



Deterrence and Security: The Impact of Military Conflicts on Global Peace

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Abstract: Deterrence theory is one of the important theory of international relations research during the Cold War. From the birth of deterrence theory to today, its main meaning has developed from nuclear deterrence as the core to conventional deterrence. By studying the impact of the Gulf War on the US deterrence capability and the impact of the Russo-Ukrainian War on Russia's deterrence capability, this paper argues that military conflict is not only a test of deterrence capability, but also a shaping process of deterrence capability. In military conflict, a country's performance will affect its opponents and other countries' perception of its strength and will, thereby increasing or decreasing its deterrence capability. The United States established a strong conventional deterrence capability in the global scope through the Gulf War, which enabled the United States to obtain a large number of potential allies and national interests after the Cold War. Russia's mediocre performance in the Russo-Ukrainian War is undermining its conventional deterrence that it established after the Cold War through military reform and a series of military actions, and its geo-security environment is deteriorating due to its reduced deterrence capability. Based on this, countries should correctly assess their own and other countries' strength and will, avoid overestimating or underestimating their own or others' deterrence capabilities, and thus avoid military adventures. At the same time, they should also abide by international laws and rules, respect other countries' sovereignty and interests, in order to achieve lasting peace and common security.

Keywords: Deterrence theory, Deterrence capability, Gulf War, Russo-Ukrainian War, nuclear deterrence, conventional deterrence

Introduction

In military conflict, the deterrence capability of each country is an important factor that can affect the outbreak, duration and end of the conflict. Deterrence capability refers to the ability of a country or group to deter opponents from launching or expanding war by demonstrating their military strength and political will. Deterrence capability is an important factor for maintaining national security and international stability and is also the core content of military strategy. Deterrence theory is a theoretical framework for studying deterrence capability and deterrence behavior that holds that by threatening to use force or other means, one can prevent opponents from taking actions that are unfavorable to oneself. Deterrence theory was widely applied during the Cold War, especially in the field of nuclear weapons, because nuclear weapons have massively destructive power, which can make opponents not act rashly. However, with the end of the Cold War and the changes in the international pattern, deterrence theory also faces new challenges and problems. On the one hand, the proliferation of nuclear weapons and the threat of terrorism have cast doubt on the effectiveness of nuclear deterrence; on the other hand, the development of conventional weapons and the frequent occurrence of regional conflicts have increased the importance of conventional deterrence. With the rise of the new technological revolution, traditional nuclear deterrence and strategic stability are facing extremely complex challenges^[1]. In this situation, how to evaluate and improve a country's deterrence capability and how to cope with different deterrence challenges and scenarios become a topic worth discussing. Military conflict is the most serious form of international politics, which not only causes casualties and property losses but also has a profound impact on international order and security. This paper aims to explore how military conflict changes deterrence capability and how this change affects the international security environment. This paper, which is based on deterrence theory, will examine two typical Cold War and post-Cold War military conflict cases—the Gulf War and the Russo-Ukrainian War—and compare how well the United States and Russia fared in them, as well as the effects these conflicts had on their respective conventional deterrence capabilities. And offer practical solutions and advice for preserving world peace and security.

I. A Review from Nuclear Deterrence to Conventional Deterrence

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Generally speaking, deterrence can be divided into two types: deterrence by punishment and deterrence by denial ^[2]. John Mearscheme argues that the former aims to deter opponents' actions by threatening to destroy their population and industry, while the latter aims to convince opponents that they will not achieve their goals on the battlefield ^[3]. Deterrence theory was a dominant international security theory during the Cold War, which means that one side forces the other side to abandon some behavior through its strength and determination in a confrontational situation. In other words, the effective establishment of deterrence must make the deterred side realize that the benefits of forcibly implementing some behavior prohibited by the other side are ultimately smaller than the losses caused by the other side's attack and thus abandon this behavior. The effective establishment of deterrence implies three premises: rationality, determination, and strength. Rationality means that both sides of the behavior make decisions based on the principle of seeking benefits and avoiding harm and are unwilling to bear greater losses than benefits; otherwise, deterrence cannot be achieved. This premise is also the cornerstone of the "nuclear balance of terror" between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. A nuclear war would make both sides perish together, and perishing together is obviously not what rational people expect, so neither side wants to initiate a nuclear war. Determination means having the determination to use one's strength. Having a strong strength but not daring to launch an attack when the opponent violates the warning due to culture, belief, and other factors, deterrence cannot be established either and will only become "blackmail" seen through by the opponent. As in the appeasement policy of Britain and France before World War II, they had strong strength but no determination to stop Nazi Germany's expansion by war, so they naturally could not establish successful deterrence. Strength is the basis of deterrence. With a strong determination but not enough strength to cause losses to the opponent and make them feel afraid, there is no talk of deterrence.

Before the advent of nuclear weapons, the deterrence of conventional warfare was controllable, whether it was successful or not. Conventional warfare was a long process; total war could be stopped, military conflict could be resolved, and neither caused immediate devastating damage to the decision-makers or the entire nation. The emergence of nuclear weapons and intercontinental delivery means (strategic bombers and long-range missiles) changed all this. The huge power of nuclear weapons and the intercontinental missiles flying at ten times the speed of sound determined that the outbreak of nuclear war would destroy the industry, cities, and population of the warring countries on a large scale in a short time (usually half an hour to an hour), resulting in an irreversible destructive outcome. This result was unacceptable to both decision-makers and the nation. Strategic scholars such as Bernard Brodie, Thomas C. Schelling, and Henry Kissinger, and international relations theorists such as Kenneth N. Waltz and Robert Jervis, were supporters of nuclear deterrence theory ^[4]. After both the United States and the Soviet Union possessed nuclear weapons and intercontinental delivery vehicles, they had the ability to "mutually assure destruction", thus forming a nuclear deterrence between each other and achieving a "nuclear balance of terror" in the long-term Cold War, which was also an important reason why, despite the tension between the two sides, relative peace was maintained globally during the Cold War.

But nuclear deterrence also has its natural limitations; that is, its "all or nothing" characteristic makes it ineffective in small-scale conflicts. The famous British comedy "Yes, Prime Minister" vividly depicted this point. The prime minister thought he would press the nuclear button at the "last moment" to stop the Soviet invasion, and the host asked him: "When West Berlin is on fire and the East Berlin fire brigade comes to put out the fire, is it the last moment? When the East Berlin police come to maintain order, is it the last moment? When the East German army comes to help with post-disaster reconstruction, is it the last moment? When the Soviet army also crosses the West German border, is it the last moment?" The prime minister had no answer. Obviously, the result of nuclear war was too heavy, so nuclear weapons were given the connotation of unusable," which was also the core of the formation of the nuclear balance of terror. In a situation where no one dares to easily fight a nuclear war, conventional conflicts are more likely to exist as the main form of conflict, and establishing effective conventional deterrence can restrain the local military adventures of hostile parties and consolidate the overall deterrence effect on a global scale. Maxwell Taylor, former chief of staff of the US Army, proposed a "national military plan for flexible response", emphasizing the flexible use of various military forces to cope with different levels of conflict challenges ^[5]. John Mearsheimer, a professor of international relations at the University of Chicago, argues that there are at least three factors that lead one side to dare to challenge deterrence when two countries confront each other with conventional forces: (1) superiority in armed forces quantity, that is, having the conditions to win with more; (2) advanced and sophisticated weapons equipment, that is, military technology equipment quality superior to the other side; and (3) correct choice and use of military strategy. In fact, before the Gulf War, the discussion on conventional deterrence mainly focused on issues such as equipment quantity, personnel quantity, etc., which was consistent with the "war of attrition" mode of World War II and post-war conflicts. When there was only a gap in equipment performance and quantity between the two sides' military forces, the side with larger military forces was more likely to win. However, in the Gulf War, the US military showed a completely different war mode from traditional war to the world. The crushing victory over the "Soviet-style" Iraqi army initially established the myth that the US military was invincible in the world and also shocked other countries that were in line with the Soviet military system at the same time. They had to speed up their military modernization.

II . The Establishment and Destruction of Conventional Deterrence - A Comparison between the US and Russia

Deterrence, as a process and result of changing the decision of the hostile party by strength, emphasizes more psychological suppression and intimidation and takes avoiding war as its success sign. But this is in the scenario of “binary opposition” between one country and another. The significance of establishing a strong conventional deterrence is not only to deter opponents in confrontations with hostile countries but, more importantly, to establish a “godlike” image of the country's invincible military power in a global context. This terror that exists in the opponent's consciousness can bring more realistic benefits to the country in politics, economy, culture, and other aspects than the strong strength itself. Marked by the Gulf War, mankind entered the era of modern high-tech warfare, and the US military, which was at the forefront, naturally established a very strong conventional deterrence against the world until today. The fundamental difference between this deterrence and the strong military power of other regional powers is that the gap between other countries and the US military is neither a quantitative nor a quality difference, but a “system difference” that has never appeared before. The British army in the colonial expansion period could be annihilated by the Zulu cold weapon army relying on sudden attacks; Finland in the Winter War could inflict heavy losses on the powerful Soviet army relying on the natural environment and fortification terrain; and even Vietnam after the war could rely on tropical jungle and flexible tactics to consume the invading US army. In previous wars, although it was difficult for the weak to achieve final victory, it was also difficult for the strong to conquer the weak without suffering considerable losses under determined resistance. But the Gulf War changed all this and opened an era where a powerful country could make the main force of a medium-sized country's army disappear in a short time with only conventional forces.

(I) The Gulf War and the Establishment of US Conventional Deterrence

1. The Defeat of the Soviet-style Army

The Iraqi army, which had been built under the military guidance of the Soviet Union for a long time, had millions of people and thousands of tanks. In terms of advanced technology equipment, the air force was equipped with dozens of Mirage F1s and MiG-29s, and the army was equipped with more than 800 T72 tanks and other weapons that were still advanced at that time. The level of equipment of its land and air forces even surpassed that of the Chinese army at the same time, and it had just gone through the turbulence of the Iran-Iraq War. Such an army was not weak in the era of mechanized warfare, and even the US military predicted more than 5,000 casualties in the pre-war simulation, so much so that it prepared more than 10,000 body bags, ready to bear a large loss. Although Douhet had already put forward the “air power theory”, there had never been a situation where air power alone could dominate and occupy in previous wars. However, after 38 days of continuous “Desert Storm” air strikes, the Iraqi front-line troops on the Kuwaiti battlefield lost nearly 50%, the rear troops lost about 25%, heavy equipment lost 30-45%, and the Iraqi C3I (command automation technology system) was basically disabled. Some army, division, and brigade commanders lost contact with the Iraqi headquarters; logistics transportation was severely damaged; and Iraqi morale was severely hit. The subsequent “Desert Saber” operation only took 100 hours of ground warfare to basically wipe out the Iraqi army in Kuwait, forcing Saddam to announce unconditional acceptance of relevant UN Security Council resolutions on Iraq. In the entire Gulf War, the Iraqi army suffered about 100,000 casualties, lost 324 aircraft, 3847 tanks, 1450 armored vehicles, 2917 artillery pieces, 143 ships, and suffered direct economic losses of \$200 billion. But in stark contrast, only 148 US troops and 192 from other countries were killed. The multinational forces lost a total of 68 aircraft, 35 tanks, and two ships ^[6]. This result not only surprised the world but also had a great impact on China, which still adhered to “continental armyism” and believed in “ground victory theory” at that time. Jiang Zemin, then China's president, said: “There is another round of the generation gap' in military technology between developed countries and developing countries. The historical military technology advantage of Western powers over Asian, African, and Latin American countries with foreign guns and cannons against big swords and spears is transforming into a new military technology advantage of developed countries with informationized military over developing countries with mechanized and semi-mechanized military ^[7].”

2. Fear under the System Difference

Before the Gulf War, the US military was mired in the quagmire of the Vietnam War, making people feel that as long as there were enough people and enough resistance, they could eventually drag down the US military. Saddam also had this expectation before the Gulf War. But the US military, based on a series of UN resolutions, especially Resolution 678 “to take all necessary means to uphold and implement Security Council Resolution 660 and other resolutions on Iraq”, showed its war determination to mobilize a large amount of manpower and material resources in a short time in a region half a world away in the “Desert Shield” operation and showed its war strength to inflict heavy damage and annihilate the main force of the enemy's army in a short time with conventional forces in the “Desert Storm”. The combination of determination and strength enabled the United States to successfully establish a conventional deterrent against the world in the era of high-tech warfare. Taking Iraq as a model, the US military showed a comprehensive surpassing of the traditional military system by the modern military system, forming a “system difference” from other

countries in terms of military. And this gap cannot be made up by expanding the army or buying advanced equipment. The number of troops is meaningless in front of the gap in the system. The era when one could confront the strong by relying on expanding the army and having more people and power is completely over. The Iraqi army, which followed the Soviet Union as a teacher, bought a large number of Soviet weapons, and accepted Soviet military guidance, was so vulnerable. Any country that also followed the Soviet Union as a teacher would have a question: If Iraq were replaced by their own country, could they withstand the attack of the multinational coalition? The answer is no.

But is the US military really invincible, like a god descending to earth? The answer is also no. In the 1999 NATO bombing of Yugoslavia, NATO also adopted a high-intensity air strike mode against Yugoslav military targets and infrastructure, trying to replicate the case of the “Desert Storm” operation that destroyed the main force of the enemy's army with only air strikes. But in the 78-day air strike period, which was almost twice as long as the Desert Storm operation, the Yugoslav army did not suffer much damage under the protection of a large number of false targets and effective protection, and NATO never launched a ground attack. It is even more needless to say that the US military later got stuck in the quagmire of the Iraq War and the Afghanistan War and was exhausted in the “security war”. However, none of these were as impressive as the Gulf War, where conventional forces destroyed the main force of a regional power's army in a short time. Nuclear deterrence still bears a large moral burden, and the US military does not need to resort to nuclear blackmail like the US and Soviet Union did during the Cold War. And by relying solely on conventional forces, especially the air force, they can make a regional power's national defense force that has been operating for many years “evaporate”, and even fail to make effective resistance and cause enough casualties to the US military. The fear of this powerful conventional deterrence is a huge threat that any country's leadership has to consider when making diplomatic decisions. Should they insist on independence and autonomy, ally with anti-American countries, or attach themselves to the wings of America? Since the Gulf War, along with the Kosovo War and the Iraq War, the strength of the military has not only brought real benefits to the United States in various aspects, but more importantly, it has established a strong conventional deterrence in the world, making “the US military is strong and invincible” a kind of ideological imprint deeply engraved in the hearts of people and decision-makers of various countries. To a large extent, it has eliminated many intentions of conflict and confrontation with the United States. It also makes countries naturally inclined toward Western countries led by the United States in their diplomatic orientation and choice of allies. With the rise and fall of enemy and US forces, the hegemony of the United States has become more stable, successfully establishing a post-Cold War international order dominated by the United States.

This can also explain well why countries around China often choose “political US and economic China”, that is, to be close to the United States politically and more dependent on China economically. Especially in Southeast Asian countries where the proportion of Chinese and overseas Chinese is very high, the political atmosphere is still hostile to China. With China's military strength so strong today, it is not inferior to the US military in military conflicts in the surrounding areas, especially in the Western Pacific region. Why do countries like Japan and South Korea choose to ally with the United States so firmly rather than remain neutral? This is also a puzzling question for many people. If we use deterrence theory to explain this phenomenon, then the reason is that, apart from the historical reasons that Japan and South Korea have been dependent on the United States for development since the post-war period, the Chinese army has not really shown its strength in war for a long time. The geographical environment of the Western Pacific determines that the more likely war in this region is sea and air war rather than large-scale ground war, but China lacks experience in sea and air war under modern conditions. The survival of the nation is the first priority, and the military protection umbrella that China can provide only exists in the analysis and imagination of paper data. It cannot make a deep impression on the decision-makers of neighboring countries like the US military's crushing of traditional mechanized armies in the Gulf War and, naturally, cannot establish a strong conventional deterrence in the surrounding areas. Even in the field of land warfare, where China is more proficient, this deterrence that only exists in the imagination cannot prevent military adventures by neighboring countries, such as India. For Chinese and overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia, because they could not get military protection from China in previous anti-Chinese incidents, they had to take an anti-Chinese stance regardless of their willingness and even form a “convert's zeal” that was more anti-Chinese than the local indigenous residents to express a kind of political loyalty for their own survival. Therefore, for China, which wants to effectively improve the international security environment, it is extremely necessary to create a “godlike” image of conventional deterrence in the next war like the US military did in those days and imprint the idea that “the Chinese army is invincible” into the hearts of neighboring countries. The successful establishment of this conventional deterrence will greatly improve China's geopolitical environment in its surrounding areas and the international security environment on a global scale. On the contrary, if it fails to show far superior combat power than other countries in future actual combat, like the US military did in the Gulf War, and performs like Russia did in the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, like a “same-level opponent” with potential enemies, it will stimulate these countries to make military adventures and worsen their own geopolitical environment and international security environment.

(II) The Russo-Ukrainian Conflict and the Deterioration of Russia's Security Environment

1. Military Failure Leads to Deterrence Decline

Before the beginning of 2022, Russia's impression on the world in terms of its military was that “a skinny camel is bigger than a horse”. Although its strength was far less than that of the Soviet era, it was still in second or third place in the world. In recent years, the development of some new weapons such as T50 tanks, “Zircon” hypersonic missiles, fifth-generation fighter Su-57, and so on also made Russia's military strength look still ahead of the world and continued to maintain the fear of “iron flood” in the hearts of Europeans with its huge scale of armored forces. As a legacy of the Cold War, NATO still exists today when its opponent, the Warsaw Pact, has long been gone. A very important reason is Russia's long-term threat to Europe. In the “Winter 2020” computer simulation exercise conducted by Poland in early 2021, Poland obtained a lot of cutting-edge weapons, such as the F35, that it had not obtained in reality based on the simulation data and received strong assistance from Western allies after the war started. According to the exercise objectives and assumptions, the Polish army could resist the Russian army for 22 days. However, in the simulation, only four days had passed, and the Russian army that poured in from the eastern border of Poland quickly surrounded Warsaw, the capital of Poland. On the east bank of the Vistula River, the Polish army suffered a devastating blow from the Russian army, losing 60% to 80% of its troops on the front line. The strategically important ports were occupied or blocked by the Russian army [8]. This result shows that at least before the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict in early 2022, Russia still maintained a huge conventional deterrence against Western Europe. At least in my imagination, the Russian army still had the ability to quickly destroy NATO forces in Eastern Europe. Combined with Russia's successful seizure of Crimea in 2014, the excellent performance of Russia's Aerospace Forces on the Syrian battlefield since 2015, and the high-efficiency killing of Ukrainian troops by Russia's “Battalion Tactical Group” (BTG) in the eight-year civil war in eastern Ukraine from 2014 to 2022, a series of successful military operations and BTG's rapid expansion under Shoigu's military reform created the illusion that Russia's army was emerging from the long-term trough after the Cold War and regained efficient conventional military power. It caused a powerful Russian army that only existed in imagination to keep Europeans in fear of being “drunk by Soviet troops at the English Channel” during the Cold War. The size of the army and the number of main combat weapons gave Russia confidence to defeat Ukraine. The Russo-Ukrainian conflict was carried out under this kind of “technical equipment worship” thinking that abstracted military struggle into the performance and quantity of main combat equipment. They believed that as long as they invested in a large number of BTGs that performed well on the eastern Ukrainian battlefield, they could crush Ukrainian troops with Russia's huge size. Within 24 hours after the outbreak of war, a large number of articles appeared on the Internet, such as “Russia captured Kiev in 1 hour and 22 minutes”, the Ukrainian navy and air force were completely annihilated”, and the Western mainstream media also reported that the United States was preparing to form an exile government for Ukraine [9]. These details fully showed that Russia's conventional deterrence was very effective, making the world believe that Russia really had the determination and strength to destroy the Ukrainian regime.

However, the war has reached a stalemate after the Ukrainian army launched several counterattacks. In addition to the huge casualties, Russia's biggest loss came from the fact that this war completely exposed that the Russian army only had the ability to fight traditional mechanized wars and did not have the ability to fight high-tech local wars under informationized conditions, destroying the strong conventional deterrence that had been formed in the past. The essence of deterrence is psychological suppression and intimidation of the enemy; making the opponent generate and believe in a certain consciousness is the core of the deterrence process. For a long time, there have been problems within the Russian army, such as frequent adjustments of organization, corruption, inefficiency, formalism, and deterioration of training level. The Russian decision-makers should have a clear understanding of this problem; that is, under the appearance that they think is bright, the Russian army does not have the strength to launch a large-scale conventional war against a medium-sized industrial country like Ukraine. Russia's previous conventional deterrence was based on other countries' perceptions of Russia in the past, and “once war starts, all experience becomes obsolete immediately”. The result of forcibly launching a war would only be to expose one's own shortcomings without reservation. Other countries will re-evaluate Russia's deterrence ability based on the outcome of this war, and the result of Russia's poor performance is to weaken the psychological pressure on other countries' decision-makers and seriously damage Russia's conventional deterrence ability.

Russia still launched this war with great risk, which can be reasonably explained from both macro and micro perspectives. From a micro perspective, at the beginning of the war, the Russian army launched a “hybrid war” represented by information warfare and cognitive warfare in cyberspace and physical space, such as the coordinated information in reality and online, such as the joint air and ground assault on Kiev from the Belarusian direction and the online information of “Zelensky fleeing” and “Kiev being captured”, or the risk of being cut off from logistics in reality, advancing rapidly to the depth of Ukraine without attacking Ukrainian positions and the online information of “Lviv (a western Ukrainian city) being captured” and “Russian army is encircling Ukrainian army with a large-scale pincer attack”. They tried to disrupt the morale and confidence of Ukraine with chaotic information, thereby reducing the resistance intensity of Ukrainian troops to gain an actual advantage on the battlefield, and then use this actual advantage to further undermine the enemy's morale and confidence, forming a cycle and quickly ending the war before

the shortcomings of insufficient strength were exposed. On a macro level, Russia's inherent conventional deterrence ability interacts with this hybrid war, forming a cycle of launching a hybrid war with deterrence ability and then strengthening deterrence ability with real war results. If this double cycle can be successfully established, it can greatly enhance Russia's conventional deterrence ability and continue to maintain its position as the second or third military power in the world ^[10]. But the reality is that Russia's failure directly destroyed its conventional deterrence ability that it relied on to maintain its international status, causing its own "threat value" to rise by using force against its neighbors, leading to a deterioration of the security environment.

2. The Rise of Threat Value Leads to the Deterioration of Security Environment

"Threat value" is an important concept in realism and international relations theory. It consists of five factors: comprehensive national strength, geographical distance, offensive capability (aggressiveness), ideology, and bad intentions. The determination of a country's threat value is composed of a combination of these five factors. Countries tend to choose countries with higher threat values as opponents and ally with countries with lower threat values ^[11]. For many European countries bordering Russia in the west, there is a large gap in comprehensive national strength, close geographical distance, and contradictory and conflicting ideologies with Russia. However, these three indicators do not change much in the short term and are not the main reasons for the sudden increase in Russia's threat value. After the Crimea incident, Russia's offensive capability was demonstrated, and its bad intentions increased significantly. For neighboring countries, especially small countries, the threat value has increased significantly. If the Crimea incident can still be rationalized by the fact that Russia did not invade Ukraine but needed a seaport on the Black Sea, it makes it look less bad-intentioned. Then, in the 2022 Russo-Ukrainian conflict, Russia's slogans of "demilitarization" and "denazification" made its bad intentions impossible to conceal, completely exposing its military actions as a naked aggression against a sovereign country, resulting in a sharp increase in its threat value. In terms of offensive capability, although the Russian army was defeated on the battlefield, its offensive capability was insufficient relative to Ukraine, a medium-sized industrial country, but still a huge threat to small countries such as Finland or the Baltic states. In summary, after the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, Russia's display of its offensive capability and bad intentions led to a sharp increase in its threat value for neighboring small countries, which will have to seek alliances with other countries to counter this threat, which also leads to a deterioration of Russia's security environment.

Using Finland as an example, the term "Finlandization" originated from Finland's foreign policy during the Cold War and refers to a weak country's submission to the policy decisions of a powerful neighboring country in order to maintain its sovereignty and territorial integrity. This is also known as "appeasement" in Confucian thought, which influenced ancient Korea's long-term vassal status with China. This idea has been subject to great criticism, but it must be seen that appeasement is an effective strategy for small countries to preserve their independence and autonomy. Finland inflicted huge casualties on the Soviet Union in the Winter War and joined the Nazi camp in World War II. Coupled with its geographical position, which made it difficult to obtain support from the Western world, the post-war international order was bound to be extremely unfavorable to Finland. Finland was closer to the Western countries in terms of national system and ideology, but it remained neutral for a long time during the Cold War, did not join NATO, and often followed the Soviet Union's footsteps in various international affairs ^[12]. It preserved Finland's sovereignty and territorial integrity, focused on economic development and social construction, and created today's "happiest country in the world" ^[13]. Even after joining the European Union in 1995, it has always maintained its independence and autonomy in foreign affairs. However, on May 18th, 2022, after the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, Finland submitted an application to join NATO and then signed the Protocol of Accession to NATO on July 5th, starting the substantive accession process. This is undoubtedly a heavy blow to Russia's security environment.

Appeasement is not simply about submitting to the big country and giving up one's own interests, but rather about obtaining as many security guarantees as possible in a submissive posture to protect one's own interests. If we talk about the relations between countries, Ukraine and Russia were once members of the Commonwealth of Independent States and had long been friendly after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The industrial layout and energy supply and demand relationship during the Soviet era determined the high degree of dependence between the two sides in economic development. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Ukraine became a de facto independent sovereign state, and the development of Ukrainian national consciousness and sovereignty consciousness determined that, at least in legal terms, the relationship between Russia and Ukraine was one of equality between countries. The pro-Russian environment in eastern Ukraine could be a favorable condition for Russia to seek a good security environment in the west. Even if it could not make Ukraine fully lean towards Russia, it could at least strive for Ukraine to maintain a neutral status and avoid becoming a forward base for NATO. However, in the Crimea incident in 2014, Russia directly occupied Crimea, a legitimate territory of Ukraine. At this time, any regime that represented Ukraine as an independent sovereign state would inevitably fall out with Russia quickly; otherwise, its own legitimacy basis would be gone. In the subsequent eight-year war in eastern Ukraine, huge casualties formed the basis of the deep hatred of the Ukrainian people towards Russia. The Russian ethnic group in Ukraine is first a Ukrainian citizen with sovereignty consciousness, and secondly a Russian ethnic group. In a situation where the national territory is invaded and compatriots are killed,

even the Russian ethnic group cannot be close to Russia anymore. In a situation where their own security cannot be guaranteed, even a country that believes in appeasement will inevitably break with this “big country” in order to survive. The disappearance of the pro-Russian environment in eastern Ukraine also helped create today’s fierce resistance and heavy losses that the Russian army encountered in eastern Ukraine.

However, it is unfair to attribute the deterioration of the security environment in Eastern Europe entirely to Russia’s aggressiveness. It must be seen that in the process of NATO enlargement after the Cold War, former member states and satellite states of the Soviet Union became the frontiers of confrontation between NATO and Russia. Therefore, some views believe that Russia’s security space being squeezed is an important reason why it had to take the initiative to “strike out” in order to obtain a strategic buffer. However, ironically, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, which had already become NATO member states and bordered Russia, were not attacked by Russia. For the surrounding small countries, this situation precisely sends a signal: trying to join NATO will be attacked by Russia; successfully joining NATO will instead obtain security. This will undoubtedly stimulate those countries that are undecided and try to maintain neutrality, prompting them to make a decision to ally with the West and seek security guarantees. Finland could not guarantee that it would not be the next one to be “de-Nazified”, so it immediately applied to join NATO after the front line between Russia and Ukraine became deadlocked. And this kind of alliance itself will aggravate the deterioration of Russia’s security environment, prompting it to take more extreme measures to ensure its own security, which will fall into the “security dilemma”.

Russia believes that it is constantly threatened by Western Europe and needs a so-called “strategic buffer”. If Eastern European countries cannot become allies, they will become enemies. And from the perspective of Eastern European countries, it is difficult to build trust and security with such a behemoth as Russia. Coupled with the historical memory of being ruled by the Soviet Union and even Tsarist Russia, countries try to get rid of the shadow of being controlled by Russia, which is contrary to Russia’s intention to establish a buffer zone. Once Russia threatens with force, Eastern European countries have to quickly lean towards the West to obtain security guarantees. And this leaning further strengthens Russia’s insecurity, stimulating it to seek more security space. On May 18th, 2022, after the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, Finland, which had long been good at dancing between Russia (the Soviet Union) and the United States and the West, submitted an application to join NATO and then signed the Protocol of Accession to NATO with Sweden on July 5th, starting the substantive accession process. On March 22, 2023, the Swedish parliament officially approved joining NATO. On April 4th, 2023, Finland officially joined NATO. This is a heavy blow to Russia’s geopolitical environment. It then strengthened its military deployment in the northwest direction in response, which fell into the “security dilemma”. The pan-security thinking ultimately created more enemies for Russia in a “self-fulfilling prophecy” way and also brought refugees, energy shortages, and a more severe security situation to the whole of Europe. There is no real winner for any party.

Should Finland join NATO - 2022 poll

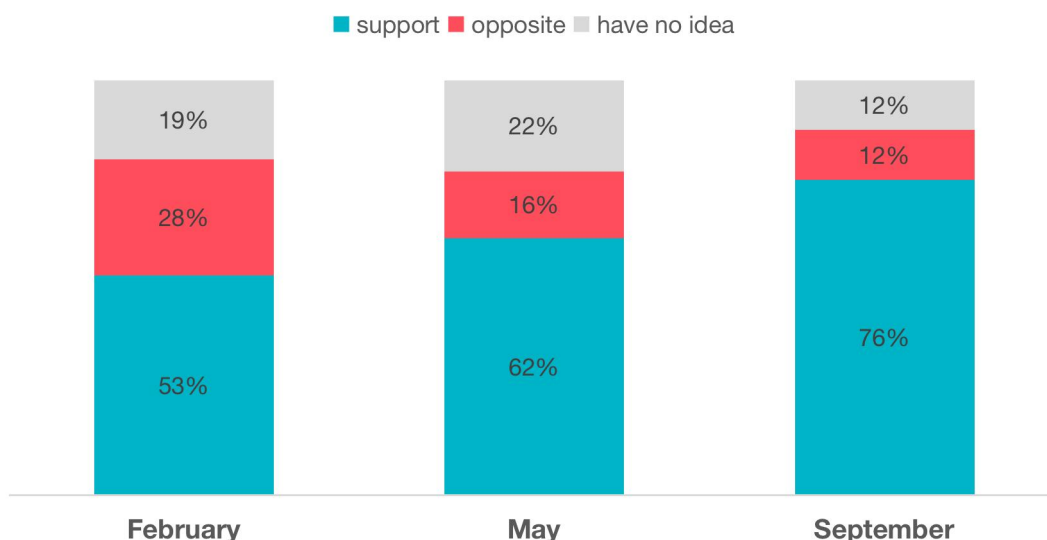


Table 1: Should Finland join NATO - 2022 poll
(Data source: Finnish Broadcasting Corporation (YLE))

Should Sweden Join NATO - 2022 Poll

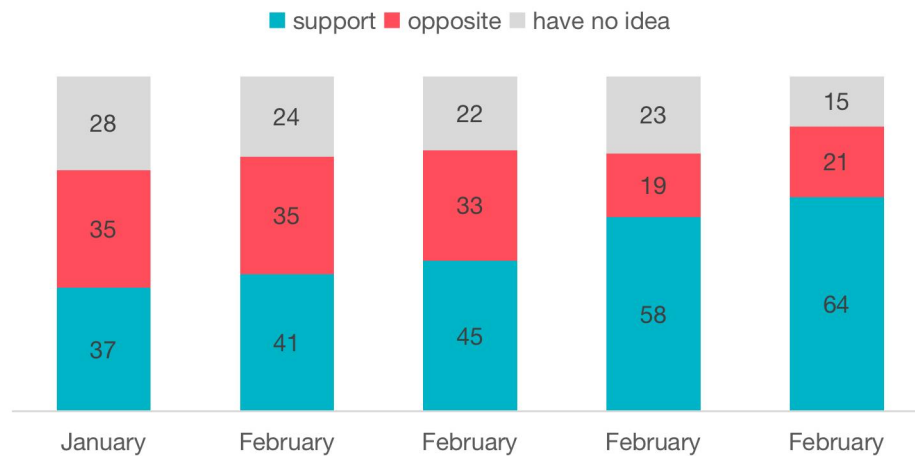


Table 2: Should Sweden Join NATO - 2022 Poll
(Data source: Statista database)

Recommendation

In the first three parts of this paper, we have studied in depth the impact of military conflict on deterrence capabilities and the security environment. This paper concludes that The United States used its military advantage brought by its powerful technological strength to destroy the Iraqi army in a devastating way in the Gulf War, showing the world the strength of the US military and establishing a strong conventional deterrence capability against all potential enemies through this war, which played an important role in establishing the United States as the only global superpower after the end of the Cold War and gained many potential allies and real interests for the United States. But on the contrary, the poor performance of the Russian army in the Russo-Ukrainian War not only failed to deter neighboring countries but also undermined Russia's deterrence capability inherited from the Soviet Union, worsened Russia's geo-security environment, and led to its further isolation and decline in international status. These two contrasting cases are worth learning from for all countries pursuing security and peace. By analyzing the evolution of deterrence theory and practical cases, we find that correctly assessing one's own strength, avoiding military adventures, and promoting international cooperation are key factors for maintaining world peace and improving the global security environment. At the end of the article, we will propose four suggestions and opinions from these perspectives. These findings have important implications for understanding and improving the current international security environment.

First, countries should correctly assess their own strengths. In military conflicts, strength plays a vital role in deterrence capabilities and the security environment. Therefore, countries should conduct a comprehensive and objective assessment of their own military capabilities, economic strength, and geopolitical environment. Such an assessment can help countries formulate reasonable defense policies and military strategies and avoid misjudgments based on overconfidence or underestimation of their own strengths. In addition, assessing one's own strength also requires taking into account non-military factors, such as economic development, social stability, and technological innovation, to comprehensively enhance national strength.

Second, avoiding military adventures is the key to ensuring the stability of the global security environment. Military adventures often lead to unpredictable consequences that may cause the situation to deteriorate further. Countries should try to resolve disputes and conflicts through peaceful diplomatic means rather than resorting to force. Military actions should be carefully considered, abide by international law and moral principles, and fully assess possible risks and consequences. At the same time, countries should also abide by international law and rules, respect the sovereignty and interests of other countries, and not abuse their own deterrence capabilities to interfere in other countries' internal affairs or force other countries to submit. In addition, the international community should also strengthen conflict prevention mechanisms and multilateral cooperation to promote dialogue, consultation, and mediation, thereby reducing the possibility of a conflict outbreak.

Third, international cooperation is the cornerstone of maintaining world peace and improving the global security environment. In the modern world, the interests and problems of countries are intertwined and interrelated. Whether they are global challenges or regional conflicts, they require the joint efforts of the international community to solve them. Countries should strengthen the role of multilateral institutions and international organizations, promote the improvement of the global governance system, coordinate the interests of various parties, promote common

development, and maintain global security. At the same time, transnational cooperation and consultation should also be the preferred means of resolving disputes and conflicts to avoid unilateral actions and zero-sum games.

Finally, improving the global security environment requires comprehensive and lasting efforts. In terms of military affairs, countries should strengthen military exchanges and cooperation, establish mutual trust mechanisms, and ease tensions through arms control and disarmament measures. In terms of the economy, promoting trade and investment liberalization and strengthening economic connectivity can provide a solid foundation for interdependence and common prosperity among countries. In terms of the humanities, strengthening exchanges and dialogue among peoples can enhance mutual understanding and friendship, help eliminate misunderstandings and prejudices, and promote harmonious coexistence.

Conclusion

Military conflict is a double-edged sword that can either enhance or weaken a country's deterrence capabilities, thus affecting its security environment. In summary, from the perspective of maintaining world peace and improving the global security environment, we need to correctly assess our own strengths, avoid military adventures, strengthen international cooperation, and comprehensively use political, economic, and humanistic means. Use force cautiously and strive to solve problems in non-violent ways. Only through persistent and comprehensive efforts can we establish a stable, harmonious, and secure international order, accelerate the construction of a community of shared futures for mankind, and create a better future for the common interests and development of mankind.

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