

End Scenarios for Russian War in Ukraine

Summary

ICUV analysts reviewed scenarios for the ongoing Russian war in Ukraine. By assessing Russian decision-making hierarchies and objectives, the modeling signals an advantage for NATO to step up its military assistance for Ukraine to defeat Russia on the battlefield.

On the contrary, NATO’s delays with increased counteraction to Russian attempts to achieve territorial and political gains from the current war would lead to grave security and economic consequences for Europe over the mid- and longer term.

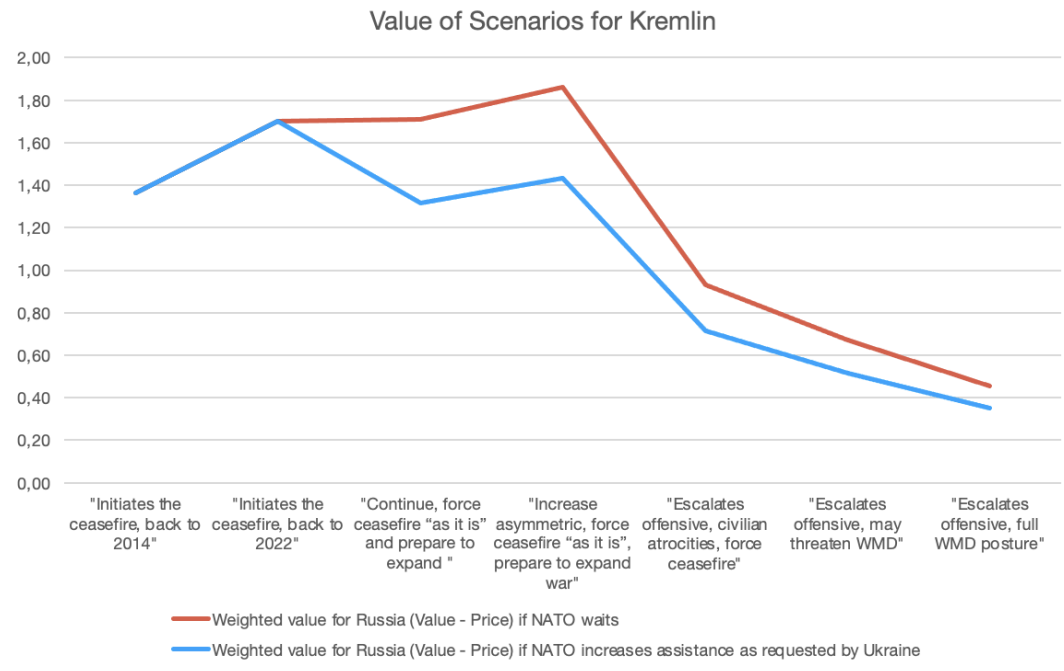
NATO’s scenarios for ending the war	Russia’s scenarios for using the war
<p>“Let them die” Military assistance to Ukraine is curtailed to “end the war” by negotiations with Russia</p>	<p>Continue status quo, civilian atrocities, force ceasefire in Ukraine with positioning “as it is”, prepare to expand</p>
<p>“Safe mode” Military assistance to Ukraine remains at the current level, but not enough to free occupied territories and to keep Russia out</p>	<p>Continue status quo, escalate asymmetric attacks, civilian atrocities, force ceasefire in Ukraine with positioning “as it is”, prepare to expand</p>
<p>“Squeeze out Russia by degrees” Military assistance gradually increases but falls short to change the war dynamics fast</p>	<p>Russia escalates full-scale offensive, civilian atrocities, force ceasefire</p>
<p>“Firm stance” Military assistance increases to enable UAF to free territories and keep Russia out</p>	<p>Russia escalates offensive, may threaten WMD but not use</p>
<p>“Blow them out” Unlimited military assistance to Ukraine, NATO involves into actions</p>	<p>Russia escalates war across the theater, WMD posture</p>

** NATO and RU scenarios are interconnected but do not represent a direct link. Russia does what brings most value to the Russian ruling elite, and NATO responds to contain Russia and bring the war to a favorable end

Findings

The Kremlin Scenarios

The most preferable scenario for Russia currently would be “Continue status quo, escalate asymmetric attacks, civilian atrocities, force a ceasefire in Ukraine with positioning “as it is”, prepare to expand”. With NATO’s accelerating military assistance to Ukraine, the price of this scenario for Russia is increasing, and its attractiveness declines. Instead, the Kremlin would be more predisposed to yield in negotiations following the military defeat.

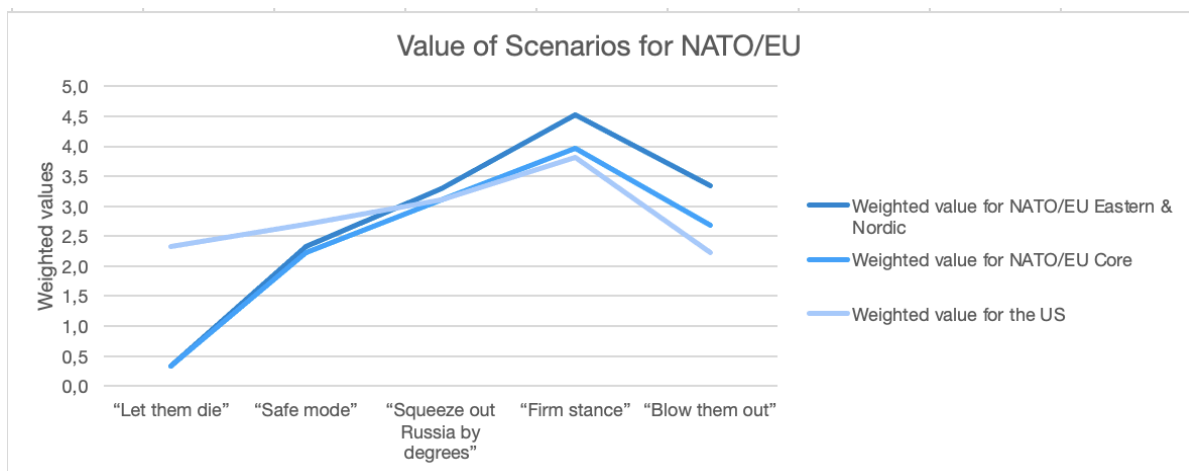


** Weighted value is assessed by evaluating how each scenario provides for achieving specific Russian goals against the price which the scenario evokes for Russia

The model shows that Moscow's "WMD posture" scenario has a low probability as it bears high price for the "Russian ruling elite" which is deeply integrated into the global financial system.

The NATO/EU Scenarios

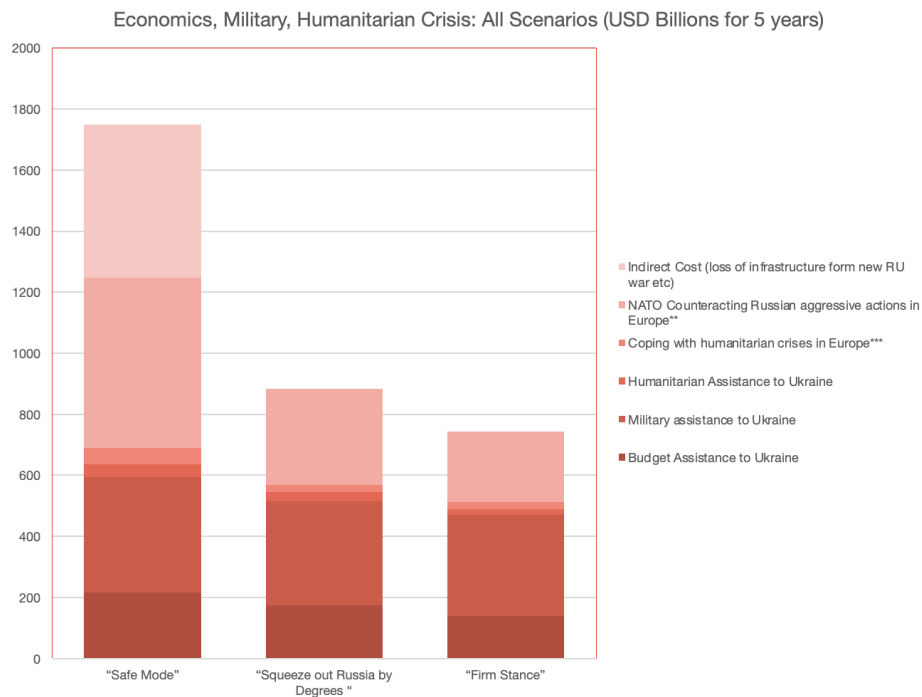
The most preferable for the NATO allies (although with different degrees of attractiveness) is the scenario of accelerated military assistance to Ukraine to free its territories and keep Russia out. The scenarios of reducing assistance to Ukraine "Let them die" and NATO's full-scale involvement in war on Ukrainian soil are least attractive. Somewhere in-between are scenarios with too cautious/delayed approach of military assistance to Ukraine.



** Weighted value for NATO/EU is assessed by evaluating how each scenario provides for achieving specific NATO/EU goals against the price the scenario evokes for NATO/EU

Direct Cost Calculation

The direct financial cost for the NATO allies and their economies of massively supplying modern warfare to Ukraine now would be incomparably lower than “playing it safe”. Unless getting defeated by a strong and well-equipped Ukrainian Army, Russia would continue the war of attrition in Ukraine and would destabilize neighboring countries including the Eastern European and Scandinavian nations. The Kremlin's foreign policy paradigm, unless changed by defeat in Ukraine, will drive Russia to provoke new conflicts and wars in Europe within a 2–5-year horizon. Economic details for the scenarios of declining assistance to Ukraine “Let them die” and NATO's full-scale involvement in war on Ukrainian soil were not assessed as they looked least attractive.

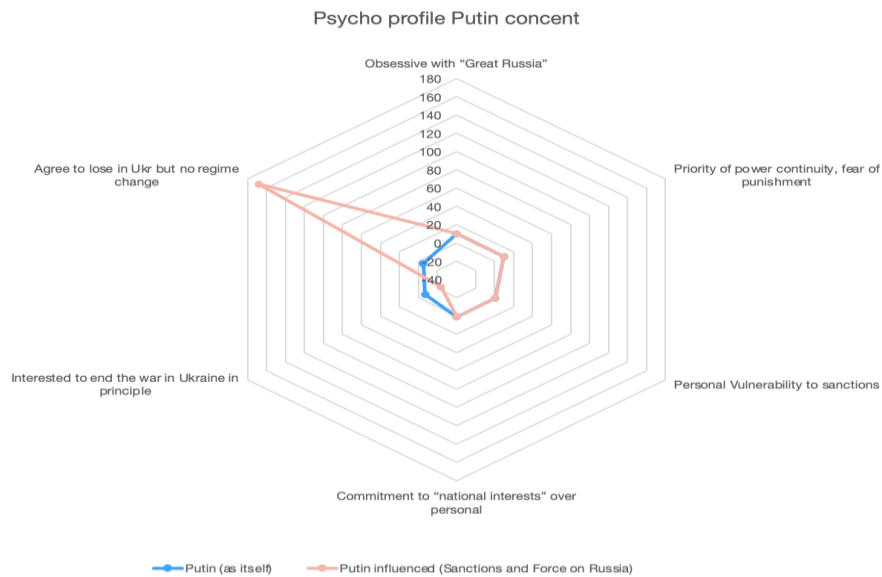


Russian Decision Making

The Kremlin would need to “sell” something to the “Russian people” in case of military defeat in Ukraine, but this doesn’t critically matter to Putin and his confidants. Russians have high tolerance for the arbitrariness of authorities, and they would “buy” any clumsy Kremlin’s propaganda ‘explanations’.

Moscow’s domestic repression machine remains strong and there are no reasons to hope (or be afraid) that following the military defeat in Ukraine Russia would “undergo fast power change”, “plunge into a civil war”, or “disintegrate”.

The “Kremlin Power Matrix”¹¹ demonstrates that the current combined mood of Putin and his confidants is to continue the war in Ukraine, with very slight readiness to finish it on Ukraine’s/NATO terms. At the same time, the model shows that the more successful the Ukrainian Army will be on the battlefield, the less weight would the “Kremlin hawks” (who surrounded Putin and incited him into the war) have in Moscow’s decision-making. Defeats of the Russian army on the ground in Ukraine and stronger international sanctions will give higher weight to reasonable economic considerations and a more balanced approach in Moscow's ruling circles.



Timing is an important element. Ukraine will fight this war “till the last bullet”. But insufficient supplies of modern military materials wear out the most valuable Ukrainian resource - people. Now, Ukraine "is bleeding” with tens of thousands of killed and wounded soldiers. And the longer the war goes on, the more difficult it would be to ensure the replacement of trained and motivated servicemen.

Apart from the fighting at the frontline, the continued Russian missile and drone attacks on the Ukrainian infrastructure and energy system, including Nuclear Power Plants, bear heavy risks of environmental and radiation accidents affecting millions of people far beyond Ukrainian borders.

Since his advent to power in 1999, Putin is on a gradual upward curve of audacity and unpredictability. The war in Ukraine should be won by Ukraine and NATO allies now.

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