

Alexander Theodor Narbut,

TRiZ Master by G.S.Altshuller, D.Sc., Professor.

COMCON^TRiZ & FRT Corporation (Ukraine, R.Korea)

Alexander.Narbut@gmail.com

The Anatomy of Failure:

Problems of Moscow's Strategy in Ukraine

1. Introduction & The Grand Delusion

Dear colleagues.

We are gathered here to analyze one of the most profound geopolitical and military miscalculations of the 21st century: Moscow's grand strategy in its war against Ukraine.

When Vladimir Putin launched the full-scale invasion, the Kremlin did not just expect a quick operational victory; they expected a tectonic shift in the global security architecture. They envisioned a shattered Ukraine, a paralyzed NATO, and a triumphant Russia dictating terms to a fragmented West.

Instead, Moscow found itself trapped in a multi-year war of attrition. The conflict has drained Russia's Soviet-era stockpiles, decimated its economy, and triggered severe internal strains. Today, we will dissect the 12 most critical elements of Moscow's strategy and expose the structural flaws that turned their imperial ambitions into a strategic catastrophe.

2. The 12 Elements of Moscow's Strategy & Why They Failed

Element 1: The "Decapitation Strike" (Blitzkrieg)

- **The Strategy:** Moscow aimed to capture Kyiv within 72 hours, assassinate or capture Ukraine's political leadership, and install a pro-Russian puppet regime.
- **Why it Failed: Inflexible Command & Defiant Resistance.** The plan relied on absolute secrecy, which blinded Russia's own frontline commanders. They expected a logistical parade, not a fight. Ukraine's rapid decentralization of command, coupled with fierce civil-military resistance and the unexpected resolve of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, shattered the blitzkrieg model in the opening days.

Element 2: Shock and Awe through "Air Supremacy"

- **The Strategy:** To neutralize Ukraine's air force and air defenses in the opening hours, allowing Russian bombers to operate freely across the country.
- **Why it Failed: Failure in SEAD (Suppression of Enemy Air Defenses).** Russian forces failed to conduct complex, synchronized electronic warfare and air strikes. Ukraine successfully dispersed its air defense assets. Over time, Western-supplied systems (from Patriots to NASAMS) turned Ukrainian air-space into a deadly zone for Russian jets, forcing Moscow to rely on expensive missiles and drones rather than tactical aviation.

Element 3: Massive Armor Breakthroughs (The BTG Doctrine)

- **The Strategy:** Relying on Battalion Tactical Groups (BTGs)—heavily armed, mechanized units—to punch deep lines through Ukrainian territory, following classic Soviet deep-battle doctrine.
- **Why it Failed: Logistical Fragility & Modern Anti-Tank Weapons.** BTGs proved to be structurally flawed. They lacked sufficient infantry to protect their flanks. Ukrainian forces, utilizing lightweight anti-tank guided missiles (ATGMs) like Javelins and NLAWs, combined with commercial drones, systematically picked apart Russian armored columns stuck on choked highways.

Element 4: Weaponization of Energy (The "Winter Freeze")

- **The Strategy:** Cutting off natural gas and oil to Europe while launching massive missile strikes on Ukraine's energy grid to break domestic morale and force Western capitulation.
- **Why it Failed: Western Adaptation & Structural Resilience.** Europe diversified its energy supply with unprecedented speed, shifting to LNG and renewables. Meanwhile, Ukraine developed highly sophisticated rapid-repair protocols for its grid. Instead of breaking morale, the strikes solidified Ukrainian hatred of the invader and accelerated Western air defense deliveries.

Element 5: Nuclear Blackmail and Strategic Deterrence

- **The Strategy:** Using aggressive nuclear rhetoric and tactical missile testing (like the recent *Oreshnik* system) to draw a "red line," forcing the West to abandon military aid to Ukraine.
- **Why it Failed: The "Salami-Slicing" Counter-Strategy.** The West gradually learned to manage escalation by slowly expanding the scope of aid—moving from helmets to Javelins, then to tanks, Patriots, F-16s, and long-range missiles. By the time Moscow threatened retaliation, its "red lines" had lost their psychological credibility, transforming nuclear threats into diplomatic background noise.

Element 6: Demographic Mass and "Meat Assaults"

- **The Strategy:** Utilizing Russia's 4.5-to-1 population advantage over Ukraine through partial mobilizations, prison recruitment, and financially incentivized contracts to overwhelm Ukrainian lines via pure mass.
- **Why it Failed: Extreme Attrition & Drone Warfare.** Modern warfare values precision over raw numbers. The emergence of FPV (First-Person View) drones and advanced artillery cluster munitions turned these "human wave" tactics into a meat grinder. Moscow faces massive casualty rates—exceeding 1,400 men per day in peak offensive periods—leading to long-term demographic collapse and domestic recruitment crises.

Element 7: Global South Diplomatic Isolation Bypass

- **The Strategy:** Cultivating alternative diplomatic and economic blocs (BRICS, ties with African and Latin American states) to prove that Russia cannot be

isolated by the Western coalition.

- **Why it Failed: Transactional Alliances.** While countries like India or China buy discounted Russian oil, they refuse to provide overt, unrestricted military alliances or validate Moscow's territorial annexations. Russia's dependency on pariah states like North Korea for artillery shells and Iran for drones exposed its isolation rather than hiding it.

Element 8: Internal Security and "Autocratic Stability"

- **The Strategy:** Total suppression of domestic dissent, labeling any anti-war sentiment as "terrorism," and shifting the Russian economy to a permanent wartime footing to insulate the regime.
- **Why it Failed: Hidden Cracks & Economic Overheating.** While Putin maintains tight political control, the cracks are economic and structural. Inflation is skyrocketing, the central bank interest rates are unsustainably high, and Russia has burned through a massive portion of its liquid sovereign wealth funds. The economy is artificially propped up by military spending, which creates a highly unstable bubble.

Element 9: Hybrid Warfare, Sabotage, and Cyber Attacks

- **The Strategy:** Executing continuous cyber strikes against Western infrastructure, jamming GPS signals over the Baltics, and funding covert sabotage operations across Europe to destabilize Ukraine's rear support.
- **Why it Failed: Enhanced Collective Western Defenses.** Ukraine's cyber defenses, hardened by years of Russian aggression and backed by tech giants like Microsoft, proved incredibly resilient. In Europe, instead of causing panic, Russian gray-zone sabotage has forced NATO members to treat hybrid threats as active security priorities, driving deeper intelligence integration.

Element 10: Attrition via Soviet Stockpile Depletion

- **The Strategy:** Out-lasting Ukraine by pulling thousands of Soviet-era tanks, artillery pieces, and armored vehicles out of deep storage, assuming Russian industrial mass would outproduce Western factories.
- **Why it Failed: The "Late-2026" Equipment Horizon.** Soviet stockpiles are finite. Analysts show that by late 2026 or early 2027, Russia's active reserves of easily refurbishable tanks and artillery will face a critical exhaustion point. Rebuilding completely new manufacturing lines takes a decade, meaning Moscow's material edge is on a ticking clock.

Element 11: Cognitive Warfare and Disinformation

- **The Strategy:** Sowing political polarization in the US and Europe via deep-fakes, bot farms, and proxy media to convince Western voters that supporting Ukraine is a "lost cause."
- **Why it Failed: Bipartisan Institutional Reality.** While political rhetoric fluctuates during election cycles, institutional support for Ukraine has remained structurally resilient. The geopolitical reality—that a Russian victory would destabilize the entire global economy—keeps Western assistance flowing despite Moscow's intense disinformation campaigns.

Element 12: Creeping Annexation and "Russification"

- **The Strategy:** Staging sham referendums, forcibly issuing Russian passports, and structurally integrating occupied Ukrainian territories into the Russian Federation to present a *fait accompli* to the world.
- **Why it Failed: Asymmetric Resistance and Deep Long-Range Strikes.** Ukraine refused to accept frozen frontlines. Utilizing long-range drone and missile strikes, Ukrainian forces have consistently targeted military infrastructure deep inside Crimea and occupied areas, turning these annexed zones into high-risk, economically draining battlegrounds rather than stable asset zones.

3. The Core Strategic Errors: Why Russia Cannot Win

If we step back from these 12 individual elements, we can synthesize Moscow's failure into three overarching strategic errors:

I. The Hubris of Bureaucratic Sycophancy

The Russian decision-making apparatus suffers from a classic autocratic feedback loop. For years, intelligence agencies told Putin what he wanted to hear: that Ukraine was a fake nation, its army would collapse, and the West was weak. Corruption eroded the real capabilities of the Russian military, but on paper, everything looked pristine. You cannot execute a successful strategy when your initial data is a total lie.

II. Third-Class Economy vs. First-Class Ambitions

As military historian Pavel Baev noted, Russia attempted to build a first-class military machine while possessing a third-class economy heavily reliant on hydrocarbons. Moscow quintupled its military budget, spending nearly 9% of its GDP on the war. This level of spending is approaching late-Soviet levels during the Afghanistan campaign—a trajectory that is historically unsustainable and leads directly to economic collapse.

III. Underestimating Asymmetric Innovation

Moscow planned for a 20th-century conventional war. They were utterly unprepared for 21st-century distributed, tech-driven warfare. Ukraine's rapid integration of civilian technology—such as using AI for targeting, commercial Starlink networks, and mass-produced maritime drones that effectively drove the Russian Black Sea Fleet out of occupied Crimea—completely neutralized Russia's traditional advantages in size and heavy metal.

4. Conclusion & Q&A

To conclude: Moscow is currently trapped in a negative equilibrium. It is paying an extraordinary price in human lives, economic stability, and long-term sovereign power for minimal, grinding tactical advances measured in meters per day.

The problems with Moscow's strategy are not accidental; they are structural. They are baked into the very nature of the Russian regime—a system built on corruption, historical revisionism, and a fundamental misunderstanding of modern sovereignty. Ukraine has denied a nuclear superpower an easy victory and exposed its conventional limits to the world.

As we look ahead, the lesson of Moscow's failed strategy is clear: raw mass and imperial nostalgia are no match for a unified, technologically innovative nation fighting for its survival, backed by a resilient international coalition.

Thank you very much. I am now open to your questions.