PART IV
CONCLUSIONS

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Russia's War in Ukraine

Taking Stock

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Introduction

As the most significant high-intensity conflict in Europe since the Second World War, Russia's war in Ukraine will likely be a defining case and reference point for debates on modern warfare in the coming decades.[1] The conclusions drawn are far beyond the reach of any single publication and will likely be subject to reinterpretation over time. Moreover, the richness of documentation and array of different perspectives applied to this long war, and the different phases it has gone through are already fuelling opposing arguments drawing on the same empirics.

Russia's war in Ukraine has stimulated an enormous volume of military, strategic, and political analysis, based on which a wide range of observers have sought to draw enduring lessons about the future of warfare. However, the extraction of clear and universal insights from the Ukrainian battlefield remains complex and must be treated with caution. As is the case with all conflicts, experiences from the war in Ukraine are contingent on the context in which they were drawn.

Managing the multitude of interpretations that can emerge from the same set of observations presents an illuminating challenge while extrapolating experiences. This pertains to divergent views regarding the future utility of manoeuvre warfare, the relative importance of new technologies versus that of conventional and tested means of fighting, and the significance of information and strategic communication in war. Existing evidence supports competing hypotheses across a range of examples.

The fact that the war continues at the time of writing this volume, and the final outcomes are yet to be seen, is a factor adding to the complication. Thus, the durability of conclusions will be realized over time, since aspects of the war will be

[1] Funding has been received from the Joint Advanced Staff and Command Programme Directorate (PL HOP), the Officers' Programme Directorate (PL OP) of the Swedish Defence University and the Swedish armed forces' research programme. During the preparation of this work, the authors have used a number of generative artificial intelligence (AI) and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process, including ChatGPT, Co-pilot, and Grammarly. These tools were employed to support the writing process and to enhance and refine the text. The authors carefully reviewed, edited, and validated the content to ensure its accuracy and integrity and take full responsibility for the final published work. The authors contributed equally to this chapter.

debated, reinterpreted, and re-evaluated in light of new evidence and knowledge. In all likelihood, the long-term strategic implications of clearly established tactical or operational implications of the fighting will in all likelihood remain contested and heavily dependent on adversarial adaptation.

However, with these caveats in mind, this volume has covered a wide range of aspects of Russia's war in Ukraine in order to provide an overview of useful lessons to be drawn for our understanding of modern warfare and the challenges faced by modern militaries. The war has gone through several phases since February 2022, and it is now possible to approach those with some analytical distance and evaluate the events in light of subsequent developments. Indeed, Russia's war in Ukraine has provided an extraordinarily rich trove of lessons about modern warfare, not least due to the exceptionally detailed documentation of the fighting that is available to researchers, whose significance will in all likelihood remain over time.

The chapters in this volume are divided into the three parts 'Dimensions of Modern Warfare'; 'Organization, Technology, and Training'; and 'Case Studies'. The main conclusions drawn from the contributions of these sections are as follows.

Dimensions of Modern Warfare

Experiences from the war offer several perspectives on the idealized modes of fighting in traditional domains versus the realities of battle. Manoeuvre is a centrepiece of contemporary Western tactical and operational thinking in the land domain. In this regard, Tuck highlights an important observation of established doctrinal wisdom: supported by the same empirics, the war has sustained two opposing interpretations of manoeuvre warfare. Indeed, given that fighting has gradually become dominated by positional and attritional warfare, this has reopened a fundamental debate about the nature and utility of manoeuvre warfare. Several observers have argued that this feature of war has underscored the enduring importance of attrition in warfare, whereas the transparency and lethality of the modern battlefield have made manoeuvre warfare increasingly risky and costly. However, these are not the only explanations of the increasingly attritional character of the war. Rather than concluding that manoeuvre warfare is becoming obsolete, Tuck argues that the realities of the modern battlefield demand that military organizations formulate credible alternatives and contingencies.

Although the war in Ukraine has been heavily land-centric, the volume presents important observations from the maritime and air domains. In terms of air power, neither side of the war has achieved uncontested air superiority. Instead, to reiterate Fedorchak's observation, the war witnessed a form of mutual air denial, which did not allow either side to establish a conclusive dominance over the airspace. Despite the lack of control over the air domain, both parties consistently leveraged aerial assets to support their ground operations. However, given the risks involved in these operations, the utilization of manned aviation was limited. Ukraine's layered integration of both Soviet era and Western systems in its air defences not only promotes the army's resilience and adaptability but also remains an important feature of the air

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domain. Furthermore, the rapid proliferation and diversification of drones, including reconnaissance, loitering munitions, and strike unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), have been heralded as a transformative shift in the character of air warfare. The very rapid development in this field during the war has demonstrated the significance of innovation and adaptation in warfare, as well as of deconfliction and integration of assets belonging to different domains.

Although the scale of naval engagement has been limited, Sanders observes that Russia's Black Sea fleet played an important role in the first phases of the invasion; however, its relevance gradually eroded over the course of the war. This reflects Ukraine's successful efforts to innovate and neutralize traditional naval superiority. Ukraine's employment of sea mines, land-based assets, and uncrewed surface vehicles (USVs) demonstrates that maritime power extends beyond naval capabilities and can be effectively generated with limited means. Although maritime power remains highly relevant in the twenty-first century, Ukrainian successes in the maritime domain, especially the sinking of the *Moskva*, underscore the critical role of qualitative factors in maritime power, as insufficient attention to training, leadership, and technological integration appears to have been important contributing factors to Russia's loss of the flagship. Moreover, the war demonstrated the continuous use of amphibious operations. Although challenging, Ukraine has been able to leverage these operations with adaptability and impact.

Alongside these observations from traditional domains, the war in Ukraine also provides important insights into the variable operational environments in which the war has been fought. Some of the most challenging and destructive battles have taken place in dense urban environments, which are expected to gain increased centrality in future conflicts with peer or near-peer adversaries. Weissmann and Winton show that Ukraine's experiences underscore the significant shift in how technology influences urban warfare. Drones, electronic warfare, and surveillance tools have changed tactical dynamics, serving as important complementary assets to traditional methods, without fundamentally changing them. Fighting in densely populated urban environments, where the balance between military necessity and humanitarian concern becomes particularly salient, places extraordinary demands on battlefield intelligence. Urban combat likely cannot be avoided; therefore, addressing challenges attached to urban combat requires a shift in conceptualization, training, and execution. Weissmann and Winton suggest an adaptable, multi-dimensional approach to the problem by integrating technologies, tactics, and operational situational awareness.

The war has also produced critical lessons regarding logistics, particularly in terms of Russian operational shortcomings. Kinsey and Ti point to the structural inability of the Russian military to sustain its operations due to centralized logistics, inflexible supply systems, and a disconnection between higher command decisions and front-line needs. The war in Ukraine is a testament to the increasingly transparent battlefield, with heightened vulnerability for the rear areas. This transformation implies an increased demand for logistics functions that employ camouflage, electronic discipline, and tactical dispersion.

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Full-scale wars also place enormous strain on military health service capabilities. Bricknell emphasizes that the war in Ukraine has demonstrated the necessity for civil-military integration by mobilizing the entire health sector as part of the war effort. Although specialized, trauma-focused military care capabilities are central in forward areas, rear area care and rehabilitation can leverage civilian health infrastructure. From the point of injury to long-term recovery, clinical standardization is important across the continuum of care.

The war has also highlighted the value of military medical academic institutions as engines of innovation, training, and system oversight. In addition to robust clinical registries and governance structures, these institutions are essential for driving continuous improvements in clinical outcomes.

Organization, Technology, and Training

The long duration of the war in Ukraine has raised important issues regarding the sustainability and endurance of modern militaries, including challenges encountered in terms of maintaining a steady supply of munitions and replacing equipment lost during intensive and attritional fighting. However, the perhaps most central long-term imperative for both sides in the war has been to sustain manpower. The evolution of structure and training practices demonstrated by Ukraine throughout the war has offered several critical observations, for the armed forces of Ukraine (AFU) and its Western partners. As Watling notes, early mobilization driven by necessity provided a surge in the number of volunteers and conscripts that outpaced the state's ability to equip and train them effectively. Although this enabled an immediate response to the existential threat posed by Russia's full-scale invasion, it also incurred long-term costs, particularly in terms of lowering the quality and consistency of combat units.

The AFU initially relied on in-unit training, with limited results compared to rotating units off the front line for training. Watling underscores the importance of a resilient training system with dedicated training battalions staffed by experienced or recuperating personnel who can deliver realistic and up-to-date instructions. Another organizational imperative is the need for legal and procedural flexibility in times of war, allowing for combat-realistic training and the acceptance of higher levels of controlled risk. The diversity in equipment supplied to Ukraine also highlights the necessity of institutionalizing flexibility through training that can equip personnel across multiple platforms without relying on standardization. The longevity of the war and the heavy attrition it has inflicted on the AFU has also raised questions regarding the balance in Western training philosophies between taught operational tempo and force regeneration capacity, and the inherent trade-offs between them. Emphasizing the importance of long-duration exercises can help reframe tactical incentives.

Inclusion and equality are also important features of Ukraine's societal mobilization. Martsenyuk points out that Ukraine has made substantial progress in promoting

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gender equality within society and its military structures, driven by its commitment to international standards, including North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) norms and the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda. The adoption of the Second National Action Plan for United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution 1325 reflects the strong political will of the government to support women's roles in security and defence. Notable successes include legislative support for gender equality, increasing the representation of women in combat roles and leadership positions, and the removal of formal restrictions on women's military education and participation. However, the AFU continues to encounter serious issues, such as gender-based violence, inadequate institutional mechanisms for handling harassment, limited visibility of women in top military and expert roles, and the enduring 'glass ceiling'.

The war has also led to several important observations regarding the predictive reliability, utility, and utilization of intelligence. As Nilsson demonstrates, early deficiencies in intelligence assessments, especially overestimation of Russian capability and underestimation of Ukrainian resilience, underscore the limits of prediction and the difficulty of accounting for intangible variables such as morale, leadership, and adaptability. A much-discussed development has been the United States (US) and United Kingdom (UK) decision to declassify and disclose strategic warning intelligence in the run-up to the invasion to pre-empt Russian disinformation and align Western responses, to a large extent enabled by the growing open-source intelligence (OSINT) ecosystem and real-time commercial satellite imagery.

Intelligence sharing between the US and NATO allies, and Ukraine grew progressively after the full-scale invasion, in close connection with decisions to provide Ukraine with long-range weaponry and political rebalancing of the objectives of helping sustain Ukraine's defence and avoiding escalating the conflict with Russia beyond Ukraine. Intelligence has also seen a transformative technological development during the war. Ukraine has become a live testing ground for commercial artificial intelligence (AI) solutions and cloud-based intelligence processing. These tools offer the potential to process the vast volumes of data generated by modern warfare. However, the outsourcing of technological integration to commercial actors also raises strategic questions about dependency, data sovereignty, and long-term control over battlefield decision-making architecture.

Finally, the analysis and dissemination of experiences from recent wars are key to forecasting the future demands of conflict and the organization of militaries world-wide. In this regard, the war in Ukraine provides a rich trove of information that has had a major impact on military thinking and planning, and will likely continue to do so for decades. As an illustration of a structured analysis and learning process, Hecht and Berelovich describe how the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) instituted comprehensive research into the war in Ukraine, which challenged many of the prevailing assumptions about future wars and reignited debates about the appropriate structure and capabilities of the Israeli military.

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Case Studies

The trajectory of the war can, in simplified terms, be viewed as a sequence of phases in which different characteristics of the fighting have been predominant. While such temporal divisions can of course be subject to debate, this volume has elected to highlight four distinct phases of the war, intended to underline important changes in the mode and pre-conditions for the fighting. These include the preparations and points of departure for both sides at the initiation of the full-scale invasion and the initial Russian operational failure in early 2022; Ukraine's successful counter-offensives in late 2022; the failure of Ukraine's major counter-offensive in 2023; and the war's stagnation into positional and attritional warfare, and attempts to break this deadlock through asymmetrical means.

Arnold presents a detailed analysis of the failure of Russia's initial 'Special Military Operation' (SMO), which was predicated on the assumption of rapid Ukrainian capitulation. Russia's failures were systemic. At the political level, Putin's personal miscalculations generated a misalignment between strategic objectives and operational planning. While Ukraine unified its strategic and tactical levels with the singular aim of national resistance, Russia's invasion plan was riddled with inconsistencies and overconfidence.

These three principal factors underpin the early setbacks of Russia. First, the disjunction between the political leadership and military planners was a fundamental vulnerability to the initial strategy. Second, the moral component of Ukraine's fighting power, manifested as societal cohesion and national resolution, was far superior to that of the aggressor. Third, Ukraine applied traditional principles of war, such as the selection and maintenance of the aim, flexibility, surprise, and economy of effort, far more effectively than Russia, which proved decisive in shaping the course of the war in its early stages.

Ukraine's defence proved resilient and adaptive, providing important insights into defence strategies for smaller or asymmetrically disadvantaged states. Ashour and Shelest argue that Ukraine employed a 'hybrid' defence strategy, which enabled the country to compensate for disadvantages in size. Five key lessons can be drawn from Ukraine's ability to resist the Russian invasion. In particular, reservists constitute as cost-effective force multipliers, enhance national resilience, and allow for rapid mobilization and scalability. Preparing and enabling civilian infrastructure for military use, as applied in the defence of Mariupol, served to strengthen the overall defence system and enabled prolonged resistance against superior forces. Ukraine's ability to integrate capabilities across domains, synchronizing land, air, cyber, and maritime capabilities, allowed it to offset Russian mass through agility and innovation. Remote warfare, enabled in Ukraine through the use of UAVs, USVs, unmanned underwater vehicles (UUVs), and unmanned ground vehicles (UGVs), was employed at a scale and sophistication that was previously unseen in state-on-state conflicts. These platforms enhanced the lethality and extended the operational reach of the AFU. Moreover, Ukraine's strategic support for non-state forces, in Ukraine's occupied

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territories as well as in Russia, and as far afield as in Syria and Mali, enabled horizontal escalation and forced Russian forces to divert resources across a wider battlespace.

The 2022 Ukrainian counter-offensive in Kharkiv achieved remarkable success, conditioned on surprise, rapid manoeuvre, and Russian overextension. While also successful, the Kherson operation by contrast encountered stiff resistance and underscored the difficulty of achieving rapid breakthroughs under more contested conditions. However, as Massicot notes, these offensive accomplishments could not be replicated in subsequent operations. By mid-2023, Russian forces improved their defensive posture through unit rotations, wide and deep mining fields, and increased drone coverage. This transition marked a broader shift from manoeuvre to positional warfare. Russian forces' increasing reliance on drones and loitering munitions further inhibited Ukrainian advances and redefined the tempo and nature of engagements. Massicot characterizes this new phase as sustainable competition, with both sides locked in a prolonged contest for endurance, resource mobilization, and external support.

Fedorchak's analysis of the 2023 spring counter-offensive further underscores Ukraine's structural and tactical constraints. The ambitious plans for mechanized assaults were derailed by dense Russian minefields, pervasive intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) from drones, and flooding of key terrain following the destruction of the Kakhovka dam. After initial and failed attempts at mechanized breakthroughs, the offensive relied on infantry-centred tactics. However, despite yielding limited territorial gains, the Ukrainian armed forces (UAF) fell short of achieving their operational objectives. This period can be characterized as a contest for time and preparation, as Ukraine's priorities for personnel, training, and deployment and delayed access to essential Western equipment created a window for Russia to entrench its defences.

As the conflict entered 2024 and 2025, and either side failed to accomplish the breakthroughs and openings required to reintroduce manoeuvre to the fighting, Göransson highlights how Ukraine adopted a strategy of elastic defence, leveraging terrain and defence-in-depth to impose disproportionate costs on Russian attackers. In parallel, Ukraine increasingly sought to impose asymmetry on the war. The AFU utilized long-range aerial and maritime drones to disrupt Russian operations far beyond the front lines, including carrying out attacks on infrastructure deep within Russian territory. Ukraine's incursion into the Kursk region also represented a successful surprise attack in an area where the Russian side was unprepared, temporarily leaving Ukraine in control of a sizeable piece of Russian territory.

Despite these tactical successes, Ukraine has remained vulnerable to Russia's numerical advantages and shifts in Western political dynamics. Donald Trump's election as US president in late 2024 introduced new uncertainties about the durability of US support for Ukraine. This change in US politics raised questions about the long-term viability of Ukraine's military strategy in the absence of sustained external assistance.

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Expanding the Scope

The multitude of perspectives covered in this volume cannot purport to provide a full picture either of the war or of modern warfare. There are of course notable additional angles of importance, which also speak to the conceptual approaches introduced in Chapter 1. Of these, both sides in the conflict have put significant effort into the informational dimension of the war, including the systematic use of strategic communication, information influence, and psychological operations. Russia's extensive spread of disinformation, both domestically and abroad, aimed to undermine Ukrainian morale and resistance and fracture Western unity and support. *Vis-à-vis* a Western audience (although not globally), however, Ukraine was capable of establishing a powerful narrative of the war's causes and trajectory, which dominated Western understandings of the war especially during the first two years.

Ukraine's agile strategic communication, making innovative use of social media and memes, with a direct appeal to Western publics, played a significant role in sustaining international engagement and framing the conflict. The battle for perception and shaping of the cognitive domain has been a central feature of the war.

Cyber warfare has featured prominently in the war and was an important coercive instrument that Russia employed against Ukraine between 2014 and the beginning of the full-scale invasion. In the cyber domain, Russia sought to target Ukrainian infrastructure (e.g. attacking energy grids, conducting espionage, and disabling command and control networks). Ukraine, with extensive assistance from Western tech firms and cyber defence agencies, mounted significant cyber defence efforts, including migrating government data to secure Western cloud servers. The integration of cyber operations with conventional warfare is undoubtedly an important feature of modern warfare.

The issue of force sustainment is naturally also connected to economic measures as part of the overall war effort. Since 2022, Western states have imposed sanctions targeting Russian banking, energy, and defence sectors; imposed export controls on high-tech components critical to Russia's military-industrial complex; and frozen the assets of Russian oligarchs and officials. Russia responded with energy blackmail and attempted to reroute trade through non-Western partners.

Although the volume focuses on Ukraine, Russia, and the West, the war naturally has wider global ramifications. These include China's ambivalent but strategically calculated position, transfers of weapons to Russia by Iran and North Korea, and Turkey seeking a balancing and mediating role.

Finally, the war has had significant environmental impacts, from the immediate destruction of infrastructure such as the Kakhovka dam to the significant pollution and environmental degradation caused by the fighting. Indeed, climate and environmental security are both a consequence of, and a potential tool in, war, including the potential use of ecological damage and food supply disruption.

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In an attempt to provide some synthesized conclusions based on the individual contributions, it is useful to revisit the two conceptual frameworks presented in the introductory Chapter 1 of this volume: the continuum of military operations in relation to the intensity of conflict and the versatility of military forces.

Indeed, the Ukrainian experience over time elucidates how military organizations must have the capacity to operate across a continuum of scenarios, responding to fluid tactical conditions and shifting strategic demands with both adaptability and flexibility. The war between Russia and Ukraine has fluctuated in conflict intensity since 2014, and the significance of military force, relative to other coercive means that Russia has employed against Ukraine, has varied over time. Ukraine's defence against Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion represents the far right end of the military operations continuum, with full-spectrum engagement across all domains: land, air, maritime, cyber, and space. The transition from manoeuvre to entrenched positional warfare underscores the need for scalable doctrinal and operational alternatives. This emphasizes that military organizations must plan not only for optimal conditions but also for attritional and ambiguous environments.

An important insight from the outbreak of the war is the role of the 'pivot zone', the transitional area on the operations continuum where conflicts shift from limited to high intensity, and the inherent difficulty of pinpointing this shift in a war that is not of one's own choosing. Indeed, Ukraine's political and military leadership, while seeing Russia's build-up and receiving warning intelligence from partners, appears to have been surprised by the timing and scale of the attack. Ukraine's ability to navigate this shift, particularly through rapid mobilization and solicitation of international support, was decisive in the country's ability to resist, as was societal cohesion, strategic communication, and intelligence sharing, which supported political and military decision making.

The case studies have highlighted how intensity affects the balance between conventional and unconventional warfare. The war in Ukraine has truly been a full-spectrum conflict in which conventional force employment has worked in tandem with the integration of hybrid and asymmetric strategies, such as non-state actors, cyber operations, and covert action. This demonstrates the necessity for an armed force structure that is adaptable and deployable across intensity levels.

Versatility, which emerges from the interplay between adaptability and flexibility, is considered an ideal model for assessing operational effectiveness. For Ukraine, adaptability through doctrinal reform, rapid integration of foreign equipment, and learning loops from battlefield realities, has enabled adjustments to evolving threats and changes in the operational environment. Flexibility, manifested in tactical innovations and agile responses to Russian actions, has allowed these adaptations to be implemented swiftly and effectively.

The Ukrainian experience illustrates how versatility must be cultivated through seven interdependent factors: doctrine and TTPs, technology, interoperability, cross-domain integration, military identity and culture, education, and training. Deficiencies in any of these factors constrains versatility. For example, problems with training

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and equipment integration impede offensive capabilities. Conversely, robust civil-military integration in war efforts mitigates systemic strain and improves long-term sustainability.

In summary, the war in Ukraine underscores the centrality of the ability to adapt, learn, and operate across multiple domains and intensities. Versatility, as a function of adaptability and flexibility, when institutionalized across the seven factors of military capability, is pivotal in modern militaries.

Modern Warfare and Military Preparedness in an Unstable Environment

At the time of writing this volume, the war in Ukraine has stretched into its fourth year. Governments and intelligence agencies across Europe are developing increasingly detailed assessments of the threats to Europe and NATO that Russia might pose after a ceasefire or peace settlement. These predictions reflect the common recognition that Russia's geopolitical ambitions and willingness to use force will not be extinguished by the cessation of active hostilities in Ukraine. Instead, many expect Moscow to rearm, adapt, and seek new opportunities to challenge Europe's security. Throughout the war in Ukraine, Europe has witnessed a surge in hybrid activities traceable to Russia, including sabotage, espionage, and targeted assassinations. The cessation of large-scale fighting in Ukraine is unlikely to imply a relaxation of these actions, while potentially opening opportunities for Russia to project the conventional military power of its dramatically boosted defence production.

Indeed, there is no shortage of geopolitical flashpoints underscoring the risk that the entire spectrum of conflict and war scenarios, including full-scale warfare between technologically advanced adversaries, could become a distinct feature of international politics in the coming decades. China's potential to launch a military invasion of Taiwan remains the most significant security concern in east Asia. Recently, Chinese military activity around Taiwan has markedly increased, including frequent airspace incursions and large-scale exercises in the Taiwan Strait. The situation on the Korean peninsula has a continued potential for renewed fighting.

The escalation between India and Pakistan in 2025 underscores the prevalent risk of war between the two nuclear-armed neighbours, whereas Pakistan in February 2026 declared 'open war' against Afghanistan with operations ongoing at the finalization of this manuscript. The first months of 2026 have also seen the US/Israeli war against Iran and a renewed Israeli incursion into southern Lebanon.

The increased risk of international volatility and conflict amid ongoing geopolitical shifts underscores that the continued development of versatile military forces employable across the entire range of conflict scenarios is a critical task for NATO allies and partners.

The evolving features of the modern battlefield, including transparency, data abundance, and information overload, along with the continued pertinence of well-established conventional warfighting, highlight how new innovations are added to

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existing ones, rather than replacing them. In the war between Russia and Ukraine, fighting has not been predominately characterized by the application of any particular set of tactics, materials, or innovations; it involves everything at once.

The very rapid development of AI in the service of decision making and targeting and the rise of automation are distinctly new technologies that some observers argue will revolutionize warfighting, although scepticism is also rightly raised as to whether this will be the case. Nevertheless, optimism regarding the capacity to integrate the full range of effects that a military can exert, epitomized in the evolution of multi-domain operations, is fuelled by the potential to fuse enormous amounts of information granted by new technologies.

At a time of grave uncertainty regarding international politics and the future of the international system, we are witnessing significant investments in military capability, drawing in large part on experiences from the devastating war in Ukraine and attempts to apply present knowledge to the anticipation of future opportunities granted by technology and doctrinal innovation. This volume has attempted to pull together a set of important observations drawn from the war in Ukraine, in order to hopefully provide a piece of the puzzle, and contribute to established understandings of military power and modern warfare.

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