

INDSR Newsletter



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Conducting Hybrid Warfare in the Russia-Ukraine War

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Topic: cyber warfare, cognitive warfare, patterns of warfare

1. News Highlights

Since the annexation of Crimea by Russia through militia combined with local forces, the confrontation between Russia versus Ukraine and Western democratic nations has persisted. With Russian support, pro-Russian separatists in Eastern Ukraine further established the Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic, accepting military aid from Russia in the ongoing conflict with Kyiv.¹ Russia has repeatedly warned NATO against "expanding east" and deem it the line that cannot be crossed. The United States as the main leader of NATO, on the other hand, refused to make such a guarantee and emphasized that it will honor the will of member states and

follow the democratic system in reviewing new applications. Hybrid warfare has been the primary method of attack by Russia in the major battles throughout the crises, including the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the conflict between the Ukrainian government and the Donbas militia, and the ongoing invasion of Ukraine. This article analyzes the hybrid warfare methods employed in the events, and how they might be of reference to Taiwan in terms of security implications.

2. Security Implications

1. Military warfare actions in hybrid warfare

In terms of the actual military

1. Andrew E. Kramer, "Fighting Escalates in Eastern Ukraine, Signaling the End to Another Cease-Fire," *The New York Times*, March 30, 2021, <https://nyti.ms/3gyC30v>.

actions in this invasion, Russia first began deploying troops in the name of “military exercise”, but instead of returning to defend their base after the military exercise, the troops lingered along the Ukraine border to garrison and build a camp.² By continuing to build up its military forces as well as making diplomatic announcements and shaping public opinion,³ Russia openly accuses Ukraine of violating Russia’s national interest. While Russia works on its military deployment and makes diplomatic accusations, its cyber warfare and propaganda warfare persists. Even amidst its large-scale military mobilization and deployment, the Kremlin continues to accuse the West of irresponsibly escalating the situation with its warning of Russia’s imminent invasion of Ukraine.⁴

On February 21, the day after the closing of the Beijing Winter Olympics, Putin announced to the world through

television broadcast that he will be signing the order approved by the State Duma to acknowledge the sovereignty of the two republics of Donetsk and Luhansk. On February 24, Putin instructed the Ministry of Defense to send troops into Ukraine to assist the “peacekeeping operation” in the two regions, then followed by air raiding significant sites in Ukraine to neutralize air defense forces of Ukraine. Finally, hybrid tactical camps adopting blitzkrieg with tank-based mechanized troops struck Ukrainian forces with large-scale suppressive fire from the above-deployed regions including from the directions of Belarus, Sumy, Kharkiv, the two occupied regions in Eastern Ukraine, Crimea, and Odessa, attempting to surround and takedown Kyiv via the Dnieper River. In the meantime, Russia, or rather pro-Russian separatists, sabotaged and infiltrated major cities including Kyiv.⁵

2. Eugene Rumer, “Even a Major Military Exercise Like Zapad Can’t Fix Some of the Biggest Security Challenges Facing Russia,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, September 21, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3IRPZPO>.

3. “Satellite Images Show Russia Still Building up Forces Near Ukraine,” *Reuters*, December 24, 2021, <https://reuters/3CnmQta>.

4. “Vladimir Kuznetsov, Nancy Cook, U.S. Ramps Up Ukraine Warnings as Russia Denies Invasion Plans,” *Bloomberg*, February 17, 2022, <https://bloom.bg/3pLBiWM>.

5. Lily Hyde, “Saboteurs Spark Suspicion and Solidarity in Kyiv,” *Politico*, February 26, 2022, <https://politico/3CoXriH>.

2. Cyber warfare actions in hybrid warfare

Russia has deployed hybrid warfare in Ukraine against Eastern Ukraine and other regions since the annexation of Crimea in 2014. It may be difficult to determine the actors behind the cyberattacks as a state, a group, or an individual, but after the attacks, many countries pieced together enough clues to point to Moscow. The actual actions included using Mimikatz to gain administrative access via Windows and steal network administrator credentials, then hack the power company system on a large scale; or using NotPetya, which masquerades as ransomware but actually takes out the system, severely impacting post offices, banks, the metro, payment systems, and even power systems in Ukraine. NotPetya masquerades as ransomware, but it operates differently in that no contact information or bank transfer details are provided as hackers generally do to receive ransom, and that

paying the ransom still leads to permanent and irreversible damage to the data. Since 60% of the victims are infrastructures in Ukraine, experts point to Moscow as the source, naming it an act of cyber warfare which is a wiper disguised as ransomware.⁶

Russia initiated a new round of cyberattacks early during its military deployment in early 2022, attacking government organizations and banks in Ukraine through DDoS in an attempt to cause social unrest from within. Following the first wave of DDoS attacks was a data-wiping malware dubbed HermeticWiper, which data security companies believed had been attacking Ukraine for some time.⁷ Used alongside the HermeticWiper was PartyTicket, a poorly coded malware believed to have been used to tie up resources in the victim's system, so that the attack of HermeticWiper could perform more efficiently.⁸ In terms of cyber operations, there has yet to be a hard kill on a larger scale, for example, the

6. Iain Thomson, "Everything you Need to Know about the Petya, er, NotPetya Nasty Trashing PCs Worldwide," *The Register*, June 28, 2017, <https://bit.ly/3HDkTtI>.

7. HermeticWiper, "New Data-wiping Malware Hits Ukraine," *Editor of WeLiveSecurity*, February 24, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3Kc3Osn>.

8. Juan Andrés Guerrero-Saade, "HermeticWiper | New Destructive Malware Used In Cyber Attacks on Ukraine," *Sentinel Labs*, February 23, 2022, <https://bit.ly/35HJkc7>.

previous attack on the power plant or other key infrastructures, and this may have to do with the fact that the Russian forces intend to conduct propaganda warfare at the same time. On the other hand, Ukraine is creating an IT Army, openly calling for volunteers around the world to join them and Russian targets will be regularly announced for cyberattacks.⁹

3. Public opinion and propaganda warfare in hybrid warfare

The Kremlin has repeatedly declared to the world since 2015 that Ukraine is becoming the breeding ground for Neo-Nazism,¹⁰ and accused the Azov Battalion stationed in Mariupol in 2014 to be the fortress of ultranationalism, white supremacy, and Neo-Nazism, with the two regions of special historical, cultural, and identity connections to Russia as

main targets of the propaganda warfare. After invading the aforementioned two regions, Russia shut down the local Ukrainian language media, leaving only the Russian channel to control the source of information for residents, making sure that their viewpoints are aligned to Moscow.¹¹ Furthermore, separatists in St. Petersburg and Eastern Ukraine produced a series of videos that were considered fake, with the main purpose to echo the accusations made by Moscow that pro-Ukrainian protesters have committed various extreme crimes and crimes against race and humanity. Such information was spread through media and hackers.¹² Under the threat of Anti-West, Kyiv Threat, and Extremism, Russia did not face much resistance within Russia or the two regions when advancing into Crimea and Eastern Ukraine.

9. "Ukraine Creates 'IT Army'—Says 'Hack these Russian Companies'," *The Stack*, February 26, 2022. <https://bit.ly/3vOeObu>.

10. "В МИД РФ назвали Украину «полигоном неонацизма»," *NTV Russia*, December 17, 2015, <https://bit.ly/3hDvY3o>.

11. Tsung Han Wu, "Emotions in Politics and Asymmetric Warfare: With 2014 Ukraine Crisis as Example," *Defense Situation: Special Edition on Asymmetric Defense Thinking and Application*, p62.

12. Andrei Soshnikov, "Inside a Pro-Russia Propaganda Machine in Ukraine," *BBC*, November 13, 2017, <https://bbc.in/3vHqLQf>.

Conducting Hybrid Warfare in the Russia-Ukraine War

Prior to invading Ukraine in 2022, Russia adopted the same method of public opinion warfare to manipulate the public opinion on Ukraine in Russia. When Russia was ready to invade, the favorable impression of Ukraine in Russia was significantly lower. In addition to the above accusation of extremism, Russia condemned Ukraine for repeated violation of the Minsk Protocol and creating bloody confrontations in Eastern Ukraine. A Russian far-right talk show host had many times advocated in the show that Moscow should not hesitate to use military force should Ukraine seek accession to NATO,¹³ which was obviously trying to influence the public opinion through entertainment. In this invasion, the Kremlin reinforced its control of the language used by the public opinion and the media. All statements must be aligned with Putin, calling it “special military operations”, and words such as war, invasion, and attack are

considered a violation of Moscow policy and thus controlled.¹⁴

During the Russian invasion this time, large amounts of fake accounts appeared on various social media, and Telegram, a Russian-based messaging platform, falsely claiming the collapse of the Ukraine government, the President fleeing the country, Russia surrounding Kyiv, the Ukraine government conducting genocide of civilians in Eastern Ukraine, or that Russia is attacking the radicals and not Ukrainians;¹⁵ all of which, on the one hand, justifies the “peacekeeping operation” of Russia in Ukraine, and on the other, dismantling the resistance of Ukrainian civilians and troops. However, with assistance from the international community, various non-governmental fact-checking organizations have appeared on the internet, educating the public on how to spot disinformation.¹⁶

Meanwhile, the Ukrainian President

13. Roman Goncharenko, “How Russian Media Outlets are Preparing an Attack on Ukraine,” *Deutsche Welle*, February 16, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3KxH8Dp>.

14. Andrew Roth, “‘Don’t Call it a War’ – Propaganda Filters the Truth about Ukraine on Russian Media,” *The Guardian*, February 26, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3sEgHp9>.

15. Rebecca Kern, Mark Scott, and Clothilde Goujard, “Social Media Platforms on the Defensive as Russian-based Disinformation about Ukraine Spreads,” *Politico*, February 24, 2022, <https://politi.co/35rYD97>.

16. Melissa De Witte, “Seven Tips for Spotting Disinformation Related to the Russia-Ukraine Conflict,” *Stanford News*, March 3, 2022, <https://stanford.io/3sCuXim>; Alan Yuhas, “Russian Propaganda over Crimea and the Ukraine: How Does it Work?,” *The Guardian*, March 17, 2014, <https://bit.ly/3sHZyv6>.

and other top officials used a mobile phone to film a simple yet real video, sending fearless images of Ukrainians through Western media or platforms,¹⁷ and their Ministry of Defense and agency on national security used words, pictures, and videos on social media including Facebook and Twitter to document and share with the world the heroic resistance by Ukraine, the brutal indiscriminate attacks of Russia, and how the Russian forces continue to crumble and be defeated, all of which can be seen as anti-public opinion warfare practiced by Ukraine against Russia and the world. While some of which are also suspected of false claims and pending fact-checking, the main purpose is to largely cancel what the Russian propaganda and public opinion warfare is trying to achieve.

3. Trend Observation

1. Cyber and public opinion warfares may suffer from military setback

Since the internet knows no boundary and given the fact that it is difficult to clearly determine the public and private domains, the aforementioned cyber attacks may have been targeted at Ukraine but have also caused billions of economic losses in USD around the world. Facing the war, it is presumed that the reason Russia has yet to conduct a large-scale cyberattack or shut down the internet in Ukraine is mainly due to the following three factors: Russia is over-confident in its military operations and wants to use the internet to share quickly with Ukraine and the rest of the world how incredibly easy it is for them military-wise, block the possibilities of other nations intervening, and breakdown the mental barrier of the Ukrainian resistance.

According to intelligence provided by Ukraine, Putin had originally planned to take down four major cities in Ukraine within 48 hours, including Kyiv, and further pressure Volodymyr Zelenskyy into signing a surrender agreement followed by the establishment of a pro-

17. Vera Bergengruen, "How Putin Is Losing at His Own Disinformation Game in Ukraine," *TIME*, February 25, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3hLRNO7>.

Russian regime.¹⁸ According to this plan, the Russian forces obviously aimed to replicate the air raid on Iraq by the US forces widely covered by the media during the Gulf War, which followed with a blitzkrieg of tanks taking down Baghdad, and achieve the above purpose by having the media and social networks showing off the Russian attacks.

Secondly, having suffered extensive cyberattacks after 2014 with some key infrastructure destroyed, Ukraine has worked on reinforcing the ability to protect their core network while working with NATO or technological exchange and support with the West to improve its capability and joint defense to effectively defend against Russian cyber operations, but also give it the ability to strike attacks. When the actual military actions taken by Russia face repeated setbacks, public opinion and propaganda warfare naturally fail to be effective with the loss of samples and materials to use. Furthermore, Ukraine is creating an IT Army in the name of defending Europe and the Free World, providing targets so hackers outside Ukraine can attack Russia,

which on a certain level has also impacted Russia.

As the attacker, the Russian forces need to establish communication among troops in joint combat even more than the Ukrainian forces. Even though the ability for overall joint combat in this battle has been questioned throughout, the liaison between troops and even the logistic pipeline can determine the success of the battle. When Russia undergoes large-scale electronic or spectrum countermeasures, forces fighting on the front line will also suffer and lose communication behind the front. Therefore, due to actual operational requirement, Russia has yet to shut down the power or internet on a large scale. Without substantial progress in military operations, cyber or public opinion warfare is thwarted due to lack of substantial material, thus unable to support the military operation.

2. Social media and messaging platforms become another variable

Hybrid warfare is a supplementary method to regular warfare, aimed at stepping up the harm that can be caused

18.Larisa Brown, "Ukraine Resistance Shatters Putin's Plan for Victory in 48 Hours," *The Times*, February 28, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3sUpWBZ>.

by regular warfare and putting the enemy in a tactical environment of further disadvantage, or it can be used to improve the advantage of one's own tactical environment. Be it the hybrid warfare by Russia against Ukraine or China against Taiwan, with regulations and monitoring becoming more strict, we are seeing less of TV stations or state-owned media disseminating news of specific political stances. Instead, social media, messaging, and internet platforms that cannot be fully monitored by the public authority are on the rise to become the breeding ground for cognitive warfare initiation and cultivation. During the Russian invasion, social networks including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, content farms, messaging platforms including LINE and Telegram, and even video-sharing platform YouTube, have seen a significant increase in fake accounts and bot accounts to accelerate the spread of information. It has become very easy for the general public to be influenced in real-time by the cognitive warfare with their smartphones. The mixture of real information also makes it difficult to spot disinformation.

As the owner of the above-mentioned media outlets, the authority of these large transnational enterprises is similar

to that of the government yet cannot really be monitored by the government or traditional media. When complicated algorithms and correlating cash flows are involved in the operations of these media outlets, it can be rather easy to pay off domestic actors with RMB or rubles. Just like Ukraine, in terms of the potential attacks against Taiwan by China, once war starts, we can anticipate an overwhelming attack of hybrid warfare to shake the public morale and create social chaos. Therefore, we should continue to pay attention to and review the manipulation of social media and messaging platforms in the hybrid warfare used in the Russia-Ukraine war.

(Originally published in the 51th “National Defense and Security Biweekly”, April 8, 2022, by the Institute for National Defense and Security Research.)

(The contents and advice in the assessments are the personal opinions of the authors, and do not represent the position of the Institute for National Defense and Security Research.)

Calculation and Risks in China's Dealings with the Russia-Ukraine War

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Topic: International Situation

1. News Highlights

On April 7, 2022, the United Nations General Assembly voted to suspend Russia from the United Nations Human Rights Council; of the 193 member states, 93 voted in favor, 24 voted against (including Russia, China, Cuba, North Korea, Iran, Syria, and Vietnam), and 58 abstained. Calling the move “illegitimate and politically motivated,” Russia announced its complete withdrawal from the Council. Zhang Jun, China’s representative to the UN, warned before the vote that he would vote against it, saying that “such a hasty move by the UN General Assembly

to force countries to choose sides will exacerbate differences among member states and intensify confrontation between the parties concerned.¹ China’s attitude seems to have changed significantly in the face of Russia’s unfavorable progress in the Ukraine conflict and increased pressure from the US and Europe for Beijing not to assist Moscow. In this article, we will observe the twists and turns in China’s official statements in international organizations and explore the possible calculations and risks of China’s response to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

1. “The UN General Assembly Voted to Suspend Russia from the Human Rights Council, How do Others See?,” *Central News Agency*, April 8, 2022, <https://reurl.cc/e6joax>; “UN General Assembly Suspends Russia’s Membership in Human Rights Council, China: Fueling the Fire,” *Reuters*, April 8, 2022, <https://reurl.cc/02Yee6>; UN News Twitter, April 7, 2022, <https://is.gd/u4xVOi>.

2. Security Implications

On February 4, 2022, before the opening of the Beijing Winter Olympics, Xi Jinping and visiting Russian President Vladimir Putin signed the “Sino-Russian Joint Declaration on International Relations and Sustainable Global Development in the New Age” and 15 agreements on topics including oil and gas deals, declaring that the relationship between China and Russia “transcends the military-political alliance in the Cold War era” and “the friendship between the two countries knows no ends and cooperation knows no bounds”. A few days after the Winter Olympics, Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine.

2-1. Beijing did not condemn Russia and takes a non-intervening, non-interfering position on the conflict

On February 24, Russia invaded Ukraine; and on the following day, Zheng Yongnian, Director of the Institute of Advanced Studies in Global and Contemporary China of the Chinese University of Hong Kong (Shenzhen), who is regarded as an important official brain trust of China, published an article titled “War in Ukraine and the Reconstruction of World Order?”, and

pointed out that the war in Ukraine would “significantly slow down the shift of the US efforts from Europe to the Indo-Pacific region” and that as long as China “does not make subversive strategic mistakes,” China’s modernization process not only won’t be interrupted but also “will have the ability and will to play an important role in the process of building a new international order.”

After the war began, Beijing tried to pacify both Russia and Ukraine at the same time, urging calm and calling for peace while emphasizing its “non-intervention and non-interference” position. Although China claims to recognize Ukraine’s territorial sovereignty, it has not condemned Moscow for interfering in the internal affairs of other countries but rather declared that Russia’s security demands should be taken seriously and properly resolved as the Chinese official media has mostly used the Russian term “Special Military Operation” to describe the war. According to the New York Times, the policy circles in China believe that China will be the winner in this turbulent situation since its strategy would avoid possible diplomatic and economic consequences. As long as China can transcend the struggle between

the US and Russia, the country will benefit from the post-war geopolitical changes and the world will see China as a pillar of stability.²

2-2. Beijing verbally declares willingness to mediate to end the war, but no action is taken

On March 7, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said at a press conference at the National People's Congress that China is "willing to work with the international community to provide necessary mediation when needed" regarding the conflict and will provide urgent humanitarian supplies to Ukraine. The following day, during a virtual summit with French President Macron and German Chancellor Scholz, Xi Jinping said he "deeply deplored the raging war on the European continent" and said China was willing

to "play a positive role together with the international community according to the needs of the parties involved."³

In addition, Ukraine and Josep Borrell, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, have also called on China to mediate.

Although China has called for peace, it has not mediated or facilitated the negotiations while France and Turkey have stepped in to make relevant efforts. On March 15, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian even said at a press conference that the call by Ukraine to discuss the war at this year's Group of Twenty (G20) ministerial meeting was inappropriate. Since the G20 is a major forum for international economic cooperation, it's not a suitable venue for discussing political security issues such as Ukraine's.⁴ These seemingly contradictory positions and statements by the Beijing

2. Steven Lee Myers and Chris Buckley, "China Sees at Least One Winner Emerging from Ukraine War: China," *New York Times*, March 14, 2022, <https://reurl.cc/X4on3j>; Liu Youming, "Why Does Beijing Continue to Cooperate with Putin Even Though It May Not Have a Chance to Make a Profit from the War between Russia and Ukraine?," *The News Lens*, March 29, 2022, <https://reurl.cc/nEWkOe>.

3. "State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi Answers Questions from Chinese and Foreign Journalists on China's Foreign Policy and Foreign Relations," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, March 7, 2022, <https://reurl.cc/X4vn57>; "Xi Jinping Holds Video Summit with French and German Leaders," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, <https://reurl.cc/MbnqE4>.

4. "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian Hosted a Regular Press Conference on March 15, 2022," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, March 15, 2022, <https://reurl.cc/k7GDQ9>.

authorities may be a short-term resolution to its own assessment that the military operation could end quickly; but as the war continued and other countries stepped up sanctions against Russia, China abandoned its “neutrality” in favor of more explicit position to support Russia and criticize the US.

3. Trend Observation

Since Russia's military actions did not defeat Ukraine quickly as expected, the US and European countries have increased their actions to aid Kyiv and sanction Moscow. Although Beijing has publicly stated its opposition to sanctions against Russia, China would have to bear the risk of losing the US and European markets as well as its participation in global technology and financial transactions to US and European sanctions if it keeps supporting the relatively small Russian market; and there is no sign of

China's RMB Cross-border Interbank Payment System (CIPS) helping after seven major Russian banks were removed from SWIFT.⁵ In other words, Beijing's “rational calculation” is becoming increasingly difficult to achieve.

3-1. Chinese position is shifting from “benefit from two sides” to “support Russia against US”

In the face of the changing situation, Hu Wei, Deputy Director of the Public Policy Research Center of the State Council of China, wrote on March 12 that “apparent neutrality is a wise choice, but it does not apply to this war,” and he suggested that “China cannot be tied to Russian President Vladimir Putin” and needs to cut ties as soon as possible, otherwise China will be further isolated by the US and Western siege. Zhu Feng, a professor in the Department of Diplomacy and International Affairs at Nanjing University's School of International

5. In 2021, the Sino-Russian trade volume was US\$146.8 billion, much lower than which between China and the US (US\$657 billion) or Europe (US\$828 billion). The transaction volume of China's self-developed RMB Cross-border Interbank Payment System (CIPS) is also far less than that of SWIFT. In the third quarter of 2021, the transaction volumes of the two were about 13,000 and 40 million transactions per day respectively. “Chinese Banks Can't Save Putin: 80% of China's Payment Transactions Rely on SWIFT,” *Liberty Times*, March 6, 2022, <https://reurl.cc/qOMyyn>.

Relations, also expressed “great, great anxiety” that the Russia-Ukraine war would force Europe to tilt toward the US and drag China deeper into trouble; and the US allies in the Pacific “would adopt a tougher military posture... everything seems unfriendly to China.”

Sun Yun, Director of the Stimson Center's China program, also said that in the long run, Russia will become an orphan in the international community and will have no other country to turn to except China. If China gets too close to Russia, its tensions with Europe or other regions could be deepened; if Germany, France, and other US allies strengthen their own defenses against Russia, the US will eventually be able to free up more military resources to confront China.⁶ Hu Wei's article was soon completely deleted from the Internet, while Zhu Feng and Sun Yun's concerns about the risks involved may not have been taken into account by the CCP central, since Beijing is quickly shifting its “neutral” posture to a more explicitly pro-Russia, anti-US strategy.

3-2. China has explicitly supported Russia in the international community since mid-March

As of April 7, eight votes on the Russian-Ukrainian war have been taken by the relevant UN organizations, and Beijing's stance on these issues has been clearly changed since mid-March. From the day after the outbreak of the war between Russia and Ukraine to March 4, there were four proposals presented: condemnation of Russia, whether to convene an emergency special session of the General Assembly to discuss the matter, to demand Russia immediately stop its attacks and withdraw its troops, and whether to establish an international commission of inquiry to investigate all human rights violations and breaches of international law during the war in Ukraine; but China did not vote for or against them but abstained from voting.

On March 16, the International Court of Justice ruled that Russia should immediately cease its military actions against Ukraine; of the 15 judges, only

6. “Scholar in China's System Proposes to Cut Ties with Putin, but Censored from the Internet,” *Radio Free Asia*, March 14, 2022, <https://reurl.cc/9OgMmj>; Steven Lee Myers and Chris Buckley, “China Sees at Least One Winner Emerging from Ukraine War: China,” *The New York Times*, March 14, 2022, <https://reurl.cc/X4on3j>.

Kirill Gevorgian, the Russian Vice-President of the Court, and Xue Hanqin, the Chinese judge, expressed their opposition, making it the first time that China stood with Russia in an UN-related vote. On March 23 and March 24, faced with two proposals for humanitarian aid to Ukraine, China was the only country that chose to support the Russian version of the proposal and abstained from the versions proposed by other countries. On April 7, before the UN General Assembly voted on whether to suspend Russia's membership in the Human Rights Council, China's permanent representative to the UN, Zhang Jun, announced that he would vote against the suspension, saying that China "firmly opposes the politicization and instrumentalization of human rights issues, and also opposes selectivity, double standards, and confrontation on human rights issues. China also stands against the use of human rights issues to exert pressure on other countries".⁷

3-3. Chinese officials and media criticize the US synchronously

In a speech at an online forum at Tsinghua University in Beijing on March 19, Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Le Yucheng criticized the West's sanctions against Russia for invading Ukraine as "increasingly outrageous. ...and the abusive sanctions will bring disastrous consequences to the entire world". He also criticized, not to the US by name, that "bucking the trend and engaging in some 'Indo-Pacific strategy' to cause trouble everywhere... bringing the region to the evil path of fragmentation and camping. Such an 'Indo-Pacific strategy' is as dangerous as Europe's NATO expansion to the east, and if left unchecked, the consequences will be unimaginable, ultimately pushing the Asia-Pacific region into the fire."⁸

From March 29 to April 11, People's Daily published a series of 10

7. "UN General Assembly Votes to Suspend Russia's Membership in Human Rights Council," *UN News*, April 7, 2022, <https://reurl.cc/DdWapQ>.

8. "Vice Foreign Minister Le Yucheng Attends the Fourth International Forum on Strategy and Security and Delivers a Speech," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, March 19, 2022, <https://reurl.cc/dXK6Ly>.

commentary articles titled “US Hegemony in the Light of the Ukraine Crisis” under the byline “Zhong Sheng”, while Xinhua Online published six similar consecutive articles between April 7-12. The commentary series in the two official media severely accused the US of being behind the war in Ukraine and the source of the international disorder.⁹ On March 31, at a press conference after hosting the third meeting of foreign ministers of Afghanistan’s neighbors in Tunxi, Anhui Province, Wang Yi put forward China’s “five insistences” on the crisis in Ukraine, with a tit-for-tat rebuke of US actions.¹⁰ On April 1, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian also followed up in a regular press conference by criticizing the US as the originator and biggest driver of the Ukraine crisis.

With the possible long-term development of the Russian-Ukrainian war, China and Russia are embracing each other more and more tightly, and the Russian and Ukrainian camps are investing more and more resources. Whether a compromise can be found in the confrontation between China and the US or whether it continues to intensify, and whether a “decent” settlement can be reached in this war, will put the wisdom of the major powers to the test, and will also affect the post-war global geostrategy as well as the political and economic landscape.

9. “Extra! People’s Daily Published Zhong Sheng’s Ten Comments on US Hegemony,” *People’s Daily Overseas Network*, April 11, 2022, <https://reurl.cc/Dy1vge>; “The US ‘Black Hand’ Behind the Chaos in Ukraine is Revealed in Six Consecutive Xinhua News Agency Articles,” *Xinhuanet*, April 13, 2022, <https://reurl.cc/b26k2o>.

10. “Wang Yi on China’s Five Insistences on Ukraine,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China*, April 1, 2022, <https://reurl.cc/g0LV5p>.

Calculation and Risks in China's Dealings with the Russia-Ukraine War

Table: UN votes related to Russia-Ukraine war and China's position

Time	Organization and title	Voting results and China's position
February 25	Security Council: Whether to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine	Vetoed. For: 11 countries; Abstain: China, India, UAE; Against: Russia.
February 27	Security Council: whether to convene an emergency special session of the General Assembly on the situation in Ukraine.	Passed. For: 11 countries; Abstaining: China, India, UAE; Against: Russia.
March 2	General Assembly: Russia should immediately stop attacking Ukraine and fully withdraw its troops.	Passed. For: 141 countries; Abstain: China, India, and 35 other countries. Against: Russia, Belarus, North Korea, Syria, Eritrea.
March 4	Human Rights Council: Whether to establish an "independent international commission of inquiry" to investigate all human rights violations and breaches of international law during the war in Ukraine.	Passed. For: 32 countries; Abstain: China, India, and 13 other countries; Against: Russia, Eritrea.
March 16	International Court of Justice: Russia should immediately stop its military operations against Ukraine.	The ruling passed. For: 15 votes; Against: Russian and Chinese judges with 2 votes.
March 23	Security Council: Vote on "Humanitarian Situation in Ukraine" Submitted by Russia, Belarus, North Korea, and Syria. ¹¹	Not passed. For: China, Russia; Against: None; Abstain: 13.
March 24	General Assembly: passed a resolution on humanitarian aid in Ukraine, condemning Russia for causing a humanitarian crisis in Ukraine and demanding an immediate ceasefire to protect Ukrainian civilians and their homes, schools, and hospitals.	Passed. For: 140; Against: 5 (Russia, Belarus, Syria, North Korea, and Eritrea); Abstentions: China and 38 others.
April 7	General Assembly: Suspension of Russia's membership in the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) for "serious and systematic" human rights violations and abuses during the Russian invasion of Ukraine.	Passed. For: 93 votes; Against: China and other 24 votes; Abstain: 58 votes.

Source: Compiled by Che-chuan Lee based on public information.

11. "Russia is too reckless to propose a resolution calling on the international community to address a humanitarian crisis of its own making," said Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the US Permanent Representative to the United Nations. "It is clear that Russia does not care about the deteriorating humanitarian situation or the war that shattered the lives and dreams of millions". See "Security Council Fails to Adopt a Draft Resolution on the Humanitarian Situation in Ukraine," *UN News*, March 23, 2022, <https://reurl.cc/RjadaD>.

Table 2: China's "Five Insistences" on the Ukraine Crisis

Titles	Contents
Insist on the right direction to pursue peace and facilitate negotiation	The only way out is dialogue and negotiation. China opposes fueling the fire and aggravating the confrontation. China calls for a ceasefire to stop the war and supports Russia and Ukraine to start direct dialogues.
Insist on defending the basic principles of international relations	China respects the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries, and opposes pushing smaller countries to the front line of geopolitical games.
Insist on preventing the return of the Cold War mentality	China does not agree with the "friends or foe" confrontation and is determined to promote international solidarity and advocate a common, cooperative, integrated, and sustainable security concept. China respects and takes care of the legitimate, reasonable concerns of all parties.
Insist on protecting the legitimate rights of all countries	China opposes unilateral sanctions that have no basis in international law and calls for safeguarding the international industrial supply chain to avoid damaging the normal economic and trade exchanges between countries and people's lives.
Insist on upholding peace and stability in the Asia Pacific region	China is determined to pursue a sincere, tolerant diplomatic policy and guard against the introduction of the US group confrontation scourge in the region through its "Indo-Pacific strategy". China wishes to accelerate the promotion of regional integration and cooperation to protect the hard-won development momentum in the region.

Source: "Wang Yi on China's Five Insistences on Ukraine," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, April 1, 2022, <https://reurl.cc/g0LV5p>.

(Originally published in the 52th "National Defense and Security Biweekly", April 22 , 2022, by the Institute for National Defense and Security Research.)

(The contents and advice in the assessments are the personal opinions of the authors, and do not represent the position of the Institute for National Defense and Security Research)

Calculation and Risks in China's Dealings with the Russia-Ukraine War



Evolution of Preventive Measures for COVID-19 in Shanghai

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1. News Highlights

In Spring 2022, during the Two Sessions, another wave of COVID-19 entered China. The Omicron variant is highly transmissible and tends to cause less severe illness. More than 90% of the confirmed cases show no symptoms, making it difficult to block the pandemic.¹ On March 14, Shenzhen became China's first first-tier city to go into lockdown.² After Shenzhen reopened, the pandemic

in Shanghai started to worsen. As Shanghai has an irreplaceable status in the Chinese economy, its pandemic trend and prevention strategies have attracted the world's attention. Later in this article, we will explore the implication of the oscillation between the two prevention strategies, "Catching the Mouse in the Urn" and the "clear-cut Covid strategy".

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1. "China's Pandemic Outbreak Caused Lockdowns in Various Places, Dynamic Clearing Policy is Facing Challenges," *BBC Zhongwen*, March 14, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/zhongwen/trad/chinese-news-60735214>; *wenweipo.com*, February 16, 2022, <https://www.wenweipo.com/a/202202/16/AP620c3945e4b036dce99343c5.html>; "Where did Jilin's Pandemic Come From? How Will it Develop? Journalists Reporting Live with Zhao Qinglong, the Chief Expert in Infectious Disease Prevention and Control in Jilin Province," *people.com*, March 18, 2022, <http://jl.people.com.cn/n2/2022/0318/c349771-35180660.html>.
 2. "Shenzhen Becomes the First First-tier City in China to Close Down Its Factories, with Many Industries Facing the Challenge," *Central News Agency (CNA)*, March 14, 2022, <https://www.cna.com.tw/news/acn/202203140279.aspx>.

2. Security Implications

1. Shanghai's Precise Prevention and Control mode is no longer effective

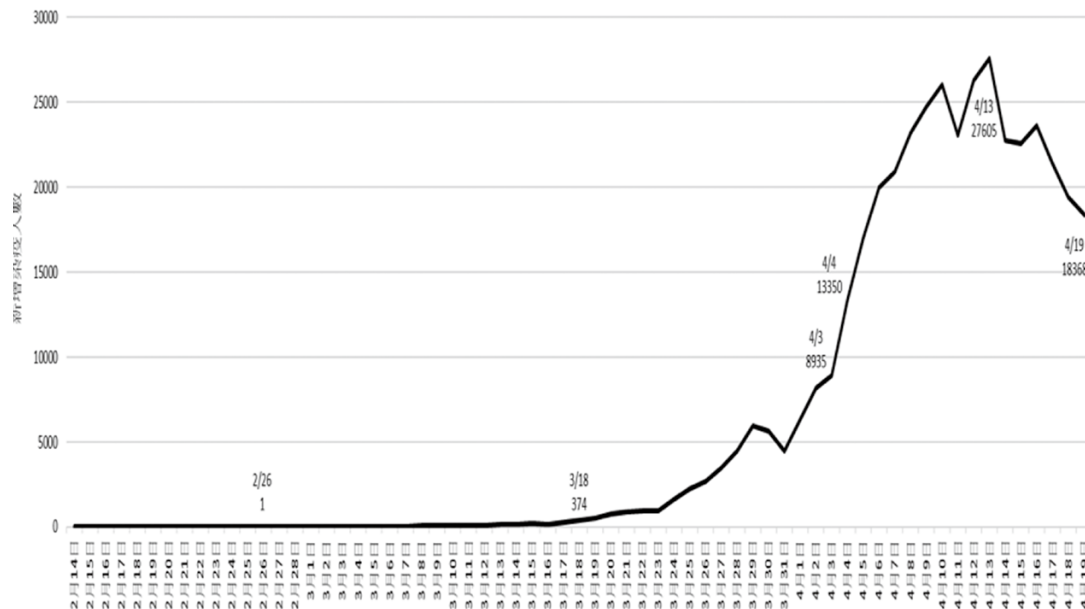
Two years since the pandemic began, Shanghai adopted the Precise Prevention and Control mode or “Catching the Mouse in the Urn” strategy with its abundant public health resource: controlling the pandemic by managing confirmed cases based on COVID-19 prevention checklists, rather than the “clear-cut” strategy featuring a complete lockdown and rounds of large-scale COVID-19 nucleic acid tests. To maintain its normal economic and social functions, Shanghai has tried hard not to break the urn and to lower the impact of the pandemic on the economy and society.

In fact, Shanghai's Precise Prevention and Control mode has not deviated from the central government's policy of Dynamic Clearing. The Dynamic Clearing policy aims to identify and

isolate the patients as soon as possible to avoid the spread of the pandemic. It implies the central government urges the local government to implement all possible isolation of patients within a short time. This is called Social Clearing. Over the past two years and before the Omicron wave, Shanghai has been able to control the pandemic with the Precise Prevention and Control strategy, without a lockdown or large-scale COVID-19 nucleic acid tests. On the other hand, other local governments, which have poor public health resources, are not able to discover and control the cases in the early stages. Therefore, they can't adopt the Precise Prevention and Control strategy like Shanghai. To achieve the goal of Social Dynamic Clearing, most local governments adopt the clear-cut policy unanimously: They would rather “kill a hundred than miss one”. The checklist is maximized and people's daily routines are put on pause to achieve the goal of zero-COVID in a short time.

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Picture 1: Daily confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Shanghai (Feb 14, 2022 to Apr 19, 2022)



Description: The confirmed cases in this article include patients with or without symptoms. Cases that are tested negative but later show symptoms are not excluded.

Sources: Shanghai Municipal Health Commission, <https://wsjkw.sh.gov.cn/yqtb/index.html>

Despite having handled COVID-19 well since its start, Shanghai has fallen short in the new wave of the pandemic since March 2022. Precise Prevention and Control mode has faced a challenge. The case-control and checklists are no longer effective as people infected with the highly transmissible Omicron variant usually show mild or no symptoms, and the number of confirmed cases has rocketed (as shown in Picture 1). This shows, that under the premise of Social

Dynamic Clearing, Shanghai is no longer able to balance the prevention strategy and the normal functioning of the economy and life.

1. Xi Jinping decided Shanghai has to adopt a clear-cut strategy to achieve the goal of dynamic clearing

Seen as China's financial capital, Shanghai has a well-developed financial service industry, manufacturing industry, and high-tech industry. It also controls the

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raw materials, exports, and imports in the Yangtze River Delta region. Therefore, the prevention strategy in Shanghai has to be well calculated and carefully deployed. Fairly speaking, compared with other cities, Shanghai cares more about striking a balance between the pandemic prevention and economic activities due to the role it plays in China's economy. Even in late March, when the number of cases was on the rise, Shanghai refused to go into lockdown or adopt large-scale COVID-19 nucleic acid tests. Instead, Shanghai's goal was still to reduce the range of city control and lower the impact on daily operations. However, the Shanghai municipal government suddenly announced on March 27 that the city was to go into a phased lockdown the next day,

with Huangpu River being the border.³ Shanghai didn't exit lockdown as planned and instead entered a "citywide static management" for the first time, starting a citywide nucleic acid testing.⁴

This article believes that the policy shift reflects the involvement of the Xi Jinping administration in the pandemic while temporarily closing the dispute of the zero-COVID policy versus coexistence. From the Politburo Standing Committee (PSC) meeting on March 17, we can see the stance of the CCP and the senior officials on pandemic prevention: 1. Dynamic Clearing is more advanced than coexistence; 2. Dynamic Clearing is a political issue; thus, we need to firmly oppose the ideas of coexistence the virus or treat COVID like a flu; 3. the central

3. "Notice on the New Round of Nucleic Acid Tests in the City," *Shanghai Municipal Health Commission*, March 27, 2022, <https://wsjkw.sh.gov.cn/xwfb/20220327/b9d985cedb<g id="4">4042a</g>2843fb8b<g id="6">108c<g id="7"></g><g id="8"></g>401f</g>4.html>.

4. As of April 11, the Shanghai government has just announced the first batch of "three zones". Communities were categorized into three types of zones: lockdown, controlled, and precautionary zones. Different control measures were adopted according to different zones. "The First Batch of the Three Zones List of Shanghai Has been Decided," *Xinhuanet*, April 11, 2022, http://www.news.cn/local/2022-04/11/c_1128548848.htm.

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government can't ignore the fact that Shanghai hasn't gone into lockdown and has lost patience with their enhanced version of Precise Control.⁵

Due to the prevalence of the Omicron variant, many countries have chosen to coexist with COVID, which is to increase vaccination coverage, classify severe and mild cases to preserve medical resources, and store medical supplies to cope with the pandemic, which has already entered the community, and to alleviate the impact

on economic development. In early March this year, the media reported that the Chinese public health experts and officials will explore new opportunities in adjusting the pandemic prevention strategy and relaxing the policy of Dynamic Clearing. Since local governments have been imposing lockdowns and large-scale tests to meet the goal of Dynamic Clearing,⁶ the country is suffering from a lack of resource provision, a broken supply chain, insufficient protection for

5. Before late March, Shanghai still didn't want to resort to lockdown, but to isolate positive people and allow only negative people to go out. The plan is as follows: First, distinguish between key areas and non-key areas, and arrange nucleic acid testing or rapid antigen screening depending on the level of risk; Second, adopt rolling screening instead of "static" city-wide screening which stops residents' activities; Third, precisely control the infected status of each community through rolling screening. Depending on the different infectious conditions in each community, different control measures will be imposed. "Why are the Districts with Negative Nucleic Acid Test Results still in Lockdown? How to Ensure Transport when Stations in Jiading District are Stopped? Today's Release will Explain in Detail," *Shanghai Municipal Health Commission*, March 23, 2022, <https://wsjkw.sh.gov.cn/xwfb/20220323/1700f492a8b24f95922d97a520bf4bff.html>; "Why are Positive Cases Increasing? How to Use the Health Code? Can Masks Protect Against Omicron? Today's Release will Explain in Detail," *Shanghai Municipal Health Commission*, March 25, <https://wsjkw.sh.gov.cn/xwfb/20220325/9a9cddc3d6ca4d288ae992d563daf1c6.html>; "City Hall Press Conference Q&A (March 26, 2022)," *Shanghai Municipal Health Commission*, March 27, 2022, [.](https://wsjkw.sh.gov.cn/rdhy/20220327/c8b97e3dd988484b8ddc&id=10)

6. In terms of policy exploration, according to media reports, in mid-April, the State Council is preparing to make public the Pilot Study on the Optimization of Prevention and Control Measures for COVID-19, adjusting the quarantine control measures from "14 days of centralized isolation + 7 days of home isolation" to "10 days of centralized isolation + 7 days of home isolation". "Xiamen Shortens the Quarantine Period for All Arrivals to 10+7," *Wen Wei Po*, April 14, 2022, <https://www.wenweipo.com/epaper/view/newsDetail/1514299059089838080.html>; "Chief Pandemic Prevention Scientist Zeng Guang: China May Eventually Coexist with COVID-19," *Radio Taiwan International*, March 1, 2022, <https://www.rti.org.tw/news/view/id/2125897>; "Foreign Media Suggests China is Seeking to Relax the 'Zero-Covid' Policy Will some Cities Go Into Coexistence?," *Radio Free Asia*, March 4, 2022, <https://www.rfa.org/cantonese/news/covidpolicy-03042022062248.html>.

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citizens, and excessive workloads for local administrations. This harms the goal of achieving economic stability.⁷

However, from the Politburo Standing Committee meeting on March 17 to⁸ articles in the *People's Daily* and *Xinhuanet* (the mouthpiece of the CCP) on March 29, we can see Xi Jinping's latest stance on the pandemic in 2022 based on the article published, “‘Always insist on putting people first and life first’ - Review of General Secretary Xi Jinping's command to fight the battle of

pandemic prevention and control and the economic and social development.”⁹

There are four main points: (1) Xi Jinping has always been hands-on during the pandemic, “personally directing and deploying” the fight against the pandemic; (2) Xi believes that in dealing with the Omicron variant, while always “insisting on putting the people and life first”, we should still insist on “dynamic clearing”; (3) he stressed the need for “rapid” local control of the pandemic and the implementation of the requirements of

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7. In early April, Li Keqiang has successively pointed out in the experts and entrepreneur's seminar (April 8), the main responsible local governments seminar (April 11), as well as the State Council Standing Committee (April 13) that “(China) should be highly alert to the complex evolution of the current world situation, the recent domestic outbreak, and unexpected factors, which bring greater uncertainty and challenges to the stable operation of the economy. To cope with the impact of the pandemic, consumption must resume development, encourage local governments to increase the scale of relief, and stabilize more consumer service market entities; the central government is also expected to arrange for banks to lower their standards, which will boost the ability of banks to invest in credit. “Stabilize Economic Fundamentals and Keep the Economy in a Reasonable Range,” *People's Daily Online*, April 9, 2022, <http://politics.people.com.cn/n1/2022/0409/c1024-32395003.html>; “Li Keqiang Presided over a Forum of the Main Local Governments in Charge of the Economic Situation, Stressing that Stability Should Take the Lead and Seek Progress Stably to Stabilize Employment and Prices to Support the Economy to Run in a Reasonable Range,” *People's Daily Online*, April 11, 2022, <http://politics.people.com.cn/n1/2022/0411/c1024-32396488.html>; “Li Keqiang Presided over the State Council Standing Meeting,” *People's Daily Online*, April 14, 2022, <http://politics.people.com.cn/n1/2022/0414/c1024-32398501.html>.
 8. “Analysis of the Situation of the COVID-19 Pandemic and the Deployment of Strict Control,” *People's Daily Online*, March 18, 2022, http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2022-03/18/nw.D110000renmrb_20220318_1-01.htm.
 9. “‘Always Insist on Putting People First and Life First’ - Review of General Secretary Xi Jinping's Command to Fight the Battle of Pandemic Prevention and Control and Economic and Social Development,” *People's Daily Online*, March 29, 2022, http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2022-03/29/nw.D110000renmrb_20220329_3-01.htm.

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“early detection, early reporting, early isolation, and early treatment”; and (4) China's pandemic prevention policy has a “systemic advantage” over that of the West in terms of the number of infections and deaths. The four main points share one thing in common: Xi Jinping believes that the quickest way to detect the virus should be implemented as a priority in disease prevention, meaning that even in Shanghai, the economic center of China, lockdown is not impracticable.

On April 2, Sun Chunlan, a member of the Politburo and Vice Premier of the State Council in charge of medical and health affairs, was transferred from Jilin to Shanghai to ensure that the Shanghai authorities would indeed implement the pandemic prevention policy in

accordance with the deployment of the Party Central Committee and the State Council.¹⁰ Secretary of the Party Group and Director of the National Health Commission Ma Xiaowei reiterated the political stance of the Party Central Committee in dealing with the pandemic through Study Times on April 18, after Shanghai had been under lockdown for several days, that the Shanghai authorities must continue to adhere to the current measures to control the pandemic and must not make a mistake in their political stance.¹¹ Shanghai's subsequent pandemic prevention strategy took a major turn for the worse around the Qingming Festival when a series of political orders led to the fallout from the lockdown.

10. According to official information, as of April 17, Sun Chunlan was still in Shanghai supervising the frontline fight against the pandemic.” Sun Chun-lan Stressed the Need to Fight as Hard as Possible, to Fight Quickly, and to Contain the Spread of the Pandemic in the Shortest Time Possible,” *Xinhuanet*, April 2, 2022, http://www.news.cn/politics/leaders/2022-04/02/c_1128528609.htm; “We will Work Together and Fast and Achieve the Goal of Zero-Covid as soon as Possible! Sun Chun-lan Investigated and Guided the Prevention and Control of the Pandemic in Shanghai,” *Shanghai Municipal Health Commission*, April 17, 2022, [https://wsjkw.sh.gov.cn/xwfb/20220417/2c<g id=7"></g>2a1ab7321740eea80aacdd9bafbf26.html](https://wsjkw.sh.gov.cn/xwfb/20220417/2c<g id=7).

11. “Contain the Spread of the Pandemic as quickly as Possible to Firmly Consolidated the Hard-earned Prevention and Control Gains,” *People's Daily Online*, April 18, 2022, <http://theory.people.com.cn/n1/2022/0418/c40531-32401363.html>.

3. Trend Observation

1. “Grid-based management” may not be able to fully strengthen the capacity of local administration

Long before the Third Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of the CCP (October 2013) proposed “grid-based” governance in the Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Some Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening the Reform, some local governments (e.g., Beijing and Xiamen) were exploring community “grid-based” management as part of local governance innovation. However, it is worth noting that the “grid” is also a conduit for party organizations

to infiltrate the local community.¹² To put it simply, the “grid-based” community management means extending China’s local administrative organizations from the community (village) down to each household-based “grid”¹³ In other words, community “grid-based” management means that the Chinese government wants to extend the core of local social governance down to the household, which is the basic unit in the society, so that party organizations and the government can grasp the “conflicts and problems” that occur in each “grid” and quickly eliminate them.

Prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, China overall had already become well-versed in developing “grid-based”

12. In the latest plan for community “grid-based” services in Guangzhou, one of the goals is to promote the full coverage of the party organization on the “grid” so that the party organization is rooted in the “grid” and extended to the masses. In addition, the community “grid” structure of Xiamen Gulangyu in 2012 shows that the chief grid leader is the secretary of the community party committee, and the grid leader is a member of the community party committee. “14th Five-Year Plan of the Guangzhou City Grid-based Service Management,” *The People’s Government of Guangzhou City*, December 1, 2021, http://www.gz.gov.cn/zt/jjsswgh/sjzxgh/content/post_7942326.html; “Mao Wanlei and Lu Zhikui, “Optimization of ‘Community Grid-based’ Management in Xiamen Comprehensive Reform Area,” *Southeast Academic*, Vol. 4, 2013, p. 78.

13. Take Gulangyu in Xiamen as an example, community “gridization” means roughly dividing the community under the street office into three grids, each grid is further divided into two groups, and each group is finally divided into one grid unit for every few hundred households (ranging from 200 to 300 households); Mao Wanlei and Lu Zhikui, “Optimization of ‘Community Gridization’ Management in Xiamen Comprehensive Reform Area,” *Southeast Academic*, Vol. 4, 2013, pp. 77-83.

communities.¹⁴ At the beginning of the COVID outbreak in 2020, Xi Jinping pointed out the importance of community “grid-based” management in preventing the spread of the pandemic.¹⁵ However, China's well-developed community “grid” focused only on the control aspects of the pandemic, such as strengthening the country’s collection of personal and social intelligence and data, but neglected the social welfare or livelihood protection, such as the deployment and distribution of goods, the classification of patients and how to deliver them to hospitals, the preparation of children for quarantine, and the rights of non-local household registration holders. In short, the administrative capacity of local governments in China has not been enhanced by the “grid-based” approach.

2. Shanghai Party Secretary Li Qiang’s career path may not take much of a turn

Since Jiang Zemin (except Chen Liangyu), the next step in the career path of those who have held the post of Shanghai Party Secretary is to become a Politburo Standing Committee member. Therefore, in 2017, when Li Qiang (born in July 1959, aged 63), a member of the “Zhijiang New Army” (Xi Jinping’s old ministry), was transferred from the post of Party Secretary of Jiangsu Province to replace Han Zheng as Shanghai Party Secretary, attention was drawn to his career development. The fall of Shanghai from the altar as a role model in pandemic prevention has raised concerns about whether this will hurt Li Qiang’s future career. It may not be a concern as explained below:

14. As early as 2016, foreign media criticized the Chinese government's push for “grid-based” community management for the surveillance and human rights violations it would bring. “British Media: China Regresses to ‘Grid-based Management’ to Monitor Citizens’ Lives,” *BBC Zhongwen*, April 4, 2016, https://www.bbc.com/zhongwen/trad/press_review/2016/04/160404_press_review.

15. The Politburo Standing Committee meeting on February 3, 2020 noted that “Local parties and governments should take responsibility for strengthening the grid management of community prevention and control and take more thorough and precise, effective measures to prevent the spread of the pandemic.” “The Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CCP Central Committee Held a Meeting to Study the Strengthening of the Prevention and Control of the COVID-19 Outbreak, with Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the CCP Central Committee, Presiding over the Meeting,” *Xinhuanet*, February 3, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2020-02/03/c_1125527334.htm.

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First of all, we cannot ignore the fact that since 2020, except for Jiang Chaoliang, the provincial party secretary of Hubei Province, where the pandemic broke out, no major party secretary has stepped down due to the severity of the pandemic. Second, Li Qiang did not disappear from the public eye when Shanghai's pandemic prevention policy was being adjusted or when the pandemic was at its worst, and continued to carry out his usual schedule as Shanghai Party Secretary, such as attending the Standing Committee meetings of the Shanghai Municipal Party Committee or inspecting the pandemic preparation status of each district in Shanghai.¹⁶ Third, Shanghai's Precise Prevention and Control mode shares the same goal as the Dynamic Clearing insisted by the central government. The discrepancy between Shanghai and the central government is at

most the prevention and control strategies, instead of its political stance. Finally, Li Qiang's career started in Zhejiang Province, where he served for a long time, assuming the role of Secretary-General of the Zhejiang Provincial Party Committee in late 2004, and would have had many business contacts with Xi Jinping, then-Secretary of the Zhejiang Provincial Party Committee. Regardless of the actual relationship between Xi Jinping and Li Qiang, it is clear from public information that Li Qiang's career did rise with Xi Jinping's succession in 2012.¹⁷ In the beginning of succession, the top leader of the CCP tends to face a cabinet arranged by and promoted by the previous leader, and "their own people" have often yet to occupy key positions. Even Xi Jinping was not immune to this problem. Therefore, in his third term in office, expected later this year, it will be essential

16. For more information about Li Qiang's Schedule, please refer to "Comrade Li Qiang's Report", www.eastday.com, <https://sh.eastday.com/liqiang.html>.

17. Li Qiang took over as the acting governor of Zhejiang Province in December 2012 and was subsequently promoted to the minister rank in January 2013. In June 2016, from the governor of Zhejiang Province to the secretary of the Jiangsu Provincial Party Committee, he officially became a local "hand". After a short experience as the secretary of the Jiangsu Provincial Party Committee, he was promoted again in October 2017 and has been the Shanghai Municipal Party Committee Secretary since then.

for Xi Jinping to have his own people in the Politburo Standing Committee. As Shanghai Party Secretary, Li Qiang is expected to secure a seat in the Politburo Standing Committee and will be a strong arm for Xi in his third term.

(Originally published in the 52th “National Defense and Security Biweekly”, April 22, 2022, by the Institute for National Defense and Security Research.)

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Comparison of Russian and Ukraine Air Force and Observation of Russian Air Combat Capabilities

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Keywords: Su-27, Su-35, hypersonic missile, Russian-Ukraine War

As the war in Ukraine continues to this day, the Russian military is still deadlocked, and its Air Force does not seem to play a key role in the war. The Russian Air Force is far superior to the Ukrainian Air Force in terms of performance and number of fighters, and the Ukrainian Air Force and air defense forces were already suppressed at the beginning of the war; however, the Russian Air Force did not fully exploit its power to support ground operations in the follow-on campaigns, which is incomprehensible to Western experts.

1. Ukraine's air power ar inferior to Russia's

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the restoration of its independence in 1991, Ukraine inherited the military equipment of the former Soviet Union and had the world's fourth-largest armed forces, retaining nearly 400 missiles and nuclear weapons, including 130 SS19 ballistic missiles, 160 SS24 ballistic missiles, and 46 SS-24 missiles.¹ As for combat aircraft, Ukraine possessed 43 strategic bombers (Tu-160 and Tu-95), 241 tactical bombers (Tu-16, Tu-22, and Tu-22M), 20 Il-78 aerial refueling aircraft, 245 Su-24 fighter-bombers, 80 MiG-25 fighters, 260 MiG-29 and Su-27, in addition to a large number of naval and ground forces.²

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1. "Ukraine Destroys Last SS-19 N-missile," *Deseret News*, February 28, 1999, <https://reurl.cc/NpvGN6>.
 2. "Ukraine's Fall From Grace: How a World Leading Military Industrial Power Devolved Into a Dependant on Western Aid," *Military Watch Magazine*, November 6, 2020, <https://reurl.cc/xO51W1>.

Comparison of Russian and Ukraine Air Force and Observation of Russian Air Combat Capabilities

After the Cold War, the US promoted a policy of preventive defense and worked with the former Soviet republics, including Russia, to destroy their strategic weapons to prevent them from spiraling out of control and threatening international security, and to prevent the sale of these advanced weapons to China. With the assistance of the US, Ukraine destroyed its strategic weapons, including Tu-160, and retained only the original Russian-made Su-27, MiG-29, Su-24, and Su-25 fighters, of which less than 100 remained until the war. Due to economic and other factors, almost no further improvements or enhancements have been made in the past 30 years except for some minimal upgrades. The Ukrainian fighters lack new electronic scanning radar, active radar-guided missiles, and electronic self-defense systems, lagging significantly behind the Russian 4.5-generation fighters such as Su-30SM and Su-35 that were continuously improved after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In addition, under Western pressure, Ukraine scrapped Tu-22M, Tu-160, and tactical missiles as well,

so that it also does not have the ability to launch retaliatory strikes against Russia.

Before the recent conflict, the Ukrainian Air Force had a few 4th-generation fighters such as 35 MiG-29s and 35 Su-27s, far less than the previous 260. Although the Su-27 is an excellent fighter, the Ukrainian fleet of such aircraft lacks advanced air-to-air weapons like the active radar-guided R-77 missiles. Overall, the Ukrainian Air Force is at least 25 years behind the Russians in terms of radar, avionics, and electronic warfare technology. In addition, the smaller fleet and planes grounded due to the low availability not only prevent them from flying combat missions but also increase the chances of being suppressed by Russian precision weapons.³

Due to the lack of modern fighter aircraft, Ukraine relies heavily on ground-based air defense systems; however, the Soviet-era systems are outdated, and the Russians are very familiar with their performance and specifications as well as the vulnerabilities that can be blinded by electronic warfare. For instance, Ukraine

3. "Air Superiority Over Kiev: Can Russian Strike Fighters Eliminate Ukraine's Air Defences Within 24 Hours?," *Military Watch Magazine*, December 26, 2021, <https://reurl.cc/AKVy9Y>. December-26th-2021.

Comparison of Russian and Ukraine Air Force and Observation of Russian Air Combat Capabilities

is still using the former-Soviet S200 long-range missiles, and even the S125 system, which lacks maneuverability, has been redeployed in 2020.⁴ The Ukrainians use S300 and BuK-M1 from the 1980s for their medium- and short-range air defense. Since it's not designed for wide-area defense, the S300 lacks multi-layer defense capability, situational awareness, proper mobility, and up-to-date electronic countermeasures, making it vulnerable to Russian air suppression from the anti-radiation missiles equipped by Su-34, or attack helicopters such as Ka-52 and Mi-28, for example.⁵

Some of the Ukrainian air defense systems were sold to the US for testing, while the BuK short-range missiles were sold to Georgia, making the scale of its air defense system even smaller. Since NATO countries rely on aircraft rather than missiles to strengthen their air defenses, it limits the ability of Western countries to help Ukraine improve its air defense

capability.⁶

After the outbreak of the war, the Ukrainian Air Force was quickly overwhelmed; some of its fighters were destroyed at the airport or shot down by Russian fighters and ground-to-air missiles. The Ukrainian Air Force lost four Su-27s on March 5, which may have been shot down by Russian fighters or S-400 missiles deployed in Belarus, or by the Su-35s, the most advanced Russian fighter. The Ukrainian Air Force has a very small number of fighters evacuated to the west part of the country; however, a Su-24 was still shot down on March 13. It is currently unknown how much resource remains in the Ukrainian Air Force and how long it can last.⁷

The Ukrainian Air Force has long been using Russian-made equipment and lacks experience in operating Western fighters; moreover, the fighters not only require pilots and ground crews, but also air-to-air and air-to-surface weapons,

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4. "Russia Just Destroyed Ukraine's Air Defences in a Couple of Hours: Why Was it So Easy?," *Military Watch Magazine*, February 24, 2022, <https://reurl.cc/NpvGO6>.
 5. "Air Superiority Over Kiev: Can Russian Strike Fighters Eliminate Ukraine's Air Defences Within 24 Hours?"
 6. "Russia Just Destroyed Ukraine's Air Defences in a Couple of Hours: Why Was it So Easy?"
 7. "Ukrainian Su-24 Strike Fighter and 11 Drones Shot Down as Air Assets Diminish," *Military Watch Magazine*, March 13, 2022, <https://reurl.cc/yQdm0M>.

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fuel, spare parts, and available airfields to operate. Although Poland can provide 28 MiG-29s to Ukraine, they are not expected to significantly enhance Ukraine's air combat capability; other former Warsaw Pact countries may have some MiG-29s as well, but most of them are too old and have a poor availability rate. As for American or European fighters such as F-16 or A-10, Ukraine is yet to have the ability to use them effectively. Ukrainian President Zelensky has appealed to Western countries, including Canada, to provide fighter jets, but Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said the Canadian Air Force could not provide available aircraft. The US believes that providing fighter aircraft will not help. If the Russian Air Force already has air superiority, anti-aircraft missiles may be the only viable option.

2. Russia unable to fully utilize its air superiority

After the Cold War, the Russian Air Force has continued to enhance its combat capabilities by eliminating most of its

former Soviet-era fighters and undergoing an impressive modernization since 2010. The newly acquired 350 modern combat aircraft, including the advanced Su-35S and Su-30SM that are mostly based in the southern and western theaters. Ukraine is in their operational range and some units have likely been transferred in from other regions before the war.⁸ According to *Flight Global* magazine, the Russian Air Force owns 240 MiG-29s and MiG-35s (improved MiG-29s), 131 MiG-31s, 273 Su-24s, 192 Su-25s, 350 Su-27s, Su-30s and Su-35s, and 125 Su-34s in 2022. These are all 4th-generation fighters. The Su-57, the first Russian 5th-generation fighter, has 75 units on order and should have yet to become operational before the war.⁹ The most notable Su-35S is a new fighter with the 5th-generation technology as its core that adopts Irbis-E passive phase-array radar, new-generation AL-41F engine, distributed active/passive radar and electro-optical warning system, common datalink, and a new self-defense system. Its avionics system, engine thrust, and weapon-carrying capability are all

8. "Is the Russian Air Force Actually Incapable of Complex Air Operations?," *RUSI*, March 4, 2022, <https://reurl.cc/3jg3W1>.

9. "2022 World Air Forces," *Flight International*, March 24, 2022, <https://reurl.cc/2D18OO>.

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greatly improved over its predecessor.¹⁰

Russia launched airstrikes against Ukrainian military facilities, air defense systems, and airports on February 24, destroying Ukraine's major land-based air defense radar with cruise missiles and ballistic missiles to "blind" its air force and block its activities at major bases; and some Ukrainian S-300 air defense missiles were destroyed as well in Russian tactics similar to which employed by Western countries before mounting attacks. After suppressing Ukraine's air defense capability, the Russian Air Force should then launch a massive strike to destroy Ukraine's combat power.¹¹

A 2021 report predicted that if Russia and Ukraine were going to war, the Russian Air Force should quickly seize air superiority and strike Ukrainian air defense positions, airports, command facilities, and other high-value targets within hours to pave the way for ground forces to push forward.¹² However, the

war is stagnant, and the Russian army is unable to achieve important strategic results. Western experts are puzzled by the fact that although the Russian Air Force has an absolute advantage over Ukraine, it has not been able to grasp complete air control and has not fully utilized its air resources to support ground operations. Western defense officials also found that the Russian Air Force had committed only about 75 fighters at the beginning of the war when it was expected to commit at least a few hundred. It is obvious that Russia has been very cautious in the use of its air force, which has allowed Ukraine to effectively counterattack even after more than 20 days of fighting with its functioning air defense system to threaten Russian pilots trying to provide air support for their ground troops. The Western experts pointed out that there is no explanation for the apparent risk-averse behavior of the Russian Air Force.

10. Yang Zhengwei, *The Two Ultimate Killers: Russia's Fifth-generation Fighter* (Taipei: Jingdian Co., Ltd., September 2012), pp. 46-96.

11. "The Mysterious Case of the Missing Russian Air Force," *RUSI*, February 28, 2022, <https://reurl.cc/nEaZbD>.

12. "Air Superiority Over Kiev: Can Russian Strike Fighters Eliminate Ukraine's Air Defences Within 24 Hours?," *Military Watch Magazine*, December 26, 2021, <https://reurl.cc/AKVy9Y>.

3. Why Russian Air Force under performing

Western experts also found that the actions of the Russian Air Force and ground forces lack coordination; many Russian ground units were sent to combat in theaters outside air defense cover, which exposed the units to Ukrainian drone and anti-tank weapon attacks. David Deptula, a retired US Air Force General, believes the Russian military finds it difficult to coordinate multi-domain operations.¹³

The Russian Army has only limited combat experience in Syria, and the lack of air support for ground forces may also be related to its lack of precision-guided munitions (PGM). In Syria, the Russian Air Force used only a small number of precision weapons while most fighters were still using unguided bombs or rockets. In addition, the Russian Air Force's aerial reconnaissance capabilities are also insufficient. For example,

although Russians raided the Ozerne base in western Kyiv, satellite images show that they did not successfully hit the main runway, nor did the bombing prevent the Ukrainian Air Force from continuing to use the base. Since the Russian planes have to avoid short-range anti-aircraft weapons by staying at high altitudes, their use of non-precision weapons also increases the chance of hitting civilian targets by mistake.¹⁴

Experts at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), a British think tank, believe that the Syrian war could have depleted the Russian inventory of precision weapons, and the Russian military also lacks equipment such as target identification and designation pods. However Russian multi-role fighters should be versatile enough to perform low-altitude “defensive counter-air” (DCA) or “offensive counter-air” (OCA) missions.¹⁵

The RUSI report also noted that

13. “Why hasn’t Russia Mobilised its vast air power against Ukraine?,” *Al Jazeera*, March 2, 2022, <https://reurl.cc/e6RW4L>.

14. “Why has Russia’s Superior Air Force Failed to Conquer Ukraine’s Skies?,” *Week*, March 2, 2022, <https://reurl.cc/Y9gdrx>.

15. “The Mysterious Case of the Missing Russian Air Force,” *RUSI*, February 28, 2022, <https://reurl.cc/nEaZb.D>.

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Russian fighters flew only limited missions in Ukrainian airspace, mostly at low altitudes after dark, to minimize losses to Ukrainian man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS) and ground fire. The experts say this shows that the Russian Air Force lacks the ability to organize and plan large-scale air operations with dozens or even hundreds of airplanes for joint air-ground combat.¹⁶

The RUSI experts also believe that the Russian Air Force may not be able to effectively prevent friendly fires, and it also lacks the ability to coordinate the activities of air and ground forces and to provide air cover for maneuvering units. In addition, the average number of training hours for Russian pilots is 100-120 per year, lower than the Western standard of 180-240 hours plus simulator training. The Russian Air Force also lacks an exercise structure comparable to that of NATO, such as the complex, extensive annual exercises like Red Flag or NATO Tiger Meet. This makes it difficult for

Russian pilots to organize large-scale air operations to effectively perform in high-threat airspace as well as to support military operations and protect ground forces.¹⁷

At present, the Russian Air Force is flying about 200 sorties a day. Due to Putin's request to bomb cities and infrastructure, it seems to have increased to 300 sorties daily by March 21. However they were unable to establish full air superiority, and their flight missions in Ukraine have also increased.¹⁸ US experts believe the reasons for the limited combat performance of the Russian Air Force may be that this is still a limited operation, based on the Russian view; therefore the Kremlin is reluctant to conduct large-scale air force operations and wants to convey a message that its ground units can fight without air support. If the war escalates, the Russian Air Force still has the ability to scramble and stop NATO air forces. But US experts stress that there is no evidence to support these inferences.¹⁹

16. "Is the Russian Air Force Actually Incapable of Complex Air Operations?"

17. "Is the Russian Air Force Actually Incapable of Complex Air Operations?"

18. "Russia Speeds Up Air War Over Ukraine, As Some Munitions Run Low or Malfunction," *Defense One*, March 21, 2022, <https://reurl.cc/DdzXr.O>.

19. "U.S. Intelligence Perplexed as Russia Refuses to Hit Hard with Air Force in Ukraine – Reports," *Military Watch Magazine*, March 2, 2022, <https://reurl.cc/Y9gdzO>.

5. Conclusion

Although the Russian Air Force fighters are more advanced, they lack precision ammunition and have to rely on long-range weapons and even hypersonic missiles, which limits their ability to perform attacks on Ukrainian ground units and support the Russian offensive. In addition, the Russian Air Force may also lack the ability to conduct large-scale operations, and the Ukrainian air defense system can still pose a deadly threat to the Russian aircraft. If the West succeeds in providing additional ground-to-air

missiles, then there is no need to take the risk of escalating the war with a direct confrontation between Russia and NATO. NATO countries are also concerned about whether the Russian Air Force is retaining the advanced fighters to counter NATO or conduct the next operation in Eastern Europe, so they will also deploy advanced fighters and air defense systems to Eastern Europe to enhance air defense capabilities on the eastern side and deter possible Russian threats to NATO borders.²⁰

20. "Send Missiles Not Planes," *CSIS*, March 9, 2022, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/send-missiles-not-planes>.



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