

# The Lessons of Ukraine and Gaza

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## Abstract

*In the West, the Ukraine and Gaza Wars have been viewed by the power elite as a necessary extension of Western power politics. Viewing the progress of these wars, several lessons emerge about the conduct of future warfare. What this article argues is while some of the lessons of these conflicts are important, for economic reasons these two wars will not be typical of future conflicts. For scholars of modern warfare, therefore, these wars provide both opportunities and cautionary notes about what to do in future conflicts.*

## Introduction

Carl von Clausewitz is best remembered for writing that war is a continuation of policy by other means but in the case of both Ukraine and Gaza the more relevant quote may be that, “War has its own grammar but not its own logic”. In the West, the Ukraine and Gaza Wars have been viewed by the power elite as a necessary extension of Western power politics. But, if India looks at how these wars have progressed, several lessons emerge about how to conduct a war in the new millennium. These lessons are important since these two wars are not necessarily the type of conflicts that will be typically conducted in the future but some takeaways from both conflicts are important. From an Indian perspective, do these wars provide both opportunities and cautionary notes about what to do in future conflicts?

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## The High Cost of War

Both the Ukraine and Gaza Wars have been lavishly bankrolled by the West, particularly the United States (US). As the Kiel Institute for the World Economy's Ukraine support tracker points out, the country has received approximately USD 95.0 bn from the European Union and USD 71.5 bn from the US to fund its war effort.<sup>1</sup> These sums include military assistance, humanitarian aid, and assistance to pay the salaries of Ukrainian civil servants. Additionally, the US will give another USD 61.0 bn while the European Union is committed to providing another USD 87.3 bn in assistance to the Ukrainians. This does not cover the cost of future reconstruction which the World Bank has put at USD 486.0 bn and Ukrainian sources put closer to USD 700.0 bn. In other words, after Iraq and Afghanistan this is going to be the world's third trillion-dollar war.

In the case of the Gaza War, the costs have been equally high. Israeli sources claim that an Iron Dome missile, used to take out the Hamas rockets reportedly cost USD 60,000 per missile but some dispute this claim. In contrast, a Hamas rocket is estimated to cost USD 600, roughly one per cent the cost of an Iron Dome missile and Hamas was able to swamp the Israeli system by simply firing thousands of missiles at it, which led to some getting through.<sup>2</sup> Israel has also used drones and precision-guided munitions to inflict damage in Gaza and like Ukraine, it will benefit from American largesse. The US has approved a USD 26.0 bn aid package for Israel and this includes, supporting current US military operations in the region, replacing defence articles that were provided to Israel, reimbursing the Department of Defence for defence services and training provided to Israel; and procuring Israel's Iron Dome, David's Sling, and Iron Beam defence systems to counter short-range rocket threats.<sup>3</sup>

Very few nations in the world have the ability to sustain such an expensive war and instead, much like Ukraine and Israel, they will require substantial donations of weapons and funds from other countries. The question is, can the Europeans and the Americans provide such kinds of assistance to other nations or are they spent in terms of their ability to supply weapons to other nations? JD Vance, the American senator from Ohio, convincingly spelt out why this was not going to be possible.

Vance pointed out that the Ukrainians claimed to need between 4 to 7 million 155 mm artillery shells per year, but the US could only provide 3,60,000 shells per year—less than ten per cent of the Ukrainian requirement. Similarly, to counter the thousands of guided aerial bombs, drones, and missiles that Russia was launching at it, Ukraine required thousands of very expensive Patriot missiles (approximately USD 4.0 mn a piece) but the US annually produces only 550 missiles.<sup>4</sup>

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's production capabilities are worse than those of the US because for decades the European nations benefitted from the peace dividend and allowed their military production capabilities to decline. Today, Czechia is leading an initiative to produce a million artillery shells for Ukraine, but that would merely cover one hundred days of high-intensity war. Perhaps what was more laughable was the Danes announcing with great fanfare that they were giving 15,000 artillery shells to Ukraine, but these shells would only cover 36 hours of warfare for Kyiv. Wars of these types are hugely expensive and it is clear that the West does not have the wherewithal to logistically support such wars.

### **Stockpiles Matter**

The second lesson from the two wars is that there is a need to have large stockpiles of weapons that can be used by the armed forces. Both the Russians and the Ukrainians have gone around the world buying weapons and ammunition from whoever can supply them and have paid inflated rates for these armaments. The Russians, who have a much larger military industrial base, had to go to North Korea for artillery and missiles and to Iran to get Medium Altitude Long Endurance (MALE) drones. Ukraine, similarly, got Turkish drones and through crowdfunding bought sizeable numbers of first-person view drones and in the initial phase of the war wreaked havoc with these cheap systems. Modern militaries, therefore, can no longer go with low stockpiles and, instead, will have to keep up to six months of munitions in reserve since they cannot depend on allies or the arms market to fulfil their requirements.

## **Revising Doctrine and Tactics**

Ukraine and Gaza have shown that the old ideas of how to conduct warfare are being rapidly rewritten as drones, missiles, and glide bombs are dominating the landscape of modern wars. Despite having the Iron Dome, Israel could not stop the Hamas attack or take out all the cheap rockets that were launched from Gaza. Ukraine has shown that drones disrupt large formations and leave traditional instruments of land war, like tanks, particularly vulnerable—as can be seen in how the Russians have blown up both Leopard and Abrams tanks which had the reputation of being difficult to destroy. Further, the Houthis, Hezbollah, and Hamas have all shown how lethal drones can be because the West, Ukraine, and Israel have spent a fortune shooting down these relatively cheap weapons systems that are made with off-the-shelf components. Iran's attack on Israel was largely with slow-flying drones and old ballistic missiles. But it took 154 aircraft (American, British, and Israeli) firing expensive Sidewinder missiles to shoot down the bulk of these drones. As the American scientist Theodore Postel has written, an Iranian drone costs between USD 10,000 to USD 20,000 while a cruise missile may be around USD 1,00,000 but the Sidewinder Aim-9x is a USD 5,00,000 missile so the West and Israel probably spent between USD 2.0 to 3.0 bn to intercept the Iranian weaponry.<sup>5</sup> Poorer nations, therefore, are going to use weapons that are cheap to manufacture and cause headaches for national defences. Armies everywhere will, therefore, have to change their playbook to counter these systems.

## **Winning the Narrative**

Unlike previous wars, Ukraine and Gaza have shown the vital importance of shaping the narrative to get global public opinion on one's side. Ukraine did a great job of doing this by using social media to successfully make the Ukrainian case to international public opinion. This was largely done by young Ukrainians who posted on social media platforms and were even able, for a while, to create urban myths like the Ghost of Kyiv fighter pilot who was shooting down Russian aircraft. It turned out that the Ghost was actually a video game.

In contrast, Israel was not able to determine the narrative in the Gaza War even though initially there was international sympathy for the Israelis. In the past, thanks to the support of the US, Israel

was able to prosecute its wars against the Arab states and the Palestinians largely on its own terms and with little interference from the rest of the world. In the past, an American veto in the United Nations, a friendly Western media that permitted the Israeli narrative to be the dominant one in the global press (where the issue was generally portrayed as Palestinian terrorism against innocent Israelis), and the fact that the Palestinians were unable to effectively voice their case, made it a situation where the coverage became one-sided and the Palestinians disappeared from the view of the international community.

In this war, however, the media monopoly of the West, which overwhelmingly supported Israel, failed as the Palestinians were able to convincingly make their case on social media like TikTok, Telegram, and YouTube. This along with a generational shift in the US on how to view Israel has created a situation where nearly 33.0 per cent of young people support an end to genocide and an immediate ceasefire and the world has seen protests in university campuses across the US. Further, in the international community, there was a willingness to appreciate the genocide perpetrated on the Palestinians—especially as graphic video emerged from Gaza of the deaths of women and children. This has led to global support for a cease-fire and a long-term solution to the problem, preferably a meaningful two-state solution. Future wars, therefore, will also require winning the hearts and minds of the international community and not through the traditional means of using mainstream media. Instead, it will require, as in the case of Ukraine, harnessing the skills of young people who are in tune with the latest social media tools and know, intuitively, how to work with the new media to get the best results.

### **War has its own Grammar but not its own logic**

Clausewitz observed that while war may have its own grammar, it does not have its own logic. In international circles, the bulk of the discussion on the Ukraine and Gaza conflicts centres on how to conduct the wars. Very little has been written about war termination and what a future end state in Ukraine and Gaza should look like. Both the Ukrainian and Israeli governments need to spell out what they see as possible end states to the conflict that they can live with—and that would require moving away from maximalist positions that the other side will never agree to. Ukraine

must espouse a long-term solution for living with Russia and the West cannot go back to mouthing platitudes about a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine (Israel has already rejected this proposal).

In both cases, the fact is that without an end state not only can peace be negotiated, but it only means that either conflict could once again flare up with adverse consequences for both Ukraine and Israel. Since the war started, Ukraine's population has shrunk from around 43.0 to 35.0 million and one can only wonder how many of those who left the country will return to a war-ravaged economy with little prospects of employment. Similarly, in Israel where there is no concrete peace settlement one has to wonder if the hundreds of thousands of Israelis with dual nationality will continue to stay in a country where Israel's image of invincibility has taken a beating and instead, people are left to wonder when the next 07 Oct 2023 style attack will be repeated?

### **An Economic Shift?**

Lastly, India is seeing the start of an economic shift in the global system brought about by the Ukraine War. Sanctions on multiple countries, the problem with using the Dollar to trade and make payments, and the confiscation of assets held in western banks are leading to preliminary action being taken to make countries less vulnerable to the Western-created international economic system. These measures include the move towards the association of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa currencies, the greater economic cooperation between Russia and China, and the fact that heavily sanctioned nations like Iran, North Korea, and Russia are increasingly working with each other and China to defy the West. Thus, despite all the sanctions on Russia its economy is growing and the Russian arms industry has seen a renaissance in its abilities.

### **Conclusion**

For a country like India, these lessons are of great importance. In a future war, the country will not receive unrestricted aid and large stockpiles of weaponry from the West. And even if it does get some, the political cost may be too great for the Indian government to accept. Further, one cannot ignore the military lessons of these two wars. Ukraine is showing that while artillery, armour, and

even landmines matter, new tactics must be adopted. Part of this would include a coherent drone policy to buy both First Person View drones as well as MALE drones for all three services. The Hamas attack is probably being studied very carefully in Pakistan to try and see what is applicable to an India-Pakistan conflict. Lastly, starting a war without an endgame is something India cannot afford. Unlike Ukraine and Israel, it does not have a benefactor like the US or the European Union and will have to depend largely on itself. While this is acceptable, it does mean that realistic choices on war initiation, war continuation, and war termination will have to be made.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Ukraine Support Tracker, Kiel Institute for the World Economy, available at, Ukraine Support Tracker | Kiel Institute (ifw-kiel.de).

<sup>2</sup> Iain Boyd, "Israel's Iron Dome air defense system works well – here's how Hamas got around it", Colorado Arts and Sciences Magazine, University of Colorado, Boulder, October 13, 2023.

<sup>3</sup> H.R.7217 - Israel Security Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2024, available at, H.R.7217 - 118th Congress (2023-2024): Israel Security Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2024 | Congress.gov | Library of Congress

<sup>4</sup> J.D. Vance, "The Math on Ukraine Doesn't Add Up", The New York Times, 13 Apr 2024.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/12/opinion/jd-vance-ukraine.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Alastair Crooke, "The Interlocking of Strategic Positions", Strategic Culture Foundation, 29 Apr 2024.  
<https://strategic-culture.eu/news/2024/04/29/the-interlocking-of-strategic-paradigms/>.