

From endless wars to permanent war

Samir Saul and Michel Seymour

Respectively Professor of History, Université de Montréal; Retired Professor of Philosophy,  
Université de Montréal

September 7, 2022

The six months of war in Ukraine has left the world wondering what will happen next. When and how will it end? According to the authorities in Kiev, all the lost territories will be taken back by arms and the Russians will be driven out. As for Russia, it has not set a timetable or final perimeter for its operations. The course of events since February suggests that it will focus on the territories populated by Russian speakers as far as Transnistria, but it has also made it clear that it could go beyond that if a settlement is not reached.

Given that Kiev sets as a precondition the defeat of Russia, there would be nothing to negotiate. And from the Russian point of view, what need would there be to negotiate after reaching Transnistria? The protracted talks in March 2022 were doomed to failure, especially since NATO pressured Kiev to end them and one of the Ukrainian negotiators was murdered. An agreement would have been no more respected than the Minsk agreements. Finally, the longer the conflict continues, the more difficult it will be to find a diplomatic solution.

The answer to the question at the beginning is that the conflict in Ukraine will be long-lasting, because it is the nodal point of an iron cross between forces that go far beyond Ukraine. It coincides with a far-reaching duel on the economic level, with the initial intention of a Russian collapse and the immediate prospect of Europe following in Russia's footsteps. Lucidity requires clarity, even if it means that our optimism suffers.

Novelty of the conflict

We are so used to American wars that military intervention by another great power was like a thunderclap. It was a prerogative of the "one superpower," the exclusive attribute of the hegemon. For years, Russia only wanted to be accepted by the West. However, the extension of NATO to its borders, the "revolutions" in neighboring countries and the denunciation campaigns have made it change its attitude. The armed intervention in Ukraine is the clear expression of this change of attitude. Not that it came as a surprise to U.S. policymakers. The report *Extending Russia* (2019) by the Rand Corporation, a "think tank" serving the Pentagon, listed ways to squeeze Russia, while anticipating a "counter-escalation" on its part. If you were to believe it, you would think you were reading a game plan. Subsequent U.S. actions have been perfectly consistent in every detail with the measures proposed in the Rand paper. To the point of caricature, the same scenario is being played out against China, with Taiwan acting as the Eastern Ukraine.

The image of Vladimir Putin as an expansionist who wants to regain the lost USSR has thus faded. In this regard, the West has been making a fuss about the figure of the conservative philosopher Alexander Dugin for some time, as an attempt to cling to the idea that the military operation can be explained by an internal Russian logic (Dugin's influence on Putin) and not as a reaction to the provocation of the United States. This imaginary scenario had the great advantage of evacuating the geopolitical stakes and of not taking into account the American elephant in the room.

The conflict in Ukraine has put an end to the post-Cold War era. The unipolar moment is in its twilight. The initiative for military action is no longer the monopoly of the United States as soon as another great power takes up arms and, moreover, does so as a frontal challenge to U.S. policy. Even the methods change. The Russian operation is a limited war, both conventional and essentially ground-based, a model that had been replaced by American "postmodern" wars, made up of aerial bombardments and a flood of "communications" where "narrative" and "virtual reality" drown out reality.

#### Risk of perpetuation of the conflict

Let us hope that the conflict does not degenerate into a world war, despite the efforts of a few hotheads fed up with Russophobia. Whatever the configuration that emerges in Ukraine, with negotiations and a signed agreement or not, Russia will have to defend the Russian-speaking regions of the East and the South, and prevent the transformation of the North and the West into a NATO weapons base. And as long as it is there, the other side will try to dislodge it, with the support of NATO. There will be strikes, blows, sabotage, attacks (like the one against Daria Dugina) and reprisals.

The result would be a protracted conflict, always part of the U.S. strategy to undermine a Russia that shadows U.S. hegemony. Any empire will seek to perpetuate itself. Stopping the erosion of unipolar globalism requires "pre-emptive" offensives that have sown disorder and chaos around the world through hybrid wars that mix military action with the panoply of other destabilizing levers. As a distant power, the United States acts through proxy countries on the periphery of Russia and China. The misfortune of Ukraine is that it has all the "assets" for this mission: it is a neighbor of Russia, an obligatory passage in Eurasia, and not an official member of NATO.

In the post-Cold War era, the United States waged endless wars against countries that were weak but guilty of thinking themselves sovereign. Now that the post-Cold War era is over, the United States is waging a permanent hybrid war against two great powers straddling their sovereignty. Without the unlikely resolution of the current conflict, Ukraine has little chance of escaping this infernal mechanism.

Original French

<https://www.ledevoir.com/opinion/idees/753390/relations-internationales-des-guerres-sans-fin-a-la-guerre-permanente>