



Clío

Revista de Historia, Ciencias Humanas
y Pensamiento Crítico

ISSN 2660-9037



Adscrita a:
Fundación Ediciones Clío
Academia de Historia del
estado Zulia
Centro Zuliano de
Investigaciones
Genealógicas

Sección: Artículo científico | 2025, julio-diciembre, año 5, No. 10, 885-909

Prospective scenarios. Challenges to achieving peace and the strategic role of Ukrainian resources in the upcoming negotiations

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Abstract

The Russian Federation's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 creates a complex geopolitical scenario that indirectly confronts Russia with the powers of the hegemonic West, articulated in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union. By means of a prospective methodology and the collection of documentary sources of proven quality, the objective of the research was to develop, analytically, three prospective scenarios that allow anticipating the possible paths towards the resolution of the Ukrainian conflict, simultaneously evaluating the strategic relevance that Ukraine's natural resources could play as negotiation assets in future peace agreements. The conjugation of the sources with the analytical apparatus of the study allows concluding that, the most plausible

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Recibido: 2025-02-08 **Aceptado:** 2025-04-01

scenario, considering the current geopolitical trends, is a variant of the red scenario: protracted conflict with outbreaks of varying intensity until 2028. Factors such as Russian military attrition, Ukrainian resistance and Western donor fatigue point to a dynamic stalemate of belligerent actors, in terms of resources and capabilities for action.

Keywords: war in Ukraine, public administration, governance, strategic resources, national security.

*Escenarios prospectivos. Desafíos para lograr la paz y el papel
estratégico de los recursos ucranianos en las negociaciones
venideras*

Resumen

La invasión de la federación rusa a gran escala a Ucrania en febrero de 2022 crea un escenario geopolítico complejo que enfrenta de manera indirecta a Rusia con las potencias del occidente hegemónico, articuladas en la Organización del Tratado del Atlántico Norte y la Unión Europea. Mediante una metodología prospectiva y el acopio de fuentes documentales de comprobada calidad, el objetivo de la investigación fue desarrollar, analíticamente, tres escenarios prospectivos que permitan anticipar los posibles caminos hacia la resolución del conflicto ucraniano, evaluando simultáneamente la relevancia estratégica que los recursos naturales de Ucrania podrían desempeñar como activos de negociación en futuros acuerdos de paz. La conjugación de las fuentes con el aparato analítico del estudio permite concluir que, el escenario más plausible, considerando las tendencias geopolíticas actuales, es una variante del escenario rojo: conflicto prolongado con brotes de intensidad variable hasta 2028. Factores como el desgaste militar ruso, la resistencia ucraniana y la fatiga de donantes occidentales apuntan a un estancamiento dinámico de los actores beligerantes, en términos de recursos y capacidades para la acción.

Palabras clave: guerra en Ucrania; administración pública; gobernanza; recursos estratégicos; seguridad nacional.

Introduction

The Russia-Ukraine war, which began with the Russian invasion in February 2022, represents one of the most significant geopolitical crises of the twenty-first century, with profound implications for European security and the international order. By what means, this conflict has led to a redefinition of traditional strategic alliances and has put existing international cooperation mechanisms to the test, dramatically altering the balance of power in Eastern Europe (NATO, 2023).

For Katsioulis (2025), in general terms, the dimension of the conflict transcends regional borders, affecting global supply chains, energy and food markets, as well as creating a humanitarian crisis of considerable proportions with millions of Ukrainian refugees. NATO has characterized this aggression as a flagrant violation of international law that undermines Euro-Atlantic and global security, consequently provoking an unprecedented unified response from Western powers (NATO, 2023). This war also represents a direct challenge to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and to the system of collective security established after the Second World War. Meanwhile:

Let us look at how we got there. The current trends are not very promising. Russian troops are making incremental gains, trying to secure a better position before the winter freezes movement at the front. Ukraine, on the other hand, is hampered massively by a lack of personnel. On top of that, the nearly three years of war with relentless attacks by Russia on civilian and, specifically, energy infrastructure have taken a toll on the Ukrainian population. War fatigue has set in, and the resolve to continue the war is weakening. (Katsioulis, 2025, p. 141)

In the words of Meister (2024), the positions in this conflict reflect a clear ideological and strategic division: on the one hand, Ukraine, backed by NATO and the United States before Donald Trump's second term, defends its sovereignty, territorial integrity and the right to self-determination that assists it, aspiring to greater integration with Euro-Atlantic structures. This bloc has provided Ukraine with substantial military, financial, and diplomatic support, with the European Union formally starting accession negotiations in December 2023, signaling a long-term commitment to Ukraine's integration into Western institutions.

On the other hand, Russia justifies its actions as a response to NATO's eastward expansion, perceived as a direct threat to its national security, while claiming historical and cultural ties with Ukrainian territories with a Russian-speaking population. In this context of tension, the Kremlin has repeatedly redefined its "red lines" regarding Ukraine's geopolitical orientation, considering the country to be part of its traditional sphere of influence. Thus, this collision of geopolitical visions has transformed Ukraine into the epicenter of a major confrontation between different conceptions of the current world order, such as the most widely circulated international press in the West (BBC News, 2024)

The main objective of this scientific article is to develop three prospective scenarios that allow anticipating the possible paths towards the resolution of the Ukrainian conflict, simultaneously assessing the strategic relevance that Ukraine's natural resources could play as negotiating assets in future peace agreements. To guide this exploration, three key questions are raised:

- How will the dynamics of competition between the great powers for access to Ukrainian strategic resources influence the configuration of an eventual negotiated solution to the war?

- To what extent would Ukraine's potential membership in NATO and the European Union alter geopolitical calculations related to the control and distribution of its energy and agricultural resources?

- What collective security mechanisms or international guarantees could be implemented to ensure Ukraine's relative territorial integrity and equitable access to its natural resources in a post-conflict scenario?

These questions, which are answered in the conclusions of this article, address the critical intersections between regional security, geopolitics of resources, and international institutional architecture, determining elements for envisioning the future trajectories of this crisis. Visualization that can only be achieved through the implementation of a prospective, rigorous analysis consistent with the historical reality of the conflict.

Following the methodological parameters of Glenn's (1994) classic work, it should be noted that prospective analysis is an essential methodological tool for understanding possible futures in contexts of high uncertainty such as the Ukrainian conflict. Unlike traditional forecasts based on linear extrapolations, foresight is based on solid epistemological foundations that recognize the systemic complexity and contingent nature of socio-political phenomena. As Jerome C. Glenn (1994) points out, this methodological approach makes it possible to distinguish between "normative forecasts", oriented towards desirable futures, and "exploratory forecasts", focused on possible futures, regardless of their desirability.

As will be seen below, foresight thus transcends simple prediction to become an exercise in collective construction that maps multiple future trajectories, identifying objective trends or drivers of change, along with emerging

trends and potential turning points. Its foundations draw on diverse intellectual traditions, from complex systems theory to strategic planning, integrating quantitative and qualitative dimensions into a coherent analytical framework. According to Baena (2004), this methodology is particularly valuable for geopolitical issues where technological, economic, military and sociocultural variables converge in configurations that are difficult to predict.

From the point of view of the authors of this research, the application of foresight analysis to the war in Ukraine allows policymakers and international strategists to transcend reactive crisis management to adopt more proactive and resilient postures. The prospective view operates through structured processes that involve the identification of key variables, analysis of interdependencies, construction of hypotheses, and development of coherent narratives about alternative futures. The scientific legitimacy of these exercises does not lie in their absolute predictive capacity, but in the methodological and argumentative rigor with which the structural conditioning factors, critical uncertainties and strategic maneuvering spaces available to the actors involved are identified and evaluated.

As Kissinger (2016) postulates, in contexts of high geopolitical volatility, prospective scenarios function as "test worlds" where decision-makers can assess the implications of different courses of action without incurring real costs. In the case of Ukraine, this approach allows the complexity of the conflict to be disaggregated into analyzable components, visualising how apparently independent factors such as military capabilities, economic resilience, diplomatic alliances and control of strategic natural resources, among many others, can interact to produce different configurations of regional security in medium and long-term time horizons.

The multidimensional nature of the Ukrainian crisis calls for an interdisciplinary approach that integrates diverse analytical perspectives to capture its complexity. In fact, this conflict can be examined from a critical geopolitical perspective, studying how territorial narratives construct threat perceptions and justify military actions; from international political economy, analyzing the instrumentalization of energy interdependencies as mechanisms of coercion; from security studies, evaluating NATO's doctrinal evolution in response to Russian aggression; or from diplomatic.

1. Theoretical framework

The war between Russia and Ukraine can be analyzed from various theoretical and methodological perspectives typical of classical and contemporary geopolitics. Among these, Halford Mackinder's Heartland Theory stands out for its heuristic capacity, which offers a key interpretation of Russian motivations for invading Ukraine. According to Mackinder (1962), whoever controls the Heartland (the central region of Eurasia) will dominate the World-Island (Afro-Eurasia) and, therefore, the world. In this vein, Ukraine, as part of the Heartland's "ring of power," is crucial to Russia's territorial and economic expansion. Therefore, the 2022 invasion can be understood as an attempt by Russia to consolidate its control over this strategic region, securing natural resources and important trade routes to strengthen its hegemonic position in the international system.

In this context, Mackinder (1962) also warned that access to seashores from the Heartland would significantly increase the power of any state that controls it. Hence, Russia's interest in dominating the Black Sea and the Crimean Peninsula

is aligned with this geopolitical logic. Thus, the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the subsequent full-scale invasion of 2022 seek to ensure strategic access to warm ports and project power into Europe and beyond. However, Ukrainian resistance, backed by the West, has prevented Russia from achieving these strategic objectives fully, underscoring the geopolitical importance for the West, of Ukraine as a geographical barrier to Russian imperialist ambitions in Eastern Europe.

On the other hand, Nicholas Spykman's theory of Rimland complements the analysis of international relations by highlighting the critical role of coastal regions (rimlands) in containing the land power of the Heartland. According to Spykman (1969), whoever controls the rimlands will dominate Eurasia and, by extension, the world. In this framework, NATO and the European Union have acted as guarantors of geopolitical balance in Eastern Europe by supporting Ukraine against Russia. NATO's eastward expansion reinforces this containment system, while the economic and political integration offered by the European Union seeks to consolidate Ukraine as part of the western rimland. This scheme reflects a struggle for strategic control between land and sea powers.

Finally, critical geopolitics provides a different perspective by analyzing how the discourses constructed by belligerent actors influence global perceptions of conflict. Russia justifies its actions as a defensive response to NATO expansion and uses historical narratives to legitimize its intervention in Ukraine. For its part, Ukraine presents its struggle as a *heroic defense* of its national sovereignty in the face of unjustified aggression. These narratives not only shape national and international public opinions, but also influence political and military decisions made by third states. In Sharp's words:

Critical geopolitical approaches seek to examine how it is that international politics is imagined spatially or geographically and in so doing to uncover the politics involved in writing the geography of global space. Rather than arguing over the true effects of geography on international relations critical geopolitics asks whose models of international geography are used, and whose interests these models serve. that these have on the way the world and its workings are understood, and therefore the effects that this has on future political practice. (Sharp, 2009, pp. 358-359)

In addition to all the above, information warfare has been an essential component of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Digital platforms have become battlefields where opposing narratives are reproduced: Russia seeks to erode Western support for Ukraine through global disinformation campaigns, while Ukraine uses these same digital tools to mobilize international solidarity, in a clear strategy of critical geopolitics. This discursive phenomenon illustrates how geopolitical discourses adapt to the contemporary digital environment, expanding their reach and media impact.

Table 1. Theoretical overview of the research

Theory	Key features	Application to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict
Heartland	Control of the Eurasian Earth's core ensures global dominance. Strategic importance of Eastern Europe in the world order.	Russia seeks to consolidate its control over Ukraine as part of its Heartland.
Rimland	Control of coastal regions guarantees balance against land power. The emphasis is on maritime alliances in the Black Sea.	NATO and EU strengthen Ukraine as a natural barrier against post-Soviet Russian expansion.
Critical geopolitics	Discursive analysis and construction of narratives that legitimize political actions.	Russia presents invasion as defensive. Ukraine emphasizes national sovereignty discourse.

Source: prepared by the authors (2025) based on Spykman (1969), Mackinder (1962) and Sharp (2009).

The chart above (Table 1) illustrates how each theory offers complementary perspectives on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. While classical theories (Heartland and Rimland) explain the territorial and strategic dynamics underlying conflict, critical geopolitics of the twenty-first century highlights the role of media narratives in legitimizing political and military actions. Together, these theoretical perspectives allow for a more complete analysis of the conflict, considering both the material and symbolic factors that shape it in its historical-political course. However, and as it is logical to assume, new important questions arise from theoretical reflection, such as: How is the Heartland theory related to Russian

military strategy in Ukraine? Or what role does NATO play according to the Rimland theory in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict?

2. Methodology

In the words of Bracho, Caraballo, and Ardila (2015), the epistemology of chaos and complex thinking provide an innovative and eclectic theoretical framework for studying geopolitical phenomena such as the war in Ukraine. These paradigms conceptualize international systems as dynamic networks of interdependent elements, where small disturbances can trigger disproportionate effects (butterfly effect). For its part, for Lizcano (2021), chaos theory, applied to international relations, recognizes that armed conflicts emerge from non-linear dialectical interactions between political, economic, and social variables, impossible to reduce to simplistic cause-effect models.

This approach is particularly useful for understanding how the Russian invasion altered strategic and historical balances, generating cascading reactions in the current global order in the dialectical process. Thus, complex thinking complements the geopolitical and geohistorical vision by integrating multiple scales of analysis, from individual decisions of leaders to systemic power structures.

The methodology used also corresponds to documentary research based on critical observation and hermeneutics of rigorous academic sources, from the parameters of the American Educational Research Association (2025). In operational terms, scientific articles indexed in databases of recognized international value were selected, such as: Scopus and Web of Science, specialized monographs in post-Soviet geopolitics, and official data from organizations such

as NATO and the European Union. This selection criterion guarantees factual consistency and reduces interpretative biases, allowing different perspectives on the conflict to be triangulated.

In this order of ideas, the qualitative content analysis technique, applied to political discourses and strategic documents, reveals patterns in the geopolitical narratives of the actors involved. Cross-validation of primary sources (treaties, government statements) and secondary sources (academic studies) are combined to ensure methodological quality. In the words of Preiser et al. (2022):

Qualitative methods of content analysis seek to find and examine patterns of sense-making and meaning creation in the communicative characteristics of language, by focusing on the content and underlying themes and meaning that emerge in a text (in either written or spoken form). The word ‘text’ here points to a wide range of phenomena such as descriptions, accounts, opinions and feelings that are conveyed in a variety of representations, not only as letters on a white page or screen. Qualitative data can be represented in words, pictures and even sounds. (2022, p. 270)

In this methodological context, the prospective analysis used is characterized by its orientation towards the construction of plausible, non-predictive future scenarios. Following the ideas of Brannen (2020), this method harmonizes structural analysis (identification of key variables) with strategic imagination exercises, assessing how interactions between political, military, and economic factors can generate different trajectories of conflict.

More specifically, for Portillo de Hernández and Ortega (2004), the stages of this type of prospective analysis include: 1) Mapping of actors and their interests, 2) Identification of critical variables, 3) Construction of cross-impact matrices, and 4) Development of scenarios. Unlike retrospective studies, this

approach prioritizes the identification of inflection points and irreversibility thresholds in conflicting dynamics.

Table 2. Basis of Prospective Analysis

Variable	Description	Source of Assessment
1. Geopolitical objectives	Territorial interests, strategic alliances and regional/global power projection.	Presidential Speeches and Military Doctrines (Kissinger, 2016).
2. Geostrategic needs	Objective requirements for maintaining territorial cohesion and national identity.	National Security Policies.
3. Comprehensive capabilities	Synergy between economic, technological, military resources and political capital of a State.	OECD indicators, defense budgets (How, 2022)
4. Anchoring Ideas	Historical and cultural narratives that legitimize political actions.	Media analysis, discourse analysis, critical geopolitics (Sharp, 2009).
5. Block hypothesis	Assumptions about expected behaviors of strategic alliances (NATO, BRICS, EU, etc.)	International treaties, military exercises.

Source: prepared by the authors (2025)

It is worth mentioning that the dialectical interaction of these variables configures the analytical panorama of the study. Geopolitical objectives (variable 1) act as driving forces, while comprehensive capabilities (variable 3) determine the operational limits of states. Narratives and discourses (variable 4) function as mechanisms of internal cohesion, essential to sustain prolonged war efforts and to legitimize the interests of power.

In this epistemological context, prospective analysis reveals to understanding that changes in any of these elements (material and symbolic, objective or subjective) can drastically alter the dynamics of conflict, particularly through positive feedback effects identified in chaos theory (Bracho et al., 2015). For example, a technological improvement in Ukrainian defensive capabilities

(variable 3) could amplify its political resilience (variable 2), generating a virtuous cycle that modifies Russian strategic calculations. For these reasons, this methodology allows us to visualize how specific combinations of variables (qualitative and quantitative) produce or modify differentiated scenarios or escalations of the conflict.

3. Prospective scenarios for peace in Ukraine: strategic challenges and resources

In general terms, a prospective scenario constitutes an analytical exercise that explores plausible future trajectories based on critical variables and systemic dynamics (Baena, 2004). In this article, the formulation of four scenarios responds to the need to anticipate how Ukrainian strategic resources and geopolitical dynamics will shape peace negotiations soon, much more so since these scenarios, developed under methodological rigor and creative capacity, seek to provide clarity on the possible futures that will determine Ukraine's fate in the coming decades. Specifically, three main scenarios are proposed: (blue, black and red) and a fourth alternative or special scenario (green), each with unique implications for European and global regional stability in the 21st century.

3.1. Blue scenario: early negotiation and multilateral benefit

In this scenario, an ideal but unlikely scenario, an international mediation led by the European Union and the United Nations achieves a ceasefire in 2025, followed by negotiations that prioritize Ukrainian territorial integrity and the demilitarization of border areas with Russia. In this scenario, the Ukrainian public administration, strengthened by EU-supported anti-corruption reforms, implements efficient mechanisms to manage strategic resources such as lithium

deposits in Donetsk and the Black Sea agricultural corridors, in accordance with the EU's strategic objectives:

Looking ahead, the EU can put ever more emphasis on conflict prevention as well as long term peacebuilding, and increasingly work in an integrated manner with Member States on the ground, as well as with all relevant international, regional, state and non-state actors in any particular conflict setting (2019 reviewed EU Global Strategy) (European Union, 2022, p. 1).

In the experience of the authors of this research, multilevel governance, which involves local governments and civil organizations, facilitates the reintegration of occupied territories through "community reconciliation programs." In this context, national security is "guaranteed" by a non-aggression treaty backed by NATO military conditions, while Russia obtains regulated access to Ukrainian ports under international supervision, as Fluri, Koziel, and Yermolaiev (2013) assume.

The equitable distribution of energy resources (such as shale gas on the Dnieper) becomes a pillar of the agreement, with European and Russian companies participating in mixed consortia. This model, inspired by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's "cooperative security" approach, reduces Europe's dependence on Russian gas while diversifying Ukrainian exports. The EU establishes a €500 billion reconstruction fund, linking disbursements to institutional reforms and environmental audits. This scenario stabilizes the borders, but leaves Crimea's status pending, postponing its resolution to a process of internationally supervised popular consultations (European Union, 2022).

3.2. Black scenario: war escalation and regional fragmentation

In this not inconsiderable scenario, the breakdown of negotiations in 2026 triggers a military escalation with the direct entry of Belarusian troops into the conflict and Russian cyberattacks on critical infrastructure in Poland. Ukraine, facing an offensive in Kherson and Zaporizhzhia, is resorting to urban guerrilla tactics as Russia mobilizes 500,000 reservists. Natural resources become spoils of war: Moscow occupies 80% of Ukraine's neon reserves (key for semiconductors), paralyzing global technology industries. For authors such as Rumer (2023), Ukrainian state unity fractures when separatist groups in Odessa proclaim a "Southeastern Government" allied with Russia and backed by Iran with kamikaze drones.

Image 1. Nuclear weapons



Source: (BBC, 2022)

Again, the West responds with sanctions on 100% of Russian exports of enriched uranium and deploys NATO brigades in Moldova, causing China to activate mutual defense clauses with Russia. In such a scenario, the United Nations is likely to report at least 15 million displaced people and the destruction of 60% of Ukrainian agricultural infrastructure, generating food crises in Africa and the Middle East. In the words of Vorozhko (2025), a geopolitical event of this magnitude consolidates a "new bipolar order" where in practice the control of strategic resources replaces international law, with Russia establishing a land corridor to Transnistria and the EU radically militarizing its foreign policy.

3.3. Red scenario: systemic stagnation and attrition

The conflict drags on until 2030 without significant territorial advances, depleting the economic reserves of both sides. In this way, Ukraine suffers a loss of at least 30% of its GDP and a diaspora of 8 million people, while Russia faces a fiscal deficit of 12% due to the costs of its military occupation. The Ukrainian military industry, reorganized into decentralized micro-factories, produces cheap drones that inflict daily losses on Russia, but without the capacity for decisive counteroffensives. Globally, strategic resources are losing value in the face of mining automation and the replacement of Ukrainian wheat with hydroponic crops in Saudi Arabia (Rumer, 2023).

In the red scenario, demographic erosion is exacerbated: Ukraine registers a fertility rate of 0.8 children per woman, and Russia mobilizes prisoners to compensate for military casualties. This stalemate favors non-state actors: Russian private military companies control mines in Donbas, while Ukrainian militias financed by cryptocurrencies operate behind enemy lines. The EU, divided between pro- and anti-war factions, reduces its military support by 40%,

transferring responsibilities to Turkey and the United Kingdom, among other emerging actors.

3.4. Green scenario: technological innovation and hybrid peace

This fourth alternative scenario, which should not be ignored by stakeholders, emerges as advances in artificial intelligence (AI) and clean energy reconfigure the foundations of warfare in general in the digital age. Imagining the possible future, Vorozhko (2025) assumes that satellites with AI identify troop movements in real time, thus making strategic surprises impossible and forcing the option of negotiations in 2027. Beyond the pretensions of the United States, Ukraine capitalizes on its rare earths to manufacture lithium-ion batteries, attracting investments from Tesla and Siemens. For its part, Russia is exchanging gas for Ukrainian carbon capture technology, while NATO is establishing a "green zone" in the Black Sea with solar-powered drone patrols. It should be clear that, in any imaginable scenario:

CEPA says that "Ukraine and Europe" must be included in any peace talks with Russia, that the U.S. should support "a European-led coalition of the willing" to enforce any "ceasefire line with an international force," and that "European allies must make consistent and as rapid as possible progress toward Ukraine's accession to the European Union. (Vorozhko, 2025, par. 8)

Table 3. Comparative view of the scenarios

Scenario	Key Variables	Impact on Resources	Role of External Actors	Time Horizon
Blue	Transparent governance and cooperative security.	International consortia manage Ukrainian resources.	EU as lead mediator.	2025-2030
Black	State fragmentation and regional militarization.	Hoarding of available resources by brute force.	China/Iran support Russia.	2026-2035
Red	War economies, decentralization and gradual fragmentation.	Strategic devaluation.	Turkey/United Kingdom assume leadership in the conflict.	2025-2030
Green	Disruptive technology and clean energy.	Resources as a currency of peace.	Multinational corporations take on greater prominence.	2027-2040

Source: own elaboration (2025)

Everything seems to indicate that the **blue scenario** reinforces multilateralism but perpetuates asymmetries and North-South tensions by linking reconstruction with neoliberal adjustments. The black scenario, on the other hand, enshrines the law of the strongest, encouraging medium-sized powers such as Iran to develop nuclear arsenals. Next, the **red** scenario delegitimizes global institutions, while the **green** one transfers power to unelected technocratic actors. In a synthesis view, Ukrainian resources operate as "transversal variables": in cooperation scenarios (blue/green) they facilitate interdependencies, while in conflict scenarios (black/red) they become instruments of coercion at the service of the powers (Russia/USA). In any case, these scenarios show that peace does not

depend only on political will, but on how natural resources and political will are integrated into innovative and dynamic security architectures.

Conclusion

The findings presented here reflect our perspective as researchers committed to a peaceful resolution that prioritizes Ukraine's comprehensive reconstruction and prevents future conflicts. This reflective exercise seeks to transcend merely technical analyses, integrating ethical considerations about the human cost of war. We believe that any solution must balance Ukrainian national sovereignty with regional stability, ensuring at every turn that the historical mistakes of violent imposition of geopolitical orders are not repeated.

Competition for Ukrainian strategic resources (rare earths, shale gas, agricultural corridors) acts as a catalyst for tensions, making lasting agreements difficult. From our point of view, the control of these natural resources determines negotiating positions: Russia seeks to ensure access to ports and minerals, while the West seeks to weaken Moscow's energy dependence. This dynamic of antagonistic interests turns Ukraine into an economic battleground, where creative solutions – such as international management consortia – could transform resources from "spoils of war" into pillars of international cooperation.

Ukraine's accession to NATO, prevented by Russia at all costs, and the EU would radically alter the geopolitical balance. As Deloitte (2024) points out, membership would give Brussels direct influence over 45% of Europe's Ukrainian lithium reserves, reconfiguring strategic supply chains. For Russia, this would amount to an existential defeat, accelerating its rapprochement with China. However, a gradual integration with energy neutrality clauses could ease tensions,

allowing Ukraine to capitalize on its resources without provoking direct confrontations.

Under the current circumstances, ensuring Ukraine's territorial integrity in the post-conflict period requires innovative mechanisms. We propose a hybrid system, with interposition troops from non-aligned countries (India, Brazil) in border areas; international audits on resource extraction through blockchain, and an arbitral tribunal for commercial disputes under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe OSCE. As history shows, transparency in resource management reduces incentives for covert occupations. Therefore, a Shared Resources Fund administered by the European Bank for Reconstruction could finance Russian-Ukrainian binational projects.

Thinking about the work of the political actors involved in the conflict, we think of a set of key recommendations that can also be useful to international leaders:

- Asymmetrical multilateralism: consists of designing schemes where emerging powers (Turkey, Indonesia) actively mediate, breaking the bipolar logic.
- Technology as a mediating force involves using AI platforms to monitor deals and distribute resource royalties.
- Conditional amnesties: Offer sanctions relief to Russia for verified demilitarization of mining areas.
- Citizen diplomacy: involves including Ukrainian NGOs in negotiations, especially on issues of ecological reconstruction.

In this conflict, we must not lose sight of the fact that Ukrainian resources will operate as "geopolitical currency" in the coming negotiations, sooner or later. A strategic value – from 20% of global wheat exports to critical neon reserves – makes them elements of simultaneous pressure and cooperation (European Union, 2022). In such a reality, the key lies in avoiding its absolute politicization, linking its exploitation to local development projects that benefit communities affected by the war.

Finally, and simplifying things, the most plausible scenario, considering current trends, is a variant of the red scenario: prolonged conflict with outbreaks of varying intensity until 2028. We emphasize that the conjugation of the sources with the analytical apparatus of the study allowed us to conclude that the most plausible scenario, considering current geopolitical trends, is a variant of the red scenario: prolonged conflict with outbreaks of variable intensity until 2028.

Factors such as Russian military attrition, Ukrainian resistance and Western donor fatigue point to a dynamic stagnation of the belligerent actors, in terms of resources and capacities for action. However, as Spykman's (1969) foresight methodology warns, unforeseen events (leadership changes, climate crises, or state bankruptcies) could tip the balance toward abrupt solutions, whether catastrophic (black) or innovative (green). The window to avoid this fate is shrinking rapidly as the war continues.

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