



# HUMANITARIAN LESSONS IDENTIFIED IN THE CONDUCT OF THE ACTUAL CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

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*The authors of this study, conducted a comprehensive analysis of information from various domestic and international sources concerning the humanitarian dimensions of the ongoing conflict initiated by Russia in Ukraine. Their study revealed numerous inconsistencies and inaccuracies regarding the health and social aspects of the parties involved, and conclude on several lessons that should be considered in the context of future conflicts.*

*Employing a case study methodology, the research focused on assessing the casualties among combatants during major military engagements, as well as the losses sustained by the civilian population, regardless of their national, ethnic, or social affiliations. The analysis examined how these losses impacted the physical and psychological resilience of the affected groups, thereby influencing the overall combat effectiveness of the belligerents in this protracted war.*

*Furthermore, the study scrutinized the role of wartime propaganda disseminated by both Russian and Ukrainian sources. It analysed how information regarding enemy and own casualties was presented to morale among troops and the general population, highlighting the strategic use of information in shaping public perception and sustaining support during prolonged armed conflict.*

**Keywords:** War; Ukraine; Russia; medical intelligence; human casualties; collateral damage; lessons identified.

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## Introduction

The humanitarian aspects of warfare are intrinsically linked to its sanitary and societal dimensions, with war being characterized as an “epidemic (or pandemic) of political traumas.” These considerations pertain to both combatant and non-combatant forces, as well as to the civilians of both belligerents and neutrals, irrespective of affiliation, nationality, or social status.

In the context of military forces operating under the laws and customs of warfare, it is essential to assess human losses by distinguishing between recoverable (injured) losses and non-recoverable (fatalities) losses. Namely, the actual number and proportion of the wounded, deceased, shipwrecked, prisoners and missing individuals, as well as the reduction of both physical and psychological resilience, thereby influencing the overall combat effectiveness of the belligerents engaged in the warfare.

In assessing the impact of armed conflict on civilians, it is important to consider not only the number of fatalities and injured (i.e., collateral casualties), but also the broader categories of individuals affected by the disaster, including the refugees who have fled beyond national borders. Additionally, the conflict’s biomedical and social impacts on these populations must be considered.

Through indirect analyses, *open source intelligence (OSINT)* and *medical intelligence*, we strive to present a depiction of the situation that closely approximates reality. For military planners, it is imperative to have a comprehensive understanding of the actual situation, both for the conception and conduct of operations, as well as for the organization and provisioning of logistical support and medical services that are integral to sustaining combat activities.

The main international organization addressing humanitarian concerns is the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (IFRC), along with its affiliated branches, in conjunction with the United Nations through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

The impact of armed conflict on living forces is predominantly addressed through medical interventions, with human casualties (both military and civilian) managed through human medicine, and animal casualties (both domestic and wild) addressed through veterinary medicine. In its broader conceptualization, military medicine encompasses both disciplines. For instance, the original emblem of the Romanian Sanitary Service, created by General Professor Dr. Carol Davila, prominently featured the ancient symbol of medicine and pharmacy (the Rod of the god Asclepius) flanked by laurel branches on the right to represent human medicine, and oak branches on the left symbolizing veterinary medicine. Military medicine, therefore, plays a comprehensive role in addressing the full spectrum of victims



affected by armed conflicts – whether encountered in combat or in non-combat settings – dealing with the treatment of injuries and illnesses caused by physical, chemical, or biological agents, with a varying degree of severity and prognosis. This includes the care of shipwrecked individuals, prisoners of war, and other vulnerable groups, as well as the assessment of individuals' fitness for combat, labour, or civilian life, and the certification of deaths.

Drawing upon the current experience and recent military history, it is possible to quantitatively and qualitatively estimate the requirements for sanitary and humanitarian support, as well as the necessary forces, resources, and procedures to optimize medical aid and assistance. However, detailing these aspects extends beyond the scope of this discussion (Ordeanu, Andronic 2022, 240). Moreover, we refer to the concept of “sanitary lessons”, which semantically encompasses a broader spectrum than strictly medical considerations.

### **1. Human Losses in Modern Warfare – A Case Study: Ukrainian Forces in the Contemporary Russo-Ukrainian War**

Although the human losses inflicted by belligerents in this conflict differ both quantitatively and qualitatively, they are generally comparable, and their analysis is imperative for understanding the military tactics and strategies employed, as well as for evaluating each side's capacity to sustain prolonged combat operations. The human costs of warfare exert a significant influence on the eventual attainment of victory. However, an exhaustive estimate of Ukrainian military losses remains challenging due to the classification of such data by Ukrainian authorities, with little being published regarding their own casualties.

By gathering and comparing the fragmented and occasionally contradictory data available from the written press and audio-visual media, an approximate estimation can be obtained which, in conjunction with the reported of Russian forces losses, may indicate the magnitude of human casualties in a modern, large-scale conventional war fought between European armies. Unfortunately, we are confronted with the case of the current fratricidal war between Russia and Ukraine, widely considered as the largest European conflict since World War II. As an aside, the very existence and prolongation of this war underscores the limitations of existing international mechanisms in conflict resolution. The United Nations has struggled to effectively manage global peace and address this crisis situation. Similarly, the European Union still lacks the requisite strength to impose peace and enforce a cessation of hostilities and facilitate a durable peace agreement. Furthermore, the United States has signalled a shift in its role, indicating a reduced willingness to serve as the *world's arbiter* in violent disputes.



### ***1.1. Losses of the Ukrainian Army***

The official number of Ukrainian military fatalities remains undisclosed, as official data is classified – likely due to concerns that if the Western public were to become aware of the high number of deaths and injuries caused by this war, it might oppose the war support provided by the respective governments. Moreover, not all Ukrainians support the conflict, and some are seeking refuge in neighboring countries. Field observations and testimonies from volunteers in Western countries returning from conflict zones tend to confirm the view that Ukrainian forces suffered considerably higher human losses than Russian forces, while the press never publishes estimates of Ukrainian casualties - presumably to sustain both the illusion of victory over the Russians and to justify ongoing weapons deliveries. (Baud, 2023, 278). However, in science, as in justice, to ensure a balanced understanding of the conflict, the Latin principle of “*Audiatur et altera pars*” (“Let the other side be heard”) must be applied.

The Ukrainian strategy of defending every square meter of its territory by holding positions until the end (“centimeter,” as U.S. President Joe Biden publicly stated) has led to the significant attrition within its own forces. This approach mirrors historical precedents, such as the protracted trench warfare of World War I and Germany’s defensive stance in 1945. However, in the current conflict, the Russians have maintained operational mobility, as evidenced in their defensive actions in 1914 and offensive operations in 1943. Consequently, the Ukrainian military capabilities was destroyed as early as the summer of 2022, rendering the subsequent summer counteroffensive ineffective.

In response to the ongoing conflict, Western allies have compensated by supplying the Ukrainian forces with equipment, weaponry, and ammunition. This assistance extends beyond material aid, encompassing the presence of foreign volunteers with military experience who fought alongside the Ukrainian Reserve Forces, as the Ukrainian International Legion.

Following British Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s visit to Kyiv, the Russians feared that the West would not allow the Ukrainians to negotiate peace, given statements such as “we will support Ukraine for as long as necessary” and consequently, the conflict would be prolonged to exhaust Russian resources. Thus, Russian military tactics shifted focus from attempting to destroy the combat equipment supplied from the West - since they were unable to halt the flow of weaponry - to concentrating on eliminating the military personnel operating this equipment.

The war has entered a phase characterized by attritional warfare, where the objective remains the reduction of military potential, not through the destruction of armaments per se but by targeting those who utilize them. Thus, in June 2022, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky -who de facto commands the Ukrainian Armed Forces as per the Ukrainian Constitution, despite having no military training



– reported that the country was experiencing daily losses ranging from 60 to 100 soldiers, while the presidential advisor reported to the BBC daily losses of 100-200 soldiers killed (Lawler 2023<sup>2</sup>, 6). General St. Twitty of the United States estimated the losses of the Ukrainian army at 200,000 soldiers (Kyrylenko, Roshchina 2023<sup>3</sup>, 7). A group working for the BBC (United Kingdom) and *MediaZona* (Russian opposition), analyzing obituaries and funerals, estimated Ukrainian losses at 402,000 dead.

During this “secretive” conflict, military analysis based on *open sources intelligence* (OSINT) – intelligence gathering from public, non-classified sources, primarily conveyed by written and audiovisual media – has developed. While these sources are available to the general public, interpreting them poses challenges due to biases and partial representations of reality, often favouring one side over the other. However, the methodology and professionalism of these analysts are lacking, leading to estimates that may underrepresent actual figures (Google 2022). In October 2022, General Surovkin of Russia (then commander of the invasion forces) stated that the Russian army was not attempting major operations but was simply „sweeping” the adversary without exposing Russian soldiers, which led Western observers to believe in the perceived weakness of the Russian army and to continue the war in the same manner. Nevertheless, it appears that after occupying over 20% of the Ukrainian territory in the East and South, the Russians reached their invasion objective and shifted to a defensive stance. In November 2022, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen stated that over 20,000 civilians and more than 100,000 Ukrainian soldiers have died since the onset of the conflict, triggering the fury of the Kiev government, which requested that she correct her statement, which was promptly (McGarvey 2022) done with the Ukrainians declaring 157,000 and the Turkish press supporting this estimate (Bouzouina 2023<sup>4</sup>, 3), despite by being bias for supporting Ukraine.

According to Colonel Jaques Baud, a Swiss expert who has served with NATO and the EU, Ukrainian propaganda attributes its own losses to Russians actions and vice versa, creating a mirrored effect. Another approach to addressing the issue involves comparing the artillery ammunition consumption to estimate casualties on both sides of the frontline. Ukrainian and Western military officials have calculated that Ukrainians fire between 2,000 and 4,000 heavy artillery shells daily, whereas Russian forces fire between 40,000 to 50,000 shells, which is 10 to 25 times more. On average, this equates to approximately 45,000/3,000, or about 15 times more, suggesting that the human losses could also be 15 times higher on average. While difficult to confirm, this method provides a calculable metric, unlike casualty figures reported by the media without a basis for comparison.

An alternative approach to addressing the issue involves analyzing the manpower of the belligerent armed forces. In May 2022, President Zelensky stated



that Ukraine's armed forces comprised 700,000 personnel (Dumitrache C. 2023, Google 2022), and in July 2022, the Ukrainian Minister of Defense announced: „We have approximately 700,000 soldiers, to which the National Guard, Police, and Border Guards are added, bringing us close to a million”. In September 2022, the German newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* described the Ukrainian army as the second most powerful in Europe, with 250,000 combatants (Zeheb 2023), likely referring to peacetime strength. For comparison, Russian forces engaged on this front were estimated at between 100,000 and 200,000 soldiers.

The battles in western Donbas play a key role in this analysis. At the beginning of 2023, in the city of Bakhmut, which still housed Ukrainian troops, the fighting became tragic. Although the city did not hold a particular strategic importance, the Russian army and the militia of the Donetsk People's Republic aimed to capture it to consolidate control over Donbas, while the Ukrainian army and volunteers (whom Russian sources labeled as “neo-Nazis”) sought to maintain its status within Ukraine due to its symbolic political importance. In the initial stage, the West observed the heroic resistance of the Ukrainians and the accumulation of casualties on the Russian side. Subsequently, the press reported severe losses on both sides, drawing comparison to the battles of Verdun in World War I. However, by the end of winter, reports began to reflect the substantial toll the fighting had taken on Ukrainian forces.

It has been demonstrated that the old myth of “waves of infantry” launching attacks is no longer relevant, nor is the heavy concentration of forces for “breakthroughs”, which were employed in specific situations during the world wars. These tactics are counterintuitive in modern warfare because, when using firearms, combatants must be as dispersed as possible and avoid exposure to infantry fire. However, what is valid at the tactical level is not always applicable at the operational level. The fact that the Ukrainian army received modern weaponry in staggered, small quantities facilitated the destruction of this equipment on the front lines, preventing the achievement of a “critical mass” necessary for the „principle of saturation”. This assistance, which was inefficient and sometimes delayed, seems to suggest that the allies were not seeking a Ukrainian victory, but rather the prolongation of the war to exhaust Russia (Baud J. 2023, 278).

The anticipated *Ukrainian counteroffensive* began with the mobilized Ukrainian military receiving armament and ammunition (Soviet-type from former communist countries and NATO-type from other allies), as well as support from foreign volunteers with combat experience, substantial financial aid, and political backing. Ukrainian forces also benefited from up-to-date intelligence and NATO military leadership through American and British strategists and tacticians. It was not until the spring of 2023 that the counteroffensive began tentatively and with repeated delays, eventually evolving into what could no longer be called a counteroffensive but rather a *Ukrainian offensive*, gaining momentum during the summer and





continuing into the autumn with some local successes. Overall, these were small tactical attacks at the subunit level, supported by armoured vehicles and artillery, but lacking air support due to the loss of air superiority. With the onset of autumn rains, the pace of the offensive slowed significantly and came to a near standstill by December 1, 2023, with the promise of a forthcoming winter offensive. However, given the extensive human and material losses (in fact, of both belligerents) and the high consumption of ammunition (especially heavy artillery shells, missiles, drones, etc.), it became clear that launching another offensive would not be feasible and that such promises were overly optimistic. Furthermore, the Ukrainian Air Force had lost control of both the airspace and the battlefield.

Under these unfavourable conditions, the Ukrainian army, technologically supported by Western allies, launched an attack into Russian territory and seized control of the Kursk region. This action proved to be nearly suicidal, as the Russian military bolstered tactically by the equivalent of a North Korean infantry division, swiftly retook the territory and encircled the equivalent of a Ukrainian division. However, Kyiv refused to acknowledge the situation and rejected the military surrender, resulting in increased human losses (*unnecessary excess mortality*) (Ghubotin 2025).

It seems that the tactics, operations, and strategies outlined in NATO regulations, which advocate for expeditionary actions akin to “Blitzkrieg”, proved less effective in a classic positional war with fixed frontlines, as reflected by the situation and the level of readiness of the Ukrainian military. This discrepancy in approach likely gave rise to tensions among Ukrainian commanders, as well as between these commanders and their allies, and between the military leadership and the country’s political leadership. These contradictions were expressed in an interview with General Zalujni, who was then serving as the Chief of the General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces.

As a result, support from the United States and European support has diminished, leading to the cessation of war funding through the U.S. Congress and the transfer of responsibility to the EU, which is also facing challenges in this regard. It appears that the promise of supporting Ukraine “for as long as necessary” has reached its end, and it should be noted that the Ukrainians were not misled, there was no explicit promise of *victory* or *peace*, only a vague notion of *necessity* - a term that implies no concrete commitment. In this increasingly unfavourable context for the alliance, two main scenarios can be envisioned.

Another ***predominantly military*** scenario involves a final major effort to support Ukraine, both materially and financially, including the deployment of ultra-modern weaponry (which has so far been absent from the battlefield). This could involve F-16 and F-18 aircraft (which also possess nuclear capabilities), *stealth* bombers, next-generation missiles, and advanced tanks (such as the promised *Abrams*, which



have not yet been delivered to the front lines). While Ukrainian soldiers may lack the training or time effectively operate this equipment, a strategy similar to those used in various 20th-century wars could be employed – discreetly sending these weapons along with specialized combat and maintenance teams, disguised as *volunteers*. The risk is that even these might not influence the situation on the front, and some could fall into enemy hands, enabling them to upgrade their combat techniques through reverse engineering. There have also been attempts to form a coalition of volunteer states to deploy troops to Ukraine, alongside existing foreign volunteers and mercenaries, but this has not been finalized due to opposition from the USA, which seek to avoid escalating the conflict into a world war.

An alternative, *predominantly political* scenario would involve reaching a peace agreement or at least a humanitarian armistice, potentially with some sacrifices, but aimed at preventing the adversary from capitalizing on their victory. This political resolution would be presented by the media as a triumph for the international community, allowing for extensive criticism of the victor from all perspectives and a carefully crafted narrative of the situation. Such an approach would enable the perpetuation of a *frozen conflict* zone, which could be reactivated at any time with appropriate forces and resources to achieve a real victory. The key advantage of this approach would be its reduced cost, thus increasing its likelihood of success. The attempt by U.S. President D. Trump to mediate peace following this model failed because the belligerents do not negotiate directly with each other, as Ukrainian legislation prohibits negotiations with Russia, making any negotiator liable to charges of high treason.

### ***1.2. Ukrainian Population Losses***

Given that the conflict is unfolding on Ukrainian territory, there is clearly a significant incidence of both human and material losses among civilians. If we consider civilians as non-combatants, it is already evident that substantial civilian casualties – termed “collateral casualties” – occur, even during so-called “surgical” military operations, with figures amounting to tens of thousands. As per the Laws of Armed Conflict is right they are called “collateral casualties.” But for Kremlin, the civil infrastructure and population were considered strategic objectives and targets, especially from 2023 onward, being directly targeted by the Russian Air Force. This approach is reminiscent of Romania’s experience under Anglo-American aerial bombing during War World 2 (1944) (Ordeanu, Andronic 2025). However, the current situation differs, as the the scale and nature of civilian losses have resulted in a marked shortfall of the country’s available human resources.

Military leaders had planned to mobilize hundreds of thousands of men and women, as stated by President Zelensky during the year-end press conference on December 19, 2023. Nonetheless, the Ukrainian armed forces face significant





challenges in enlisting additional combatants. This difficulty is attributed to a shrinking demographic base and issues of corruption associated with the conscription process in 2023, as highlighted by *The Daily Digest* in its report “Conscription and corruption issues in 2023 revealed a lot.” (The Daily Digest, 2025). Furthermore, large-scale emigration of citizens to other countries, including Romania, has further complicated recruitment efforts.

It is evident that the media sometimes contradicts even official Ukrainian statements, occasionally disseminating hate messages in violation of the Munich Charter. Notably, the same *media* outlets largely ignored the civilian casualties in Donbass from 2014 to 2022, as well as similar incidents. Had these events received greater attention, this criminal military intervention, which U.S. President D. Trump described as „the war that should never have existed,” might not have occurred. Trump also noted that Russia and Ukraine were very close to reaching an agreement and emphasized the need for high-level negotiations.

Meanwhile, the population has been severely impacted by the deteriorating living conditions, intensified by Russian attacks, and the inherent risks of war, leading a significant portion to seek refuge either within the country or in neighbouring states. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, as of January 2023, over 5 million Ukrainians had sought refuge in neighbouring countries, with more than half in Russia and the rest dispersed across the European Union, Moldova, Belarus, and other regions (Baud 2023, 278). This has drastically reduced the recruitment base for the military and the economic capacity of Ukraine.

Propaganda has attempted to convey to the public that Ukraine is prevailing in the conflict, with the support of its allies being effective, and on the other hand, that Ukraine is much less affected by the war than Russia. The strategic goal of weakening Russia militarily, economically, and financially was evidently to neutralize the main ally of the People’s Republic of China, which economically rivals the United States. Furthermore, the two allies are jointly working toward establishing a new multipolar world order to replace the current unipolar system (often referred to as the American Century), which followed the bipolar order of the post-World War II era. Thus, from a political perspective, this vision places them in fundamental opposition to the values and interests of Western civilization, to which we belong.

The political and economic struggle to maintain a unipolar global order has proven to be both challenging and, sometimes, unpredictable. For the European Union and NATO to continue functioning, sustained and creative efforts must be made, and the provisions of *International Law* must be applied and respected. Most importantly, fostering mutual understanding between the world’s nations is necessary to advancing peace and international cooperation. Without such efforts, as recent events have shown, a world war with or without nuclear weapons remains



an ever-present possibility.

As the war in Ukraine draws to a close, a preliminary tally of human losses can be made. More than half a million military personnel, both Russian and Ukrainian, have been lost. When civilian casualties on both sides are included, the total surpasses one million lives. Additionally, millions are internally displaced or have sought refuge in neighboring countries such as Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Moldova, and Romania, with many emigrating further to the West. These human losses represent a significant depletion of military and economic resources for Ukraine, which are likely to have long-term consequences for a country already facing instability, inadvertently playing into Russia's strategic interests.

*Le Monde* (France) wrote, "Behind the secrecy of military losses in Ukraine, a large-scale massacre," noting that: "Kyiv and Moscow are minimizing or keeping silent about the number of soldiers killed and wounded. The losses on both sides are comparable to those of the First World War" (Pop, 2023) and, certainly, they are the highest losses of these two armies since the Second World War. The figures presented by *Le Monde* align with previously reported data, lending credibility to the information.

Human casualties are inherent to any conflict - whether through death, injury, shipwrecks, disappearance, prisoners, etc., or displacement. These factors can impact the combat capabilities of the military and the resilience of the civilian population. For this reason, efforts are made to conceal the actual data from public view. However, for military planners, access to accurate data is essential as it forms the basis for "lessons learned" which can transform military strategy at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels.

For guidance in this domain, the available OSINT documents offer a realistic and informative overview. It is evident that human losses in modern warfare are substantial, comparable to those seen during the World Wars. However, contrary to expectations, they have not exceeded those levels, despite the use of modern weaponry, which is more precise, has greater range, and explosive force. Thus, theoretically more effective, they are not always efficient in practice. Additionally, the ratio of critically and moderately injured remains consistent (minor injuries are not included in statistics), but the proportion of fatalities relative to injuries has decreased, in accordance with the "severity pyramid" model. This can be attributed to the increased efficiency of medical services, which have the appropriate logistical capabilities and resources for the care of the injured, significantly reducing mortality.

## **2. Human Losses in Modern Warfare – Case Study: Russian Forces in the Current Russian Ukrainian War**

Human losses refer to the removal of combatants from battlefield and are



typically classified into two categories: irrecoverable losses - those killed in action (KIA) or outside of it (accidents, illness, etc.), or recoverable or partially recoverable losses – those wounded in action (WIA) or outside of it, illnesses (common or epidemic, infected, poisoned, burned, radiation exposure, etc.), shipwrecked, prisoners, arrested, deserters, missing in action (MIA).

The summary of human and material losses will lead to the exhaustion of the belligerents, ultimately necessitating an armistice or the conclusion of peace. Throughout history, all wars, regardless of their nature or era, have caused significant human and material damage with the aim of defeating the adversary. A potential nuclear war could result in billions of human casualties and material losses, or even the collapse of modern civilization.

In 2022, the Russians believed they would be welcomed by their Ukrainian brethren with open arms, akin to the Germans in Austria, in 1939, or in East Germany in 1989. However, the intelligence services, either incompetent or treacherous, failed to accurately assess that, since 2014, Ukraine has been gradually distancing itself from Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), aligning itself increasingly with NATO and the West. This process is part of a broader historical trajectory that began after World War I, continued through World War II, and has resumed in the present era (Carrere d'Encausse, 1993).

Therefore, the Russian military found itself ensnared in a meticulously prepared deadly trap. The assault on Kyiv resulted in a tactical failure, and the Chechen Strike Group was annihilated en route to its objective. The Russian strategy of conducting a “special military operation” was inadequate from the outset and had to be improvised along the way, leading to significant losses. By refusing to officially classify the conflict in Ukraine as a war, the Kremlin was unable to declare total or partial mobilization and permanently replace its forces in the Joint Operation Area (JOA).

Contemporary military doctrines theoretically advocate for intelligent combat actions that minimize human casualties, including the number of wounded and ill, thereby avoiding unnecessary “excess mortality” when feasible. In practice, however, the role of commanders at all levels is crucial in conducting operations at tactical, operational, and/or strategic levels in such a manner that physically minimizes (or at least minimizes in media portrayal) human losses, both recoverable and irrecoverable, as well as material losses and damage to prestige.

This entails the preparation of appropriate logistical and medical resources, both quantitatively and qualitatively, to treat the wounded and ill within the fighting forces and to maintain combat readiness. As for understanding the realities of ongoing wars, *being balanced means knowing all perspectives*, in line with the motto of TV NCN Romania. The British press reports that Russian human losses in this war are approaching a new record, being around one million (Google 2025, The



Daily Digest).

### ***2.1. Russian conventional operation in Ukraine***

This subchapter explores Russian conventional military operation in Ukraine alongside its use of war propaganda. While it is expected that warring parties will engage in propaganda, yet it tends to exaggerate enemy losses and downplay their own to maintain the morale of both troops and civilians, as well as that of their financial backers. This action is supported by censorship (both military and media-related), although its effects may have unintended consequences. Analyzing how news is presented in mainstream *media* (audiovisual and print), it is noticeable that certain errors in approach persist. Moreover, a new phenomenon has emerged: the use of words with altered meanings (with recent examples reported in war, economic, and medical developments).

We believe that for “actors” actively involved in the decision-making (both military and political) it is crucial to accurately assess the situation to act accordingly and derive meaningful lessons for the future. This underlines the importance of Psychological Operations (PSYOPS), which are tailored to target friendly forces, adversary forces, and international public opinion differently. Additionally, Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) is valuable not just for sensational press articles for the public, but for the actual documentation of those involved or potentially involved in ongoing or future developments. As the folklore saying goes, “intelligent people learn from the mistakes of others, whereas fools fail to learn even from their own”.

The ongoing Russian-Ukrainian War, which commenced as a “special military operation” with specific objectives, became stagnant after almost 20% of Ukrainian territory (areas predominantly inhabited by ethnic Russians, often inaccurately labelled as merely Russophones) was occupied through dynamic actions involving armoured and air forces, reminiscent of the tactics used during the Second World War. Subsequently, the conflict has transitioned into a phase of positional warfare, akin to the First World War. In this situation, the Russians constructed a triple defensive line behind the temporary front line. The first line comprises trenches, light weaponry, anti-tank obstacles, and barbed wire, fronted by extensive minefields. The second line - the main one -, includes fortifications, bunkers, anti-tank weaponry, and collective shelters. The third line is designated for artillery, reserves, command posts, logistic support, medical support, supply lines, and lateral movement routes. Combat has primarily involved intense artillery duels, aerial strikes - particularly with drones and missiles - and tactical operations at the subunit level, including feigned attacks. The primary targets have included military objectives, energy infrastructure, strategic nodes, and critical elements of national infrastructure. The intent is to reduce the capacity of the Ukrainian army while eroding civilian morale, similar to NATO’s approach in Yugoslavia in 1999.

The Russian aerial superiority has hindered the Ukrainian air force from providing



support to ground troops, and thus, the anticipated “Battlefield Air Interdiction 2000” scenario did not materialize as expected. Conversely, at sea, the deployment of aerial drones (provided by Turkey) and naval drones (supplied by the United Kingdom) resulted in the sinking of multiple vessels and forced the Russian Black Sea Fleet to virtually abandon its naval base in Crimea and retreat to Novorossiysk. Strategically, the Ukrainians, with NATO support, targeted the Kerch Strait bridges, the port of Sevastopol, Russia-Germany undersea gas pipelines, certain military airfields in Russia, and both military and civilian vessels in the Black Sea, etc.

The recent Russian winter offensives have achieved partial success, but have also resulted in increased human losses due to the harsh conditions imposed by *General Winter*. To date, the situation seems relatively balanced, with both armies experiencing significant losses in personnel and combat equipment, as well as widespread economic damage. This situation may lead to ceasefire or peace negotiations, even if the initial strategic objectives remain unfulfilled. This could lead to the emergence of a new frozen conflict, stabilized by the recent Agreement on Minerals signed by Ukraine and the USA.

## ***2.2. Losses of Russian Forces***

Since the inception of the Russian invasion, the Ukrainian and Western narratives (primarily NATO and the EU) have predicted the defeat of the Russian forces, praised the unexpected resilience of the Ukrainians, and highlighted the inability of the Russian president to rationally assess the risks of the war. Some publications have speculated about his health, labelling him as ill, mentally unstable, or even close to death. The emphasis has been on the notion that Russian losses, both in personnel and equipment, are significantly higher than those of the Ukrainians, thereby triggering a “numbers war” in the media and official statements. This conflict is underpinned by secrecy, maintained through excessive censorship designed to obscure the actual figures from public view.

Examining the number of Russian casualties reveals that pro-Ukrainian media systematically employs the “mirror” technique in strategic communication, hence reversing the data might be closer to reality, as assessed by Colonel Jacques Baud, a specialist in military intelligence from Switzerland, and an expert at the UN and NATO (Baud, 2023, 278; Mazurenko 20227). The objective of this approach is to demonstrate to the public that Russia must and will be defeated.

The terminology used in media reporting support the manipulation of data, such that the term “human casualties” (encompassing deaths, injuries, disappearances, etc.) is often used synonymously with “fatalities”, creating confusion regarding the timing, source, and nature of the figures. While the number of deaths is in the thousands, not tens of thousands, the human toll remains tragic. Nearly one thousand Russian military personnel die each month in operations involving over



100,000 ground forces. Additionally, there are losses suffered by other armed forces, separatist militias, Wagner mercenaries, pro-Russian Chechen forces, Russian and foreign volunteers, who have their own human losses. Moreover, military and civilian personnel in Russian territory or neighboring countries, bombed mistakenly or intentionally by Ukrainian forces, as reported in the Romanian press, add to the numbers. There are also victims resulting from invasions into regions such as Kursk and Belgorod.

The available data suggests that Russian combatant losses are approximately 1% per month, equating to over 10% annually. This attrition reduces overall combat capacity and necessitates not only for personnel replacements but also the rotation and withdrawal of units for recovery. Consequently, partial mobilization has been declared in Russia to reinforce the fighting forces.

Throughout the conflict, Ukraine has consistently reported Russian losses. Nine months after the start of the Russian invasion, the Ukrainian General Staff announced that Russian losses totalled over 86,000 personnel (Baud, 2023, 280), a figure which Yahoo News raised to 88,800. President Zelensky predicted that there would be 100,000 deaths, and on December 22, 2022, the threshold of 100,000 Russian deaths was commemorated in Kyiv by projecting the number “100 K” onto the National Library (Olearchyk, Rathbone. 2023). However, on the same date, the Russian opposition reported through MediaZona 10,229 deaths, while official Russian sources continued to withhold casualty figures.

There is a noticeable and often intentional misuse of terminology, where terms like “deaths” and “human losses” are used interchangeably, where indeed the differences are of an order of magnitude, yet the public may fail to perceive the significance.

A journalistic investigation (MediaZona and Meduza) utilizing open-source information provides an overview of the losses suffered by the Russian army in the war in Ukraine, one of the Kremlin’s most closely guarded secrets. Through statistical modelling, it was estimated that approximately 47,000 Russian men under the age of 50 have died in this war, with about 25,000 in the first year and 22,000 in the second. It can be concluded that although firepower has significantly increased, the impact on the human force remains roughly the same, and the proportion of deceased is lower due to the increased efficiency of logistic and medical support to the forces.

In January 2023, Chief of the Norwegian Armed Forces, General Kristoffersen, stated to the press that “Russian losses are approaching approximately 180,000 soldiers killed or wounded”, without specifying the source of these figures, according to Agerpres. In August 2023, The New York Times, citing American officials, indicated that Russian military losses were nearing 300,000, including 120,000 deaths and 170,000-180,000 wounded, significantly more than Ukrainian losses. The British press recently published an article stating that Russian human losses





are approaching a new record, with the Russian armed forces alone having suffered nearly one million casualties since the onset of the invasion of Ukraine on February 22, 2022 (Euronews 2022, The Daily Digest 2025).

It is peculiar that although the Russians possess the capability to conduct not only *joint operations* but also *multi-domain operations* (including land, air, naval, space, electromagnetic, cyber, information, etc.), and Ukrainians, supported by NATO and the EU, could do the same, the war appears to be waged in a conventional manner, reminiscent of world wars, or at least that is the impression given. While modern and outdated weaponry is being used, neither side has deployed advanced, state-of-the-art weapons on a large scale. The belligerents have used prohibited weapons, such as landmines and cluster munitions, but since neither Russia nor Ukraine had ratified the relevant international treaties banning them, their use is legal, albeit unethical.

It is possible that advanced technical means are being reserved for a later, decisive phase of the war. Alternatively, they may not be as effective as propaganda suggests, similar to the “wonder weapons” of the Nazis. Another possibility is that these systems are being preserved for a potential *future conflict* between major powers.

As a political demonstration that this war does not pose an existential threat to either of the belligerents and that the actual risk of regional or global escalation is minimal, the President of France refused to prioritize the discussion regarding Ukraine at the 2023 G20 Summit. Moreover, the final joint declaration of the G20 refrain from condemning Russia over the conflict in Ukraine, reflecting “a consensus that does not upset anyone, neither Russia, nor China, nor the Western states” (Fuhr, 2025).

A comparative analysis of the losses by both belligerents could offer valuable insights and *lessons* for the future, as the current conflict involves two modern military powers and foreshadows what might occur in a future war. However, it is entirely different from the mutual destruction war between Palestinians and Israelis, which does not adhere to the laws and customs of war.

Although the laws, customs, and conduct of warfare evolve in accordance with technological advancements and political morality, suggesting that tactics, operations, and strategy will be optimized, and that there will be a new paradigm of warfare in the future, there remains a conceptual inertia. It appears that the failures of the current modern Russian-Ukrainian war have not yet led to meaningful implementation of any “lessons learned” from this unnecessary disaster<sup>1</sup>, (Lawrence 2025) which should not have occurred, as recently stated by the President of the United States, Donald Trump.

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick Lawrence “La défaite, et surtout ne tirer aucun enseignement de ce desastre inutile” Mondialisation.ca, 30 Avril 2025 ([https://www.mondialisation.ca/la-defaite-et-surtout-ne-tirer-aucun-enseignement-de-ce-desastre-inutile/5698236?doing\\_wp\\_cron](https://www.mondialisation.ca/la-defaite-et-surtout-ne-tirer-aucun-enseignement-de-ce-desastre-inutile/5698236?doing_wp_cron)).



### ***2.3. Russian population losses***

The Russian population has incurred substantial losses throughout this conflict, including fatalities, injuries, prisoners of war, and displaced individuals. In the period preceding the “Special Military Operation”, approximately 15,000 casualties were reported during the clashes involving separatists in the Donbas region, including both voluntary armed forces and Russian civilians (most of whom held Ukrainian citizenship) residing in the combat zones. Following the initiation of the invasion, collateral damage occurred as a result of combat operations in border regions and areas subjected to bombardment, including Moscow.

Russian civilian casualties have been relatively substantial; though exact figures remain unreported. These casualties primarily resulted from Ukrainian incursions into Russian regions such as Kursk and Belgorod, as indicated by media sources. However, given the quantity and explosive power of modern munitions used in the conflict, the relatively low number of fatalities and injuries on both sides suggests that the belligerents did not specifically target civilians, unlike the tactics commonly employed during World War II. Instead, these casualties are more accurately classified as collateral damage. Comprehensive and definitive data regarding these incidents is likely to emerge only upon the cessation of hostilities.

## **3. The humanitarian lessons identified**

The ongoing Russian-Ukrainian War represents a traditional conventional conflict, conducted between the world’s largest nuclear power and a former nuclear power, amid propaganda-fueled threats of tactical nuclear strikes. Although both belligerents possess the capability to conduct multi-domain operations, these remain merely independent single service or joint operations.

Casualties and material losses fall within the known limits from 20th-century wars, without causing particularly severe disruptions. Nevertheless, wartime propaganda is intense and creates an exaggerated perception of the situation.

Both belligerents conceal their human losses, with only one remaining silent and the other disseminating misinformation, making it challenging for an external observer to form an accurate picture of the war casualties. Reliable information is vital for drawing lessons from ongoing conflicts, especially as they occur closer to our own regions.

The collective West possesses the capability to obliterate Russia (or any other country) at any given moment but refrains from doing so for several reasons. Firstly, the destruction of a state generates numerous international issues, resulting in chaos that is difficult and expensive to manage. Secondly, the Russians claim to have acted within the boundaries of International Law, in 2014, citing the right of self-determination of nationalities, which led to a predominantly verbal response



from public opinion. In 2022, they argued that their actions were in accordance with the UN Charter's obligation to protect (the Russian nationality). This is also why they referred to their actions as a special operation rather than a war. Consequently, Western nations could legally assist Ukraine but refrained from deploying troops.

The Ukrainians have consistently conducted acts of war on Russian territory, including in Moscow, with the aim of provoking Russia into officially declaring war, which would grant them the right to form combat alliances. Western leaders, including President Macron, along with other state leaders, have clearly understood this strategy and have publicly articulated the Western approach of participation without direct involvement to avoid escalation.

Upon the official conclusion of this war, the "lessons identified" will be systematically documented and likely applied, including humanitarian considerations, to future conflicts, the timing of which remains uncertain. We currently observe an illustrative example of these principles in the ongoing war in the Near East, which shows a tendency to extend into the Middle East and represents a model for future conflicts. These future wars are expected to feature theaters of operations rather than well-defined fronts.

At present, two distinct models of warfare with potential for globalization are unfolding. It is probable that future realities will integrate these models into a unified concept for maximum efficiency.

The Latin expression "Vae victis!" (woe to the vanquished) encapsulates the fate awaiting the defeated. However, neither is a "Pyrrhic victory" desirable, as King Pyrrhus himself remarked: "One more such victory, and I am lost".

### **Conclusions**

We are witnessing and indirectly participating in the first modern conflict between the military forces of a nation subjected to the aggression of a major global power.

The strategies and tactics employed in this conflict have undergone significant evolution. Initially intended as a "lightning war" designed to minimize human and material losses akin to those seen in World War II, the confrontation transformed into a positional warfare reminiscent of the same era. This shift involved substantial quantities of modern weaponry and an immense consumption of ammunition, resulting in notable human casualties. However, these losses have remained within the threshold observed during major battles of the world wars. Over time, the conflict has progressively transitioned into a war of attrition.

Medical casualties are approximately equivalent between the two sides, in number and severity, with both belligerents possessing modern and effective medical support systems.



The medical services have successfully mitigated the enhanced destructive capacity of modern weaponry, resulting in a lower ratio of fatalities to injuries, thereby demonstrating improved operational efficiency.

Civilian casualties remain minimal relative to military losses, indicating that the laws and customs of war are generally adhered to, notwithstanding official statements and the propagandistic accounts presented in the media.

The provisional lessons identified will eventually be consolidated into established “lessons learned” to guide future conventional warfare preparations (*Si vis pacem, parabellum*). However, it remains uncertain whether these lessons will hold relevance in the event of the outbreak of a potential World War III (advocated by certain factions), which would likely involve nuclear weapons in nature and poses a significant risk of destroying human civilization as we know it.

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