

## IWI Responds: The Two-Year Anniversary of Russia's Full-Scale Invasion of Ukraine

### Description

As the world marks the second anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, lights are blinking red in Kyiv. Ukraine's much-anticipated [summer offensive](#) petered out with disappointing results, and Russia's relentless attacks, particularly around [Avdiivka](#), echo the grim tactics seen in [Bakhmut](#), where "meat wave" assaults took a heavy toll on resource-strapped Ukrainian defenders. Amid [uncertainty](#) around US security assistance and facing critical shortages in [personnel](#) and [ammunition](#), Ukraine is also navigating a significant [leadership transition](#) within its armed forces.

Yet, despite the challenges facing Ukraine's conventional units, Kyiv's irregular tactics have carved out significant successes, particularly in [information](#) and [sabotage](#) operations. And as deadlock persists on the frontlines, with no immediate prospect of a decisive edge for either Russia or Ukraine, the role of irregular warfare may become increasingly [central](#) to the war's eventual outcome.

Over the past two years, the Irregular Warfare Initiative has produced in-depth articles, podcasts, and events that analyze these tactics and their wider implications. As we reflect on this anniversary, I take stock of our efforts and set our sights on the year ahead. Our aim since the outbreak of the wider war has been threefold: to grasp the war's trajectory, highlight lesser-known aspects of the conflict, and offer fresh insights to those on the ground and in policy circles.

### Understanding the Course of the War

Our podcast guests and authors have provided important insights into how the war has evolved from a low-level hybrid conflict in 2014 to the largest war in Europe in eighty years, following Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022. Just a few days after Putin's invasion began, we [enlisted](#) Shashank Joshi from *The Economist* and Rob Person from West Point to examine how historical events and Russian cultural myths shape Moscow's worldview. During the first summer of the full-scale war, we brought in Michael Kofman of the Center for Naval Analyses and Kent DeBenedictis, a US Army Special Forces officer and author of the book [Russian Hybrid Warfare](#), for a [two-part](#) discussion on Ukrainian and Russian approaches to irregular warfare. Taking a broader view of the war, retired US Army Lieutenant General Ben Hodges and Ravi Agrawal, editor-in-chief of *Foreign Policy*, recently [joined](#) the podcast to discuss the evolution of European defense relations and how policies toward

Ukraine have changed from before the war to now.

Our authors have contributed crucial analysis, too. In an [article](#) last fall, National Defense University's Sean McFate attributed Russian failures early in the war to an overreliance on traditional warfare no longer suited to the modern battlefield. In a [piece](#) written in June 2022, retired US Marine Colonel and former IWI podcast host Andrew Milburn foreshadowed many of the challenges Ukraine is currently facing. Highlighting inadequate training time for recruits, the rapid reduction of forces due to high casualty rates, and the urgent need for more weaponry, Milburn argued that time is a luxury that Kyiv does not have — a conclusion that is, unfortunately, proving more accurate every day.

Our team extended its reach beyond articles and podcasts to expert panels exploring key developments in the war. During the first summer of full-scale fighting, IWI [convened](#) defense researchers Byron Harper, James Kiras, and Ulrica Peterson and the deputy commander of the U.S. Army's Special Operations Command, Major General Patrick Roberson, to examine how societies employ a mix of peaceful and aggressive actions to fight against foreign control, using Ukrainian resistance against Russia as a key example. With NATO's Resistance Operating Concept as a foundation, the panel expanded on their points in a September 2022 [article](#). Later that same fall, IWI assembled another notable [panel](#), including Nataliya Bugayova from the Institute for the Study of War, LTG Tony Fletcher, commander of NATO Special Operations Forces, and defense officials from Finland and Estonia. A few weeks later, we teamed up with Northwestern University for a [session](#) with analysts Michael Kofman and John Spencer, and academics Will Reno, Alexandra Chinchilla, and Jahara Matisek. They covered a range of topics, including Ukraine's strategy for dealing with the economic and energy challenges caused by Russia's invasion. Our most recent [engagement](#) expanded beyond Ukraine and focused on Russian influence operations in Moldova. Later this month, our team will sit down with retired General and former CIA director David Petraeus [to discuss](#) the war and his recent [book](#).

## Spotlighting the Unseen

We take pride in publishing articles that highlight lesser-known aspects of the war. In this vein, Dr. Josh Roose, a political sociologist at Australia's Deakin University, and IWI's own Jacob Ware offered a compelling [analysis](#) of the conflict's gender dynamics. They contrast Putin's deliberate use of hypermasculinity in the invasion with Ukraine's successful inclusion of women, a move that not only challenged traditional gender norms but also helped strengthen the country's ability to resist Russian attacks. While not directly about the war in Ukraine, US Army officer Rick Chersicla's [article](#) about Russian and Belarusian attempts to weaponize migration tackles an important, if underappreciated indirect approach employed by Putin to distract Western leaders.

Information and cyber operations have been recurring themes within the IWI community. Last April, our podcast team [explored](#) both topics, featuring insights from experts Gavin Wilde and Jason Kikta on Ukraine's cyber resilience and Russia's cyber strategy. Dan Grobarick, a research associate at the US Naval War College, recently [examined](#) how Ukraine has employed information and influence operations to garner international backing and increased military aid. Illya Varzhanskyi, a member of Ukraine's armed forces and Peter Schrijver, a doctoral researcher at the Netherlands Defence Academy, [assessed](#) the role of information warfare in Chechnya's quest for independence and its connection to Ukraine's struggle against Russia. Defense technologist Wes Bryant [discussed](#) how Elon Musk's decision not to enable Starlink for Ukrainian military operations in Crimea illustrates the significant influence private CEOs can have on international conflicts.

### Forward-Looking Recommendations

IWI articles have also shared some innovative ideas on how to approach the war. Dr. Spencer Meredith, a professor at the National Defense University and adviser to Joint Special Operations Command, [suggested](#) that the path to victory lies not in relying on Kyiv's experience in trench warfare but in continuing to harness NATO partnerships and specialized training, particularly through special operations forces. US Army Second Lieutenant Hannah Lamb, in her award-winning [essay](#) for the IWI-Joint Staff writing contest, advocated for the adoption of unconventional warfare tactics in Ukraine, focusing on preparing guerrilla units to disrupt Russian forces in occupied areas.

Joshua Huminski, the director of the Mike Rogers Center for Intelligence & Global Affairs, gave his [advice](#) on dealing with Russian political warfare, arguing that Western governments need to do more than just respond to Russian actions. They should "inoculate" themselves from future attacks by fighting misinformation, securing their financial systems, and sustaining counterintelligence efforts. Besides policy recommendations, we have also started to publish book reviews related to the conflict. US Marine Lieutenant Paul Shields [reviewed](#) Dr. Jade McGlynn's book, [Russia's War](#), and highlighted its insights into how autocratic leaders use irregular warfare to maintain power and garner popular support for questionable policies.

### Looking Ahead

As the full-scale war enters its third year, IWI is committed to deepening our analysis of the conflict, with a keen focus on three broad areas. First, we aim to understand which irregular tactics have proven effective and explore the reasons behind their success. This includes articles on technology and innovation, such as cyber tactics, drone warfare, and trench and urban combat. Second, with 2024 anticipated as a [build](#) year for Ukraine, we are interested in how Kyiv can best prepare, particularly in terms of developing irregular forces and capabilities. This encompasses examining the strategic,

training, and psychological impacts of the conflict, including the role of special operations forces, resistance movements, private military companies, and the country's [new military branch](#) dedicated to drone warfare. Third, we are eager to explore the impact of security assistance on both sides of the conflict. Western governments have provided critical support to Kyiv, while countries like North Korea and Iran have similarly provided significant aid to Moscow. Looking beyond traditional government-to-government support, we are also interested in understanding the use of crowdfunding for defense in Ukraine. Lastly, while these focus areas are of particular interest, we remain open to a broad range of irregular warfare topics related to the war.

Sadly, there is no end in sight for this conflict. A combination of battlefield setbacks, shortages of resources, and uncertain U.S. support suggests a tough year ahead for Kyiv. With neither side willing to negotiate, the battle continues, marked by Russian progress around Avdiivka, drone and missile strikes in urban centers, and Ukrainian countermeasures in the Black Sea and within Russian territory. As the situation evolves, IWI remains dedicated to bringing together experts and insights to shed light on irregular warfare in this conflict. Your engagement and contributions are invaluable to us. Thank you for your continued support.

*Sam Rosenberg is the Deputy Editorial Director at the Irregular Warfare Initiative. He is an active-duty US Army officer with operational experience in Eastern Europe, Iraq, and Afghanistan and is currently pursuing a PhD at the LBJ School of Public Affairs.*

*The views expressed are those of the author and do not reflect the official position of the United States Military Academy, Department of the Army, or Department of Defense.*

*Main Image: The Mother Ukraine monument statue in Kyiv, Ukraine. ([Dima Pima](#) via [Unsplash](#))*

*If you value reading Irregular Warfare Initiative, please consider [supporting our work](#). And for the coolest swag, check out the [IWI store](#) for mugs, coasters, apparel, and other items.*

**Date Created**

2024/02/22