistance. By using the war as a justification for the most ham-fisted methods, the authorities were able to eliminate all opposition activity down to the municipal level. Independent media have been silenced, thousands of people have been arrested or declared foreign agents for criticising the aggression, and over half a million mostly anti-war Russians have been pushed out of the country.^[xxv]

Having weeded out open disloyalty to the regime during the initial crackdown, the security services continue to expand their control over all spheres of life. They persistently tighten the screws of internet censorship. Opposition resources and independent media were the first to be blocked, soon followed by Western social media; then all messaging services not controlled by the state found themselves in the firing line, and now the focus is on fighting virtual private network (VPN) technology used to bypass those restrictions.^[xxvi] To be sure, the



Kremlin tried to control the internet before the war too, but the efficiency and severity of the current methods are unprecedented: even web searches for undesired materials have been criminalised.^[xxvii]

The growing impunity of the security services affects not only ordinary people but also the state apparatus and elites. Under the pretext that the state cannot afford to be soft on any misdeeds at a time of war, hardly a day passes without the arrest of another mayor, judge, regional government minister, or senior manager at a state company. Even governors and federal ministers, including those who represent influential clans, no longer feel safe as the instances of their arrests multiply.^[xxviii] Such detentions, even if they do not result in lengthy prison terms, are as a rule accompanied by the confiscation of detainees' possessions, which tend to be quite vast.

In a similar vein, Russian business is undergoing the biggest redistribution of property since the country's transition to a market economy in the early 1990s. According to a statement in March 2026 by Russia's prosecutor general, the total value of the assets taken over by the state since the start of the war amounted to 4 trillion roubles (over \$50 billion) as of the end of 2025.^[xxix] Formal pretexts for nationalising are numerous and range from the owner's foreign citizenship to the need to meet military production demands to vaguely defined strategic state interests. Commercial infringements from over three decades ago are deemed sufficient for confiscating a business, while allowing the owner to leave the country instead of being arrested is considered adequate compensation.

Unlike in the earlier decades of Putin's rule, these bans, arrests, and confiscations are no longer calibrated steps with a clear purpose. Amid the overindulgence of the war, they have turned into a self-perpetuating process, becoming the way the system functions.^[xxx] An attempt to rein them back in risks undermining the very basis of the regime. Meanwhile, forging ahead down this road risks provoking a backlash from elites and society, unless it is justified by another spike in international tensions.



Putin's worldview

Finally, Putin—Russia's key decision-maker and the supreme arbiter on all policies—is not showing the remotest intention to either leave his post or change tack on his belligerent course. Domestically, the war with Ukraine has cemented his control over the state system, where no one now dares to question even his most outlandish orders. Globally, the invasion has elevated him to a position that he views as one of the leading demiurges of the new world order.

Putin's perception is that by moving troops into Ukraine, he laid bare the brittleness of the West-dominated world order and accelerated the formation of a new, multipolar one. For Putin, his war has spotlighted the arbitrariness of the US, the weakness of Europe, and numerous deficiencies of the West-centred political and financial global architecture, with Russia now leading the efforts of the so-called global majority to construct fairer structures instead.

No matter how distorted this picture may be, it is true in the sense that the war has become Putin's main asset. Domestically, it is the cornerstone of his power, and a return to peace would immediately trigger an avalanche of uneasy questions about the soundness of the Russian leader's decisions. Russia's human, economic, reputational, and other losses in the war are already so high that no realistic outcome of the fighting will be enough to justify Putin's single-handed order to start it. Hence, the only way forward is to eclipse past losses with the tangible risk of even greater ones in the future.

Internationally, it is the war that keeps Putin in the focus of the world's attention and has ushered him to the pinnacle of global politics. It is simultaneously his leverage, credentials, and conduit for influence over leading actors and developments on the international scene. Without the war, he would be sidelined to the role of a parochial strongman in charge of a declining regional power with little capacity to influence events even in the immediate surroundings. Putin needs the war simply to remain relevant. He admitted as much publicly in July 2026, when he impulsively and half-jokingly asked, 'What can we possibly busy ourselves with after the end of an undertaking as immense and essential for Russia as the Special Military Operation?'^[xxxi]



This is all in keeping with Putin's own world outlook. He has repeatedly admitted that he views Russia's war with Ukraine as merely part of a greater existential conflict with the West.^[xxxii] And if it is existential, there is no way for Moscow to win it solely on Ukrainian soil, no matter how successful the Russian army might be. Just as Stalin claimed that the class struggle would only intensify as socialism was built, so Putin sees the threats to Russia from the West as only multiplying as a result of his victories. The perceived existential nature of the conflict leaves Putin's Russia only one way to survive: by defeating the West. And that is what Putin is bent on achieving in the few active years that remain ahead of him in his mid-seventies.

Uniting against Europe

Defeating the West may sound like a tall order for a sparsely populated country that represents around 2 per cent of the world economy.^[xxxiii] But the Russian leadership has reasons to believe that it is making advances along that path: that this time, Russia has chosen the right side of history, and the objective laws of human development will bring about the collapse of the West if properly accelerated by Moscow.

The war in Ukraine keeps sparking events that the Kremlin interprets as proving it right. When the West responded to the start of the full-scale invasion with an avalanche of sanctions against Russia, none of Moscow's leading partners in the Global South agreed to join the measures. China, India, and Turkey emphasised their neutrality and eagerly expanded their cooperation with Russia, taking advantage of the new opportunities created by the Western boycott. Their trade with Russia burgeoned, which Moscow interpreted as success in diversifying away from the West and undermining global Western hegemony.



Turkey

Despite its long-standing NATO membership, Turkey became a key intermediary in all Russian economic activities directed towards the West, ranging from flights to parallel imports and the remaining gas trade with Europe. The trade turnover between the two countries almost doubled from a pre-war level of \$33 billion in 2021 to \$62 billion in 2022.^[xxxiv] Ankara's newly acquired leverage even allowed it to broker a grain deal between Russia and Ukraine, which provided safe navigation for food and fertiliser exports through the Black Sea.^[xxxv] The implementation of the arrangement had its hiccups, and the agreement collapsed a year later, but it remains one of the few successful attempts at diplomacy in this conflict.

Russia-Turkey relations have cooled somewhat since the boom in the initial months of the war. Under Western pressure, Turkish companies scaled down their offer of intermediary services for Russians, causing bilateral trade to stagnate. Things soured further when Ankara took advantage of the war in Ukraine to expand its influence in Syria and the South Caucasus at Moscow's expense. Still, the partnership holds, as Russia is ready to use energy deals and other concessions to prevent Turkey from fully allying with the West. For decades, the Kremlin has generously invested in making NATO member Turkey a showcase for the benefits of emancipation from the West. The Russian leadership is determined to stick to that goal, even at the cost of painful setbacks in other regions.

India

Russia's war-inflicted rapprochement with India is even more illustrative of the Kremlin's calculus and its accompanying fallacies. Striving to keep New Delhi away from the Western camp, Moscow has reoriented a vast part of its oil exports from now-closed Europe to the Indian market, offering major discounts. The move was welcomed by energy-hungry India and inflated bilateral trade to an unprecedented high of over \$70 billion in 2024;^[xxxvi] almost sixfold growth from the pre-war level.^[xxxvii] That made India Russia's second-largest trading partner, allowing Moscow to indulge in far-reaching conclusions.



Even though almost all expansion in Russia-India cooperation boils down to selling discounted oil, which is in essence a sanctions-inflicted necessity, Moscow prefers to interpret it as a major success in diversification.^[xxxviii] Mesmerised by dozens of billions of dollars in trade statistics, the Russian leadership has resorted to fantasy thinking, trying to persuade others and itself that the collapse of economic cooperation with the West does not matter because India is an appropriate replacement and that, moreover, cooperation with New Delhi has enough potential to balance out Russia's deepening dependence on China and lure India into an anti-Western camp.

This belief is easily refuted by the fact that both Indian exports to Russia and Russian non-oil exports to India have stagnated in recent years, despite all the pomp of the two countries' summits. Besides, New Delhi makes no secret of the fact that it values its partnerships with the US and the EU far more and may cut down on Russian oil imports if pressured by the West—as it did in late 2025.^[xxxix] But for lack of better options, Moscow prefers to remain unconvinced and keep framing India as its like-minded associate in the crusade against Western hegemony.

Alternative blocs

The Kremlin's illusion of a joint front against the West is sustained by the readiness of India, Turkey, and other major states in the Global South to get involved with non-Western institutions promoted by Russia and China. The BRICS grouping and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) have become flagship projects for Moscow, portrayed as more respectful and just alternatives to the old international order.

Both institutions have indeed expanded their memberships in recent years, which is little wonder given that they offer certain prestige and networking opportunities and request little in return. But their practical contribution to global governance is hardly meaningful. Too unwieldy because of their extremely diverse memberships, the BRICS and the SCO engender projects that remain largely on paper, while in terms of conflict resolution they have failed to prevent fighting even among their own members, as in the cases of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan or Afghanistan and Pakistan.^[xl]



China

This morbid focus on expediting the West's decline is causing the Russian leadership to ignore the most dangerous implications of the country's new international positioning. As a result, the negative effects of Russia's deepening dependence on China are nonchalantly treated as a better alternative to reliance on the US or Europe.

The invasion of Ukraine has made China Russia's indispensable partner in almost all economic domains: Beijing provides Russia with most consumer goods, industrial machinery, tech solutions, and even spare parts for the military-industrial complex while also buying the lion's share of Russian exports.^[xli] The resulting dependency is one-sided: in 2025, China accounted for 27 per cent of Russian exports and 39 per cent of imports,^[xlii] while the corresponding Russian shares in Chinese foreign trade were merely 3.2 per cent and 4.8 per cent, respectively.^[xliii] With its vast experience in trade wars, Beijing can easily find other markets for its goods if needed. And even Russian energy deliveries are deemed dispensable, judging by China's persistent rejection of Moscow's pet project, the Power of Siberia 2 gas pipeline.^[xliv]

Such humiliating imbalances do not scare the Kremlin away from welcoming China's rise, however. Still reeling from the collapse of the Soviet Union, elderly securocrats in the Russian leadership are fascinated by the Chinese authoritarian model of so-called reformed communism. They see China as an indispensable partner in defeating the West, with vast potential that will compensate for Russia's own limitations. Meanwhile, Moscow's role in this duo is to lead by example. To embolden Beijing, the Kremlin is ready to run the risk of challenging the West militarily in Ukraine or to chafe under sanctions so as to unmask the inequity of the West-centred financial infrastructure.



The United States

Believing China to be by its side and the Global South united behind it, the Kremlin sees little reason to question its eventual triumph over the West. Any remaining doubts were surely dispelled by the return of Donald Trump to the White House at the beginning of 2025. Even though his first presidential term fell short of the high hopes entertained in Moscow, the Kremlin expects this time to be different, given how much the invasion of Ukraine has changed the world.

And indeed, it is different this time around. His convincing victory in the 2024 presidential election, Republican control of the US Congress, and massive purges of the state apparatus have allowed Trump to recast US policies so radically that Moscow has unprecedentedly stopped treating Washington as its main adversary. Moreover, the Trump administration has become for the Kremlin a kind of a tacit ally in bullying what both sides see as a weak and decadent Europe.

Although US-Russia talks on numerous megadeals have so far delivered no practical results, Trump has presented the Russian leadership with the type of West that Moscow has dreamed about for so long. Rules, values, and multilateralism are gone, replaced with transactionalism, imperialism, and national egoism. All of that confirms the Kremlin's conviction that its cynical approach to international affairs is not atavism but heralds a new era that is finally taking hold of the entire world with the ascent of Trump.

Trump does not need to concede anything to Russia directly to make Moscow happy. His pledges to annex Canada, Venezuela, and Greenland normalise Russia's annexation of Crimea and other Ukrainian regions. His readiness to use military force to bypass all international institutions makes Russia's invasion of Ukraine look ordinary. His inept attack on Iran has sent global energy prices skyrocketing, relieving the Russian state budget from looming spending cuts.^[xlv]



Trump's most promising feature for the Kremlin is his eagerness to bully Europe. His desire to take his international failures out on Europeans fortifies Moscow's expectations of an irreversible split in the Western camp. It also opens a realistic path to the Kremlin's supreme goal: the defeat of the West. If the US under Trump sees no benefit in protecting its European allies, the only thing Russia needs to undertake is a targeted intervention in Europe that would expose that reluctance to everybody. Then the whole Western camp will unravel on its own.

Looking for a way out

The risk of a direct military confrontation with Russia features ever more prominently in European strategic planning, but the asymmetry in threat perceptions between Moscow and Europe remains striking. For many Europeans, especially the wider public, the Russia-Ukraine war is still merely a regional conflict that is unfolding far away on the European periphery. From Europe, it requires little more than attention and some mediation to ensure a just peace in the continent's neighbourhood.

For Russia, however, Europe is already part of the ongoing war and Moscow's most dangerous adversary.^[xlvii] Europe strives to use Ukrainian proxies to weaken Russia as much as possible, while providing Kyiv with financial resources and modern weaponry. The Europeans are also hastily rearming so as to be able to finish Russia off in case the Ukrainians fail to achieve that on their own.

There are many reasons why the conviction that Russia is fighting Europe in Ukraine has become hard-wired in the Russian leadership. It helps to explain away the Russian army's failure to capture Kyiv in three days as planned. It exonerates Russia from the guilt of aggression and frames Europe as the main provocateur and warmonger. It stems from the stifling uniformity among Russian decision-makers, where anyone daring to question the paranoid outlook of elderly securocrats is immediately sidelined. But most importantly, it flourishes because of its utmost convenience and even indispensability for the survival of Putin's regime.



Over the years of the full-scale war, Russia has invested heavily in militarising the economy, putting domestic public life on a war footing, expanding the army, reforming the military draft, and boosting the prestige of the armed forces. Hundreds of thousands of Russians have acquired battle experience and mastered the latest fighting technologies, and numerous arms production lines have been rolled out. Reversing all that to peacetime would not only be costly and fraught with political risks; it would also nullify all the investments and sacrifices already made.

As a result, the dilemma between war and peace translates for the Russian regime into a choice that leaves little room for doubt. One option is for the Kremlin to stop halfway in realising its geopolitical ambitions to start the expensive and potentially suicidal process of demilitarisation. The other is to forge ahead with the revanchist agenda as far as possible, sticking to the tested tactic of eclipsing domestic difficulties with international escalation. When facing similar dilemmas in the past, Putin's regime invariably opted for escalation over reform, subjecting Russian society to another war every six to eight years. It is difficult to imagine it making a different choice this time, when the stakes are much higher.

In fact, the Kremlin is already escalating matters, dragging Europe deeper into the ongoing war. Russian intelligence has published a list of legitimate targets in Europe, specifying addresses where military production for Ukraine supposedly takes place.^[xlvii] Russian battle drones have made a detour into Poland and menaced European airports. Russian jets have violated European airspace, European arms depots have gone up in flames under mysterious circumstances, while Russian ships have conducted suspicious activities near seabed communications infrastructure. Putin has threatened to capture European vessels in response to Europe's detentions of ships of the Russian shadow fleet.^[xlviii] And it was only by a fortunate coincidence that an attempt in August 2026 to sabotage deliveries of military equipment to Ukraine at Leipzig airport did not turn into a calamity with civilian casualties.^[xlix] The red lines are being pushed even further, with the first EU civilians injured in Romania by a Russian drone during an attack in May 2026 on port facilities in south-western Ukraine.^[l] It would be naive to expect Moscow to watch passively as Europe expands its role in military production for Kyiv.



And it is no longer only Ukraine. The war has given rise to a whole host of contentious new issues in Russia-Europe relations that could flare up in a flash. Transit to the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad, detentions of the Russian shadow fleet for violating sanctions, acts of sabotage at critical European infrastructure: a confrontation around any of these flashpoints could easily spiral out of control or be used intentionally to push the sides to the brink of war if Moscow decides to pick one of them to show to Europe how tough and assertive it is.

Europe's decision to respond to this threat by rearming is necessary but hardly sufficient. Given how transparent European policymaking is and how painstaking the implementation pace of many decisions, rearmament on its own may, on the contrary, spur the Kremlin into action. Loyal to its zero-sum paradigm, Moscow is bound to interpret the modernisation of European armies as a direct security threat.

Well aware of Europe's superior potential, the Russian leadership may conclude that time is its only advantage and opt for a pre-emptive strike while its battle experience is still relevant and Europeans have not fully woken up to the new reality. The risk of this scenario multiplies if the hostilities in Ukraine become frozen, allowing Russia to relocate troops to other fronts. But even the continuation of fighting does not preclude a ham-fisted test of Europe's resolve by the Kremlin. Vexed by intensifying Ukrainian strikes inside Russia, the Russian leadership feels increasingly entitled to respond by attacking European facilities that produce armaments for Kyiv.^[1] Moscow has always treated escalation as a panacea for any problem, be it Putin's falling approval ratings or an entrenched stalemate on the Ukrainian front.

Europe needs to talk to Russia: it is too big and dangerous a neighbour to ignore, while outsourcing such talks to the US is no longer a reliable option under Trump. Of course, Europeans should be realistic about contacts with Moscow: they will not resolve the confrontation. The current Russian leadership is convinced that its victory over Ukraine is inevitable, and the few things it is ready to negotiate with Europe in earnest are the terms of Kyiv's capitulation and a new security architecture for the continent that gives Russia a dominant position. This is likely to remain a reality until there is generational change in the Kremlin.



But talking about managing the confrontation would already be an achievement. Given the multiplying military and sabotage incidents, Europe can ill afford to have no direct line to Moscow. It needs to be able to get in touch swiftly in case of an emergency to prevent dangerous misunderstandings or deliver to the Kremlin a clear message that its false-flag operations fool nobody and will be responded to in kind.

Preparing an immediate and coordinated response to as many contingencies as possible is of the utmost importance. The Russian leadership has few doubts about Europe's overall military superiority and is realistic enough to understand that Russia will not be able to sustain a Ukraine-type war against the armies of a united Europe. But the Kremlin sees its advantage in acting quickly and secretly, covered by plausible deniability and counting on the lack of European solidarity.

Nobody in the Kremlin fancies a fight with the whole European continent. Instead, the Russian leadership would be likely to opt for a short, targeted strike. Such a strike would involve little fighting and quickly establish new facts on the ground, making Europeans more amenable to Moscow's demands to avoid a greater war.^[iii] To put it crudely, the Kremlin has no intention of fighting NATO or the organisation's European part, but it is likely to consider fighting NATO's Article 5 collective-defence clause to prove the alliance a paper tiger. And after that is proved beyond doubt, Russia would find a way to deal with each European country individually.

Despite being superior to Russia in almost all respects and by a wide margin, Europe cannot afford any complacency. During military drills in Sweden in May 2026, Ukrainian drone operators, invited to share their expertise, repeatedly disrupted Swedish units, highlighting the deficiencies in the country's anti-drone tactics.^[iii] In a similar vein, Ukrainian drone operators defeated US armoured vehicles at a military exercise in Germany in August 2026.^[iv] It is very likely that Russia's expertise in this sphere, also acquired during the war, could be equally damaging to European armies.



The Russian leadership has never hidden the fact that its desire to establish control over Ukraine is only part of the story. The February 2022 invasion was, among other things, conceived as a way of forcing a dialogue on Europeans about a new security architecture for the continent that would pay due respect to Russia's interests. That has not happened so far, hence another attempt to impose such a dialogue may be in the making—especially given that the Kremlin's difficulties are mounting, and one of Putin's few invariable rules is to double down if in trouble.

Funding

This paper was made possible with generous support from *Stiftung Mercator*.

STIFTUNG
MERCATOR



About the Dahrendorf Programme

The Dahrendorf Programme at the European Studies Centre, St Antony's College Oxford, commemorates the College's third Warden, Ralf Dahrendorf, one of the leading social and political thinkers of his time, and is dedicated to a subject central to his work and life. It has three main components: a Research Agenda which currently focuses on the Europe in a Changing World project, and has previously included the Europe's Stories project, the Free Speech Debate project; an annual Ralf Dahrendorf Memorial Lecture; and an annual group of competitively selected Dahrendorf Scholars.

'Europe in a Changing World'

From July 2024 to June 2027, the project enters a new phase, building on previous insights to offer policy-relevant conclusions for a new European strategy in an evolving global environment. This phase will examine how Europe's engagement with the world—politically, geo-economically, geo-strategically, and culturally—must adapt to an increasingly non-European and post-Western order, with a continued focus on the CITRUS countries.

With great power competition, climate change, technological innovation, and public health crises reshaping the international stage, Europe faces both challenges and opportunities that will define its role in the 21st century. While much attention is given to external pressures, Europe's own transformation is equally significant. The EU is grappling with internal changes that affect how it is perceived globally, from its position as a regulatory superpower to its ambitions as a leader in the green transition. At the same time, recent events—such as the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's aggression in Ukraine—have underscored Europe's ability to consolidate internally and respond to external shocks.



^[i] T. Garton Ash, I. Krastev, and M. Leonard, 'How Trump is making China great again—and what it means for Europe', European Council on Foreign Relations, 15 January 2026, <https://ecfr.eu/publication/how-trump-is-making-china-great-again-and-what-it-means-for-europe/>.

^[ii] 'Отношение к Китаю, США, ЕС и Украине в январе 2026 года' [Attitudes Towards China, the US, the EU, and Ukraine in January 2026], Levada Center, 5 February 2026, <https://www.levada.ru/2026/02/05/otnoshenie-k-kitayu-ssha-es-i-ukraine-v-yanvare-2026-goda>.

^[iii] 'Россия и Европа' [Russia and Europe], Levada Center, 18 March 2021, <https://www.levada.ru/2021/03/18/rossiya-i-evropa-2/>; R. Goncharenko, 'Как война против Украины изменила россиян' [How the War Against Ukraine Changed Russians], DW, 28 January 2026, <https://www.dw.com/ru/ravnodusie-i-strah-kak-vojna-protiv-ukrainy-izmenila-rossian/a-75700548?maca=rus-Red-Telegram-dwglavnoe>.

^[iv] Garton Ash et al., 'How Trump'.

^[v] 'Конфликт с Украиной в апреле 2026 года: внимание, поддержка российских вооруженных сил, мнение о необходимости переговоров' [Conflict With Ukraine in April 2026: Attention, Support for Russian Armed Forces, Opinion on the Need for Negotiations], Levada Center, 7 May 2026, <https://www.levada.ru/2026/05/07/konflikt-s-ukrainoi-v-aprele-2026-goda/>.

^[vi] 'Как общество относится к участникам СВО' [How Society Sees Fighters in the Special Military Operation], Levada Center, 21 January 2026, <https://www.levada.ru/2026/01/21/kak-obshhestvo-otnositsya-k-uchastnikam-svo/>.

^[vii] 'Russia', European Commission, https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/russia_en; 'EU share in Russian exports down to 7.4% in 2025 — research', TASS, 6 March 2026, <https://tass.com/economy/2097833>.

^[viii] Q. Jin, 'China maintains position as Russia's largest partner — research', TASS, 6 March 2026, <https://tass.com/economy/2097881>.

^[ix] 'Продажи «китайцев» в 2021 году выросли в 2 раза. Их доля – тоже удвоилась' [Chinese Sales Doubled in 2021, Their Share Also Doubled], Avtostat Analytical Agency, 14 January 2022, <https://www.autostat.ru/news/50416/>; 'Russian Auto Sales Hit 1.49M in 2025, Chinese Brands Take 57.2% Share', ChinaEVHome, 28 January 2026, <https://chinaevhome.com/2026/01/28/russian-auto-sales-hit-1-49m-in-2025-chinese-brands-take-57-2-share/>.



[x] 'Смартфоны брендов КНР заняли уже 80% импорта в Россию в 2023 году' [Chinese Brands Amount to 80 per Cent of Russia's Smartphone Imports in 2023], Vedomosti, 20 February 2024, <https://www.vedomosti.ru/technology/articles/2024/02/20/1021194-smartfoni-brendov-knr-zanyali-80-importa-v-rossiyu>.

[xi] A. Migacheva and V. Kolganova, 'Подход к наряду' [Approach to the Outfit], Kommersant, 12 May 2026, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/8653335?tg>.

[xii] N. Ionta, E. Braun, and P. Guastamacchia, 'EU countries split as Russian visa numbers climb again', Euractiv, 6 May 2026, <https://www.euractiv.com/news/eu-countries-split-as-russian-visa-numbers-climb-again/>.

[xiii] 'Россияне совершили рекордное число поездок в Китай' [Russians Made a Record Number of Trips to China], RIA, 7 February 2026, <https://ria.ru/20260207/kitay-2072889857.html>.

[xiv] 'Russia, China to conduct cross-year of education', Interfax, 12 May 2025, <https://interfax.com/newsroom/top-stories/111335/>; 'DAAD suspends work in Russia', German Academic Exchange Service, 13 February 2026, <https://www.daad.de/en/press-releases/2026/nach-einstufung-als-unerwuenschte-organisation-daad-stellt-arbeit-in-russland-ein/>.

[xv] R. Qi, 'Young Russians eager to learn Chinese', China Daily, 17 May 2024, <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202405/17/WS664693f3a31082fc043c7892.html>;

'Goethe-Institut ist aufgefordert, die Zahl seiner Mitarbeiter*innen in Russland zu reduzieren' [The Goethe-Institut Has Been Asked to Reduce the Number of Its Employees in Russia], Goethe Institute, 31 May 2023, <https://www.goethe.de/de/uun/prs/pma/p23/24802066.html>.

[xvi] 'Песков рассказал, что его дочь Надя заговорила по-китайски раньше, чем по-русски' [Peskov Said That His Daughter Nadya Began Speaking Chinese Before She Spoke Russian], TASS, 20 May 2026, <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/27469495>.

[xvii] 'Did Russia's Defense-Sector Boom Peak in 2025?', Moscow Times, 26 December 2025, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2025/12/26/did-russias-defense-sector-boom-peak-in-2025-a91555>.

[xviii] A. Prokopenko, 'Горная болезнь. Чем экономике России грозит продолжение войны' [Altitude Sickness: What Threat Does the Continuation of the War Pose to Russia's economy?], Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center, 10 March 2026, <https://carnegieendowment.org/ru/russia-eurasia/politika/2026/02/russia-economic-recession-outlook>.



[xix] 'Медведев назвал число набранных за 2025 год контрактников' [Medvedev Announced the Number of Contract Soldiers Recruited by 2025], RBC, 10 December 2025, https://www.rbc.ru/politics/10/12/2025/693973c39a794779671a6cc7?utm_referrer=.

[xx] A. Prokopenko, 'Ловушка застоя. Может ли российская экономика вернуться на гражданские рельсы' [The Stagnation Trap: Can the Russian Economy Return to Civilian Operations?], Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center, 16 September 2025, <https://carnegieendowment.org/ru/russia-eurasia/politika/2025/09/russia-economy-trap>.

[xxi] E. Kurbangaleeva, 'От курьеров до букмекеров. Чьи доходы в России увеличила война' [From Couriers to Bookmakers: Whose Incomes in Russia Have Been Boosted by the War?], Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center, 28 May 2024, <https://carnegieendowment.org/ru/russia-eurasia/politika/2024/05/russia-war-income>.

[xxii] 'Russia's Defense-Sector', Moscow Times.

[xxiii] 'Russian Economy Returns to Growth Despite Ukraine Drone Strikes', Bloomberg, 12 August 2026, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2026-08-12/russian-economy-poised-to-resume-growth-despite-drone-strikes>.

[xxiv] M. Seddon and A. Stognei, 'Russia overspends on Putin's war in Ukraine by \$28bn', Financial Times, 29 May 2026, <https://www.ft.com/content/93674b5c-06ea-4e49-a005-dc08e1091574?syn-25a6b1a6=1>.

[xxv] 'Persecution of the anti-war movement report: Three Years into Russia's Full-Scale Invasion of Ukraine. February 2025', OVD Info, 5 March 2025, https://ovd.info/en/antiwar_3_years? gl=; F. Krawatzek and G. Sasse, 'The Political Diversity of the New Migration from Russia Since February 2022', Centre for East European and International Studies (ZOIS), 12 September 2024, <https://www.zois-berlin.de/en/publications/zois-report/the-political-diversity-of-the-new-migration-from-russia-since-february-2022>.

[xxvi] M. Kolomychenko, 'Страна победившего VPN. Насколько успешна борьба российских властей с обходом блокировок' [The Country of the VPN Victory: How Successful Is the Russian Authorities' Fight Against Blocking?], Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center, 28 May 2026, <https://carnegieendowment.org/ru/russia-eurasia/politika/2026/05/russia-vpn-usage-political>.

[xxvii] A. Putilov, 'Медик науглил на штраф' [A Medic Googled the Fine], Kommersant, 10 December 2025, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/8272180?ysclid=mq55qygcp312858805>.



[xxviii] A. Prokopenko, 'No Exit: What a Minister's Death Reveals About the Russian Power Vertical', Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center, 9 July 2025, <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2025/07/russia-elites-internal-pressure>.

[xxix] D. Korsunskaya, 'Генпрокуратура РФ удвоила объем изъятий активов бизнеса в пользу государства' [The Russian Prosecutor General's Office Has Doubled the Volume of Business Asset Seizures in Favour of the State], Moscow Times, 19 March 2026, <https://ru.themoscowtimes.com/2026/03/19/genprokuratura-rf-udvoila-obem-izyatiy-aktivov-biznesa-v-polzu-gosudarstva-a190255>.

[xxx] T. Stanovaya, 'Russia's System Is Beginning to Eat Its Own', Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center, 14 October 2025, <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2025/10/russia-elites-hunt>.

[xxxi] 'СВО закончится — чем мы будем заниматься?' [What Are We Going to Busy Ourselves with After the End of the Special Military Operation?], Rutube, 28 July 2026, <https://ya.ru/video/preview/3240147891297586039>.

[xxxii] T. Stanovaya, 'A Fight for Survival: What Victory Looks Like to Putin', Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center, 23 February 2023, <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2023/02/a-fight-for-survival-what-victory-looks-like-to-putin?lang=en>.

[xxxiii] 'GDP, Current Prices', International Monetary Fund, 2026, <https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/NGDPD@WEO/OEMDC/ADVEC/WEOWORLD>.

[xxxiv] E. Teslova, 'Turkish-Russian trade volume in 2022 topped \$62B: Senior Moscow diplomat', Anadolu Agency, 27 May 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/economy/turkish-russian-trade-volume-in-2022-topped-62b-senior-moscow-diplomat/2907270>; 'Russian-Turkey trade turnover doubles to \$47 bln in 9M, could reach \$60 bln in year - Econ Ministry', Interfax, 21 October 2022, <https://interfax.com/newsroom/top-stories/84151/>.

[xxxv] A. Prokopenko, 'Russia's Return to Grain Deal Is a Sign of Turkey's Growing Influence', Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center, 8 November 2022, <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2022/11/russias-return-to-grain-deal-is-a-sign-of-turkeys-growing-influence>.

[xxxvi] 'Торговля России и Индии превысила 70 миллиардов долларов' [Trade Between Russia and India Exceeds \$70 Billion], RIA, 12 March 2025, <https://ria.ru/20250312/torgovlya-2004441112.html>.

[xxxvii] 'With \$30 bn bilateral trade turnover, India, Russia plan big for 2023', Business Standard, 24 December 2022, https://www.business-standard.com/article/international/with-30-bn-bilateral-trade-turnover-india-russia-plan-big-for-2023-122122400384_1.html.



[xxxviii] H. Duggal and M. Ali, 'How much do India, Russia, China trade and what goods do they buy?', Al Jazeera, 3 September 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/9/3/how-much-do-india-russia-china-trade-and-what-goods-do-they-buy>.

[xxxix] C. Mollan, 'India's largest conglomerate stops Russian oil imports amid global pressure', BBC News, 21 November 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c9d911e7nxeo>.

[xl] T. Umarov, 'The Shanghai Cooperation Organization Is Ineffective and Irrelevant', Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center, 5 July 2024, <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2024/07/sco-summit-china-russia>.

[xli] A. Nardelli, 'Russia Increases Reliance on China for Critical War Supplies', Bloomberg, 30 April 2026, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2026-04-30/russia-increases-reliance-on-china-for-critical-war-technologies>.

[xlii] 'China maintains position as Russia's largest partner — research', TASS, 6 March 2026, <https://tass.com/economy/2097881/amp>.

[xliii] G. Stolyarov and A. Marrow, 'Russia's slowing economic growth cuts demand for Chinese imports', Reuters, 21 April 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/russias-slowing-economic-growth-cuts-demand-chinese-imports-2025-04-21/>; '(2) 2025年12月进出口商品国别（地区）总值表（美元值）' [(2) Table of Total Value of Import and Export Commodities by Country (Region) in December 2025 (US Dollars)], General Administration of Customs of the People's Republic of China, 18 January 2026, http://www.customs.gov.cn/customs/2026-01/18/article_2026011810590510732.html.

[xliv] A. Gabuev, 'Did Putin Return From China Empty-Handed?', Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center, 26 May 2026, <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2026/05/china-russia-no-pipeline>.

[xlv] S. Vakulenko, 'What's Having More Impact on Russian Oil Export Revenues: Ukrainian Strikes or Rising Prices?', Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center, 20 April 2026, <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2026/04/russia-oil-gains-losses>.

[xlvi] 'Песков назвал Европу участником конфликта с Россией на стороне Украины' [Peskov Called Europe a Participant in the Conflict with Russia on Ukraine's Side], Kommersant, 29 May 2026, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/8693306?tg>.

[xlvii] A. Doval, '"Потенциальные цели": Москва опубликовала адреса компаний в ЕС, производящих дроны для Украины' ['Potential Targets': Moscow Publishes Addresses of EU Companies Producing Drones for Ukraine], Euronews, 16 April 2026, <https://ru.euronews.com/my-europe/2026/04/16/russia-europe-target-addresses>.



[xlviii] 'Путин пообещал зеркально отвечать на захват российских судов странами ЕС' [Putin Promised to Mirror the Capture of Russian Vessels by the EU States], Kommersant, 12 August 2026, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/8877802>.

[xlix] J. Gregory and J. Parker, 'Germany says Russia behind Leipzig airport drone attack', BBC News, 2 September 2026, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c5ylm3m67n2o>.

[l] S. Rainsford, "'No-one feels safe now": Residents of Romanian city hit by drone share fears', BBC News, 30 May 2026, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cvgzyp93jq1o>.

[li] 'Лавров: РФ имеет право рассматривать удары британских дронов как участие в войне' [Lavrov: Russia Has the Right to Treat the Strikes by British Drones as a Direct Participation in the War], Kommersant, 18 August 2026, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/8892356>.

[lii] A. Gabuev, 'I Played Putin in a War Game. The Most Dangerous Period May Be Coming', New York Times, 29 April 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/04/29/opinion/international-world/putin-russia-nato-attack.html>.

[liii] E. Burrows, 'Ukrainian drone pilots turn a military exercise in Sweden into a critical warning for NATO', Hill, 12 May 2026, <https://thehill.com/homenews/ap/ap-international/ap-nato-allies-war-game-tests-response-to-russia-and-to-us-support/>.

[liv] A. MacDonald, L. Seligman, and D. Michaels, 'U.S. and Ukrainian Forces Went Head-to-Head in an Exercise. Ukraine's Drones Won', Wall Street Journal, 13 August 2026, <https://www.wsj.com/politics/national-security/u-s-and-ukrainian-forces-went-head-to-head-in-an-exercise-ukraines-drones-won-cc3663d5>.



UNIVERSITY OF
OXFORD



Dahrendorf Programme
European Studies Centre
St Antony's College

62 Woodstock Road
Oxford OX2 6JF

dahrendorf.programme@sant.ox.ac.uk
sant.ox.ac.uk/european-studies/dahrendorf-programme