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From the Editors

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FROM THE EDITORS

As of this writing, the Russo-Ukrainian war persists and continues to evolve along various dimensions, but its fundamentals have remained relatively unchanged since its early months. Russia has sustained a massive defeat which it is clearly unable to reverse—at least on the conventional battlefield. The authors assembled in this issue explore those fundamentals and assess the war’s future direction in light of them.

In the first place, there is the maritime dimension. In “Naval Considerations in the Russo-Ukrainian War,” Seth Cropsey provides a sketch of the overall trajectory of the war prior to the dramatic success of the Ukrainian offensive in the Kharkiv area in September, emphasizing the importance of the Black Sea in Russia’s attempts to consolidate control of the war’s real strategic prize: possession of the greater part of Ukraine’s coast on that body of water—which also serves as NATO’s southeastern maritime frontier. (He notes in passing that the now largely destroyed and impoverished Donbas no longer can be considered such a prize.) Cropsey argues that the importance of control of the Black Sea only can increase as the Ukrainians continue to weaken Russia’s hold on their country’s southern periphery, and ultimately on Crimea. NATO, and especially the neighboring Romanians, likely will have an increasingly critical role to play here. Seth Cropsey, a former Deputy Under Secretary of the Navy, is president of the Yorktown Institute.

There has been to date little public discussion of the legal regime relating to access to the Black Sea, but this too is a critical aspect of the war’s maritime dimension. The Montreux Convention of 1936 continues to govern Turkey’s management of access to the Black Sea via the Bosphorus and Dardanelles. In “The Russia-Ukraine Conflict: Blocking Access to the Black Sea,” Raul Pedrozo reviews the terms of this agreement, which in essence allows the Turkish government to close the straits to the warships of all belligerent powers in time of war except those returning to their home base from elsewhere. It did so a week after the Russian invasion. Few noticed, however, that the Turks have taken advantage of a loophole in the treaty to deny access to naval forces of nonbelligerent powers as well—which is to say, U.S. and nonriparian NATO navies. This move, evidently intended to appease the Russians, undermines the integrity of the treaty regime and could have far-reaching strategic consequences. Captain Raul Pedrozo, USN

(Ret.), is a professor in the Stockton Center for International Law at the Naval War College.

Undoubtedly the greatest question mark looming over the entire conflict in Ukraine is the nuclear one. In “Nuclear Weapons in Russia’s War against Ukraine,” Stephen Blank analyzes contemporary Russian doctrine regarding nuclear use in the course of a conventional conflict, within the larger context of Russia’s calculated use of nuclear threats as a psychological instrument to deter and constrain adversaries’ potential responses to Russian actions both in peacetime and in war. He suggests that the only real success the Russians have had in the current war is in intimidating effectively those elements of Western opinion in favor of terminating the war on Russian terms and in persuading Western governments to limit the kinds of military aid they have been willing to supply to the Ukrainians. Whether Vladimir Putin actually would push the nuclear button under any set of circumstances Blank does not try to guess, but he makes clear that the long-standing Russian/Soviet habit of treating tactical nuclear weapons as an integral part of the country’s operational military arsenal is certain to continue giving the West cause for alarm. Stephen Blank is a senior fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute.

In “The Euro-Russian Energy Divorce: How Ukraine and Climate Broke *Ostpolitik*,” Emily J. Holland examines another critical dimension of the current conflict, this one with ramifications extending far beyond the battlefield. It is hard to overstate the importance of oil and natural gas not only for the economy of Russia but for those of European Union member states as well. Even after Russia’s seizure of Crimea in 2014, the Europeans—especially the Germans—essentially turned a blind eye to Russian geopolitical misbehavior for the sake of preserving Europe’s access to plentiful and relatively inexpensive Russian gas. Although the Europeans envisioned eventually weaning themselves off natural gas as alternative forms of “green” energy became available in the future to cope with anticipated global warming, the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 brought a moment of reckoning. Germany was compelled to recognize the folly of its overreliance on Russian gas, while at the same time the sudden constriction in global fossil-fuel supplies began to force a rethinking of the Europeans’ equally feckless embrace of a problematic green-energy future. Emily J. Holland is an analyst in the Russia Maritime Studies Institute at the Naval War College.

Enlarging the aperture of the Russo-Ukrainian war still further brings us to its potential impact on Russia’s relationship with China, and thereby also on the international position of the United States. In “Putin’s Ukraine Invasion: Turbocharging Sino-Russian Collaboration in Energy, Maritime Security, and Beyond?” Andrew S. Erickson and Gabriel B. Collins provide some far-ranging speculations about the future of the Russia-China relationship, beginning with

a look at its energy dimension. Although the Chinese had seemed to be moving toward a tighter embrace of Vladimir Putin, they have been ambivalent about his Ukrainian venture and have declined to provide the Russians with overt military assistance. Putin's military debacle clearly has altered the terms of the relationship, with Russia now a distinctly junior partner—a situation with which the Russian leadership may become increasingly uncomfortable. Erickson and Collins make the important point that the Chinese are no longer in the position of relying on Russian/Soviet military technology transfer to provide their high-end weapons systems—with the important exception of submarine-quieting technology, which the authors suggest could form the basis for a grand bargain that could pose grave dangers for the United States in its efforts to contain the Chinese military threat in the western Pacific. They speculate further about possible increased access by the Chinese to Russian port facilities in the Far East and the Arctic. Andrew Erickson is a senior analyst in the Naval War College's China Maritime Studies Institute, and Gabriel Collins is a fellow at Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy.