500 days of war in Ukraine

written by Meir Ben Shabbat | 11.07.2023

Some 500 days have passed since armored columns shook the ground of Ukraine, but there is no end in sight for the war. The outbreak of hostilities ended the Pax Europaea that had reigned supreme since World War II, marking a historic milestone in the new world order. It is hard to tell if we are past the peak, but the results of this conflict will determine the global balance of power and impact the international norms, as well as shape our world for the next several decades.

Five days before the war, the annual Munich Security Conference took place in Germany. With the war drums already heard in the background, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy pleaded with NATO and Western leaders, saying, "What are you waiting for? Has our world completely forgotten the mistakes of the 20th century? I just want to make sure you and I read the same books. How did we get to the biggest security crisis since the Cold War?"

In what was the speech of his life, the Ukrainian leader called on the world to act immediately so that Russia's plot would be foiled. "Don't wait for the bombs; when they fall we will no longer need your sanctions," he warned, but to no avail. All those who believed that bloody wars can no longer happen in the 21st – or only in far-flung areas of the world – century got a rude awakening by reality. "What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun," the Book of Ecclesiastes says.

Weakness invites evil. This is the first lesson from this war. While the methods of war keep changing due to technological advances and other developments, war's essence remains. Its human component continues to be the most important factor. Margaret Atwood once wrote: "Wars happen because the ones who start them think they can win."

It's hard to assess what impact the US actions in Afghanistan and the Middle East had on what has unfolded in Europe. At the very least, we can say that they were not a restraining factor in Russia's overall calculus. The lessons of the war in Ukraine highlight the need to resolve the Iranian issue. Iran's arrogance and its self-confidence under the current US and European policies have demonstrated the West's eroding stature. This is clear in Tehran's brazen conduct on the

nuclear issue and its destabilizing actions in the form of arming militias and other proxies, as well as expanding and enhancing its export and production of UAVs and missiles. Iran is not just involved in the war in Ukraine but also occupies a significant role in the re-establishment of an anti-West and anti-US axis. It has lent its support for Russia's war effort and the two have deepened their cooperation, while Iran has simultaneously come close to China, whose leader has recently said that it supports Iran's rights on the nuclear issue.

The regime in Tehran has picked up the West's weakness and is squeezing everything it can from it to its benefit. Iran is threatening the stability and peace of the entire world; there is no need for any additional proof.

The West's leaders, chiefly the US, now have an opportunity to implement the lessons of the war in Ukraine. They must look at what is going on in Europe and make a decision to change their posture toward Iran. They must assume that the current provocations of the regime will pale in comparison to what it would allow itself to do if it were to have a nuclear arsenal.

If history is any guide, we know that only a credible military threat will stop Iran's nuclear program. Such a threat from the US will not drag Washington into the war it seeks to avoid because the regime in Tehran knows full well what the balance of power is and the fate of other regional leaders who tried to use their force vis-a-vis the US. In fact, if the US fails to act forcefully against Iran, this will greatly increase the likelihood of a regional war that Washington can prevent.

The future of the world order is on the line. The US knows this, as do the Europeans. Let's hope that they marshal enough courage and leadership to make the right decisions.

- Published for the first time in Israel Hayom