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Book Review

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Book Review: Tactical and Strategic Insights from the Russo-Ukrainian War: Western Security and Defence in the 21st Century edited by Thomas-Durell Young and Jarosław Gryz (2025)

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Abstract: The Russo-Ukrainian war, that was forecasted by some experts to last merely a few days, is already into its 5th year. Mounting evidence conveys that Russia started the invasion of Ukraine by ignoring all of the concepts it had been advocating and implementing since the beginning of its military reform in 2008. The war has demonstrated several essential changes in the battlefield operations, war-waging practices, recruitment of troops, and force structures.

This collection of chapters portrays how new technologies and innovations impact tactics and are arguably rewriting the rules and norms of conflict. These innovations allowed for the creation of new methods of OSINT analysis and war monitoring. The book, consisting of twelve separate studies, examines different issues and topics relevant for today's journalists, academics, as well as military experts and practitioners.

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Introduction

I have had Young and Gryz's (2025) *Tactical and Strategic Insights from the Russo-Ukrainian War: Western Security and Defence in the 21st Century* on my table since it published. When I first paged through the content, my assumption was very simple: this book is another example of a revolving door of experts presenting their own thoughts about this war. However, I was only half correct. Indeed, the book consists of a number of separate cases covering different stages and areas of the war. There are chapters including theories as well as deep dives into specific topics such as urban, air, and naval warfare. However, the farther I got into the book, an increasingly clear picture emerged. The book consisted of several individual chapter studies that supplement each other so well, that at the end of my reading, I had a new perspective of the war developing in my mind.

What was New?

Many experts who analyse the Russo-Ukrainian war go straight to the events of February 2022. Here the approach is different. The book starts from the Russian prewar theories explaining Russian behaviour in the first days of the invasion and why they made such fatal mistakes. The editors put forth that 'overtly aggressive Russian behaviour, can be found in the unique logics of the "Russia dream" which holds that Russia must be a great empire' (Gryz and Young, 2025, p.1). As this war is a realisation of Russian expansionism, it 'offers a unique opportunity to analyse, to observe, and assess critical changes taking place in the modern battle space' (Gryz and Young, 2025, p.1).

The editors arranged the chapters in a way in which they build upon and complement one another. The chapters move us smoothly alongside the development of the war. Next, the book continues to chapters on the first 500 days of the war, chronicling Russian attacks and Ukrainian defence, as well as analysis of separate areas such the battlefield communications, urban battles, operational fires, logistics, cyber war, and more. After those studies, the deeper analysis in areas such as Ukrainian cultural heritage, energy infrastructure, and information environment take centre stage. Finally, an editorial conclusion wraps everything together while presenting preliminary recommendations that NATO and national defence planners ought to consider. Synthesising these elements together does not result in a collection of separate studies, but rather in a solid interconnected analysis written by a team of experts.

In addition to the quality and flow of cases, the high level of expertise from contributors must be commended. All authors were able to provide both generalisable findings as well as astonishing or deeply intriguing insights. Different analysis approaches used across the cases introduces readers to interesting and novel methods for data collection. One such example is in chapter 02, where Zsolt Lazar's study offers an OSINT analysis of the first 500 days of the war. This chapter integrates precise GPS coordinates with thermal anomalies received from the NASO FIRMS with data from an Oryx platform presenting equipment loses in the Russo-Ukrainian war. The methods are so precise that they offer tangible proof of locating the 'hottest' engagement zones and Ukrainian successes in defence.

Another particularly stimulating study is Ilona Urych, Anna Korzeniowska-Bihun, Robert Boroch, and Tadeusz Szczurek's study detailed in chapter 10, *Ukrainian Cultural Heritage in the Russian Ukrainian War: Ukrainian Theatre – A Case Study*. This study deals with issues surrounding "anthropological aggression" and how Russia intentionally creates social conflict. Other intriguing examples are the relevant and reliable analyses presented in the air, naval, cyber, and informational domains supported by sound lines of argumentation and reinforced by credible references making these parts of the book both informative and trustworthy.

Offering opportunity for self-reflection, the collection of chapters, of course, presents findings and poses various words of caution, but they also offer unique perspectives that bring forth insights otherwise overlooked. This made the book not only interesting to read, but, in some cases, also a good reference and starting point for further research. At the same time, it is obvious that the book requires a continuation. This war is changing fast and each of the studies can easily absorb new data, generating new findings, more generalisations, and further conclusions.

The Review of Separate Studies

Chapter 01, *The Russo-Ukrainian War: How Russian Military Theory Presaged Future Wars* by Krisztián Jójárt, provides an interesting approach towards Russian military theorists' statements and ideas. While arguing that despite some (such as Makhmut Gareyev) exaggerated the significance of non-contact warfare over the usage of massive fires in the battlefield, Russians used both extensively in the war. The study provides facts and credible sources confirming the huge amounts of artillery munitions being used, the ends achieved, and the application of different Russian non-linear (hybrid) means from its "toolbox". The author rightly points out that Moscow did not fully accept the Western perception that non-military means can help to undermine and topple opposing regimes. On the contrary, Russia saw and took these non-military means as supplementary to the military means, not as a substitute.

The chapter further explains the Russian interpretation of active defence strategy, with the justification for the invasion presented as 'existential struggle with the West' (Jójárt, 2025, p.11) and states the strategy of limited action being 'indicative of the way in which Moscow wanted to use its armed forces' (Jójárt, 2025, p.13). Russian understanding surrounding special operations and their importance in war is well elaborated, and the study explains how this concept is applied in Ukraine. The author also provides numerous examples and explanations regarding the roles of other (paramilitary and secret service) institutions in this war. While stating that 'the struggle for the occupation and holding of the territory has been replaced by the control of critical structures' (Jójárt, 2025, p.17) the study details why Russia has to move from a short

special military operation to the protracted war (Jójárt, 2025, p.21) and proves that changes in both strategies and tactics are taking place.

Zsolt Lazar's chapter 02, *OSINT Chronicles: Analysing Frontline Dynamics, Equipment Losses, and Casualties in the First 500 Days of the 2022 Russian Invasion of Ukraine* serves as a solid analytical work proving that OSINT is becoming an increasingly powerful tool. The study acknowledges the OSINT transformation from 'a specialised resource to a mainstream force driving transparency and accountability in the increasingly interconnected world' (Lazar, 2025, p.33). With an explanation of the platforms, the cases of NASA FIRMS and Oryx are used to detail the Russo-Ukrainian war within the first 500 days; the study provides numerous graphs, schemes, and statistics. This chapter is an exceptional baseline to continue such research in any and all applicable cases. If anybody wants to replicate the research for the entire Russo-Ukrainian war, the result would be a useful and interesting analytical study, most likely confirming all the conclusions and therefore the validity of this study.

In chapter 03, *Battlefield Communications in the Russo-Ukraine War: The First Six Months* by Glen Grant, is essentially an analysis of failures and solutions in the military communication area from both the Russian *and* Ukrainian sides. Equipped with a challenging methodology, a series of interviews conducted by journalists explore the issue, proving to be both an interesting and effective medium for the study. While analysing the rise and fall of various types of communications: radio, internet, space, mobile, and static line phones, both the Ukrainians (Grant, 2025, pp.61-68) and Russians (Grant, 2025, pp.73-74) provide first hand evidence directly from combat participants lips. The author demonstrates the importance of communication in modern warfare as well as underscores the necessity for flexible, agile, and innovative approaches in all the types of it. The analysis surrounding the role of communications for the artillery and command and control of troops (Battle management systems, BMS) during those months allows the author to offer a set of credible conclusions proving the importance of communications as a 'fundamental and vital part of modern warfare' (Grant, 2025, p.74). As the previous study this one can to be extended to cover the entire Russo-Ukrainian war.

Chapter 04, *The Russo-Ukraine War and the Urban Battle* by Anthony King touches a very interesting topic – urban warfare. King advocates that this type of warfighting is becoming increasingly relevant today. A deep analysis of data from specified geographical areas indicates how this warfare evolved through each phase of the Russo-Ukraine war to almost become the prevailing form of military operations (King, 2025, p.80).

The study allows the reader to get a sense of the dynamics of this form of warfare. Especially interesting and useful is the line of argumentation related to the impact of localisation and globalisation on the military operations causing the urban warfare to be more present (King, 2025, pp.85-94). The author concludes that, despite being so destructive and devastating, the urban warfare most probably will prevail in the future. Still, another, almost counterintuitive conclusion is that the 'Russo-Ukrainian war surprisingly demonstrates that high-intensity warfare is characterised not by rapid, frictionless precision strikes and mobility, but rather slow, grinding destructive campaigns' (King, 2025, p.95).

Zhirayr Amirkhanyan's study detailed in chapter 05, *Operational Fires: Lessons Observed* is, according to my personal estimate, among the best studies of this book. The chapter focuses on the employment of joint combat function fires in the modern war. The study concentrates mostly on artillery (tube and MRLS) fires while leaving application and inventories of tactical missiles, UAVs, and gliding air bombs less central. Amirkhanyan details that in the beginning of the Russo-Ukrainian war, Russia demonstrated a renaissance of ground artillery, but eventually, Moscow begins to prioritise air-to-surface fires. Through the analysis of artillery involvement, the author argues that an improvement in the efficiency of artillery has been achieved due to the use of UAVs, software, and dual use hardware entering the game. A comparison of precise guided fires and mass shelling with pros and cons analysed leads to a conclusion, that despite 'precision munitions having played an important role in this war, other artillery factors need to be examined closely' as well (Amirkhanyan, 2025, p.100). The study digs deep into Russian and Ukrainian artillery application doctrines and CONOPS, thus increasing the reader's

ability to understand what has been and is happening doctrinally on the battlefield.

Another useful element of Amirkhanyan's chapter is the deep analysis of problems and shortages such as a lack of munitions, guns servicing experiences, united C2, etc. The study provides a detailed examination of the innovations that the Ukrainians have taken to tackle the aforementioned issues. Next to artillery, other fire delivery means including loitering UAVs, missiles, and directly guided projectiles (ATGMs) are studied in addition to tactics and approaches adopted to employ them. The only weakness of this study, if any, as detailed by the author themself, is that the majority of analysis is related to the Ukrainian side. Bearing in mind that, at least in the beginning of the war, Russians possessed much weaker precision fire capabilities; to compensate they generated bigger mass application of combine fires. With the recent Russian advantages in UAV, gliding air-bombs, and ballistic and cruise missiles an analysis of their practices would be extraordinarily beneficial.

Chapter 06, *Ukraine's Air War in Context*, by Christian F. Anrig provides a professional analysis of air operations Russia conducted from the first days of the invasion as well as a comparison of Russian and NATO Air Warfare doctrines. The analysis starts with the acknowledgement that after the Cold War the Western Air superiority and prioritisation was lowered to mid-altitudes (10,000-25,000 feet). Having aircraft operating above MANPADS range (like in Iraq or Bosnia) allowed the western air component to play the most vital roles in recent modern wars. At the same time Russian Air Warfare doctrines and approaches stagnated and the force itself went through a reformation. The situation started to change around 2015, during the Russian operation in Syria. The chapter touches upon numerous issues starting from the application of unguided free fall air munitions (bombs) from high altitudes and extending to lower altitudes with the suppression of enemies Air defence.

Though the study touches upon numerous essential issues, Anrig analyses three primary cases. The first case centres on how Ukrainians forced the Russian Air Force to reduce from mid-level to low-level operations (Anrig, 2025, pp.121-126). What comes as a surprise here is that Ukrainian success

was achieved mostly due to the better preparation of Ukrainian pilots; not the number of aircraft they had ready for air-to-air fights (Ukraine had 67 versus Russia had 398) (Anrig, 2025, p.122). Due to a variety of factors, Ukraine was able to force Russia to deprioritise air-to-air missions and to switch to Combat Air Patrolling (CAP). Later, the author analyses how Ukrainians employed former soviet long and mid-range air defence systems (S 300 PT and Buk M1 type). Here Anrig concludes that not the loses of the systems itself, but the runout of missiles was the bigger concern for Ukrainians.

The second case examines how Ukrainians adopted a passive air defence at the expense of one that is more fully integrated. This example describes the Ukrainian approach to organising the air defence while combining the system usage in offensive (active shooting) and defensive (avoiding destruction) modes. The passive air defence mode actually 'enabled the Ukrainian air force to continue the fight' (Anrig, 2025, p.127). The study presents how Ukrainians used western air defence systems (SAMP/T and Patriot) alongside their own airframes and missiles (ATACMS) to perform offensive counter air (OCA) mode as well.

The third case focuses on Russian offensive air operations more generally. In this section, two main reasons for Russian air war failure are provided: a successful Ukrainian passive air defence and the Russian failure to achieve full suppression of extended air defence. Both explanations are demonstrated through the analysis of factors such as sensors, tactics, and reaction speed. The roles of satellites, UAVs, and HUMINT as well as the application of GPS and EW systems are also discussed throughout the third case. The chapter closes by discussing the employment of Russian ballistic and cruise missiles (ISKANDER) and gliding air munition. With the solid and sound conclusions presented, Anrig succeeds in producing an analysis that allows even non-specialists to gain a good sense of what was happening on the Ukrainian battlefield.

Piotr Mickiewicz and Daniel Kasprzycki's study detailed in chapter 07, *The Black Sea as an Area of Miliary Operations during the Russian 'Special Operation'* is devoted to the naval component in the Russo-Ukrainian war. Although the Black Sea waters are not the main arena of decisive battles, numerous activities

involving manned and unmanned, surface and submerged vessels, new naval tactics, and new weapons applications practices took place in this theatre. Unmanned vessels have made changes both the current and future security environments. As a result of Black Sea battles and land operations, Russians managed to gain a control over the North and West parts of the Azov Sea, therefore turning it into a de facto internal sea of Russia.

One of Russia's primary goals for the entire war is to gain freedom of operations and safeguarding their commercial shipping routes in the Black Sea, simultaneously preventing Ukrainian efforts in both seas. Russians tried to monopolise the exports of metallurgical products through the Azov Sea while also expanding control of the naval traffic from Southern Europe to Central Asia via the Black Sea. Mickiewicz and Kasprzycki conclude that the Ukrainian defensive naval capabilities (especially naval missile defence) are a primary factor in denying Russia what it wanted.

Next to providing details on naval Orders of Battle (OBs) for both sides and statistics on naval equipment and operations, the study analyses two cases: the Russian occupation and defence of Snake Island, and the Ukrainian naval defence by naval missiles targeting Russian naval targets specifically. The only limitation worth mentioning is that the study only covers the period between February 2022 through February 2023. It must be stressed that the limited time period does not diminish the value of the study, though there is a significant amount of the war that is not included in the dataset which requires further research.

Roman Kolodii's chapter 08, *In the Classroom of Cyber-War: Lessons Observed from the Cyber-Kinetic Nexus*, takes the reader into a new domain of modern warfare – the cyber domain. In the beginning, Kolodii states that those who believed the Russian invasion would end rapidly with Russian victory, expected Russian cyber-warfare 'to become a significant instrument of the Russian invasion, and an important predictor of its ultimate success' (2025, p.162). This did not turn out to be true as Moscow's cyber warfare 'did not result in a catastrophic paralysis of the critical informational infrastructure undergirding Ukraine's national economy and governance' (Kolodii, 2025, p.163).

The study centres cyber warfare in its practical applications, assessing the two primary lines of opposing argumentation. The first strand is that cyber warfare is as devastating as a kinetic one, and the second, that the role of cyber warfare is overestimated, and its impact is limited. The first line of argumentation provides a scale of critical targets which can be damaged and destroyed by cyber means and points to cases such as Stuxnet to illustrate the potential destruction of military C4ISR. Supporters of the second line of argumentation, state that 'due to majority of cyberattacks not bearing violent results compare to the kinetic ones, the cyber warfare does not affect conventional war significantly (Kolodii, 2025, pp.164-166).

To challenge those two strands of thinking, the author examined three hypotheses: Russian cyber-capabilities were less effective than expected, Ukrainian cyber-capabilities were more effective than expected, and the Russo-Ukrainian war is proving that cyber space is less suitable than kinetic warfare as it was expected (Kolodii, 2025, pp.167-175). With the conclusion that 'whilst the present hypotheses contain a certain measure of truth, they nonetheless fail to explain unilaterally, each of its own, the outcomes of the Russo-Ukrainian war cyber war' the author suggest five main lessons to be learned and invites to continue to follow the developments in the Russo-Ukrainian cyber war.

Chapter 09, *Logistics Lessons Observed: A Critical Enabler and Vulnerability* by Ronald Ti, focuses on the role logistics play in the war. Ti analyses several logistics cases including NATO logistics and the changes it is experiencing now; logistics under Russian offensive doctrine and intense area fires; logistics under ISTAR and uncrewed aerial systems; logistics under denied airspace; Russian disregard of international Humanitarian Law; and re-emphasis of the importance of medical logistics and blood supply (Ti, 2025, pp.186-198).

From this series of analyses, the study concludes three main lessons. The first lesson is that 'resilient operational logistics remains an essential ingredient for success' (Ti, 2025, p.184). The second lesson confirms that the logistics represents a critical vulnerability and being 'exacerbated by a battlespace that is now transparent and directly observable via multiple intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition, and reconnaissance (ISTAR) modalities' (Ti,

2025, p.184). Finally, the third lesson acknowledges that despite 'how sound or flawed it may be, the strategy employed is secondary to effective logistics' (Ti, 2025, p.184). The study will be an interesting read for anyone who wants a deeper look at how logistics changed throughout the war thus far.

Ilona Urych, Anna Korzeniowska-Bihun, Robert Boroch, and Tadeusz Szczurek, in chapter 10, *Ukrainian Cultural Heritage in the Russian-Ukrainian War: Ukrainian Theatre – A Case Study* concentrate on the non-material essence of the war in general, highlighting the case of Ukraine in particular. Different from other studies, it analyses hybrid war components including international humanitarian laws and conventions, cultures, ethical values, etc. Attention here is devoted to discussing the importance of cultural matters (material culture, immaterial culture, and ecological culture) during wartime. This chapter asserts that before the adoption of the UN Convention protecting cultural heritage sites, cultural matters were not specifically taken into consideration during warfighting. Since its adoption, signatory countries at least try to control what they do in war. However, since the start of Russia's war in Ukraine, Russia intentionally interferes with the Ukrainian sociocultural environment and creates social conflict.

Beginning with a falsification of archaeological, historical, and cultural domains, Russia also continues with deliberate cultural and social naturalisation in the occupied territories. Among the main findings, proof of Russia's wishes to destroy Ukrainian identity as a nation in the Ukrainian theatre is presented. The study goes in depths while analysing artistic, personnel, material, and non-material losses for Ukraine as a result of Russian war crimes. Examples and cases of a reduction in artistic production, losses in the ranks of cultural personnel, a deliberate destruction of historical and cultural facilities, and more are all presented the evidence. The second part of the study underscores Ukrainian efforts to resist and protect their own cultural heritage and identity, with a particular attention given to de-russification and decolonisation efforts in film, theatre, literature, music, and more. The study concludes that 'the Russian Federation blatantly violates international law, including all relevant rules to which they are a legal party' (Urych et al., 2025, p.219). This chapter might be useful for those who are interested in exploring

Russia's non-linear warfare, especially as it relates to the information and psychological domains.

Chapter 11, *Lessons Observed from the Critical Energy Infrastructure: Its Role in the Russian-Ukrainian War*, by Jarosław Gryz, Andrzej Saborń, Dariusz Majchrzak, Krzysztof Król, and Andrej Wilk analyses economic domain particularities in the war. Critical infrastructure, especially energy infrastructure, which allows to meet the state's population, economic, communication, and military needs is one of the most foundational elements necessary to succeed in war. Ukraine demonstrates this bluntly. The study analyses Russia's actions in attempt to diminish, if not destroy, Ukrainian critical infrastructure since the beginning of the war. Interestingly, the chapter details Ukrainian efforts to safeguard and protect their critical energy infrastructure.

Since the war started in the most industrial territories of Ukraine, Russia tried to destroy this important asset. The study estimates that 'as of 24 January 2023, Russia occupied, damaged, or destroyed around 50% of Ukraine's installed energy capacity' (Gryz et al., 2025, p.225). A detailed list and analysis of Russian actions leave no question surrounding the level of brutality and decisiveness the Russian military used. The role of nuclear energy in this war is also elaborated. In indicating the exceptional importance of Ukraine's nuclear infrastructure and concluding that 'Russians treat radiological security in the same way as energy security: as a political, psychological, or kinetic weapon' (Gryz et al., 2025, p.234). As one of the lessons learned, the authors suggest the West redefine their own approaches on how to protect their own critical infrastructure. The study provides solid facts, schemes, and statistics, which makes it a good foundation for future analysis.

Marlena Zadorożna in her study detailed in chapter 12, *Lessons Observed: Countering Informational Warfare* analyses an important part of modern (hybrid) war: the information domain. With this form of warfare becoming an increasingly essential element of modern conflicts, analysis on how it is run in the Russo-Ukrainian war in addition to what lessons can be learned from it, are at the forefront of research. Zadorożna assumes that 'Russian theory of informational warfare is built in opposition to the theory of cyber-security developed in the West, based mainly on the military and intelligence use of the

new informational technologies' (2025, p.240). From her perspective, 'informational warfare in the Russian perception means influencing the consciousness of the masses, as part of the rivalry between the different civilisational systems and by use of special means to control information resources as 'information weapons' (Zadorożna, 2025, pp.240-241). The study describes and analyses both the Russian strategic narratives used against Ukraine, emphasising the ideological foundation of the Russian informational warfare doctrine: neo-conservatism, anti-liberalism, and anti-Americanism as well as the Ukrainian efforts to strengthen their information and communicational capabilities to counter to the Russian threat (Zadorożna, 2025, pp.241-245).

An interesting exception compared to other studies, is that Zadorożna elaborates on the impact the information warfare in Russo-Ukrainian war had on her own country of Poland. She provides her own thoughts from the Polish perspective, as Ukraine's neighbour, from within this information domain, acknowledging that Poland witnessed some Russian information attacks such as the migrant crisis on Polish-Belorussian border from 2021. Zadorożna suggests that 'to draw conclusions about the informational warfare in Russian-Ukrainian war is still premature' (Zadorożna, 2025, p.251) but some lessons can be identified. And one of those lessons is that 'civil-military cooperation is an essential element of effective informational security' (Zadorożna, 2025, p.253).

Bringing the book to a close, the editors offer several concluding remarks in *Conclusion: Preliminary Insights for NATO Defence Officials and Planners*. The concluding chapter wraps-up findings of all the various studies into a set of final conclusions. Among those it is worth emphasising first, the necessity for the military to rethink the role and emphasis of certain arms and weapons platforms; second, to revives military planning assumptions, warfighting concepts and, as a consequence, possibly even organisational structure. It is also essential to underscore: Russian thinking on warfare is misunderstood in the West; and that growing urbanisation needs to be taken into consideration. The Russian nonlinear warfare approaches have to be examined more closely in combination with lessons learned; and the role of communications in

modern war are an essential element for success (Grzy and Young, 2025, pp.259-268).

Conclusion

The book *Tactical and Strategic Insights from the Russo-Ukrainian War: Western Security and Defence in the 21st Century* is a solid collection of well-selected professional set of analytical works covering different fields of the modern war. All case analyses, presented as chapters of the book, are done following adequate methodologies and supported by solid arguments and facts. This makes each of them separately and the entire book a credible source of knowledge and a potential reference and foundation for future research in all of the areas covered. The book is well structured and easy to read even for ordinary readers, who do not possess deep knowledge of the subjects matters. The only wish one can express after reading the book, is that all of experts will continue their work to consistently update the analysis and findings to cover the entire Russo-Ukrainian war.

AI Statement: The author declares that Artificial Intelligence was not used in the preparation of this book review in any way.

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