



Ukraine's Faustian Bargain: The first 9 Months of the Russian-Ukrainian War

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Abstract

Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Ukraine has entered a Faustian Pact with NATO and its allies. In doing so, Ukraine became the protagonist in a proxy war by the West with Russia. Over the first nine months neither Ukraine and its western allies, nor Russia can lay claim to the upper hand in the ongoing war. In order to bring the war to a swift end the West has imposed sanctions against Russia, which have not had the desired effect, but have backfired against the west in terms of energy crises. Neither of the warring parties is in the position to negotiate for peace, as yet. This contribution argues that both parties face an existential threat, and thus cannot lose, yet neither can win. The reliance of Ukraine on support from the west, is subject to pragmatic, political and economic factors. NATO will not enter the war unless it spills over into its member countries. Despite assurances to the contrary, any negotiated settlement will be subject to the dictates of the West, and the respective governments of the day, especially the USA. From this vantage point Ukraine has “sold” its soul to the West, without the prospect of redemption.

Zusammenfassung

Nach der russischen Invasion der Ukraine im Februar 2022 ist die Ukraine einen faustischen Pakt mit der NATO und ihren Verbündeten eingegangen. Damit wurde die Ukraine zum Protagonisten eines Stellvertreterkriegs des Westens mit Russland. In den ersten neun Monaten können weder die Ukraine und ihre westlichen Verbündeten noch Russland die Oberhand im andauernden Krieg für sich beanspruchen. Um den Krieg schnell zu beenden, hat der Westen Sanktionen gegen Russland verhängt, die nicht die gewünschte Wirkung gezeigt haben, aber in Bezug auf Energiekrisen gegen den Westen fehlgegangen sind. Keine der Kriegsparteien ist bisher in der Lage, über Frieden zu verhandeln. Dieser Beitrag argumentiert, dass beide Parteien einer existenziellen Bedrohung ausgesetzt sind und daher nicht verlieren können, und gleichzeitig kann keine der beiden Kriegsparteien gewinnen. Das Vertrauen der Ukraine in die Unterstützung durch den Westen ist pragmatisch, politisch und wirtschaftlich bedingt. Die NATO wird nicht in den Krieg eintreten, solange der Krieg nicht auf ihre Mitgliedsländer übergreift. Trotz gegenteiliger Beteuerungen wird jede Verhandlungslösung dem Diktat des Westens und der jeweiligen Regierungen des Tages, insbesondere der USA, unterliegen. Von diesem Standpunkt aus hat die Ukraine ihre Seele an den Westen „verkauft“, ohne Aussicht auf eine faustische „Erlösung“.

Keywords / Schlüsselwörter: Russia-Ukraine war, geopolitics, NATO, European Union, USA, Putin, Zelenskyy, Faustian bargain.

1.0 Introduction

In pursuit of NATO membership Volodymyr Zelenskyy entered into a Faustian Bargain with the West. Knowing that Russia will do its utmost to prevent Ukraine's NATO membership, Zelenskyy pushed the envelope as far as he could, and the West signalled that it is willing to support Ukraine against Russia. The result was that Russia perceived Ukraine's NATO membership as a potential existential threat, for it would allow NATO to position its forces at the Russian-Ukrainian border. However, in pursuit of weakening Russia geopolitically and economically, the NATO alliance had no intention to enter a direct conflict with Russia and utilised Ukraine as its proxy.

In the quest for NATO and EU membership, Volodymyr Zelenskyy assumed the Faustian role and the USA led Western allies promoted Ukraine as a proxy promising to support it with the necessary military and economic means to combat the Russian invasion. The problem for Ukraine is that the promises of support are Mephistophelian.

Thus, Ukraine as a sovereign country became militarily and economically totally dependent on the West for its economic and political existence. Having accepted the dependency, Ukraine sold its national sovereignty to USA and its NATO allies, without gaining any of the membership benefits. With reference to NATO membership, Zelenskyy naively assumed that Ukraine would follow the same path as Finland and Sweden and be given a privileged fast-tracked membership. However, since the Bucharest Summit in 2008, where Ukraine's membership was canvassed, there remains limited interest amongst NATO leadership to admit Ukraine as a member country. At this summit, NATO assured Ukraine and Georgia that both countries could someday become members. However, no timeline was ever set and thus far the alliance has done little to realise this promise. Today, the situation is not much different. NATO secretary general Jens Stoltenberg has never ruled out Ukraine accession to NATO yet is enduringly cautious in recent responses to questions relating to Ukraine's NATO membership, pointing out that the alliance has an open-door policy and Ukraine is thus welcome to apply for membership, yet for any applicant country to be successful, all 30 member countries must agree to such an accession (Olson 2022). However, such an agreement is at present unlikely, for, as the USA national security advisor Jake Sullivan stated, in his opinion, Ukraine's NATO membership application should be considered at another time (Olson 2022).

The overriding matter is that, if Ukraine were to become a NATO member, whilst it is at war with Russia, NATO's Article 5 would be invoked, and NATO countries would be at war with Russia. However, there appears to be little appetite within NATO countries to enter a full-scale war with Russia. This is for example evident from NATO's refusal to impose a no-fly zone over Ukraine, as requested on numerous occasions by Zelenskyy. The tensions inherent in Ukraine's bid to join NATO, including Russian demands for NATO to explicitly refuse membership is central to the conflict. The core premise of NATO is the mutual defence pact. NATO's Article 5 allows member countries to call on the support of others for their defence. NATO secretary general Jens Stoltenberg has repeatedly noted that NATO is not a party to the conflict (Jozwiak 2022) and this is unlikely to be a stance that will change. It is clear that the West is not willing to be further involved in this conflict, unless there is a spill over of the war in Ukraine to surrounding countries. November's missile strike within Poland raised the spectre of a triggering of Article 5, a situation that NATO, and specifically the US has said they will uphold, but there is no appetite for pursuing a war with Russia by the US, unless driven to it.

Equally, despite rhetoric about the provocation of the West, Russia does appear to be trying to avoid any direct conflict with Ukraine's NATO neighbours such as Poland which

provide corridors for military hardware deliveries from the West. Given Stoltenberg's ongoing position that maintains NATO's role is to provide support to Ukraine, as a sovereign nation which has the right to defend itself (Jozwiak 2022), but without further provocation, there is no danger of drawing NATO into direct military conflict. NATO in essence has real but limited interests (Mazarr, et al. 2022). From this perspective, there exists a military stand-off between Russia and NATO, enabling Russia to conduct a war within the confines of Ukrainian borders without the danger of direct NATO military response. If this stands to reason, Russia may deploy any weapons at their disposal, including tactical nuclear weapons, as long as it is contained within Ukraine. Given the above-mentioned statements by Stoltenberg and Sullivan respectively it is questionable how far, if at all, NATO would come to Ukraine's rescue in a form of direct military intervention. There is a further complication concerning territorial issues, namely the annexation of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia regions, which Russia considers as its own territory. Thus, from a Russian perspective any attack on these areas could be considered as an act of war, allowing it to respond against Ukraine by – as stated above - all military means. In other words, if based on Ukraine's counteroffensive in the annexed regions, such as the liberation of Kherson by Ukrainian troops, Russia formally declares war on Ukraine, to which extent would NATO countries come to Ukraine's rescue and thus enter the war? Most likely NATO countries would put their own security ahead of Ukraine's. Thus, for the foreseeable future Ukraine will remain in a military Faustian Bargain with the West.

2.0 The Mephistophelian sleight of hand

Since the Russian invasion, Ukraine has enjoyed strong support from NATO countries, especially in form of military hardware. Support is limited to supplies, with President Biden ruling out US troops on the ground in Ukraine. But not all NATO countries were prepared to supply Ukraine with the weapons that Zelenskyy demands. His argument is that if Ukraine were to receive the quantity of desired weapons, it would defeat Russia on the battleground. To a large extent NATO countries obliged and supplied Ukraine with weapons, but Russia is far from being defeated, yet increasingly under pressure. Estimates of the land occupied by Russia vary from around 22 per cent at the peak of the invasion in March (including breakaway regions in the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) and Crimea) to around 15% excluding these regions. Yet, Ukraine has retaken over 37% of all land occupied, or around half of the non-breakaway regions.

The trajectory of the war is strongly contingent on external provision of weapons for Ukraine, and, in the case of escalated nuclear threat a more coherent political stance by NATO, which is uncertain (de Dreuzy and Gill, 2022) (as well as economic sanctions, discussed later). Therefore, the question becomes how long will the US and NATO continue to support Ukraine, or escalate support if required? There is a range of contributing complex factors to be considered, predominantly political and domestic support for the war by the US which is the key driver of NATO support; capacity of the EU to maintain or increase support given the impacts within Europe of the war; capacity of NATO countries to maintain supply of sophisticated weapons and weapon systems, given NATO countries are slowly depleting their own weapon reserves (CNBC, 2022) and implications of nuclear escalation, or spill over of the war into surrounding countries. It is noteworthy that since the beginning of the Russo-Ukrainian war, EU and NATO countries have been vocal in support of Ukraine, and at the same time the delivery of the EU's USD 9 billion promised financial aid has been slow. There is a second question, given that China and not Russia is USA's peer competitor, how long will it take USA to refocus its political and military attention on China,

and reduce its military hardware support for Ukraine? In other words, USA and NATO are operating a proxy war in Ukraine, and have deliberately, or otherwise, led Ukraine into believing that USA (Biden 2022), EU and NATO countries such as Germany (Scholz, 2022) will support it as long as it takes to win the war.

There are at least two points to be considered. First, Ukraine and the NATO countries have potentially two different understandings what it means for Ukraine to win the war. Zelenskyy's perception of what constitutes "winning the war" is perhaps delusory. He claims that the war will not end until all the Russian occupied and annexed territories including Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia oblasts, and Crimea are returned to Ukraine. To restate, the difficulty is that Russia considers these regions as their own territory and will defend them as part of Russia.

It is important to remember that Putin's rationale for invading Ukraine has geopolitical overtones, including not only a visceral response to NATO, but also a strong message of nationalism and a stated desire to "return" Russia's historic lands (Pifer, 2022). This Russian revisionism draws in complexities of the cultural, historic, political, and societal Russo-Ukrainian roots in play which renders a negotiated resolution of the conflict very difficult as long as the West, including NATO countries, is providing military and financial aid to Ukraine.

In short, Ukraine cannot win the war without the aid from West and NATO countries. The problem is that NATO and other Western countries do not have unlimited resources as to support Ukraine with military hardware indefinitely. Over time, therefore, weapons supply from the West must ultimately be reduced. Thus, any suggestion that Ukraine will receive support from NATO countries until the war is won, is potentially illusory (CNBC, 2022). As it stands, it appears that the Russo-Ukrainian war will continue not for months but potentially for years and the longer the war continues the greater is the chance of war fatigue in the West. Even now, support for Ukraine varies within NATO member countries. For example, in comparison to Poland and Baltic states, France is more ambivalent, and Germany is more reluctant to supply sophisticated military hardware to Ukraine (BBC, 2022).

If the above observations stand to reason, Ukraine is facing a Mephistophelian sleight of hand applied by the USA, EU, and NATO. The promises made by these three entities cannot be fulfilled as it is envisaged by Zelenskyy. Ukraine's return to the pre-2014 borders including the reinstatement of Crimea as Ukrainian territory will not happen unless Russia is defeated. Whichever way the war turns out, eventually Ukraine will most likely have to accept some territorial losses. These will ultimately be determined at the negotiating table.

As far as Ukraine's position at future negotiation is concerned, Zelenskyy will be confronted with a Mephistophelian problem. Having accepted the Western promises to support Ukraine whatever and however long it takes, and his previously stated vision of what it means for Ukraine to win the war, he will not have the equal negotiating power as Russia. By attempting to trade Ukraine's neutrality for a NATO membership Zelenskyy has, as argued above, entered a Faustian Bargain from which Ukraine can no longer escape – a bargain which renders Ukraine unable to determine its own future at the negotiating table to end the war.

Ukraine depends on EU and USA and other NATO countries for its defence and any success in reclaiming territories annexed by Russia. In short, despite strong assurances from the West on "nothing about Ukraine without Ukraine", it is the USA and other NATO countries whose authority Ukraine will have to follow in negotiations with Russia. This means that firstly without the West, Ukraine will not be able to continue its war against Russia indefinitely, and secondly it will be the USA, EU and NATO which will determine when Zelenskyy needs to negotiate with Russia and how the war will end.

To unpack this further we will now turn to a more detailed consideration of the continuation of the war.

3.0 NATO and the continuation of the war

The Economist (2022) outlined three potential scenarios, the first sees a decisive victory by Russia, a situation which is looking decreasingly likely, the second a stalemate, and the third a continued series of victories by Ukraine, leading to the spectre of Ukraine at the border of the Crimean Peninsula. This third scenario is noted as being the most positive, but also the most dangerous, including the afore-mentioned threat of nuclear escalation. For the time being a continuation of the war is difficult to refute. Zelenskyy is seeking continuing military help from the Western allies, which he justifies with the need to persist with the offensive and thus to prolong the war. In response the USA, EU and other NATO countries are supplying Ukraine with offensive and defensive military hardware, intelligence, and other military aid. Some NATO countries provide military training, and diplomatic and financial support. This has not only emboldened Zelenskyy to shift his narrative from defence to offence, but he also has decreed that Ukraine will not negotiate with Putin. This means that this decree closes the door to any negotiations between Russia and Ukraine, and Zelenskyy who previously was seeking Western help for the purpose of defence, is now pursuing Western military aid for a prolonged offensive.

It is important to recognise that Ukraine's resources are diminishing. Nevertheless, it needs to be acknowledged that the Ukrainian military has been bold, highly successful and precarious. Notwithstanding that Ukraine is taking initiatives, it is unlikely that it will be able to retake completely the regions annexed by Russia. Thus far Ukraine has made some territorial gains, but the regions annexed by Russia remain mostly under Moscow's control. However, in order to retain the annexed regions, Putin will need to conduct the war by adopting alternative non-nuclear strategies. At the same time much will depend on (i) the status and deployment of the Russian forces; (ii) the support Ukraine will receive from NATO countries, (iii) how far the Western alliance countries will be able to deal on the domestic front with the economic, political, and social consequences of the sanctions imposed on Russia?

3.1 The status and deployment of the Russian forces

As noted above, Russian armed forces have performed poorly in the Russo-Ukrainian war, whereas the Ukrainian military has accomplished significant victories. It may be opportune to analyse standing of Russian military forces. Such an analysis provides a background against which we can better understand Russia's military strength and the potential outcome of the Russo-Ukrainian war. Notwithstanding the rather poor performance of the Russian military comparative to the Ukrainian armed forces in the Russo-Ukrainian war thus far the former has greater human and physical resources which it may employ in the future.

According to VSB Defense (2021) Russia had in 2021 3,569,000 military personnel, which includes 1,014,000 active personnel, 2,000,000 reserve personnel and 555,000 paramilitary personnel. Russia has 13,000 tanks, 4144 aircrafts and 603 warships. In comparison Ukraine has 255,000 active personnel, 2430 tanks, 285 aircrafts and 25 warships. Since the beginning of the Russo-Ukrainian war Ukraine has increased its armed forces to approximately 700,000 and when adding national guard, police, border guard, Ukrainian's defence forces are approximately one million strong (Global Security Organisation, 2022; International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2022).

Notwithstanding the Russian military strength, the apparent problem is that its troops have shown a low morale, poor discipline, and low engagement quality, enabling Ukraine to attain significant territorial advances and reclaiming parts of the Russian annexed areas. In effect according to the above figures Russia has deployed only about 20 per cent of its reported active personnel in the Ukraine. These forces were partially withdrawn and replaced with Kuban Cossacks (Arnald, 2022) some militias, Chechens, various volunteer groups and the Wagner mercenary group (Macgregor, 2022; Landry, 2022) to name but a few. The withdrawal of Russian regular army from the frontlines puts Russia's military into a difficult position. For example, in the occupied region of Kherson further territorial gains by Ukrainian forces are progressing. For Russia to lose Kherson would be a symbolic defeat. The open question is when will Russia employ a large number of its armed forces against Ukraine? If this were to happen, Russia may be in the position to advance its territorial gains further. Providing, we accept that on basis of the physical and human resources the Russian military has an overwhelming advantage over its Ukrainian counterparts, then the question is how it is possible for the Russian army to perform purely in the Ukrainian war arena?

Perhaps the answer may be found in the inability of the Russian military command to understand and implement the necessary military tactics, and that the Ukrainian army has been able to demonstrate its superior tactical military approach. Thus far Ukrainian tactics and strategies have been excellent, utilizing every possible "home advantage" and outmaneuvering the Russian military command.

This superiority of Ukraine's military power limits Russian ambitions to gain control over large Ukrainian territory. Furthermore, even with all its military might Russia has not the capacity to occupy all of Ukraine, for the simple reason that it would need to commit a significant portion of its force to be stationed in the Ukraine covering some 600,000 square kilometres.

Russia has a large number of discharged soldiers who served in the armed and militia forces. It also has a significant stock of military hardware which is mostly deployed at their Far East borders and Russia has its own armament industry. Despite this military infrastructure and resources, it would be deluded to assume that Russia would be able to change the on-ground situation in a short period of time. Most likely, it will take time until Russia is able to muster and deploy additional military resources required for the defence of the annexed territories – if at all, supporting the longer drawn-out war scenario.

Depending on the success or otherwise of the above-stated stabilisation, and with the view that Russian army has difficulties to defend the occupied regions it could be argued that Ukrainian forces will continue to advance and liberate their own territories.

3.2 Ukraine Support from NATO – The USA and the West: Holding on to the Faustian Bargain

The USA and the West are holding on to the Faustian Bargain, fulfilling to a large extent Ukraine's wishes to supply certain military hardware and financial support. But not all wishes are being fulfilled. For example, as stated above, the Ukrainian wish to gain fast-track NATO and EU membership is simply not going to be fulfilled any time soon. But European countries have thus far not experienced the consequences of the energy crisis, which, come winter, may turn the population in USA and the EU against Ukraine. Important is the question concerning the political environment in Europe especially in Hungary and more recently Italy, with its right-wing populist government, and the forthcoming national and presidential elections in France. But more importantly is the outcome of the mid-term

election in the USA. Although the Democrats have secured a slim majority in the USA Senate, the Republicans have the majority in the House of Representatives. In May 2022, eleven USA Senate Republicans and 57 House Republicans voted against the USD 40 billion aid package for Ukraine (Kelly, 2022) and in September 2022 almost all House Republicans voted against the funding bill which included USD 12 billion for Ukraine (Seidel, 2022).

Since the Republican Party are taking control of the House of Representatives in January 2023, a re-evaluation of aid for Ukraine is most likely forthcoming. Questions why the USA has given Ukraine financial and other assistance and how much more should the USA give will undoubtedly be raised, when the USA Congress reconvenes. In short, the Trump wing of the Republican Party may significantly reduce the military aid to Ukraine already in 2023, and obviously if someone following in Trump's footsteps or even Trump wins the 2024 presidential election, then most likely there would be a re-evaluation not only of the afore-said USA aid to Ukraine but also the extent of a political and economic push against Russia.

From a Faustian Bargain perspective Ukraine will not have much to offer to Republican Party governed USA, and will lose its political, military, and economic bargaining position associated with a NATO membership. It would be back to "America first". The rest of the Western alliance will as usually follow the USA example. Russia on the other hand will remain a major geo-political player; it has the oil and gas reserves, and other natural resources; it has a large arsenal of nuclear weapons, and it is geographically still the largest country in the world. But following the Ukraine war, Russia will be a weakened and deglobalized country, but most likely it will maintain parts if not all of the annexed territories in Ukraine.

To be sure, and as stated above, Zelenskyy's decree prohibiting Ukraine's negotiations with Putin will be unenforceable, for it will not be his decision, unless NATO agrees. In short, since Zelenskyy has entered into the Faustian Bargain with the Western alliance it will be the latter which will dictate the timing and conditions for Russo-Ukrainian negotiations.

We have to assume that Zelenskyy is fully aware of his position, and if this stands to reason it is understandable that he is pushing to bring NATO allies into the war. This, he hopes to achieve through the back door, namely for Ukraine to become a fast-tracked NATO member. The shift from a recognition in March that Ukraine is unlikely to become a NATO member to a membership application in September, signals the current push for deeper support. Yet this is unlikely to happen. Recent pronouncements by Christine Lambrecht, the German Minister of Defence stated that NATO is taking a clear position, namely the alliance will not become a party to the war (Lambrecht, 2022). Being cognisant that NATO will not be drawn into a direct military confrontation with Russia, Zelenskyy is in a peculiar position. On the one hand, he must know that his offenses can only show favourable results for Ukraine as long as the Western allies supply military hardware. This cannot be limitless. On the other side he knows that Russia will most likely pursue a war of attrition potentially leading to a long-drawn-out war. The Western allies know that the Ukrainian territorial gains are pushing Russia into an increasingly defensive position with little option for any face saving retreat, as evidenced by a victorious retaking of Kherson in November, yet, after the Russian retreat they have established positions close to Kherson and have commenced what is described as revenge attacks shelling civilian populations described as "Russians" after the annexation of the region in September. Thus, Zelenskyy needs a different strategy to win the war – whatever "winning" means. As stated above Zelenskyy's most preferred option is to bring NATO into direct confrontation with Russia and the war to a quick ending, with a return to pre-2014 Russo-Ukrainian borders.

To achieve this result, Zelenskyy argued that NATO must prevent the possible deployment of Russian nuclear weapons, and if necessary, use nuclear pre-emptive strikes. In his address at the Lowy Institute in Sydney on 6th October 2022, Zelenskyy emphasized

the importance of preventive measures (Der Kurier, 2022; Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 2022). Zelenskyy's suggestion was widely rejected by the West since its realisation would potentially start a world war.

As Lambrecht (2022) and others have pointed out NATO will not begin a war with Russia and thus it is unlikely that the NATO will accommodate Zelenskyy's request for nuclear preemptive strike on Russia. However, in the context of nuclear threats, President Biden articulated a blunt warning concerning the risks following President Putin's thinly veiled threat. Biden (cited in Fossum et al. 2022, n.p.) stated, it is the "first time since the Cuban missile crisis, [that] we have a direct threat of the use (of a) nuclear weapon if in fact things continue down the path they are going". This is a dangerous rhetoric pushing Putin further into a corner. To defuse Biden's sable rattling the White House and Pentagon experts and other USA officials maintain that as for now there has been no suggestions that there are any changes to Russia's nuclear stance (Fossum, et al. 2022).

Of course, it is difficult to determine how the USA may respond to a Russian tactical nuclear attack within Ukraine. There is however a general view amongst USA experts that the USA would not respond in kind, namely with a tactical nuclear strike against Russia (Zakaria, 2022). At the same time, it does not seem that Putin is going to accept the status quo. Most likely he will protract his *special military operation* as a war of attrition. Potentially in the first instance he will attempt to destroy further Ukraine's energy, transportation and other infrastructures. This can be achieved without massive ground forces. It can be carried out by the Russian air force and drones bringing about an energy crisis and depriving the civilian population of basic electricity, gas, water, and other essential supplies.

However, it would be naïve to assume that even a massive destruction of the Ukrainian infrastructure would bring about a quick war turnaround in favour of Russia. It seems that Russia is currently starved of well-trained, well-equipped, highly motivated, and battle-ready military. The current mobilisation of troops does not provide the required increase in military capacity for offensives but may stabilise the war efforts. For Russia this means in the first instance to halt the Ukrainian advances and secondly using this stabilisation to advance its military initiatives in the future, which may be is achievable by increasing military power.

3.3 Sanctions

Sanctions are widely seen as the toughest action that can be taken short of going to war. Sanctions against Russia with regard to its actions against Ukraine have been in place since Russia's annexation of the Crimea in 2014. However additional recent sanctions following the 2022 invasion of Ukraine are significantly more widespread, geographically, and economically. Sanctions include financial measures, specifically removing Russian access to international financial systems (predominantly SWIFT, and Russian access and use of foreign currency and international bank holdings), oil and gas sanctions, including the banning of imports of Russian oil, gas, and coal, and significant sanctioning of more than 1,000 Russian individuals and businesses, and oligarchs, by the US, EU, UK, and other countries. Other measures include bans on certain goods, Russian flights, Russian gold, and increased taxes on selected imports.

The US, UK and EU are primary drivers of the sanctions, however over 30 countries have imposed sanctions, including Australia, Canada, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, and Switzerland, the latter most notable for a long history of neutrality.

Sanctions are driven by NATO allies. Those countries who actively condemned Russia comprised 61 percent of global GDP, but only 16% of the global population with India

(neutral) and China (leaning towards Russia) being notable exceptions to the condemnation of Russia (Green, 2022). South Africa is not bound by sanctions, but the imminent arrival of a super yacht owned by a sanctioned individual is causing tensions from differing political perspectives (Fihlani and Astier, 2022). Outside of bilateral or state sponsored sanctions a unique range of international companies has suspended or withdrawn trading in Russia completely, from Apple to Zoom.

The impact of these sanctions is less clear. The US State Department claims that the sanctions are not going to end, and that they are reducing Russian capacity to produce and stockpile weapons, as well as wage war, through economic sanctions (US Department of State, 2022). However, sanctions, as well as other global shocks are having a much broader global economic impact. The political implications of gas supply issues in Europe, a European “winter of discontent” with increasingly cold and disenfranchised voters will be challenging. There are calls to reconsider sanctions, with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) noting the significant spill over effects, and the potential disruption of the global economy, noting that “...high time for our thinking about the global economic stability implications of sanctions to catch up with the new realities of economic coercion” (Mulder 2022).

Calls for increased responsibility of sanction imposing countries on those that are most affected, both in their own voting public, and globally, is going to provide an increasing counterpressure to support sanctions, unless global economic outlook, and related energy crises are addressable within a sanctioned context.

4.0 Refusal to Negotiate with Putin: Ukraine should be careful what it wishes for

Let us return to the Faustian Bargain and Zelenskyy recently decree that Ukraine will not negotiate with Putin. In essence this means that the war in the Ukraine will only come to an end if either all the occupied territories are returned, or if Putin is removed. As it currently stands the first option is highly unlikely. It does not matter who is governing Russia, a return of all occupied territory will not occur unless Russia is defeated on the battlefield. This however, as it was analysed above will be for Ukraine difficult to achieve due to the thus far untapped Russian military resources as stated above. Furthermore, as mentioned above, Zelenskyy's presidential decree banning Ukraine to negotiate with Putin puts Ukraine into a peculiar situation, for if Putin is replaced it is difficult to determine who his successor may be. Putin has made sure that there is neither a viable political competitor nor a successor.

So internally, Putin seems to be relatively secure and not subjected to challenges – at least not immediately. However, the situation may change depending to a large extent on the outcome of Russia's war in the Ukraine. As it stands, there are compelling reasons to argue that due to the sluggish course of the war in Ukraine, Putin is under massive pressure to ensure Russia's military success. Be this as it may, assuming the reality of pressure on Putin from within Kremlin there are no clear signs that Putin could soon be replaced, and the jury is out on this matter. However, in the Western mainstream press and commentaries there are persistent reports of dissatisfaction among the Kremlin elites from the secret service, the military, politicians, and the oligarchs.

Given the uncertainties about who will replace Putin and when, Western media and political analysts have identified, however speculative several individuals who may fill the succession role. According to Busvine (2022) and Sweeney and Armitage (2022) the list of individuals who may replace Putin includes (i) Nikolai Patrushev, former head of FSB and current Secretary of the Russian Security Council who is seen by Western Kremlin watchers as the most likely successor. His political views are more extreme and anti-Western and anti-

USA than those of Putin; (ii) Dmitry Medvedev, former Russian President, currently the Deputy Chairman of the Russian Security Council, and an advocate for the deployment of nuclear weapons in the Ukraine war. In other words, the individual who might replace Putin may pursue more drastic measures in the Russo-Ukraine war. Both, Patrushev and Medvedev would potentially make the Ukraine war even worse than what we have seen under Putin's rule.

5.0 Conclusion

At the heart of the Russo-Ukrainian war is Russia's rejection of having the NATO alliance at its border with Ukraine, for it is perceived by Moscow as a military and political existential threat. However, there are those in the West which do not agree with the notion that NATO forces at the Russian border do not threaten Russia's survival. It does not matter how the West sees the presence of NATO forces at the Russo-Ukraine borders. The only thing that matters is what the Russian government generally and Putin specifically think. Underpinned by a sense of righting historical wrongs by reinstating Russian lands gives a sense of legitimacy within Russia. To put it simply, if Putin and his government think that they are confronted with an existential threat, the USA and the NATO alliance should be very cautious in interacting with Russia. After all Russia has some 10,000 nuclear weapons and if put into a situation where it needs to protect its military, political and economic existential interests, it may just use all the forces at its disposal.

This raises the question, what is Russia trying to achieve? Although this question is difficult to answer, it could be argued that despite many Western mainstream media reports, observations, and political analyses there is no indication that Russia had any interests in seizing all of Ukraine and to make it part of the Russian Federation. The parts of Ukraine annexed by Russia amount to only fraction of Ukraine's territory. Thus, rather than asking what Russia is trying to achieve, it may be more informative to ask how this war could end? Bluntly put there is no potential answer to be advanced. The reason is that Russia cannot afford to lose. NATO under the USA leadership has decided that it will use the Russo-Ukrainian conflict to defeat Russia through the proxy war within the Ukrainian borders and at the same time bring Russia's economy to its knees. Thus, paradoxically a situation arises where Russia must win to maintain its existence as a world power and USA as a super-power with its NATO allies has to win, being the single largest military, political and economic global force. It is obvious that both sides cannot win. Thus, the question "how this war could end?" must for the time being remain unanswered. It may be worth noting that there is a pervasive view in the West that the Russo-Ukrainian war will continue for years.

The end of the war through negotiation and a peace agreement is currently not on the horizon, unless either Russia or the USA sue for peace, or the USA directs Ukraine to accept a negotiated peace.

Thus, from the perspective of a Faustian Bargain, Zelenskyy is beholden to the West, irredeemably it seems, as any roads out of the current situation require either further commitment from the West, and NATO, with potential escalation of conflict, which is currently unsupported by the West, and this appears unlikely to change. Any negotiations are liable to entrench Ukraine in sovereign losses. There is no divine intervention to redeem Zelenskyy's bargain with NATO. He has gambled Ukraine, on NATO, and the West, which is subject to political economic and social impacts of war support, exacerbated in Europe by a looming winter of discontent through energy and cost of living crises, in some countries exacerbated by large influx of Ukrainian and other migrants. The US is subject to the "America First" rhetoric of the Republicans, whose increase in power following the midterm

elections may impact on Bidens ongoing financial and military support for Ukraine. This gamble for the soul of Ukraine is shaky, and unlike one version of Faust, there may be no divine redemption.

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