

## ABOUT THIS INITIATIVE

**Briefs**, scans the best academic platforms, national newspapers, and leading think tanks to pick the most relevant articles and research. It converts them into crisp, high-impact points you can directly use in your Mains answers.



## TODAY'S ARTICLES (fill in)

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# The Curse of Middle-Sized Wars

*In Iran, Trump Risks Falling Into a Familiar Trap*

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War: The World in Permanent Crisis*

[More by Robert D. Kaplan →](#)

**Context** The article argues that Donald Trump's Iran policy risks dragging U.S. into a destructive "middle-sized war" - a neither small nor total conflict that historically damages democracies, erodes public support & spirals beyond its aims.

## Facts

- James Stokesbury (1988) argued that democracies handle either small wars or total wars better than "middle-sized wars".
- A middle-sized war is one in which some citizens fight while the rest stay detached from the conflict.
- Grenada (1983) & Panama (1989) are examples of U.S. small wars.
- Bosnia (1995) & Kosovo (1999) were limited air operations.
- Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan & Iraq are U.S. middle-sized wars.

## Theoretical lens + Verbatim Quotes

- **Thucydidean triad** "Fear, Honour, Interest as driver of interstate conflict."  
The Greek historian Thucydides identified honor as a cause for conflict between states.
- **Clausewitzian theory of war** Clausewitz distinguished limited war from other wars; a limited war aims to hurt the enemy, not destroy it fully.  
"As Clausewitz wrote - war is the province of uncertainty; 3/4 of the things on which action in war is based lie hidden in the fog of a greater or lesser uncertainty."
- **Powell Doctrine** Colin Powell, as chairman of the Joint Chiefs in the early post-Cold War era, laid out Powell Doctrine. It called for overwhelming force, a clear objective, an exit strategy, a vital national interest before going to war.

## Analytical Crucx

America usually does not fail in very small wars or total wars; it fails in middle-sized wars that begin limited but slowly become quagmires. Kaplan warns that Iran could become another such trap, where striking is easy but stabilizing the aftermath is nearly impossible.

The article shows that the biggest U.S. mistakes come from misreading local realities while thinking only in geopolitical terms.

Its real message is that imperial overreach often begins with arrogance, incremental escalation & no serious day-after plan.

So, the safest strategy for a great power is restraint: enter no conflict without clear goals, local understanding and a credible exit.



## Article - 2

**Context** This article explains why Russia sees Ukraine as central to its security sphere, but argues that using force to enforce such a sphere ultimately makes the region more unstable rather than more secure.

## Theoretical lens + Verbatim Quotes

**Realism** "At the same time, the realist embrace of sphere of influence logic is not without its shortcomings."

"As the Balance of Power theories explain - weak states resent dominance & find ways to reduce it."

## Facts

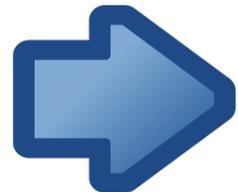
- Russia used force in its neighbourhood in Georgia (2008), Ukraine (2014) & full scale invasion (2022).
- Ukraine stopped importing Russian natural gas in 2015, but its wider energy system remained tied to Russian supply chains before 2022.

**Sphere of influence & International Anarchy** "Russia's experience in its 'near abroad' provides an apt example of the sphere of influence logic articulated by Stephen M. Walt, who argues that it is 'both an inevitable result of international anarchy and an imperfect solution to the competitive incentives that anarchy creates.'"

**Security Dilemma** "This decoupling of economic integration from military alignment will create space to address Moscow's security dilemma & define Kyiv by its capacity, not by alignment."

**Liberal Internationalism / Sovereign Equality** "Liberal internationalists argue that, under the UN charter, all states possess equal sovereignty and that powerful countries should not impose their will on weaker ones."

## Analytical Crux



Russia attacked Ukraine partly out of a classic great-power fear: a big power wants strategic control in its neighbourhood and sees outside military entry there as a direct threat. But the paradox is that the more Russia tried to enforce this sphere of influence through force, the more it destroyed its own position by pushing Ukraine deeper into anti-Russian nationalism and pushing Europe closer to Western alliance.



So, the article's core point is that sphere-of-influence logic may explain why wars begin, but it cannot build a stable peace. Lasting peace needs security arrangements that respect Ukrainian sovereignty, address Russian security concerns and avoid turning every issue into a choice between NATO expansion and Russian domination.

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