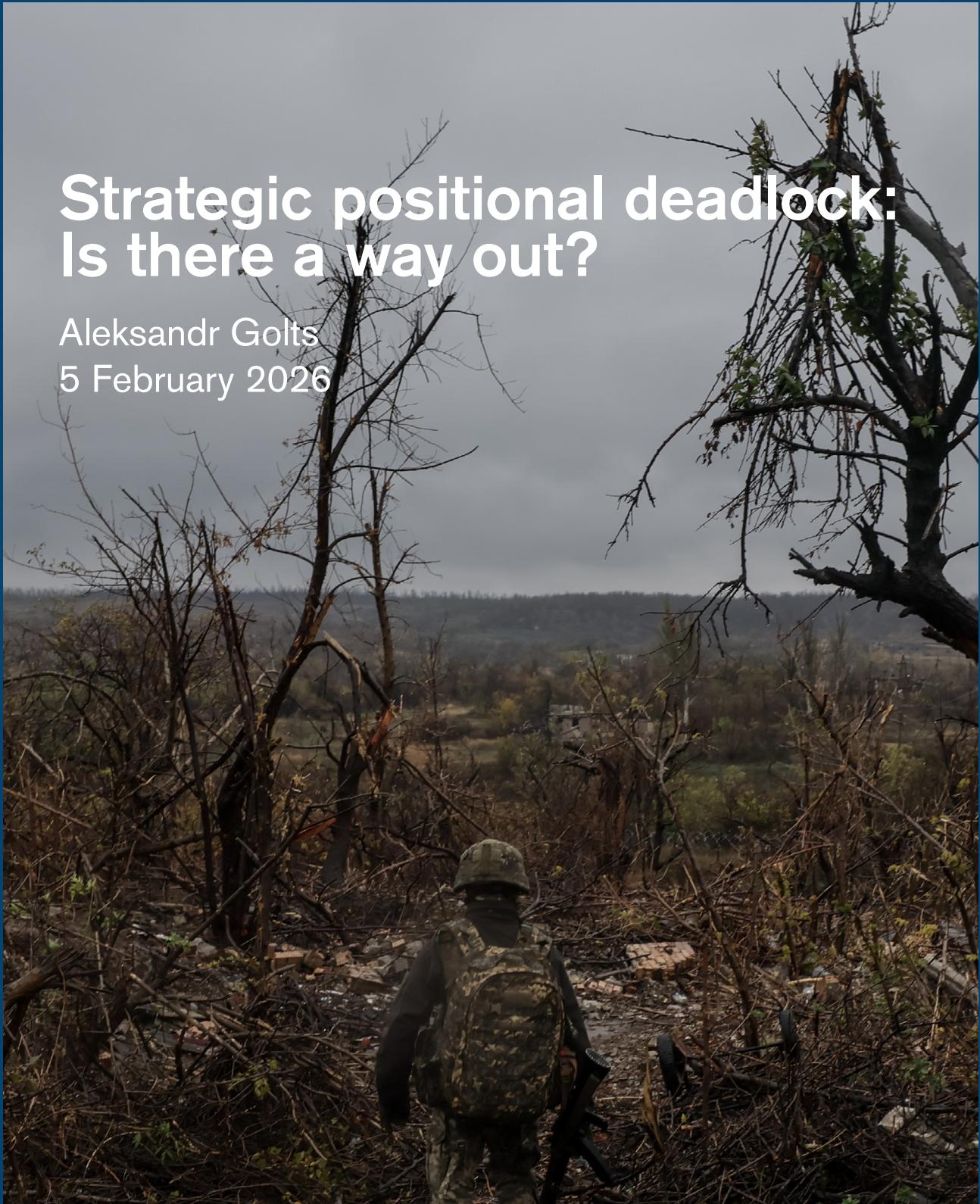


# Strategic positional deadlock: Is there a way out?

Aleksandr Golts  
5 February 2026



## Executive Summary

Positional deadlock since 2023 is the main characteristic of the situation on the Russian-Ukrainian front. Neither side can break through the enemy's defences to an operational depth to manoeuvre or conduct combat operations. Throughout 2024–25, both sides adapted to the positional deadlock. The positional deadlock has led to a strategic deadlock: neither side is able to win a decisive victory on the battlefield, leading to a prolonged war of attrition.

Each side has focused on military-technical measures. Less attention has been paid to another aspect of the positional deadlock – the inability of either side to build up the reserves needed to achieve a decisive victory. In the case of Ukraine, this is due to the exhaustion of mobilisation resources caused primarily by the mass migration of men of fighting age. For Russia, this is the result of a combination of factors, such as the likely negative reaction of the population to any possible mass mobilisation and a lack of training centres.

From a military point of view the positional deadlock is more advantageous to the defending side. This presents a window of opportunity for Ukraine. In Russia, military production has reached its peak. Ukraine can build up its military potential through assistance from Western countries.

Western policy should consider Ukraine not only as a victim of unprovoked aggression, but first and foremost as the front line of defence for Europe. From this point of view, the positional deadlock represents a window of opportunity for European countries, allowing them to redeploy the defence industry to start mass production of weapons based on the Ukrainian experience, and begin organisational preparations to deter possible Russian aggression.

## Positional deadlock

The hostilities between Russia and Ukraine have led to a positional deadlock since the autumn of 2023, “a situation in which any efforts to break through the enemy's defences in order to turn the nature of hostilities into manoeuvres are offset by fire attacks and the deployment of reserves by the enemy”.<sup>1</sup> This characterisation is not disputed by [most experts](#). That said, Russian military theorists, with few exceptions, try to avoid the term “positional deadlock” to avoid contradicting regular statements by Putin and the Russian Ministry of Defence on the success of the 2024–25 offensive. However, these statements are misleading. Russian troops [advanced](#) a maximum of 50 kilometres into Ukrainian territory in 2025, which is slower than the rate of advance during World War I. To reconcile official statements with reality, some Russian analysts allow that offensive actions can be carried out even in a situation of positional deadlock, noting that despite the general tightening of the line of contact there has been a slow advance of a protracted nature with disproportionate losses, often compared to a “meat grinder”. The enemy is often squeezed out without losing its combat effectiveness.

---

<sup>1</sup> The first [to state](#) this was General Zaluzhny, then Commander-in-Chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. A. Kalistratov. K voprosu o pozicionnom tupike. Armejskij sbornik №9. 2024 p191

The expert community accepts that there has been a fundamental change in the nature of combat operations and, as a consequence, an inevitable rejection of the forms of warfare that seemed immutable not so long ago. The idea of breaking through the enemy's fortified defences using concentrated tank strikes – the main manoeuvre of the Russian army – has lost its critical relevance. According to Colonel General Trushin, Chair of the Military Scientific Committee of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation and Deputy Chief of the General Staff, "The unmanned aerial vehicle, being a highly effective reconnaissance tool, has transformed the battlefield, increasing the awareness of the opposing sides of the tactical situation, and has become an important tool in the fight against the enemy".<sup>2</sup> The strengthened role of artillery assisted by the capabilities of modern reconnaissance and targeting is also indisputable. Thanks to the automated fire control system and the possibility of fire correction using drones, conventional artillery has become a precision weapon in terms of efficiency. Existing satellite communications systems allow artillery to be used in a dispersed manner, even on a gun-by-gun basis at up to 500 metres. The use of aerial bombs with Universal Planning and Correction Modules (UMPK) and guided projectiles in Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS) has increased effectiveness many times over, while shells, missiles and aerial bombs in cluster and thermobaric shells provide reliable area defeat of targets. At the same time, the role of manned aviation has been significantly diminished by the use of air defences.

The battlefield has become transparent. Attacks by combat vehicles are now practically ruled out. According to General Baluyevsky, former chief of the Russian General Staff:

Secrecy of the transfer, deployment, concentration and employment of forces becomes virtually impossible. Any concentration of units and subunits becomes an immediate target, and the more significant the concentration, the more visible it will be, attracting all possible strike means at virtually any distance from the line of contact. This is further aggravated by the dependence of modern troops on a huge mobile rear (means of supply and logistics), on the one hand, easily detected, and on the other hand, consisting of highly vulnerable vehicles.<sup>3</sup>

Combat is now conducted in small groups on foot or using light vehicles, such as quad bikes, motorbikes or buggies, travelling across the battlefield at high speed. The basic logistics for a brigade or division, with food stations, food and other warehouses, and repair shops, must be more than 100 kilometres from the front line. A unit tied to such a rear area is not designed for manoeuvre combat operations.

## Adaptation instead of exit strategy

It would be logical to assume that in four years of combat operations, military thought might have been able to devise ways out of the positional deadlock. However, so far it has concentrated mainly on adapting troops to combat operations under the new conditions. Thus, General Trushin states that the tactic of breaking through the enemy's defence with an "armoured fist" has been replaced by the "tactic of a phased offensive". He describes what this tactic means: "Initially, the offensive is conducted by several forward detachments on a wide front using a method similar to battle reconnaissance, with the aim of establishing the weakest link in the defence".<sup>4</sup>

2 V. V. Trushin. Zadachi voennoj nauki v usloviyakh special'noj voennoj operacii. Voennaya mysl' №4, 2025, p 9

3 Algoritmy ognya i stali: oruzhie sovremennoy voyn / S. A. Denisencev, A. V. Lavrov, YU. YU. Lyamin, A. A. Khetagurov; pod red. M. S. Barabanova. – M.: Centr analiza strategij i tekhnologij, 2023. p.9

4 Trushin...p11

Once a vulnerable point has been identified, a fire strike is carried out, followed immediately by an attack by an advance detachment in order to create the conditions for the main forces to break through the defences. Then all the other forward detachments manoeuvre along the front to the identified breakthrough area to develop the offensive deep into the defences. Methods such as infiltration deep into the enemy's defences, a surprise attack on its positions, flank attacks when the enemy is constrained from the front, and frontal attack through a "pierced corridor" should be widely used.

Most analysts argue in the same direction, developing "practical tactics" and "practical operational art". There have been several articles on fighting enemy drones.<sup>5</sup> Other authors try to generalise the experience of combat operations to adapt armed forces to current conditions, which suggests that the positional deadlock will last for some time. Several measures of a military-technical and an organisational nature have been proposed. Experts believe that the mass production and mass installation of means to protect military equipment from attack drones and cluster munitions is essential, as well as the replacement of existing Armoured Personnel Carriers and Infantry Fighting Vehicles with heavy, well-protected, tank-based vehicles.

The organisational structure of military formations should be adapted to the constantly changing conditions of combat. For example, in addition to manoeuvring and firing subgroups, the assault group to be created on the basis of a company should include subgroups for carrying ammunition, evacuating the wounded, drone operators and protection against drones, as well as a group for consolidation and reserves.

In a situation where the role of infantry storm troopers moving on foot to infiltrate enemy defences has become paramount, the need to prepare troops for operations as part of large units has disappeared. According General Buvaltsev, head of Russia's main combat training directorate of the armed forces, "combat training has moved mainly to the level of 'squad/platoon/company'".<sup>6</sup> It is precisely for such combat operations, which do not require mastery of complex modern equipment, that servicemen could be trained in reserve units near the front line. This makes it possible to return to a system of very brief training for reservists, characteristic of the Soviet model of a mass mobilisation army. Then, the training of reserve formations was based on shortened training programmes for motorised rifle units. These lasted an average of 20 days for servicemen who did not require specialist training and up to 25 days for specialist training at Ministry of Defence training centres.<sup>7</sup>

In Trushin's opinion, future military operations will comprise defeating the enemy first with long-range strikes and then in close combat. Such operations will begin with the dispersal of troops and powerful fire strikes should follow. Only then would the advancing troops go on the offensive.<sup>8</sup> He admits that breaking through the enemy's defences is still a "topical problem". In other words, Russian military thought still has no established ideas in this regard. The same conclusion is reached by Jack Watling, a leading RUSI researcher: "In summary, Russia has largely failed to develop a concept of combined arms manoeuvre to overcome the tactical problems it faces, despite having the resources to do so".

---

5 M.Bil'kunov, A.Vinogradov, A.Shatalov. Chtoby dron ne zastal vrasplokh. Armejskij sbornik №5, 2025. pp 55-57; R. Gadel'shin. Novye sposoby i sredstva protivodejstviya BPLA. Armejskij sbornik №4, 2025 pp 24-32; V.Bychkov, I.Dorofeev. Bor'ba s bezekipazhnymi katerami – prioritetnaya zadacha. Armejskij sbornik №4, 2025 pp 52-60; O.A. Kotov. O sposobakh bor'by s bespilotnymi letatel'nymi apparatami. Voennaya mys' №4, 2025 pp 32-37

6 Ivan Buval'cev. Glavnaya zadacha – nastrojchivo usvaivat' nauku pobezhdat'. Krasnaya zvezda 26.07.2024 <http://redstar.ru/glavnaya-zadacha-nastrojchivo-usvaivat-nauku-pobezhdat/>

7 K. Zabuga. Uroki SVO. Izuchenie boevogo opyta special'noj voennoj operacii. Armejskij sbornik № 2, 2025, pp.35-36

8 Trushin p. 15

## In the absence of reserves

Military theorists only indirectly touch on the other important cause of the deadlock: the inability of either side to create substantial strategic reserves of personnel and armaments. If the cause of the positional deadlock in World War I was the overconcentration of troops on the front line, the Russia-Ukraine War represents the opposite phenomenon. The new face of war is based primarily on the high dispersal and very low density of troops and their combat positions.<sup>9</sup> However, the problem is not just that the sides cannot concentrate the required number of troops in the area of possible strikes. They do not have a sufficient number of troops in general. An article in the military theory journal *Vestnik Akademii Voennoy Nauk* states that Russia is incapable of conducting a large-scale offensive operation:

It is possible that a large-scale frontal offensive operation consisting of three or four combined arms (tank) armies, supported by aviation and the navy, would have led to a more rapid (no doubt successful) achievement of the goals of the special military operation and the end of hostilities. The canons of operational art suggest: to suppress all living things in the direction of the offensive with the firepower of all kinds and types of troops and in 3-4 days to come victoriously to the western borders of Ukraine. But this would be a completely different operation (war) with more extensive losses on both sides and a wide range of severe consequences.<sup>10</sup>

However, it seems that it was not a desire to save the lives of service personnel that led the Russian military and political leadership to abandon attempts to win a decisive victory by creating multiple numerical superiority over the enemy on the battlefield. After all, the enormous losses incurred by the Russian armed forces in an offensive under conditions of positional warfare (up to 1200 men daily) are at least comparable to the possible losses resulting from a large-scale offensive operation that would allow Moscow to win a decisive victory on the battlefield and end the war on favourable terms. The ability of the Kremlin to create the strategic reserves required for such an operation seems highly questionable.

At first glance, no difficulties should arise. The so-called mobilisation resource (the theoretical number of men liable for military service) is about 25 million strong. However, according to material obtained as a result of a hacker attack, the General Staff does not plan to mobilise more than 1,000,000 people per year. Following a “partial mobilisation” in the autumn of 2022, which according to official information allowed some 300,000 reservists to be sent to the army, the Kremlin has revolutionised its traditional military mobilisation by making recruitment voluntary. Those who have expressed a desire to fight are paid far more than can be earned in civilian life. As a result, it is possible to recruit about 1000 men a week. The size of ground forces has almost doubled from 280,000 in 2022 to 550,000 in 2025. At the end of 2023, the Minister of Defence reported that two combined arms armies, a mixed aviation corps and 50 formations or military units, comprising four divisions, 18 brigades and 28 regiments, had been formed.<sup>11</sup> A year later, the Chief of the General Staff reported that two armies and 19 new divisions and brigades had been created.<sup>12</sup> According to Belousov, five divisions, 13 brigades and 30 regiments were formed in 2025.<sup>13</sup>

9 Algoritmy ognya i stali...p 8

10 Gavrilov p. 58

11 Rasshirennoe zasedanie kollegii Minoborony. 19.12.2023 <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/73035>

12 Gerasimov rasskazal, skol'ko armij i soedinenij sozdany v vojskakh za god 18.12.2024. <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/18/12/2024/6762a3879a79478503ad832f?ysclid=mgp0c1ftfg822081870>

13 <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/78801>

Nonetheless, the course of hostilities shows that Russian generals lack strategic reserves. The Russian command did not deploy significant contingents of troops immediately after the Ukrainian incursion into the Kursk region in the summer of 2024 to counter the Ukrainian offensive. Between 30,000 and 40,000 troops would have been needed to “dislodge” the Ukrainian invasion forces but the Russian command managed to deploy no more than 5000 in the first weeks. Bearing in mind the political and morale-related damage that the Ukrainian invasion inflicted on the Kremlin, this failure can only be explained by the fact that the Russian command simply did not have the required number of troops. Units transferred from other parts of the front were later used to dislodge the Ukrainian troops.<sup>14</sup> This situation was repeated during the offensive in the Donetsk region in the summer and autumn of 2025.

It is only partially true that the Kremlin rejects mass mobilisation for fear of arousing popular discontent. Putin's approval rating fell to its lowest point during the war in the autumn of 2022, when a partial mobilisation was announced, but even then it did not fall below 70 per cent. The Kremlin could resort to a new partial mobilisation to recruit the 400,000 to 500,000 troops required for a decisive operation, promising the population a speedy and victorious end to the war.

There appear to be other reasons for the abandonment of attempts to create the comprehensive numerical superiority needed for a decisive victory. First, mass mobilisation requires training centres where hundreds of thousands of men could be deployed at the same time to be given at least the most rudimentary training. Colonel General Burdinsky, then head of the Main Organisation and Mobilisation Directorate of the General Staff, identified the “placement of personnel” as one of the main problems of the partial mobilisation of 2022.<sup>15</sup> At present, the combat training of new recruits is being carried out in hastily created reserve regiments not far from the front line, which cannot accommodate thousands of mobilised soldiers.

Any attempt at mobilisation would raise the question of who would command the thousands of reservists. A huge number of junior officers were killed or wounded in 2022–2025.<sup>16</sup> In addition to making up for these losses, the Kremlin needs at least another 50,000 officers if it is to increase the Armed Forces by one-third. Currently, Russian military schools graduate about 14,000 lieutenants a year. Although in 2025 the number of cadets was increased to 19,600 and two new military schools were established, it would take several years for Putin to get his new lieutenants.

In addition, the new units would still have to be armed. Moreover, this would have to be done in conditions where huge amounts of military equipment and armaments are being used up in combat operations. Russian industry must therefore now establish mass production of weapons. Thus far, just as with the issue of recruitment, Russian leaders are reporting complete success in providing troops with the necessary armaments. They are partly right, as is confirmed by foreign analysts,<sup>17</sup> but it should be noted that the increase in the production of new military equipment is mainly related to the production of drones and electronic warfare equipment.

---

14 [https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%91%D0%BE%D0%B8\\_%D0%B2\\_%D0%9A%D1%83%D1%80%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B9\\_%D0%BE%D0%B1%D0%BB%D0%B0%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B8\\_\(%D1%81\\_2024\)](https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%91%D0%BE%D0%B8_%D0%B2_%D0%9A%D1%83%D1%80%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B9_%D0%BE%D0%B1%D0%BB%D0%B0%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B8_(%D1%81_2024))

15 E. Burdinskij. Organizacionno-mobilizacionnym organam predstoit i dalee sovershenstvovat' svoyu rabotu po vsem napravleniyam deyatel'nosti. Voennye komissariaty Rossii (№ 3, May-June 2023) <http://voenkom.ric.mil.ru/Stati/item/495317/>

16 Russian losses in the war with Ukraine. Mediazona count, updated [https://en.zona.media/article/2025/10/10/casualties\\_eng-trl](https://en.zona.media/article/2025/10/10/casualties_eng-trl)

17 Dara Massicot. How Russia Recovered. Foreign Affaires November/December 2025

The situation regarding the production of armoured vehicles and artillery, without which a return to manoeuvre and offensive combat operations would be impossible, looks very different. Here, it can be concluded that the rapid increase in production is most likely linked to the modernisation or repair of old military equipment that has been in storage since Soviet times. According to then Defence Minister Shoigu, 1535 tanks were “produced and modernised” in 2023.<sup>18</sup> In 2024, according to Defence Minister Belousov, deliveries would remain at the same level.<sup>19</sup> By the beginning of 2024, up to 4000 tanks were in storage.<sup>20</sup> By the beginning of 2025, the number was about 2900.<sup>21</sup> Thus, 1100 of the “produced” tanks were actually taken out of storage and brought into serviceable condition. At the same time, according to the most conservative estimates, Russia lost 1400 tanks in 2024.<sup>22</sup> (In 2025 number of lost tanks decreased due to the refusal of the Russian command to use them in military operations.) Current estimates are that tank stocks are sufficient for 1–2 years of war. The situation is roughly the same with other types of armoured vehicles and artillery. A build-up of armaments in the quantities needed for manoeuvre offensive operations will require a restructuring of the defence industry in two possible directions: either the creation of a Soviet-style version of a planned economy, where virtually all industrial enterprises produce military goods, or the construction of new military enterprises. Either path would take several years.

It follows that any attempt by Russia to overcome the positional deadlock and return to manoeuvre warfare appears unlikely. Moreover, it follows from the work of Russian military experts, primarily General Trushin, that the military conflicts of the future will resemble the Russia-Ukraine War. If this is the case, it cannot be ruled out that by proving to Putin that NATO is also incapable of conducting manoeuvre offensives, the generals might push him into military adventures soon after the end of hostilities in Ukraine. Some sort of risky move cannot be excluded, such as a local operation to seize Narva or the Suwałki Gap. This could lead to internal disagreement within NATO and help Russia dominate Eastern Europe.

Russian leaders admit the possibility of a military conflict with NATO in their official statements. Defence Minister Belousov has stated that the Russian military must be prepared “for any developments, including possible military conflict with NATO in Europe in the coming decade”. Two factors might encourage the Kremlin to make such a move. The Kremlin must understand that time is working against it. In the war against Ukraine, it is people born in the late 1970s and early 1980s – the last time Russia witnessed a baby boom – that are currently being sacrificed. Since then, the country has fallen into a demographic pit. By 2030, mobilisation resources will have been significantly reduced. Russia currently has around 700,000 soldiers with combat experience under arms. A significant number of these soldiers are already aged over 45 and will be demobilised in the next five years. Putin might be tempted to make use of these experienced soldiers in the near future.

---

18 Rasshirennoe zasedanie kollegii Minoborony. 19.12.2023 <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/73035>

19 Glavnoe iz vystuplenij Putina i Belousova na kollegii Minoborony. Kommersant. 16.12.2024 <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/7381417>

20 The military balance 2024. The International Institute for Strategic Studies. p 190

21 The Military Balance 2025. The International Institute for Strategic Studies p.182

22 U Rossii ostalos' malo tankov v zapase i ona pytaetsya zapustit' mashtabnuyu programmu perevooruzheniya. Ehko Rossii. 15.10.2025 <https://ehorussia.com/new/node/33505>

NATO's European members have nothing like this number of military personnel. All of NATO's plans have been built on US forces being sent across the Atlantic in case of a crisis. The political changes that have taken place in the United States mean that it is by no means certain that this would happen. The Kremlin has reason to believe that any aggressive actions on Russia's part would not lead to an immediate military response, but to political discussions within NATO. The military operation could be completed while such discussions were taking place, and the world would be presented with a fait accompli.

## Positional deadlock as a window of opportunity for Ukraine

Given the above, support for Ukraine from European states is not just assistance to a victim of aggression, but a crucial contribution to their own defence. For this reason, the positional deadlock can be seen as a window of opportunity for both Ukraine and NATO that does not allow Russia to fully utilise its objective advantages linked to population size and industrial output. The forced abandonment of the mass use of armoured vehicles means that no tactical successes can ensure an effective offensive at operational depth or a decisive Russian victory. At the same time, unlike Russia, Ukraine is open to external assistance, primarily from the European Union, which gives it hope it will be able to withstand a war of attrition. In a situation of positional deadlock, the outcome of a war is decided not on the battlefield, but as a result of internal processes taking place in the warring countries. It was the revolutions in Russia and Germany, for instance, that had a decisive impact on the outcome of the First World War.

For the hostilities to end on terms acceptable to Ukraine, it must be able to wage a successful defensive war. The main problem at present is a critical shortage of personnel. In some cases, a kilometre of the front line on the Ukrainian side is held by only six to eight soldiers, rather than the company of 100 soldiers required by the regulations of the Ground Forces of the Russian Armed Forces.

Although this sparse combat formation can be explained by specific conditions, such as mass use by the enemy of drones and glide bombs, it poses the threat of a relatively rapid advance by Russian forces to an operational depth into Ukraine's defences. At the same time, Ukraine continues to experience serious difficulties obtaining western military equipment and weapons. At present, the most acute shortage appears to be of air defence equipment. It is obvious that by striking major Ukrainian cities, the Russian command intends to maximise discontent among the population. In this context, the provision of air defence systems would prevent the growth of discontent with the war in the cities.

Resolving these problems will require a radical increase in the financial and military assistance provided to Ukraine. Supplies of the most modern weapons would provide Ukraine with the ability to conduct "digital operations", which, according to Valery Zaluzhny, would provide reliable deterrence of Russian troops and remove the initiative from Russia. He stated, that [T]he modern battlefield should be seen as a single, integrated network of cyber-physical systems. In practice this means unmanned and robotic platforms are linked by sensors and supporting command-and-control and communications infrastructure to software. In that digital domain mechanical systems –today's UAVs and UGVs – are fused with onboard and remote software control to deliver situational awareness, coordinate forces and execute combat tasks in real time.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Valery Zaluzhny. Innovation as Core of Strategic Resilience: Denying Russia the Power to Dictate Terms Through War. Zerkalo

At the same time, given its vast experience in the development and use of modern weapons, Ukraine could become not just a recipient of western assistance, but a fully-fledged partner in the development and production of such weapons. Its experience and expertise would be invaluable in the implementation of the Drone Wall concept.

Financial assistance from European states is also needed to resolve the most acute strategic problem: the shortage of manpower. There are a considerable number of men in Ukraine and on EU territory who could be drafted into the armed forces. According to [Eurostat](#), there are 882,000 adult Ukrainian men currently living in EU member states. Compulsory mobilisation has not been successful in Ukraine and cannot be used outside of it. It might make sense to borrow from the experience of the Kremlin, which has ensured an influx of volunteers into the armed forces by setting high salaries for military personnel in the active army (in Russia, about €2000 per month). Ukraine currently implements a highly complex system of military pay involving numerous bonuses, resulting in an average military man receiving about €700 per month. If the EU were to set up a fund to support Ukrainians who are fighting that allowed the payment of about €2000 per month (€24 billion per 1000,000 soldiers), this would probably provide the necessary influx of volunteers into the Ukrainian army.

Another option would also borrow from the Russian experience. A significant proportion of the money received by a Russian volunteer is in the form of a one-off bonus of €15–20,000, paid by the authorities in the region where the contract is signed. Ukrainians abroad could sign a contract directly in their country of residence. Ideally, it would be possible to form, equip and train Ukrainian units on the territory of EU member states. Implementation of such approaches would require a qualitative change in Ukraine's financial support. The EU needs to understand that it is not just about helping the victim of aggression but contributing to its own defence efforts. The slogan should be adopted that "Ukraine is Europe's first line of defence". We should return to the proposal contained in a [report](#) by the Estonian Ministry of Defence, to allocate 0.25 percent of gross domestic product from each NATO country annually to military assistance to Ukraine. This would provide approximately €120 billion a year.

## Conclusions

- While the Russian military has not abandoned its intention to return to the principles of manoeuvre warfare in the future, it recognises positional deadlock as the defining factor in the Russia–Ukraine War. It is currently more focused on adapting its armed forces to the conditions of positional deadlock than on finding a way out of it.
- The military leadership probably assumes that any possible conflict with NATO will be similar to the Russia–Ukraine War. They will try to convince Vladimir Putin of this. This will have a decisive impact on the army's future training.
- The positional deadlock represents a window of opportunity for Ukraine, allowing it to reduce Russia's apparent superiority in a war of attrition. The forced abandonment of mass use of armoured vehicles leaves Russian forces unable to develop an offensive in operational depth and therefore win on the battlefield.
- In order to wage a successful defensive war, Ukraine must resolve its manpower shortage. In addition, Russia's numerical superiority can be compensated for by Ukraine's rapid absorption and use of the most recent achievements of the Revolution in Military Affairs.

- Western military assistance has been a decisive factor in organising a defensive war. In addition to supplying arms and establishing military-technical cooperation, including joint production, the recruitment of Ukrainian volunteers should be financed not only in Ukraine, but also in the EU member states.

## **Recommendations**

- The possibility of positional deadlock should be envisaged in the training of NATO's armed forces. It will be essential to answer the question whether NATO's superiority in manned aviation, electronic and space reconnaissance, and long-range precision weapons will allow a return to manoeuvre combat operations. If the answer is no, preparations should be made for a long conventional war or a war of attrition, and to create strategic reserves. Most importantly, a return to conscription will be required in many NATO countries, such as Germany, France and Italy.
- Since a successful defensive war in Ukraine represents the West's first line of defence, support for Kiev should be strongly increased, in terms of arms supplies and funding for Ukrainian volunteers.



**Aleksandr Golts**  
Analyst, SCEEUS

## About SCEEUS

The Stockholm Centre for Eastern European Studies (SCEEUS) at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs (UI) is an independent Centre, funded by the Swedish Government, established in 2021. The Centre conducts policy relevant analysis on Russia and Eastern Europe and serves as a platform and meeting place for national and international discussions and exchanges on Russia and Eastern Europe. Guest Commentaries are written based on the views of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the views of SCEEUS.

Photo: AP/ Oleg Petrasuik

© 2025 Stockholm Centre for Eastern European Studies

## Previous SCEEUS Publications

**Five Wars and a Funeral: How the conflicts in Ukraine, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, and Iran broke Russia's Middle East Policy by Aron Lund**  
SCEEUS Guest Report No. 1, 2026

**Iran's first-ever SCO military exercise solidifies ties with China and Russia by Eva Seiwert**  
SCEEUS China-Russia Dashboard Analysis, 2025