

# IGA-677 / RusNatSecPol / Lecture 24

## Russian-Ukrainian War, 2022-

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November 28, 2023

## Today's objectives

1. *Take stock*: battlefield dynamics since February 24, 2022
2. *Consider*: implications of military stalemate for future of war
3. *Discuss*: Ukraine's strategic options in 2024

# Russian-Ukrainian War in Context

## War Makes the State

1. Events of 2014 changed Ukraine & Russia
  - a) Ukraine: political generation change, emerging pro-West consensus
  - b) Russia: autocratic consolidation, diplomatic isolation, repression
  - c) both: militarization of society
2. Russia's Imperial Syndrome (Lectures 2, 3)
  - a) security from foreign threat requires strategic depth → territorial conquest
  - b) territorial conquest creates new political realities (e.g. new borders, new populations, new enemies)
  - c) adapting to these "new realities" transforms state and society (e.g. serfdom, colonialism, tyranny)
  - d) legitimacy of political-economic status quo rests on foreign threat



Figure 1: New colonies



Figure 2: New servitors



Figure 3: New powers



## Overview of Main Events

## Eve of invasion

(Feb 23 2022)

1. Russians occupy 7.5% of Ukraine's territory
2. Ukraine's most capable units operating in JFO area (Donets'k, Luhans'k)
3. static, defensive battles, artillery duels
4. 14,200 casualties (most in 2014-2015)

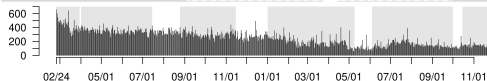
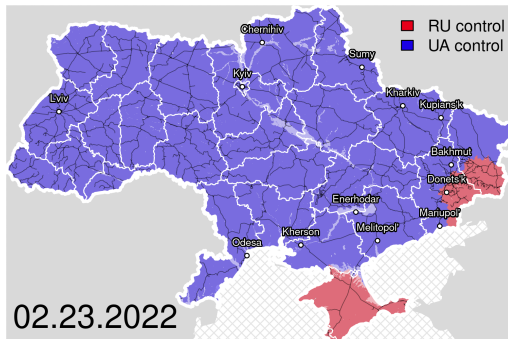


Figure 4: Operational tempo (events/day)

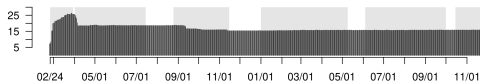


Figure 5: Percent territory under occupation

## Russia's objective

1. "demilitarization & denazification"
2. translation:
  - a) regime change
  - b) (in)direct rule

## Battle for Kyiv (Feb-Mar 2022)

1. Russians advance along four axes (N, NE, SE, SW)
2. supported by strikes against C2 & AAD
3. goal: seize Kyiv, overthrow govt
4. but plan based on flawed assumptions (no resistance)
5. successes in south
6. but northern front collapses
7. 26% under Russian control (at peak)

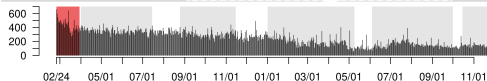
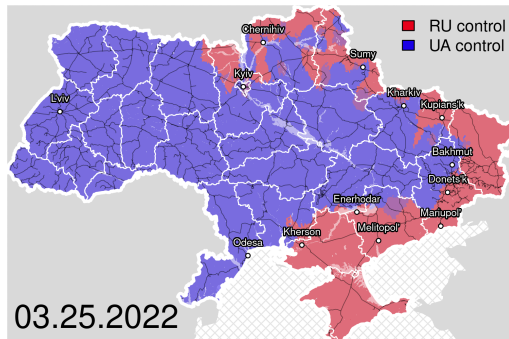


Figure 6: Operational tempo (events/day)

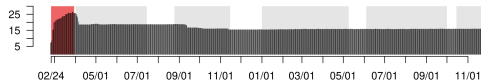


Figure 7: Percent territory under occupation

## Battle for Donbas

(Apr-Jul 2022)

1. switch to more targeted campaign to capture Donbas
2. Russians have 12:1 advantage in fires
3. but territorial gains limited
4. siege of Mariupol completed in May
5. Lysychans'k and Sievierodonets'k captured in June/July
6. 18% under Russian control (culmination)

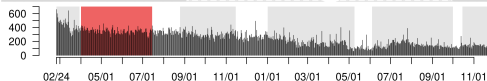
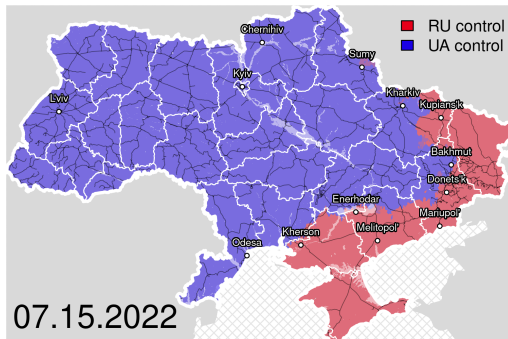


Figure 8: Operational tempo (events/day)

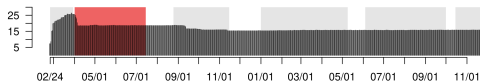


Figure 9: Percent territory under occupation

## Ukraine's fall offensive (Aug-Nov 2022)

1. using local numerical advantage, Ukraine liberates most of Kharkiv oblast
2. Kherson liberated in November
3. Russia shifts to defensive posture
4. Russia announces mobilization
5. Russian strike campaign vs. critical infrastructure
6. 15% under Russian control (culmination)

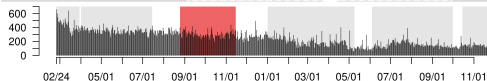
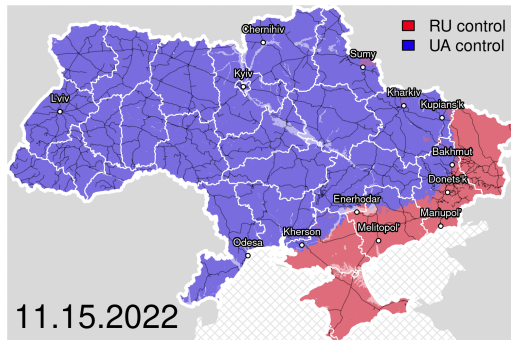


Figure 10: Operational tempo (events/day)

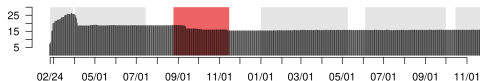


Figure 11: Percent territory under occupation

## Russia's winter offensive (Jan-May 2023)

1. limited to Donbas
2. attempt to envelop Ukrainian forces from NE and S
3. main efforts around Bakhmut, Svatove, Kreminna, Vuhledar, Avdiivka
4. envelopment not achieved
5. small territorial gains (around Bakhmut, Kupians'k)
6. 15.6% under Russian control (culmination)

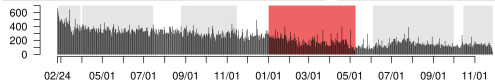
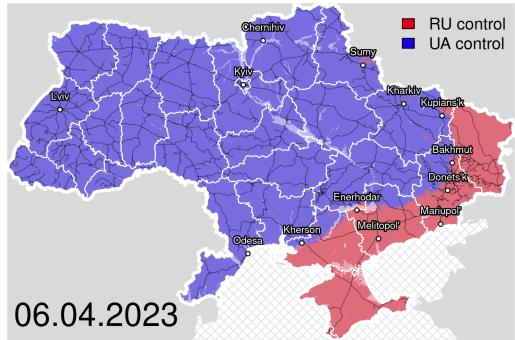


Figure 12: Operational tempo (events/day)

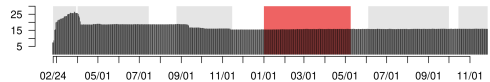


Figure 13: Percent territory under occupation

## Ukraine's 2023 offensive (Jun-Oct 2023)

1. three main axes:  
Melitopol, Berdyans'k,  
Bakhmut
2. heavily fortified  
Russian positions,  
dynamic defense
3. local Russian  
counteroffensive  
around Kupians'k
4. breakthrough not  
achieved
5. very small territorial  
gains (about 10 km)
6. 15.6% under Russian  
control (culmination)

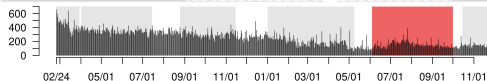
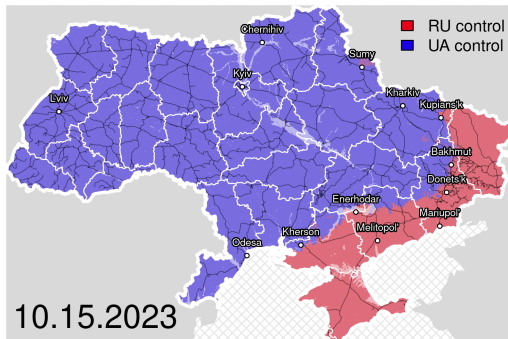


Figure 14: Operational tempo (events/day)

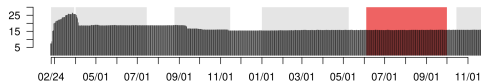


Figure 15: Percent territory under occupation

## Russia's fall offensive

(Oct-Nov 2023)

1. new push to envelop Avdiivka, re-capture Kupians'k
2. local pinning actions to divert Ukraine's resources
3. reliance on "meat storm" tactics, high casualties
4. Ukraine captures bridgehead on left bank of Dnipro
5. no breakthroughs yet
6. 15.6% under Russian control (current)

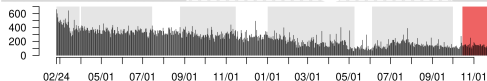
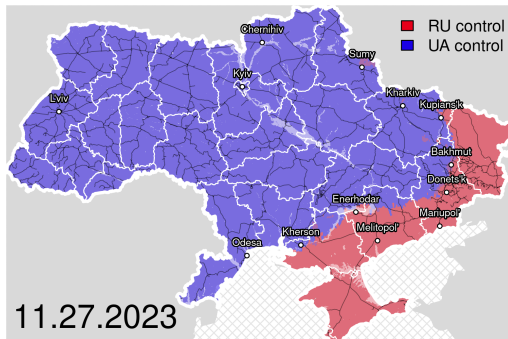


Figure 16: Operational tempo (events/day)

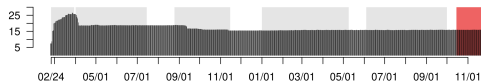


Figure 17: Percent territory under occupation



# Stalemate and Military Victory

## Is This a Stalemate?

## The stalemate debate

1. Very difficult for either side to achieve strategic breakthrough, given
  - a) current levels of mobilization
  - b) current reinforcement rates
  - c) current rates of supply
2. Causes of static front line
  - a) loss of Russian offensive potential
  - b) loss of experienced officers
  - c) difficulty of combined arms offensives vs. prepared defenses
  - d) lack of staff training, enabling capabilities on Ukraine side
3. But static  $\neq$  permanent
  - a) Russian material advantage will grow in 2024
  - b) Western support for Ukraine will grow more uncertain



Figure 18: He says it is



Figure 19: He disagrees

## Is “Military Victory” an Illusion?

## What is "Military Victory"?

1. Defining "victory" in war
  - a) attainment of political aims for which one went to war
  - b) can be obtained through force or coercive diplomacy
2. Defining "military victory"
  - a) imposition of political terms by rendering one's enemy incapable of further resistance.
  - b) can be obtained only through force

Pure "military victories" almost never happen

1. Strategic level
  - a) extremely rare for losing army to be fully (or mostly) destroyed in war
2. Tactical level
  - a) military formations are almost never fully annihilated in combat



Figure 20: Not happening

## Personnel losses in interstate wars since 1816



Figure 21: Total casualties per war

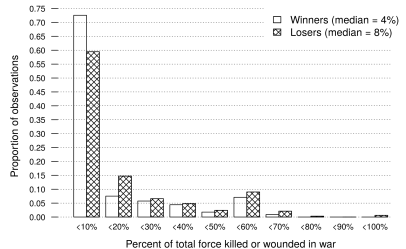


Figure 22: War winners vs. losers

Almost all **wars end** before belligerents exhaust military potential

- loss rates higher for median war loser than for winner, but...
- most belligerents since 1816 lost less than 10% of armed forces
- median war participant lost 4.5% of overall force strength

## Personnel losses in conventional ground battles since 1939

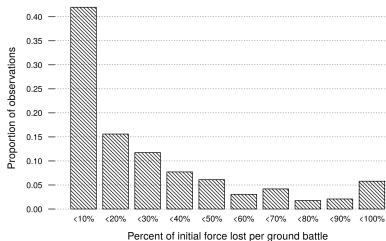


Figure 23: Casualties per battle



Figure 24: War winners vs. losers

Most **battles end** before belligerents exhaust military potential

- high losses more common in battles than in wars, but...
- median battle participant lost only 14% of available forces
- loss rates not strongly predictive of strategic-level outcomes

## How does this end?

1. Ending war is a choice
  - a) abstain/exit from combat
  - b) continue to fight
2. Bargaining model of war
  - a) almost all military outcomes, at all levels of war, are choices that reflect (*tacit*) bargaining
  - b) war begins if sides can't reach deal
  - c) fighting reveals information about capabilities & resolve, updating perceptions of bargaining leverage
  - d) war ends when these perceptions yield agreement on terms of deal
3. Purpose of violence
  - c) establish credibility of threats
  - d) ... not to neutralize enemy's capacity to continue fighting



Figure 25: Flight & fight



## What drives this choice?

1. Not simply a reflection of who would win a fight to the finish
  - a) choice is shaped not only by brute force destructive potential ("can we destroy them?")
  - b) but also by resolve and commitment to stakes ("is it worth it?")
  - c) example: U.S. in Afghanistan
2. Wars do not end in stalemate
  - a) stalemate creates uncertainty over who would prevail in long run
  - b) this makes bargains harder to reach (at least in short term)
  - c) negotiated settlement becomes possible when one side is unable & unwilling to maintain stalemate



Figure 26: Show the flag

## Discussion

What should Ukraine do in 2024?

1. Seek negotiated settlement (get best deal possible before military balance decisively shifts in Russia's favor)
2. Dig in (fortify defensive line, take static positions, conserve strength)
3. Attempt strategic breakthrough (counteroffensive 3.0, 4.0, 5.0, etc.)

# NEXT AND FINAL MEETING

*Group Activity 2 (Th, Nov. 30)*

- mission analysis staff briefing: **Suwałki Corridor Red Team**
- 75 minutes: 60 minute briefing + 15 minute Q&A
- what I will be looking for:
  - a) clarity
  - b) organization
  - c) cohesiveness
  - d) coherence
  - e) concision