

War Diplomacy in Ukraine: Causes and Endings of Russia's Military Invasions

Berma Klein Goldewijk

Abstract

How will the ongoing war end? Following Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, multiple unlikely endings are part of extensive public and academic debates: victory/defeat, an armistice/durable cease-fire, or a political settlement/peace deal. By stepping up to the challenge, this study examines war diplomacy in Ukraine and how it relates to the causes and endings of this war. A closer exploration of how Ukraine employs diplomacy in conducting war validates Tarak Barkawi's earlier statement: diplomacy is not the opposite of war. Diplomacy is not to be aligned with peace *against* war. The main objective is to advance scholarship on war diplomacy by outlining a basic explanatory framework to clarify how war diplomacy links with the causes and endings of war. The central question is: why is war diplomacy showing restraint towards ending the war that followed the Russian 2022 invasion of Ukraine, and what would it imply for explaining the causes of this war? The findings break new ground and trigger some novel inquiries.

Keywords: Ukraine, War diplomacy, Ending war, Causal effects

1. Introduction

Leo Tolstoy, well-known for his epic novel *War and Peace* (1869), had no confidence in the restraint of war. He 'understood that humanity in warfare, for all its virtues, opened up the possibility of a new vice – facilitating and legitimating war rather than controlling its outbreak or ending its continuation.'¹ Samuel Moyn, in his recent book *Humane*, recalls that killing in wars was 'nasty and brutish' at the battlefields of the Crimean War that Tolstoy witnessed in 1854-1855. For Tolstoy, the inhumanity of wars did not make them more infrequent or short: wars would remain and worsen as they broke out too regularly and lasted too long. He doubted Henry Dunant, who saw the battle of Solferino in 1859 and wanted to restrain war by binding it to rules and humanising its conduct. Tolstoy's anxieties were that making war more humane by setting rules brings an elusive peace. A century later,

¹ Moyn, *Humane*, 45.

political theorist Michael Walzer posited against Tolstoy that the ‘restraint of war’ by humanising its rules ‘is the beginning of peace.’² This dispute sets the stage for the core of the following contribution: the restraint of war and war diplomacy in an international rules-based order.

War diplomacy amid an evolving war is a controversial topic. Commonly, diplomacy is seen as the opposite of war. War marks the failure of diplomacy, and it is linked with a process towards peace.³ Moreover, diplomacy is widely regarded as an alternative to war. Diplomacy conventionally connects to negotiations by which states conduct their relations to move out of war and decide conflicts. Diplomacy scholars have reinforced this approach by aligning diplomacy with peace and excluding war from the definitions of diplomacy. Consequently, diplomacy tends to be defined as distinct from or opposed to war, as the way out of war, and the conduct of international relations and alliances towards peace agreements. However, as proactively undertaken by the Ukrainian government today, war diplomacy breaks the narrow war-peace binary. Tarak Barkawi already argued in 2015 that definitions of diplomacy that bring the term in contrast to war are untenable because diplomatic activities are central to the conduct of war.⁴ Diplomacy cannot be defined against war.

Ukraine’s war diplomacy, exercised since the onset of the Russian 2022 invasion, is part of significant resistance by Ukrainians. President Volodymyr Zelensky and Defence Minister Oleksii Reznikov, and those behind, relentlessly and publicly reveal the nexus between war and diplomacy. They coordinate with international partners, negotiate and advance political decisions, and successfully strengthen the ongoing military, humanitarian, legal and economic support. Ukraine’s conduct of war diplomacy enables international coordination across different spheres and has persuaded Western governments to increase and consolidate their support.

Two principal positions on ending this war appear irreconcilable in public and scholarly discourse. The one focuses on increasing and maintaining Ukraine’s military support to strengthen its position on the battlefield towards victory – the other aims at ending this war with an armistice, possibly combined with a political settlement. The one side recalls Russia’s ongoing territorial invasions and demands improved Western weapons supply to Ukraine. The other side wants to stop the massive killing, prevent a long war, and avoid further escalation towards an outright confrontation between world powers by calling for a cease-fire or a political settlement. In both positions, a seemingly paradoxical thesis is present. The one manifests the paradoxical suggestion that this war’s end will be accelerated by

² Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, 335.

³ Barkawi, “Diplomacy, war, and world politics,” 55; Brown, “Diplomacy,” 3695.

⁴ Barkawi, “Diplomacy, war, and world politics,” 56.

supplying weapons to Ukraine. The other advances the paradoxical proposition that all wars, this war too, must end at the negotiation table.

In this setting, the 'central' question is: why is war diplomacy showing restraint towards ending the war that followed the Russian 2022 invasion of Ukraine, and what would it imply for explaining the causes of this war? The underlying assumption here is that the dynamics on the battlefield both advance and restrain diplomatic efforts: it reinforces Ukraine's war diplomacy with various international coalitions but also reduces external diplomatic involvement by international alliances in the possible endings of this war.

The methodological approach followed is a case study, though the term as such is a 'definitional morass'.⁵ Whereas it is commonly acknowledged that significant empirical knowledge comes from case studies, the 'method' tends to be held in low regard, as John Gerring recalls: 'It has a miserable status in various disciplines.' In line with Kathleen Eisenhardt and Melissa Graebner, the case study here will be a research strategy to create theoretical propositions based on an analytical unit from a real-world context and inductively grounded in empirical evidence.⁶ The selected analytical unit is Ukraine's war diplomacy. The onset proposition is that this case is representative of the 'causal effects' of international diplomatic restraint vis-à-vis the potential endings of this war.

Hew Strachan advances the theoretical proposition that the 'continuum from causes to outcomes rarely holds'⁷ in matters of war and policy. It means that the endings of war do not necessarily reflect its origins. He argues that after first military operational successes, wars may transform into protracted and indecisive conflicts that question 'any sort of continuum between causes, course and consequence'.⁸ With Strachan's postulate in mind, this study focuses on war diplomacy and how it links to the causes and endings of the war in Ukraine.

The 'main objective' is to advance scholarship on war diplomacy by outlining a basic explanatory framework to clarify why and how it links with the causes and endings of war. This study mainly outlines some core issues and requires much more comprehensive research: for now, the 'empirical' basis for investigating war diplomacy in Ukraine during an evolving war is minimal and incomplete, if not unachievable. Moreover, the lack of accessible data is nothing unusual during wars: scholarship on war and diplomacy meshes with and accounts for such uncertainties and contingencies.⁹

⁵ Gerring, "What is a case study," 342.

⁶ Eisenhardt and Graebner, "Theory building from cases," 25-26, 29.

⁷ Strachan, "The causes of war," 12.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Röscher, "Realism, the war," 203.

The interdisciplinary approach here connects the disciplines of international relations (IR), international law, and social and political sciences. It draws primarily on literature from the subfields of war studies and diplomatic studies but also from security, strategic, and intelligence studies. Next to academic sources, think tank reports, government documents, and policy speeches will be used. The first section explores international war diplomacy in Ukraine and how it relates to the causes of this war. The second section examines Ukraine's current war diplomacy and how it connects to the trajectories for ending this war. This Introduction has outlined the problem setting and basic theoretical frame, while the Conclusions present the main findings and further research.

2. Causes of the war and diplomacy

Several explanations of the causes of the war in Ukraine have emerged in the years leading up to and after the Russian 2022 full-scale invasion. They vary from Russia's declining position in shifting powers in the international order, to increased geopolitical tensions, domestic political conditions, autocratic tendencies in the Russian regime, historical worldview influences, and overreach towards Greater Russia.¹⁰ Two leading causes of the war in Ukraine will be selected here for further exploration: the Russian territorial invasions and the expansion of NATO. First, they have taken centre stage in the public domain and academic and policy debates. Second, these two represent a much broader set of causes and meet the criterion of high representativeness in terms of causal effects. Third, they have multiple implications for this study on war diplomacy.

2.1 Russian territorial invasions

The first cause concerns Russian territorial intrusions, culminating in the February 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine. It also involves Russia's February 2014 invasion and March 2014 annexation of Crimea and the September 2022 annexation of the four oblasts in the Eastern part of Ukraine: Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson. The Russian 2022 all-out invasion and military offensive in Ukraine must be regarded as an act of aggression.¹¹ This invasion was 'unprovoked, illegal, and morally repugnant.'¹² According to Russia's document submitted to the

¹⁰ Dunford, "Causes of the crisis"; Sæther, "War of broken fraternity"; Götz and Staun, "Why Russia attacked"; Mearsheimer, "The causes and consequences"; Walt, "Liberal illusions caused"; Hauter, "How the war began"; Götz, "Putin, the state, and war."

¹¹ Welfens, *Russia's Invasion of Ukraine*.

¹² Charap and Priebe, "Avoiding a long war," 2.

International Court of Justice (ICJ),¹³ its main 'justification' for the invasion was exercising the right of self-defence against the crime of genocide allegedly committed by Ukraine. For this, Russia's ICJ document, which includes Vladimir Putin's address to the citizens of Russia on 24th February 2022,¹⁴ refers to anticipatory self-defence of the Russian Federation and collective defence of the self-proclaimed governments in the four Donbas regions, invoking Article 51 (Chapter VII) of the UN Charter. Furthermore, in the ICJ document, Russia justifies its special military operation by referring to the NATO bombing of Serbia (1999). The included address by Putin invokes that US-led interventions in Iraq, Libya, and Syria were also exercised in the name of Western self-defence and the defence of human rights in these countries.¹⁵ In various speeches, Putin and Sergei Lavrov denote that such Western interventions and violations of international law have generated in Russia deep distrust in a multilateral system where the UN Security Council is continually bypassed.¹⁶

This first cause of war, successive Russian territorial invasions of Ukraine, is a grave threat to international security and peace and is shocking because of its anachronistic nature, as Tanisha Fazal observes. Territorial conquest, one country trying to conquer another with internationally recognised established borders, seemed to belong to the past of former centuries.¹⁷ Russia's invasions of Ukraine are a flagrant violation of universally established core principles of international order and law in the UN Charter, including the norm against territorial conquest¹⁸ and states' territorial integrity and sovereignty,¹⁹ which was breached by annexing Crimea and the four Eastern regions.²⁰ The accusation that Russia has committed a 'crime of aggression' by attacking another state's territory appears to be the most favourable path to hold Russia accountable through international criminal law. However, though the crime of aggression is included in Art. 5 of the Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), where it relates to *jus ad bellum*, the ICC lacks jurisdiction and has no authority to investigate and prosecute Russia for such a crime – though legal openings are under investigation.²¹ Possibilities for prosecuting the crime of aggression by amending ICC's Statute or creating an international, *ad hoc* or hybrid criminal tribunal are being widely explored.

¹³ Russian Federation, "Document (with Annexes)," 4.

¹⁴ Putin, "Address by the President," 2022b.

¹⁵ Russian Federation, "Document (with Annexes)" 11-12; Putin, "Address by the President," 2022b.

¹⁶ Lavrov, "Genuine multilateralism," 110; Lavrov, "On law, rights," 233-234; Putin, "Address by the President," 2022b; Lonardo, *Russia's 2022 War against Ukraine*, 61.

¹⁷ Fazal, "The return of conquest?" 20.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Salari and Hosseini, "Russia's attack on Ukraine."

²⁰ Fazal, "The return of conquest?" 24-26.

²¹ Salari and Hosseini, "Russia's attack on Ukraine," 13, 21.

2.2 *Eastward expansion of NATO*

The second cause is the much-debated expansion of NATO in Eurasia and, to a lesser extent, Ukraine's connections with the EU. Russia repeatedly invokes NATO expansion to justify its interventions. It also appears as the core of explanations by some realist thinkers in IR, notably the US political scientist John Mearsheimer.

In December 2021, when Russia amassed military troops on the Ukrainian border and pressures escalated, Russia's Foreign Ministry presented an ultimatum as a diplomatic offensive directly addressed to the US²² and NATO.²³ It concerned legally binding 'security guarantees' for Russia that the West should agree on: NATO should not admit any new members, including Ukraine; NATO should refrain from any form of military activity in Ukraine and former Soviet states; and the US was to withdraw its nuclear weapons from Europe. Diplomatic exchanges on this ultimatum failed. For Russia, the ultimatum had to express that NATO enlargement is a risk or threat and that the rules-based international order functions to its permanent disadvantage, as Russian Military Doctrines and National Security Strategies recall since 1993.²⁴ Russia's deep-seated sense of insecurity due to perceived threats by NATO,²⁵ its alleged entitlement to a sphere of influence in Eurasia, and its basic security needs caused it to challenge the international order by invading Ukraine, seen to be drifting to the West.²⁶

For John Mearsheimer, the main cause for the current war in Ukraine is Western expansion, explicitly since NATO's April 2008 Bucharest Summit announcement of a potential NATO membership of Ukraine and Georgia. Already in 2014, when Russia annexed Crimea, Mearsheimer wrote that the 'taproot of the trouble is NATO enlargement, the central element of a larger strategy to move Ukraine out of Russia's orbit.'²⁷ In 2022, after Russia's full-scale invasion, he noted that the 'taproot of the crisis is the American-led effort to make Ukraine a Western bulwark on Russia's borders.'²⁸ His basic argument concerns international stability, the potential threat that great powers are sensitive to in their neighbourhood,²⁹ and the provocative effect of NATO enlargement in the Russian sphere of influence.³⁰ For Mearsheimer, the West's 'fault' with NATO expansion is this: treating Russia as a rising power that

²² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (2021b), Draft Treaty.

²³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (2021a), Draft Agreement.

²⁴ Götz and Staun, "Why Russia attacked," 484.

²⁵ Putin, "Address by the President," 2022a; Putin, "Address by the President" 2022b.

²⁶ Götz and Staun, "Why Russia attacked," 483, 486; Mulligan, "Erosions, ruptures," 261.

²⁷ Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine crisis," 77.

²⁸ Mearsheimer, "The causes and consequences," 18.

²⁹ Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine crisis," 82.

³⁰ Mearsheimer, "The causes and consequences," 22, 25.

needs to be contained, not seeing it as a declining power.³¹ However, Mearsheimer could also have reversed his argument to the opposite effect: Russia caused the West to expand NATO because it was in decline, thus posing a specific threat. Anyhow, Mearsheimer sees no end to this war unless Ukraine pushes for the state's neutrality by divorcing itself from the West.³²

Various others have come in such classic battles on geopolitics, great powers, and spheres of influence involving two schools of thought in IR, the liberals and realists.³³ Above all, realism seems to be back in the public and academic spotlight.³⁴ Stephen Walt attributes the cause to Western 'hubris, wishful thinking, and liberal idealism,'³⁵ or 'idealistic illusions' of 'open-ended NATO enlargement.'³⁶ Following the widely published Russian ultimatum and Mearsheimer's and Walt's statements after the 2022 invasion, fiery public debates reignited on this take of the leading cause for the war: NATO expansion as the West's principal responsibility and the West's fault.

Underlying such ardent debates on NATO expansion as the main war's cause is a moral question with political consequences. Certainly, Mearsheimer raised a relevant core issue: the Western responsibility for the causes of the Russian war in Ukraine. This question requires much further debate. However, his 'normative judgement' that the cause of this war is the West's fault seems incorrect: Russia's invasions and annexations are not more reasonable or less to be politically condemned because, purportedly, others (the West) have done worse. The argument on the morally offensive character of NATO's expansion in the Russian sphere of influence fails precisely at this point of comparative reasoning. Next, for a moral condemnation of NATO enlargement as the West's fault, the wrong consequences of NATO's interventions must be causally connected to Russia's invasions of Ukraine: the appropriateness of this can be disputed. Remarkably, the Russian Federation uses the same sort of comparative reasoning with normative judgements on the wrongs done by the other side. The Russian ICJ document, in its included February 2022 address by Putin, compares the legitimacy of the operation in Ukraine to Western interventions and the use of military power in Iraq, Libya, and Syria, thus suggesting Western double standards and hypocrisy.³⁷ However, moral condemnation regarding such wrongs fails when comparisons of dissimilar contexts and statements of facts produce generalised normative claims.

³¹ Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine crisis," 83, 88.

³² Mearsheimer, "The causes and consequences," 24.

³³ Edinger, "Offensive ideas," 1873-1874.

³⁴ Rösch, "Realism, the war," 203.

³⁵ Walt, "Liberal illusions caused."

³⁶ Walt, "Why do people hate realism."

³⁷ Russian Federation, "Document (with Annexes)"; Putin, "Address by the President," 2022b.

2.3 Diplomacy in Ukraine and the causes

As Barkawi asserts, diplomacy cannot be put against war to align it with peace. Diplomacy is not the opposite of war, and diplomatic activities are not necessarily an alternative to war: they are central to conducting war and making world politics.³⁸ In war and conflict, there has always been diplomacy. How has Ukrainian diplomacy evolved since its independence in 1990, by what means has it met the earlier effects of the two causes of the war examined above, and how has international diplomacy become involved?

In 1994, the *Budapest Memorandum* granted Ukraine's territorial integrity and explicitly established extended security assurances to Ukraine by Russia, the UK and the US: this was part of arrangements by which Ukraine transferred the Soviet-made nuclear weapons on its territory to Russia.³⁹ The UK and the US entered diplomatic exchanges after bilateral negotiations between Russia and Ukraine were blocked when Ukraine did not obtain guarantees for its security from Russia by handing over nuclear weapons to a potential adversary.⁴⁰ The 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit offered Ukraine the first serious prospects for accession to NATO. However, few countries in the West delivered on the repeated promises of NATO membership: France and Germany opposed it in 2008, and the Western partnership failed to ensure a stable security partnership for Ukraine.⁴¹ Fortified after 2008, Russia consistently and frequently reported that it would regard Ukraine's potential NATO membership as threatening its security, initially opposing it with diplomatic means.⁴²

A new chain of diplomatic negotiations followed after Russia annexed Crimea in March 2014 and started a secessionist war in Ukraine's eastern Donbas region,⁴³ by which it responded to the Euromaidan protests and the ousting of pro-Russian Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich in February 2014. By then, diplomacy had advanced in two forms to safeguard the sovereignty and independence of Ukraine and prevent further escalation. The May 2014 *Trilateral Contact Group*, which included Ukraine, Russia, and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), addressed the tactical and security aspects of the conflict region. The June 2014 *Normandy Format* between Ukraine, Russia, France, and Germany addressed talks on a cease-fire and broader strategic and political issues towards a

³⁸ Barkawi, "Diplomacy, war, and world politics," 55-56.

³⁹ Yost, "The Budapest Memorandum," 508.

⁴⁰ Shymanska, "Rethinking the Budapest Memorandum."

⁴¹ Edinger, "Offensive ideas," 1875; Welfens, *Russia's Invasion of Ukraine*, 53.

⁴² Welfens, *Russia's Invasion of Ukraine*, 50.

⁴³ Eichensehr, "Contemporary practice," 595.

settlement. It negotiated two rounds of cease-fires in the Donbas, formalised in two *Minsk Agreements* of September 2014 and February 2015. This *Normandy Format*, clearly including Russia, overtly acknowledged the occupied regions of Donbas as belonging to the territory of the Ukrainian state, to be returned through a political process.

Various issues, however, undermined the implementation of the Minsk Agreements. First, Russia agreed to talk on the Donbas but ruled out talks on Crimea. Second, Russia had a constant ambiguous status as a mediator and belligerent while denying its role in Ukraine and calling it an internal conflict between Kyiv and the Russian-backed rulers of Donetsk and Luhansk.⁴⁴ Third, the parties never agreed on the sequence of political and security-related provisions. The Minsk Agreements fully elapsed after Russia formally recognised the independence of Donetsk and Luhansk on 21st February 2022, three days before its full-scale 2022 invasion, subsequently annexing Ukraine's four eastern oblasts in September 2022.

In hindsight, the above-outlined diplomatic developments in the decades before the Russian 2022 invasion have produced an overall 'negative-sum' diplomatic outcome due to the 'zero-sum' diplomatic approaches pursued by Russia, the US and EU countries. Timothy Colton and Samuel Charap, in their 2017 book, analyse this zero-sum conduct as a policy where each partner wanted to win and defeat the other.⁴⁵ Ultimately, this resulted in a negative-sum scenario, where all parties were disadvantaged, the outcomes were ruinous, international security deteriorated, and each 'ends up worse off at the end of the day'.⁴⁶

2.4 Subconclusion

The two leading causes above have generated competing explanations with causal effects. A clear picture of the implications of both causes and how they precisely interact has not yet emerged from the Ukraine war and requires much further research. At this point, the question can be raised whether the alleged threat of Russia by NATO expansion meets the specific standard of a 'just cause' for Russia's all-out territorial invasion of Ukraine. Though the cause of NATO expansion may have been made intelligible, as explained before, this does not make it a just cause for massive territorial invasions. Russia may have legitimate interests regarding its international status and sphere of influence in Eurasia. However, initiating an unprovoked aggressive territorial invasion of Ukraine offers, by contrast, Ukraine a

⁴⁴ Fischer, "Peace talks," 2.

⁴⁵ Charap and Colton, *Everyone Loses*, 23, 86, 93, 95, 104-105, 122, 151.

⁴⁶ Charap and Colton, *Everyone Loses*, 20.

just cause to defend itself. At this stage in the war, the act of aggression still remains open-ended unless accountability can be established for the crime of aggression.

The irreconcilable positions of Russia and Ukraine became clear immediately after Ukraine's independence in 1990, most notably after the 1994 Budapest Memorandum. After negotiations on surrendering Soviet nuclear weapons left on Ukraine's territory, Russia, the US, and European countries failed to implement Ukraine's security guarantees in the Memorandum. With the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Russia severely violated the Budapest Memorandum and raised general doubts about the reliability of international security assurances.⁴⁷ In addition, few countries in the West delivered on repeated promises of Ukraine's NATO membership after NATO's 2008 Bucharest Summit. The 2014-2015 Minsk Agreements became obsolete after Russia's full invasion in 2022.

In sum, the constantly failing implementation of Russian and Western security assurances to be provided to Ukraine became typical of international diplomatic approaches since Ukraine's independence. In hindsight, international diplomacy manifestly failed as an instrument for the prevention of successive Russian territorial claims in Ukraine.

3. Endings of the war and diplomacy

Where diplomacy is associated with ending war and achieving peace, it is considered war's alternative. However, diplomacy is not to be regarded 'as inherently opposed to war'.⁴⁸ In such efforts, a faulty premise,⁴⁹ as Barkawi calls it, is at work of equating diplomacy with paths 'out' of war. It does not mean, of course, that diplomatic initiatives to promote peace should be disregarded. The point is that approaches of diplomacy-towards-peace tend to make diplomacy the 'antidote' to war. The objection is that such approaches inherently risk overlooking and neglecting Ukraine's war diplomacy as it has evolved since the Russian 2022 invasion. This war requires a reconceptualisation of diplomacy as integral to war and part of its conduct. In this sense, it has been argued that war diplomacy is part of making and using force.⁵⁰

To date, neither Ukraine, Russia, the US, the EU, nor China have publicly envisaged when and how precisely this war will end: no explicit exit strategies for withdrawing military support from Ukraine have been designed. By contrast, the

⁴⁷ Yost, "The Budapest Memorandum," 530.

⁴⁸ Barkawi, "Diplomacy, war, and world politics," 56.

⁴⁹ Barkawi, "Diplomacy, war, and world politics," 59.

⁵⁰ Barkawi, "Diplomacy, war, and world politics," 57.

explicit position of the US, expressed by President Joe Biden, is to support Ukraine 'for as long as it takes.'⁵¹

Samuel Charap and Miranda Priebe from the RAND Corporation have elaborated three core trajectories for ending this war: a decisive victory, a truce (armistice), or a political settlement.⁵² Their primary interest is to avoid protracted conflict to minimise further escalation risks: a long war in Ukraine would involve increasing military, economic, and human costs and threats of nuclear escalation. In their view, such risks outweigh the possible benefits of a long war. The three trajectories for ending this war will be briefly outlined below, partially following Charap and Priebe but adding other authors, after which the feasibility of each will be assessed.

3.1 *Trajectory victory*

The victory of one side over another implies defeat. It usually means reclaiming or taking back occupied territories and regime change by installing a new leadership.⁵³ Moreover, a 'decisive victory' is linked to the defeat of the old order, ultimately overthrowing a losing state, as John Ikenberry,⁵⁴ Tarak Barkawi and Shane Brighton note.⁵⁵ Russian state-owned news agency RIA Novosti leaked that Putin's original objective was to overthrow Kyiv in a few days, remove the state leadership, and then announce a new world order.⁵⁶ Putin quickly abandoned this maximalist objective⁵⁷ but most likely persists in the aims to end Western global dominance and ensure that 'Greater Russia' returns to its 'rightful position' as a world power in the international order.⁵⁸ However, an overall Russian decisive victory, in the above meaning of complete territorial conquest and regime change in Ukraine, seems unlikely at this point of the war.

At this stage, a decisive victory for Ukraine is also improbable. Even a complete territorial reconquest of 'all' of Ukraine's territory, including Crimea and the Donbas areas Russia has occupied since 2014, would 'not' constitute a decisive victory, according to Charap and Priebe.⁵⁹ They argue that forcing the Russian military out of Ukraine would not produce such a decisive outcome because of Russia's

⁵¹ The White House, "Remarks by President Biden."

⁵² Charap and Priebe, "Avoiding a long war."

⁵³ Charap and Priebe, "Avoiding a long war," 11-13.

⁵⁴ Ikenberry, *After victory*, 74-75.

⁵⁵ Barkawi and Brighton, "Powers of war," 138, 140.

⁵⁶ Johnson, "Dysfunctional warfare," 5.

⁵⁷ Freedman, "Why war fails: Russia's invasion," 21.

⁵⁸ Johnson (2022), *Dysfunctional warfare*, p. 5.

⁵⁹ Charap and Priebe, "Avoiding a long war," 12.

continuing future threats of reinvasion or other large-scale offensives. For a decisive victory, ‘Ukraine would have to deny Russia the *ability* to contest its territorial control [*italics mine*],’⁶⁰ which means the military destruction of Russia’s capability to conduct a war. Moreover, political regime change with Putin’s replacement in Russia is neither a guarantee for the end of Russia’s territorial control in Ukraine nor the end of the war. In addition, Ukraine’s stated goal is not regime change in Russia but, as explicitly voiced since 22nd December 2022, to retake Ukraine’s territory, including Crimea and the occupied Donbas areas.⁶¹

3.2 *Trajectory armistice*

The second way to end this war is through an armistice or truce agreement as an enduring cease-fire. An armistice would freeze the frontlines, bring them under highly militarised external control, and end the active military combat between Russia and Ukraine in a long-term perspective. It would establish various *mechanisms*, such as demilitarised zones and monitoring instruments, to ensure compliance with the agreement and prevent warfare from flaring up.⁶² An armistice does not address the causes of the war, leaving the Russian invasions and territorial claims unresolved. It would also leave aside the political drivers and grievances beyond territorial issues, such as reparations by Russia for the suffering and damage inflicted on Ukraine. A series of partial or temporary cease-fires or operational stops might precede such a truce as, for example, the third UN-Arab League Joint Special Envoy to Syria accomplished.⁶³

However, an armistice would be ‘morally’ objectionable since it would institutionalise or consolidate the current territorial status quo by durably freezing the frontlines. In this perspective, Putin called for a cease-fire in his official speech at the September 2022 annexation of the four oblasts: he was ready to negotiate on the provision that Ukraine unequivocally recognised the annexation.⁶⁴ Ukraine’s diplomatic position is that it will not talk about peace until Russia has completely withdrawn, including from the annexed four regions in Eastern Ukraine and Crimea. Considering the two positions, it would be morally abject to freeze the Russian illegal annexation of territories since it would amount to subordination under aggressive totalitarian rule and leave excessive violence and war crimes without accountability. In light of the above-mentioned first cause for this war

⁶⁰ Charap and Priebe, “Avoiding a long war,” 13.

⁶¹ Charap and Priebe, “Avoiding a long war,” 12-13.

⁶² Charap and Priebe, “Avoiding a long war,” 13-14.

⁶³ Klein Goldewijk, “International mediation,” 116.

⁶⁴ Putin, “Signing of treaties.”

(Russia's territorial invasions), the basic conditions for any form of an armistice are guaranteed sovereignty, territorial integrity, and cultural-historical recognition of all members of all concerned regions without forceful integration.

3.3 Trajectory political settlement

The third path to ending this war is a political settlement (peace treaty) involving international diplomacy by Ukraine, Russia, and guarantor states. It would comprise an armistice (as an enduring cease-fire) and address some core political issues. Not all issues would have to come to the table: the status of the annexed territories could be left unresolved because a settlement on sovereign independence and pre-2014 territories would require unlikely negotiated compromises between Ukraine and Russia.⁶⁵ Advances could be made in such a settlement on reparations to compensate for the destruction of Ukraine or on conditions for relief of Western sanctions on Russia. The question here is whether Western alliances should lift sanctions on Russia until and unless Putin recognises Ukraine's pre-2014 borders.⁶⁶

The most awkward question concerning negotiations regards this issue of 'concessions.' For now, discussions on which concessions Russia would guarantee to end this war or what Ukraine is prepared to concede are inappropriate and morally inept. The leading question should not be what might compel Russia into negotiations and concessions since any untimely compromise will protract this war. Additionally, it has been argued that negotiation is impossible until Russia assesses its prospects to be deteriorating. Proposals emerged, including by Jack Watling, that the West should convince the Kremlin that its prospects in a protracted war are limited and its position on the battlefield continues deteriorating.⁶⁷ Along the same lines, others refer to China and argue that if China's support of Russia could be weakened significantly by the West, Putin would come under substantial pressure to adapt to negotiations towards a political settlement. Nonetheless, this presupposes that the West will re-establish diplomatic, political, and economic relations with Russia under Putin's regime, which seems unlikely.⁶⁸ A political settlement or a formal peace agreement might eventually be inevitable, but reaching such a diplomatic outcome to end the war is premature and improbable in the short term.

Finally, the three trajectories for ending this war (by victory, armistice, or political settlement) are distinguished and differentiated, though no sharp divisions can be drawn: there is always overlap. Moreover, combinations exist between victory,

⁶⁵ Charap and Priebe, "Avoiding a long war," 14.

⁶⁶ Fazal, "The return of conquest?" 26.

⁶⁷ Watling, "Ending Russia's invasion."

⁶⁸ Welfens, *Russia's Invasion of Ukraine*, 163.

a longstanding cease-fire, and a political agreement. As Jack Watling pointedly writes, it is a false dichotomy to maintain ‘that it is for the military to deliver victory and for the diplomats to deliver a lasting political settlement.’⁶⁹

The three forms of ending the war may align with but are certainly not identical to the strategic directions Ukraine’s war diplomacy takes. In its war diplomacy, Ukraine determines how much risk and loss it is prepared to accept and how it responds to the interests of partnerships and antagonists that also influence the course of the war. The question thus remains to what extent this war will be heading towards outcomes that benefit the West and other major powers.

3.4 Diplomacy in Ukraine and the endings

The earlier discussed binary understanding of war and peace profoundly affects diplomacy. This war-peace dichotomy prevents the conception that part of the role of diplomacy is, as Barkawi contends, ‘the organisation and facilitation of the coercive capacities essential to the construction and maintenance of international and local orders.’⁷⁰ In the decades leading up to Russia’s 2022 invasion, as shown in the former section of this paper, there have been some international diplomatic efforts to strengthen coercive capacities and deter Russia from Ukraine. These efforts, however, failed to prevent the full-scale invasion and annexations.

In February-March 2022, several ‘bilateral negotiations’ on an armistice between Ukraine and Russia took place in Belarus and Turkey. They resulted in Ukraine’s ten-point Istanbul Communique of 29th March 2022.⁷¹ Mediated by Turkey, this document is Ukraine’s response to the Russian ultimatum: it offers far-reaching concessions under an open number of guarantor states, including Russia. Ukraine’s Istanbul Communique proclaims Ukraine’s permanently neutral status by remaining nonaligned with any blocs and not joining military coalitions or hosting foreign military bases. It requires, in turn, international legal security guarantees from guarantor states under a Treaty, their promotion of Ukraine’s membership in the EU, and their armed security assistance when under armed attack. It also proposes clarifying the status of Crimea within fifteen years by diplomatic and not military means and having the remaining points resolved by the two presidents.⁷² The Communique speaks about the withdrawal of troops but does not include the demand that Russian forces depart behind the 2022 pre-invasion lines. In April 2022, Ukraine immediately followed up and demanded a cease-fire

⁶⁹ Watling, “Ending Russia’s invasion.”

⁷⁰ Barkawi, “Diplomacy, war, and world politics,” 56.

⁷¹ Faridaily, “Ukraine’s 10-point plan.”

⁷² Faridaily, “Ukraine’s 10-point plan.”

agreement with Russia and a security treaty with a group of guarantor states, but now excluding Russia. Nevertheless, Russia insisted on its role in providing Ukraine with security guarantees through the UN Security Council.⁷³ Russia also maintained its demands from the ultimatum of December 2021 on security guarantees for Russia from the US and NATO. Ongoing diplomatic exchanges were deadlocked when Putin proclaimed the annexation of Ukraine's four oblasts, Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson, on 30th September 2022. In response, on 4th October 2022, President Zelensky signed a decree rejecting further direct talks.⁷⁴

Diplomacy during war usually means that the parties continue communication even when relations are suspended.⁷⁵ Backchannel or shuttle diplomacy is resorted to when relations are absent or strained. On a few occasions, this has contributed to concrete but limited results. Amid the ongoing war, Turkey and the UN mediated that Ukraine and Russia agreed and disagreed on the reopening of Ukrainian grain exports via the Black Sea.⁷⁶ This initiative did not require Russia or Ukraine to compromise on broader strategic interests. In addition, from 2022 through 2023, various international diplomatic initiatives were taken towards negotiations on specific aspects or a wider peace settlement, among others proposed by heads of state from Turkey, France, China,⁷⁷ and a group of African countries. However, these proposals remain explorative as yet and offer little prospects as long as Russia occupies large parts of Ukraine.

The war diplomacy strategy by Ukraine seems to be composed of some core elements. First, since Russia's invasion of Crimea in 2014 and, more particularly, since 24th February 2022, Ukraine's war diplomacy is survival diplomacy that is primarily 'conditional on the battlefield' and international military support. Ukraine has coordinated its international diplomacy with numerous alliances, including the Ukraine Defence Contact Group, whose Ramstein meetings have become most influential since 26th April 2022. They have consolidated ever-expanding Western military backing and weapon systems for Ukraine. Second, as from the Russian 2022 invasion, Ukraine tends to use an 'incremental approach' to war diplomacy: it has adopted a stepwise and aggregate diplomatic strategy to defend the country and prepare counteroffensives.⁷⁸ With this type of war diplomacy, Ukraine has decisively influenced substantial foreign and defence policy changes in Western countries, such as the *Zeitenwende* in Germany.⁷⁹ Moreover, it is transforming

⁷³ Fischer, "Peace talks," 3.

⁷⁴ Klingert, "Zelenskyy signs decree."

⁷⁵ Berridge, *Diplomacy: Theory and Practice*, 230.

⁷⁶ United Nations, "Black Sea grain initiative."

⁷⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "China's position."

⁷⁸ Potomkina, "Exploring the secrets."

⁷⁹ Scholz, "The global *Zeitenwende*"; Blumenau, "Breaking with convention?"

and strengthening NATO's and EU's cooperative security policy and institutional responsiveness.

Ukraine's war diplomacy strategy appears to succeed in combining several diplomatic instruments. First, it comprises 'conventional diplomacy' involving bilateral (between governments) and multilateral interactions (with intergovernmental organisations), including the UN, mainly dealing with legal matters and negotiating tribunals. Second, Ukraine reinforces 'public diplomacy' and 'intelligence disclosures' as foreign policy instruments aimed at strategic communication with the public of its own and other states. In the run-up to and immediately after the invasion, continually updated intelligence, supported primarily by the US and the UK, combined two pre-emptive exposure functions: warning the general public of an impending Russian invasion and preventing Russia from shaping the information environment by undercutting its public influence on Western audiences. This approach is framed as a 'pre-emptive' approach to openly using intelligence to inform and influence the wider public and deter Russian activities.⁸⁰ It has been argued that by pre-empting Russia's deceptive narrative, the war in Ukraine represents a 'watershed moment' and a 'profound new reality'⁸¹ in the diplomatic use of intelligence. Third, the strategic and diplomatic use of intelligence as a 'coercive instrument' has come into sight, whereby coercion is not limited to economic sanctions and military means. In this sense, coercive disclosure has been conceptualised as an instrument similar to how military force is leveraged in coercive diplomacy.⁸² Though intelligence disclosure as a coercive instrument did not deter Russia and failed to dissuade it from invading Ukraine, it has (at least partially) succeeded in publicly disrupting Russia's plans and actions.

3.5 Subconclusion

Whereas Russia and Ukraine are convinced they will eventually win, neither side will presumably gain a decisive victory in the sense mentioned above. Moreover, the annexation by Russia of the four oblasts in Eastern Ukraine marked the definite end of bilateral negotiations at the beginning of October 2022. Since then, ever-increasing military support to Ukraine by a wide coalition of partners intends to create at least the 'leverage' to deliver Ukraine's victory and, in this way, strengthen its position for post-victory negotiations and diplomacy. When connecting this option for ending the war with the first discussed cause of this war (the Russian territorial invasions), the argument is that there can be no lasting armistice or

⁸⁰ Dylan and Maguire, "Secret intelligence," 34, 47, 61.

⁸¹ Zegart, "Open secrets," 54, 56.

⁸² Riemer and Sobelman, "Coercive disclosure," 278.

political settlement with Russia until Ukraine has regained the status of its territories, including the annexed four Eastern Ukrainian oblasts and Crimea. Strachan's proposition on the discontinuity between the causes and endings of war becomes relevant at this point. After a victory, he remarks, the victors, in their hubris, 'read a war's outcome as evidence that their cause was right and their methods of fighting justifiable',⁸³ without recognising that a seemingly decisive victory may only be a moment in war's transformation towards a protractive and indecisive one, without clear objectives or focus anymore.

The space for achieving any form of a political settlement on the status of the annexed and occupied territories between Ukraine and Russia has decreased since the start of this war. If Ukraine's Istanbul Communique at the end of March 2022 provides a clue for a future political settlement, Ukraine would primarily want a treaty with guarantor states to reinforce security assurances with compliance mechanisms to put Russia off. In turn, Russia would claim Ukraine's state neutrality and institutionalise Ukraine's nonalignment with NATO. The latter concession is unattainable. At this point, it becomes clear that any ambiguous war ending that formalises some settlement of the territorial losses of Crimea and the four Donbas oblasts also reinforces the history of failures of the international diplomatic trajectories outlined in the first section of this paper. The risk of such diplomatic efforts is repeated zero-sum behaviour, with the same negative-sum result that emerged in the past decades, where 'the pie or pool of available benefits shrinks'.⁸⁴

4. Conclusions

This study has shown that widespread concerns about how and when the war in Ukraine ends have not been the driving force in the war diplomacy advanced by Ukraine. Ukraine's incremental approach to war diplomacy has delivered tenacious defence with stepwise battlefield gains that do not point towards a decisive victory. However, it was also argued that the core question must not be whether an armistice or internationally negotiated political settlement is feasible to end the Russian war in Ukraine. Asking this question is rooted in the contested assumption that diplomacy links to paths out of war towards peace. Barkawi's statements that diplomacy and war are not inherently antagonistic have been verified and substantiated in this sense. Since they are no opposites, diplomacy should not inherently be connected to peace 'against' war.

⁸³ Strachan, "The causes of war," 12.

⁸⁴ Charap and Colton, *Everyone Loses*, 20.

International diplomacy bears the imprint of many wars. Still, it is mainly seen as settling disputes between states peacefully and ending wars by negotiation. By contrast, this study of war diplomacy in Ukraine endorses what Barkawi had outlined much earlier: diplomacy amidst war manifests an international infrastructure that organises and facilitates persuasive capacities indispensable to international and local orders. The impacts of the aggressive Russian invasions go far beyond Ukraine and involve the rules-based international order: diplomacy and war have always been at the heart of the transformation of the international order, involving divisions, ruptures, and changes. As John Ikenberry illustrates, the effects of wars have continually altered the dynamics of the international order and the diplomatic relations involved: the type of order that emerges after wars, going beyond the balance of power politics, depends on the ability of powerful states to make commitments and the way they restrain power.⁸⁵

War diplomacy in Ukraine was positioned in the setting of causes and endings of the war. The paradoxes of the relationship between war and diplomacy emerged. The argument advanced was that the diplomatic options for ending this war differ as the narratives on the causes of this war differ. For example, Samuel Charap and Miranda Priebe, while recognising Russia's territorial invasions as the leading cause of this war, argue that the human and other costs of a long war are too high and that some combination of an armistice and political settlement should be negotiated. By contrast, John Mearsheimer's take on NATO expansion as the main cause made him argue that Ukraine should accept the ending of the war to become a neutral state or concede territory in exchange for international stability that prevents Russia's defeat. However, it was also confirmed here that there is no straight continuum between the causes and ends of war, as Hew Strachan argues. His proposition on the 'discontinuous' relation between the causes and the endings of war, not only for the defeated but also for the hubris of the victor, brought up the contingency and unpredictability of war and its policies.

The central question was why war diplomacy is showing restraint towards ending Russia's invasive war against Ukraine and what it would imply for explaining its causes. The onset proposition was that the case of Ukraine's war diplomacy is representative of the causal effects of international diplomatic restraint regarding the possible endings of this war. The assumption was that the dynamics on the battlefield tend to advance and confine diplomatic efforts by strengthening Ukraine's war diplomacy with international coalitions and restraining wider international diplomatic interventions on how this war will end. In this sense, Russia's invasive and aggressive 2022 war in Ukraine challenges the principle of diplomatic restraint substantially: restraint has become a deliberate strategic choice in international

⁸⁵ Ikenberry, *After Victory*, 4-6, 24, 37-44.

diplomatic efforts to avoid outright confrontation with Russia and further escalation.

A few other findings emerged from this study, breaking some new ground. First, how Ukraine conducts war diplomacy is existential and critical to regaining and preserving its territorial integrity and sovereignty. Second, as argued, widespread public and academic concerns about how and when this war ends have 'not' been the driving force in Ukraine's diplomatic process. Ukraine has not focused its present war diplomacy on a comprehensive effort to enforce an armistice or a peace deal to end the war. Therefore, it was suggested that some outcomes of the above-outlined trajectories for ending the war are improbable, whereas others are morally unacceptable. Third, Russia is exclusively accountable for initiating this war. However, the war is also a product of contradictions of international diplomacy and the structural non-implementation of security guarantees that Ukraine demanded since its independence in the early 1990s. Such failures have become evident after the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, the 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit, and the 2014-2015 Minsk Agreements. Fourth, the outcomes that this war delivers will primarily depend on Ukraine's war diplomacy: any trajectory for ending this war is incrementally created on the battlefield and highly depends on how this situation develops. Fifth, ending this war by diplomatic means will, for this reason, depend on the leverage created by international support for Ukraine's position on the battlefield. Ukraine is backed with Western arms supplies to defend itself and retake territories and will need international support until its territorial integrity is guaranteed.

This study on war diplomacy triggers novel inquiries based on the findings and limitations. First, the emphasis was on only two major causes for this war: a fuller explanation of the causes might bring up the interplay of multiple causal triggers and require further research. Potentially, this could involve the connection between this war and the future of diplomatic restraint in the international order as well as the current international implications of failing diplomatic negotiations in Ukraine's recent past. In fact, the international diplomatic use of restraint has received little attention in current public and scholarly debates on Ukraine: this is a significant under-theorisation gap that needs follow-up research. Further developing this will also require a more explicit focus on the significance of this war for alleged accelerating shifts, ruptures and divisions in the international order and the norms and institutions that sustain it.

Second, the links between the causes and endings of this war need to be deepened and broadened with the question of what keeps this war going: the duration of the war. Such dynamics appear fundamental for further analysis of the causes and what makes this war difficult to end. It entails the empirical identification of critical events for causal analysis. The process tracing method will be useful for

tracing and analysing chains of evidence that connect the causes-endings debate to the protraction of war in Ukraine. Third, scholarship on war diplomacy was advanced here by focusing on a basic explanatory framework: the explanations were primarily framed by connecting war diplomacy in Ukraine to work done by Barkawi, Strachan and Ikenberry. In the unfolding towards a protracted war, the dynamics of international diplomacy are also changing: diplomacy by the US, NATO, the EU, and non-Western states seems to become increasingly responsive, agile and adaptive, which requires more in-depth investigation.

Leo Tolstoy was right in his rebuttal of Henry Dunant: the inhumanity of wars did not shorten them, and wars could not be tamed; they would remain, break out too regularly, and last too long. Tolstoy's anxieties about making war more humane by humanising its rules still hold: the restraint of war has yet not broken war's barbarity and it grants an illusory peace. The aggressive Russian invasion has spoiled the moral scope for a political settlement: a negotiated compromise between Ukraine and Russia in an international rules-based order that upholds territorial integrity is presently not the appropriate diplomatic strategy to restrain this war.

Berma Klein Goldewijk

Dr. B.M.J. (Berma) Klein Goldewijk is the director of cooperation on research methodology for the Faculty of Military Sciences & Higher Defence Education at the Netherlands Defence Academy, Ministry of Defence. She is a senior research affiliate at the Dep. of International and Political History, Faculty of Humanities, Utrecht University. Her research interests include armed conflict and war studies, diplomacy and negotiation, international relations, critical theory, and intelligence studies.

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