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Integrated Deterrence in Practice: The 2022 United States National Defense Strategy Towards the Russia-Ukraine War

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the implementation of integrated deterrence by the United States, as articulated in the 2022 National Defense Strategy (NDS), in response to the Russia–Ukraine War. The central issue examined is how a strategy originally tailored to counter China was adapted to address Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Integrated deterrence seeks to align military and non-military instruments across domains and in coordination with allies, yet its real-world application presents complex challenges. The objective of this study is to assess how integrated deterrence was operationalized, evaluate its effectiveness, and identify key lessons for future defense planning. Employing a qualitative case study approach grounded in the framework of neoclassical realism, the research draws on official policy documents, expert commentary, and academic analyses. The findings reveal that the United States effectively leveraged integrated deterrence to support Ukraine without direct military engagement, utilizing a combination of economic sanctions, cyber defense, intelligence sharing, and diplomatic coordination. While the strategy did not prevent the initial invasion, it contributed to denying Russia a swift victory and reinforced NATO cohesion. The study concludes that integrated deterrence offers strategic flexibility and strengthens coalition responses in an increasingly complex global security landscape. However, its success is contingent upon

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domestic political consensus, sustained resource commitments, and a nuanced understanding of adversary behavior. The research underscores the need to adapt integrated deterrence for varying threat environments, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region, where escalation dynamics and regional contexts differ significantly.

Keywords: Integrated Deterrence; US National Defense Strategy; Russia–Ukraine War; Neoclassical Realism; Security Strategy

INTRODUCTION

The 2022 US National Defense Strategy (NDS) introduces a central strategic concept: integrated deterrence. This doctrine seeks to align military, economic, diplomatic, informational, and technological tools, both domestically and in collaboration with allies, to prevent conflict and uphold international order (Pederson & Akopian, 2023). The Russia-Ukraine war, which erupted in February 2022, tested this theory in real time. As US policymakers adjusted to the new geopolitical shock, they revised and reinforced the NDS to reflect an evolving security landscape. This paper examines how the 2022 NDS operationalizes integrated deterrence and how the conflict in Ukraine exemplifies its real-world application. The war provided both a test case and a proving ground for integrated deterrence, demonstrating its potential strengths and exposing areas for further refinement. The 2022 NDS's emphasis on integrated deterrence reflects a strategic pivot in US defense thinking, and its application during the Russia-Ukraine war showcases how multidomain coordination, allied support, and non-military instruments can counter aggression without direct military involvement (Defense, 2022).

The concept of deterrence has long been a cornerstone of international relations and defense strategy, especially in the context of great power competition. Rooted in the Cold War paradigm, deterrence traditionally emphasized the use or threat of military force to prevent adversary actions. However, in an era marked by hybrid threats, cyber warfare, and increasing interdependence among global actors, the United States has recognized the need for a more nuanced and comprehensive approach. This recognition is crystallized in the 2022 National Defense Strategy (NDS), which introduces and operationalizes the concept of "integrated deterrence" (Austin, 2022).

Integrated deterrence seeks to deter aggression not only through military might but also by leveraging diplomatic, economic, technological, and informational tools, often in coordination with allies and partners. This multidimensional approach reflects a broader understanding of contemporary security challenges and acknowledges the limitations of traditional deterrence models in a rapidly evolving geopolitical landscape (Mazarr & Ke, 2022). The Russia-Ukraine War, which escalated dramatically with Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, provides a timely and critical case study to examine how integrated deterrence is being applied in real time. The conflict has tested the resilience of the US-led security architecture in Europe, challenged NATO's strategic coherence, and raised fundamental questions about the efficacy of modern deterrence strategies against a nuclear-armed adversary (Defense, 2022).

This paper applies a neoclassical realist framework to analyze how the United States implemented its integrated deterrence strategy in response to the Russia-Ukraine war, despite its formal strategic pivot toward the Indo-Pacific. Neoclassical realism builds on classical realism's emphasis on power and national interest by incorporating domestic-level variables such as leadership perceptions, state capacity, and ideational influences (Cerioli, 2024). As such, it explains how states respond to international pressures not solely based on material capabilities, but also through the cognitive filters and institutional constraints of their leaders (Ripsman, 2017). In the case of the US, the 2022 National Defense Strategy (NDS) clearly identifies China as the pacing challenge and situates the Indo-Pacific as the central theater of competition. However, the US decision to allocate vast military and financial support to Ukraine, a secondary theater, reflects a deviation from structurally optimal grand strategy.

One of the key unit-level variables that accounts for this deviation is what strategic theorists called geographic mental maps, the conceptual frameworks that policymakers use to organize the international system spatially and prioritize threats accordingly (Mallinson & Ristic, 2016). Despite articulating a long-term reorientation toward Asia, US strategic culture continues to maintain a deeply ingrained mental map that prioritizes Euro-Atlantic security, especially when liberal values such as democracy and sovereignty are threatened (Graham, 2024). This mental map, shaped by Cold War history and post-Cold War liberal interventionism, influenced how US elites framed Russia's invasion not just as a regional crisis but as a global inflection point for democratic order.

Furthermore, liberal identity plays a significant role as a cognitive filter in US foreign policy decision-making. The moral imperative to support democracies under siege and uphold a rules-based international order contributed to the strong bipartisan consensus to assist Ukraine (Berebon, 2023). This ideational commitment embedded in both elite discourse and public opinion explains why the US deviated from the resource discipline suggested by the NDS. From a neoclassical realist perspective, this illustrates how grand strategy is often shaped as much by domestic political culture and ideological commitments as by the structural balance of power. Taken together, the US response to the Russia-Ukraine war demonstrates the practical limitations of integrated deterrence as a coherent strategic doctrine. While the concept emphasizes alignment of tools across domains and alliances to deter aggression, its implementation is filtered through a liberal political economy and normative identity. These domestic-level factors, central to neoclassical realism, help explain the mismatch between the strategic clarity of the NDS and the operational realities of US engagement in Europe.

This paper seeks to explore how the 2022 US National Defense Strategy, particularly its emphasis on integrated deterrence, has been implemented in the context of the Russia-Ukraine War. It aims to analyze the strategic logic, tools, and outcomes of this approach, assessing both its achievements and limitations. In doing so, the study addresses on how to maximize its defense strategy concept to pursue its objectives in the context of the Russia-Ukraine War, and how is the implications of this concept to be drawn in the Russia-Ukraine War. Methodologically, this paper adopts a qualitative approach, drawing on official US defense documents, scholarly literature, expert analyses, and policy commentaries. It focuses primarily on the period from the release of the 2022 NDS to the present, with specific emphasis on US and NATO responses to Russian aggression (Defense, 2022). Through this analysis, the paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the evolving nature of deterrence in the 21st century and offers policy-relevant insights into how the US and its allies might better prepare for similar crises in the future.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research approach to analyze the implementation of the United States' "integrated deterrence" strategy, as articulated in the 2022 National Defense Strategy (NDS), within the context of the Russia-Ukraine War. A qualitative

approach is uniquely suited for this research as it facilitates an in-depth, interpretive understanding of complex geopolitical phenomena, policy decisions, and strategic concepts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It allows the research to move beyond simple descriptions to explore the nuances of how and why the U.S. responded to the conflict in a particular manner, aligning with the study's objective to analyze the practical application of a theoretical defense posture.

The research is structured as a single, holistic explanatory case study (Yin, 2018). This design is optimal for investigating a contemporary event which is the U.S. response to the Russia-Ukraine War where the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly evident. The "case" under investigation is the operationalization of the integrated deterrence doctrine. An explanatory design was specifically chosen because it aims to trace the causal links and explain the process through which the principles of the 2022 NDS were translated into concrete military, economic, and diplomatic actions. This approach allows for a rich, contextualized analysis that connects the strategic theory of integrated deterrence and the neoclassical realist framework to the empirical reality of the war.

As a qualitative case study, this research relies on the comprehensive collection and analysis of secondary data from a wide array of authoritative sources. A purposive sampling strategy was used to select documents directly relevant to the research questions. The data collection process, conducted between 2023 and 2025, focused on gathering materials that illuminate the formulation of the 2022 NDS, the strategic thinking behind integrated deterrence, and the specific U.S. actions taken in response to the war. The primary sources include:

1. Official Government and Defense Documents: Key sources include the full text of the 2022 National Defense Strategy, White House press briefings, Congressional Research Service (CRS) reports on security assistance to Ukraine, and official publications from the U.S. Department of Defense and Department of State.
2. Scholarly and Academic Literature: Peer-reviewed articles from journals in international relations, security studies, and strategic studies were analyzed to ground the research in existing theoretical debates on deterrence, neoclassical realism, and great power competition.

3. Policy Analysis and Think Tank Reports: In-depth reports and commentaries from reputable institutions (e.g., Council on Foreign Relations, Center for a New American Security, RAND Corporation) provided expert analysis on the implementation and effectiveness of U.S. strategy.
4. High-Quality Journalism: Reporting from established news outlets provided a timeline of events and contemporary context for the unfolding conflict and the international response.

RESULTS

The 2022 United States National Defense Strategy

The 2022 US National Defense Strategy (NDS) provides a comprehensive framework for addressing contemporary security challenges through the concept of integrated deterrence. Released during a period of intensifying geopolitical competition, the strategy prioritizes strategic alignment with allies, modernization of defense capabilities, and a whole-of-government approach to deterring aggression, particularly from near-peer competitors such as China and Russia

At the core of the 2022 NDS is the acknowledgment of a new era of strategic competition. The document identifies the People's Republic of China (PRC) as "the most comprehensive and serious challenge to US national security," while emphasizing that Russia poses an "acute threat" to the international order. This dual-track prioritization reflects the long-term rivalry with China and the immediate crisis presented by Russia's aggression in Ukraine. Beyond state actors, the NDS also addresses transnational challenges such as climate change, pandemics, and technological disruptions, all of which require defense planning to be flexible and resilient. These emerging risks further support the argument for integrated deterrence, which aims to align military and non-military tools for strategic effect.

One of the defining features of the 2022 NDS is its reaffirmation of the United States' commitment to collective defense. The strategy underscores the value of strengthening alliances such as NATO and building new partnerships in the Indo-Pacific and beyond. As the DoD 2022 notes, "mutually beneficial alliances and partnerships are our greatest global strategic advantage." In practice, this involves more than just military

coordination. Integrated deterrence calls for interoperability in cyber defense, intelligence sharing, joint capability development, and diplomatic coordination activities that were vividly demonstrated during the international response to the Russia-Ukraine War. The emphasis on multinational collaboration also reflects a recognition that shared threats demand shared responses.

To implement integrated deterrence effectively, the NDS emphasizes military modernization, especially in emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), hypersonic weapons, quantum computing, and space systems. The US Department of Defense seeks to outpace adversaries in these domains to maintain strategic overmatch and to enhance deterrence credibility. Moreover, the NDS advocates for the restructuring of the Joint Force to enhance its adaptability across conflict spectrums. This includes investments in agile command-and-control systems, forward presence in contested regions, and the use of campaign planning to manage long-term competition.

The 2022 NDS also addresses the convergence of threats across multiple domains, asserting that future conflicts are unlikely to be limited to land, air, or sea. It promotes an "all-domain" approach to operations, seamlessly linking cyber, space, conventional, and nuclear capabilities to deter aggression at every level of escalation. This cross-domain synchronization is not only a military imperative but a strategic message: adversaries must understand that any aggressive act will be met with a well-coordinated and multidimensional response. For example, the US support to Ukraine included not only weapons shipments but also satellite intelligence, cyber defense cooperation, and international sanctions, an embodiment of integrated deterrence in action.

Lastly, the NDS introduces the concept of "campaigning," defined as proactive, sustained military and non-military actions to shape the strategic environment and undermine adversary influence. It also emphasizes building resilience, not only in US forces but across society, including critical infrastructure, supply chains, and public trust. Resilience, in this context, functions as a deterrent by increasing the costs and reducing the potential gains of adversary actions. The 2022 National Defense Strategy marks a conceptual shift in US defense policy. Through integrated deterrence, it seeks to blend military strength with diplomatic alliances, economic leverage, and technological superiority to address complex threats in a multipolar world. Its relevance becomes particularly clear

when analyzed in the context of the Russia-Ukraine War, a crisis that has tested, and to some extent validated, this strategy in practice.

Based on 2022 National Defense Strategy, Integrated deterrence is backed by a $310.7 billion investment in procurement and R&D, ensuring credible forces across all warfighting domains (air, sea, land, cyber, space). Specific defense investments include; $61.2B for air power (F-35, B-21, KC-46A, drones), $48.1B for naval capabilities, including new fleet ships and submarines, $13B for land modernization. These investments demonstrate the move from deterrence by punishment to deterrence by denial, relevant in both the Indo-Pacific and European theaters. The budget includes $3.9B specifically for Europe, continuing a strong US posture aimed at deterring Russian aggression. This includes support for rotational deployments, infrastructure, and forward presence investments across NATO allies, consistent with integrated deterrence's emphasis on coalition strength. In FY2024 (included in the supplemental), $44.4B was allocated to Ukraine reinforcing how economic, military, and diplomatic tools were integrated to resist Russian aggression.

The Russia-Ukraine War: A Strategic Overview

The Russia-Ukraine War, which erupted into full-scale conflict on February 24, 2022, marked a seismic shift in the global security environment. Though tensions between Russia and Ukraine had persisted since the 2014 annexation of Crimea, the 2022 invasion was notable for its scale, ambition, and implications for European and global security. For the United States and its allies, this war has become a defining moment to operationalize integrated deterrence in the face of overt state aggression by a nuclear-armed power.

The roots of the conflict lie in both geopolitical competition and historical grievances. Russia’s strategic objectives in Ukraine are driven by its perception of NATO expansion as a direct threat to its sphere of influence and national security. Moscow has consistently opposed Ukraine's tilt toward the West, viewing closer integration with NATO and the European Union as unacceptable. Russian President Vladimir Putin framed the invasion as a defensive measure aimed at “denazifying” Ukraine and protecting Russian-speaking populations, although these justifications have been widely dismissed as pretexts. In reality, the war is part of Russia’s broader effort to reassert influence over its near abroad and challenge the post-Cold War security order in Europe. The decision to invade

reflects a calculated risk, with the Kremlin expecting a swift victory and limited Western resistance, an assumption that proved erroneous.

The initial Russian offensive, aimed at capturing Kyiv and decapitating the Ukrainian government, encountered fierce resistance. Ukrainian forces, bolstered by years of training and reform (much of it supported by Western advisers), effectively defended key positions and disrupted Russian supply lines. This phase of the war demonstrated not only the resilience of Ukrainian society and military but also the critical role of external support in enabling national defense. As the war progressed, Russia shifted its focus to the Donbas region in eastern Ukraine, employing heavy artillery and missile strikes. Meanwhile, the United States and its allies dramatically increased military and economic aid to Ukraine, including the provision of advanced weapons systems such as HIMARS rocket launchers, anti-aircraft systems, and drones, in addition to sharing real-time intelligence.

By 2023, the war had settled into a protracted conflict, with both sides suffering heavy casualties. Ukraine's counteroffensive efforts in the south and east demonstrated operational innovation but also highlighted the challenges of retaking well-entrenched positions. Nevertheless, the continued flow of Western support has kept Ukrainian forces in the fight and raised the costs for Russia. The international response to the invasion was swift and unprecedented. Within days, the United States and its NATO allies imposed severe economic sanctions on Russia, targeting major banks, energy exports, and foreign reserves. These measures were accompanied by diplomatic isolation and coordinated efforts to support Ukraine politically and militarily. The US response exemplified integrated deterrence in action. While it refrained from direct military involvement to avoid escalation with a nuclear-armed adversary, Washington mobilized an array of tools; military aid, economic sanctions, strategic communications, and alliance coordination to support Ukraine and constrain Russia. The Biden administration also invoked a strong multilateral approach, rallying NATO and non-NATO partners such as Japan and South Korea in condemnation of Russia's actions.

The Russia-Ukraine War has significantly altered the strategic calculus in Europe and beyond. NATO has been revitalized, with Finland and Sweden abandoning neutrality to pursue membership. Defense budgets have increased across Europe, and strategic reliance on US security guarantees has grown. Conversely, the war has exposed critical vulnerabilities in Russian military capabilities, particularly in logistics, leadership, and

morale. Yet it has also highlighted the enduring challenge of deterring a revisionist state willing to incur high costs in pursuit of geopolitical goals. For the United States, the war represents both a success and a stress test of its new strategic posture. The implementation of integrated deterrence through alliance cohesion, multidomain responses, and strategic communication has helped to deny Russia a quick victory and sustain a democratic partner under siege.

United States Responses to the Russia-Ukraine War

Table 1. US Response to the Russia-Ukraine War

Domain	Actions by the United States
Military	- More than $75 billion in aid (by mid-2023) - Weapons: Javelin & Stinger missiles, HIMARS, Patriot air defense systems, advanced drones - Intelligence sharing, training, and logistical support
Economic	- Sanctions on Russia's central bank, sovereign wealth fund, energy exports, and key industries - More than 1,000 individuals and entities blacklisted - Implemented in coordination with allies
Informational & Diplomatic	- Declassified intelligence before the invasion to expose Russia's plans - Framed the conflict as a *"struggle between democracy and autocracy"* (Biden) - Supported Ukraine's information operations globally
Alliance Coordination	- Through the Ukraine Defense Contact Group - Coordinated aid from 50+ countries, including non-NATO partners (Japan, Australia)
Cyber Domain	- Strengthened Ukraine's cyber defenses against Russian attacks - Involvement of U.S. Cyber Command and private sector - Protection of critical infrastructure

The The United States' response to the Russia-Ukraine War involved a coordinated application of military, economic, and diplomatic instruments. Militarily, the US provided over $75 billion in aid to Ukraine by mid-2023, which included critical weapons systems such as Javelin and Stinger missiles, HIMARS, Patriot air defense systems, and advanced drone technologies. This was accompanied by extensive intelligence sharing, training, and logistical support. Economically, in coordination with allies, Washington imposed sweeping sanctions on Russia's central bank, sovereign wealth fund, energy exports, and key industries, blacklisting more than 1,000 individuals and entities. On the informational and diplomatic front, the US proactively declassified intelligence to expose Russia's invasion plans before the war began. President Biden also framed the conflict as a global "struggle between democracy and autocracy," and the administration amplified Ukraine's own successful information operations to galvanize. These efforts were complemented by

robust alliance coordination through mechanisms like the Ukraine Defense Contact Group, which synchronized aid from over 50 countries, including non-NATO partners like Japan and Australia. Finally, in the cyber domain, the US bolstered Ukraine's defenses against Russian cyberattacks through government entities like US Cyber Command and private sector partnerships, which helped defend critical infrastructure.

DISCUSSION

Integrated Deterrence in Practice

Deterrence, in its classical form, refers to the strategy of preventing an adversary's undesired actions through the threat of credible retaliation or denial of benefits (Payne, 2011). Traditionally, deterrence strategies were grounded in military capabilities, particularly during the Cold War, when the threat of nuclear retaliation formed the backbone of the US posture against the Soviet Union. However, as the global security environment has evolved, the concept of deterrence rising. Today, state and non-state actors engage across a spectrum of domains, military, cyber, economic, and informational, necessitating a more integrated and adaptable approach.

The 2022 US National Defense Strategy (NDS) introduced "integrated deterrence" as a central strategic concept. According to the Department of Defense 2022, integrated deterrence is "the seamless combination of capabilities to convince potential adversaries that the costs of their hostile activities outweigh the benefits." It is distinguished by three core principles: (1) integration across domains; (2) integration across instruments of national power; and (3) integration with allies and partners (Defense, 2022). These dimensions underscore the need to orchestrate efforts across military branches, government agencies, and international partnerships to deter aggression more effectively.

First, integration across domains reflects the recognition that 21st-century warfare spans land, sea, air, space, and cyberspace. Modern deterrence must account for threats like cyberattacks on critical infrastructure or anti-satellite operations, which can be just as destabilizing as conventional military aggression (Billingsley, 2023). This requires joint force planning and the ability to operate simultaneously across multiple operational theaters.

Second, integrated deterrence broadens the toolkit beyond military means. Economic sanctions, technological denial, diplomatic pressure, and information operations

all play crucial roles in influencing adversary decision-making. As Joseph Nye argues in his discussion of "smart power," combining hard and soft power enables states to shape the strategic environment more comprehensively (Nye & Goldsmith, 2011).

Third, the emphasis on allies and partners highlights the importance of collective defense and burden-sharing such as strengthening collective security arrangements like NATO and AUKUS. The NDS stresses that the credibility of deterrence is amplified when it is supported by a coalition of like-minded states. This multilateral approach not only strengthens deterrence by complicating an adversary's calculations but also reinforces the legitimacy of US actions on the global stage (Meiser, 2017).

What makes integrated deterrence distinct is not merely the combination of these tools but their deliberate, synchronized application tailored to specific threats. It is proactive rather than reactive, seeking to shape adversary behavior before crises erupt. By elevating coordination and coherence across domains and actors, integrated deterrence represents an evolution of the deterrence paradigm suited to contemporary strategic competition, especially in relation to near-peer rivals like Russia and China.

Integrated Deterrence in Action: US Responses to the Russia-Ukraine War

The Russia-Ukraine War served as the first real-world test of the United States' integrated deterrence strategy as articulated in the 2022 National Defense Strategy. Rather than relying solely on conventional military threats or nuclear deterrence, Washington employed a wide spectrum of tools; military, diplomatic, economic, cyber, and informational together with allies and partners to counter Russian aggression. This section explores how integrated deterrence was practiced and its effectiveness in influencing the course of the conflict. The US provided over $75 billion in aid to Ukraine by mid-2023, with a significant portion dedicated to military assistance (Act, 2024). This included weapons systems such as Javelin and Stinger missiles, HIMARS, Patriot air defense systems, and advanced drone technologies. Beyond hardware, the US facilitated intelligence sharing, training, and logistical support, enhancing Ukraine's battlefield effectiveness. This support illustrates the principle of deterrence-by-denial, one of the key components of integrated deterrence. By enabling Ukraine to resist and counter Russian advances, the US made aggression less likely to achieve its strategic objectives, thereby deterring further escalation (Colby & Mitchell, 2019). The provision of real-time satellite intelligence and cyber support also highlighted the multidomain nature of the US approach, blending

traditional military aid with digital and space-based capabilities. This table shows the data on US security assistance to Ukraine.

Table 2. US Military Asssistance to Ukraine

(in millions of dollars)

	FY2022	FY2023	FY2024	Total
Presidential Drawdown Authority (PDA)	9,225.0	14,628.0 + previously authorized PDA	400.0 + previously authorized PDA	24,253.0
Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative	6,300.0	12,300.0	6,300.0	24,900.0
Foreign Military Financing	1,542.6	77.8	2,000.0	3,620.4
Total	17,067.6	27,005.8	8,700.0	52,773.4

Source: Compiled by CRS, on the basis of ForeignAssistance.gov and Department of State and Department of Defense press releases through May 22, 2024.

Integrated deterrence cannot succeed without a strong political and economic foundation. The strategy urges allies to increase defense spending and share operational burdens. This reflects a shift from US-centric deterrence toward a more distributed, sustainable security architecture. The Russia-Ukraine war pushed NATO countries to raise their military budgets and strengthen industrial base cooperation, a key economic dimension of deterrence. As the DoD notes, strengthening the defense industrial base and innovation ecosystem is essential to sustaining credible deterrence in the long term (Defense, 2022).

Economic sanctions have been a central pillar of the US response. In coordination with the European Union, the United Kingdom, and other partners, the US imposed sweeping sanctions on Russia's central bank, sovereign wealth fund, energy exports, and key industries. More than 1,000 individuals and entities were blacklisted, including oligarchs, government officials, and arms manufacturers (US Department of Treasury, 2025). These sanctions were designed to isolate Russia from the global economy, disrupt its war-financing capabilities, and impose long-term costs on its strategic ambitions. Though the sanctions have not yet compelled a Russian withdrawal, they have significantly

constrained Russia's economic growth and military production capabilities, demonstrating the use of economic instruments as deterrent tools.

Another dimension of integrated deterrence is information warfare. The US engaged in a proactive campaign to declassify intelligence and expose Russia's invasion plans before the war began, undermining Moscow's narrative and rallying global support for Ukraine. President Biden's framing of the war as a "struggle between democracy and autocracy" served to position the conflict within a larger ideological context (Rabel, 2025). This not only strengthened domestic support but also mobilized like-minded nations to coordinate responses. The United Nations General Assembly resolutions condemning the invasion with overwhelming support reflected the diplomatic reach of US-led efforts.

Integrated deterrence emphasizes the coordination of efforts among allies and partners. The NATO alliance, revitalized by the threat of Russian aggression, responded with unprecedented unity. US leadership was instrumental in organizing support through mechanisms such as the Ukraine Defense Contact Group and the Ramstein meetings, which enabled 50+ countries to synchronize aid efforts. Furthermore, the US worked closely with non-NATO partners; including Japan, Australia, and South Korea demonstrating a truly global coalition. Integrated deterrence, in this context, meant leveraging a distributed network of allies across regions to apply pressure on a common adversary (Posaner, 2025).

Recognizing the risk of hybrid warfare, the US bolstered Ukraine's cyber defenses, working through entities like the US Cyber Command and private sector firms (e.g., Microsoft and Palantir) (Zulhusni, 2024). These efforts helped defend Ukraine's critical infrastructure from Russian cyberattacks and also prepared NATO allies for possible spillover effects. This cyber cooperation reflects a critical element of modern deterrence: resilience. By reducing the potential impact of attacks and increasing the robustness of defenses, the US strategy sought to deny Russia coercive leverage through non-kinetic means.

Ukraine's successful use of information operations framing the war as a defense of democracy galvanized Western support. The US amplified these narratives via coordinated diplomatic channels and information sharing, reinforcing Ukraine's legitimacy and deterring further Russian escalation. This reflects the "cognitive warfare" component of deterrence, where shaping perception is as critical as physical force (Sönke Marahrens, 2024).

While integrated deterrence did not prevent Russia's initial invasion, it has significantly shaped the strategic environment. Russia was denied a quick victory; Ukraine's sovereignty has been preserved; and NATO has expanded both in unity and geography. At the same time, the war exposed limitations, most notably, that integrated deterrence may be more effective at managing escalation and limiting success rather than at outright prevention. Nonetheless, the coordinated use of multidomain capabilities and allied responses under the banner of integrated deterrence has redefined how the US addresses major security crises. It offers a scalable, flexible framework adaptable to both European and Indo-Pacific theaters.

Implications for the Future of US Defense Strategy

The operationalization of integrated deterrence during the Russia-Ukraine War has provided the United States with both lessons learned and strategic validation. While not without shortcomings, the response to Russian aggression revealed how integrated deterrence can be implemented in real-world conflict and what adaptations might be necessary for future strategic environments especially in the Indo-Pacific. One of the key takeaways from the Ukraine conflict is the validation of integrated deterrence as a flexible, multidomain strategy. It demonstrated the effectiveness of enabling partners to deny aggression through targeted support, rather than deploying large numbers of US combat forces. This partner-centric approach minimized risks of escalation while maximizing strategic effects particularly useful in regions where direct military confrontation would be costly and politically complex (Defense, 2022). The war also highlighted how non-military tools such as financial sanctions, intelligence disclosures, and cyber defense can be rapidly mobilized in coordination with allies to shape adversary behavior. These instruments enhance the strategic toolkit of US policymakers and complement traditional force postures.

Despite its strengths, integrated deterrence in Ukraine also revealed limitations. First, it failed to deter the initial invasion indicating that integrated deterrence may struggle against adversaries willing to absorb short-term costs for long-term strategic gains. Russia was undeterred by the threat of sanctions or the prospect of Ukrainian resistance, which suggests that certain regimes may not be as sensitive to deterrent signals, especially if their leaders view the stakes as existential (Kroenig, 2020).

Second, maintaining long-term allied support requires sustained political will, economic resources, and diplomatic engagement. The longer the conflict continues, the more pressure builds on Western governments facing domestic economic challenges or political divisions. This raises concerns about the durability of deterrence strategies in protracted crises.

Finally, adversaries may adapt to integrated deterrence by developing asymmetric countermeasures, including grey zone tactics, proxy warfare, or disinformation campaigns. Deterrence must therefore evolve to anticipate and respond to such shifts in adversary behavior.

Potentionally the most significant implication lies in the application of integrated deterrence to the Indo-Pacific, particularly regarding China. The US faces a more complex and technologically advanced competitor in the region, with the potential for flashpoints like Taiwan, the South China Sea, and the Korean Peninsula. Lessons from Ukraine suggest that early investments in partner resilience such as Taiwan's asymmetric capabilities and civil defense are vital. Intelligence sharing, economic statecraft, and alliance coordination (especially with Japan, South Korea, Australia, and the Philippines) must be prioritized to deter coercive actions by China. However, unlike Ukraine, deterrence in Asia may require a more visible forward presence of US forces due to geography and the centrality of maritime access. Balancing denial strategies with credible forward deterrence will be key to success.

Looking ahead, the United States must continue to refine integrated deterrence by incorporating technological innovation, interagency coordination, and strategic foresight. Emerging domains such as artificial intelligence, space operations, and cyber warfare will increasingly shape the battlespace. Deterrence strategies must anticipate these dynamics and ensure that the US retains both a technological and strategic edge (Work & Brimley, 2014). Additionally, institutionalizing integrated deterrence across government agencies and alliances will be essential. Deterrence is no longer just a military mission; it is a whole-of-government and whole-of-alliance effort that requires shared planning, synchronized messaging, and adaptive strategy.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the United States' application of integrated deterrence during the Russia-Ukraine War as the first major test of the 2022 National Defense Strategy. The findings demonstrate that deterrence, when executed through a multidomain and multinational approach including military assistance, economic sanctions, intelligence disclosure, diplomatic coalition-building, and cyber defense can significantly shape the dynamics of conflict. The U.S. strategy not only reshaped the battlefield but also reaffirmed the strategic value of alliances and partnerships in deterring aggression without direct large-scale military intervention.

Nevertheless, the research also reveals critical limitations. Integrated deterrence did not prevent Russia's initial invasion, and its long-term effectiveness depends on sustained political, economic, and military commitments. Furthermore, adversaries such as Russia and China continue to adapt rapidly, exploiting asymmetric tools that challenge traditional deterrence frameworks.

Based on these insights, future research should examine how integrated deterrence can be adapted to different regional contexts, particularly in the Indo-Pacific, where competition with China presents unique challenges. Further exploration is also needed on how agility, resilience, and technological innovation can enhance deterrence strategies in the face of evolving global threats. By addressing these gaps, integrated deterrence can be refined into a more robust framework for managing great power competition and safeguarding international security in an increasingly complex world.

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