

## The Ukraine War, Geopolitics and South Africa's Search for Meaning.

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Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the war has progressed through several phases. At a military level, armed forces and staff colleges around the world are studying the war in great detail. Major interstate war, it seems, had not become the relic of the past that many predicted it to be in the last thirty years. At a regional level, the Ukraine war had a fundamental impact on the security of Europe and the thinking within Europa about its relations with its neighbours to the east. In reality, Russia's strategic perception is shaped by war at two levels: an immediate and direct conflict with Ukraine; and a long-term metaphysical war with the "West". In orchestration of both the war in Ukraine and the metaphysical war with the West, the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, brought geopolitical alignments around the world into sharp focus; reminiscent of the Cold War period that was fundamental in shaping his *Weltanschauung*.

The discussion aims at providing an outline of the unfolding of the war in Ukraine; its fundamental impact on Europe and the West; and important geopolitical shifts brought about by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This ought to provide a broad framework to also reflect on South Africa's response to the war and its geostrategic positioning because of the war.

### Résumé

Abel Esterhuyse is an associate professor in the Department of Strategic Studies in the Faculty of Military Science, Stellenbosch University at the South African Military Academy. Holding a PhD from the University of Stellenbosch, he is also a graduate of The Senior Leadership Programme of the African Center for Strategic Studies in Washington DC; The Summer Programme in Military History at the US Military Academy, West Point; and the Programme on the Analysis of Military Operations and Strategy (SWAMOS) of Columbia University's Saltzman Institute of War and Peace Studies in New York. Before joining academia, he served as an officer in the South African Army. A rated scientist of the South African National Research Foundation, he specialises in South African security and defence, military and strategic theory, and contemporary conflict. His most recent publication is a co-authored journal article titled 'South African defence decision-making: analysing dysfunctional approaches'.

*saam vorentoe · masiye phambili · forward together*

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