

# The war in Ukraine: A battle of GDPs

Most people realize that the war between Russia and Ukraine isn't a fair fight. To get a precise sense of just how unfair the fight

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is, we can turn to Gross Domestic Product (GDP). GDP is a measure of the value of a country's output. Countries with higher GDPs have more productive capacity to produce war materials. Generally, the

country with a larger GDP will win a prolonged war.

History is filled with examples of conflicts where the countries with the larger GDP started off a war by losing battles but eventually won the war because their opponents couldn't keep up with their capacity for making weapons. In the Civil War, the North eventually wore down the South. In World War II, the U.S. overwhelmed Japan. For instance, according to the historian John Keegan, in a single year during World War II, Japan built five aircraft carriers, the most important weapon of war in the Pacific theater. In that same year, the U.S. built 14 of its largest aircraft carriers. Japan couldn't keep up. If the war did not end quickly, America's production capacity would be

more decisive than the outcome of any battle.

Russia has the same advantage that the North had in the Civil War and that the U.S. had in World War II: it has a larger GDP. Russia's GDP is \$1.4 trillion per year while Ukraine's GDP is only \$155.4 billion per year. So Russia's GDP is about ten times the size of Ukraine's GDP.

To put this in perspective, we can think about the GDPs of individual states. Russia's GDP is about the same size as Florida's GDP; Ukraine's GDP is about the same size as Arkansas's GDP. This really does put things in perspective. Imagine a war between Florida and Arkansas. Florida has many major cities such as Miami and Tampa. Arkansas doesn't really have any major cities. It wouldn't be a fair fight. Even if Arkansas won a battle or two, Florida has so much more production capacity that it would soon gain an edge.

Russia appears to be gaining the edge now. It is true that Ukraine did well in the beginning of the war. It beat back Russian troops near Kiev. But now that Russia is concentrating its troops in Southern Ukraine, it is taking territory and it appears ready to roll through the region.

However, a Russian victory is not inevitable. Yes, Ukraine has a smaller GDP than Russia. But

Ukraine could win if it got enough help from the West. The reason why comes down to GDPs. The countries in the West have GDPs that dwarf Russia's GDP. The European Union's GDP is ten times the size as Russia's GDP. The U.S.'s GDP is 15 times the size of Russia's GDP. If the European Union and the U.S. make a serious and substantial commitment to arming Ukraine, the tide of the battle in Southern Ukraine could turn. The Western powers have so much production capacity that they can outproduce Russia in the same way that Russia can outproduce Ukraine.

What is needed from the Western powers is a commitment to arm Ukraine. So far, our arms shipments have been small weapons, such as stingers and drones. These weapons worked fine in the hilly regions in Northern Ukraine. To win in the flat lands of Southern Ukraine, the Ukrainians need heavy weapons, such as tanks and aircraft. These are expensive. The western powers will have to make sacrifices to provide enough of these heavy weapons to change the outcome of the war. However, this cost will be minor compared to the cost of defending a NATO nation should Russia win in Ukraine and become emboldened to try to expand its empire once more.