

U.S. Officials Believe That ‘We’ Are at War With Russia

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Could someone please tell Sen. Lindsey Graham, one of the Senate’s premier warmongers, that “we” are not at war with Russia? Ukraine is.

The grandstanding warrior wannabe recently visited Kiev. The Zelensky government is under pressure to expand conscription to bulk up its army. Graham enthusiastically backed the effort. Reported the Washington Post: “I would hope that those eligible to serve in the Ukrainian military would join. I can’t believe it’s at 27,’ he told reporters Monday. ‘You’re in a fight for your life, so you should be serving—not at 25 or 27.’” He insisted: “We need more people in the line.”

We? When did Graham accept Ukrainian citizenship and enter the Ukrainian Rada?

Graham is one of many witless American officials who seem to believe that they are to represent foreign countries dealing with the U.S. rather than the U.S. in dealing with foreign countries. This isn’t a new phenomenon. People often have been devoted to other nations reflecting their ethnic or religious background, supporting everything up to military intervention by Washington, often to America’s great disadvantage. A commitment to ancestral homelands accounted for significant backing for NATO’s ill-fated expansion up to Russia’s borders. (So did the desire of the merchants of death to open new markets for weapons sales.)

Graham appears to have a bizarre enthusiasm for sending others off to war, here, there, and almost everywhere. *Send* is the key verb, at least until now. If *we* really “need more people in the line,” he could join Ukraine’s forces. After all, Kiev is calling on foreigners to bolster its defense. Several already have died fighting for Ukraine. Graham could finally put his life, rather than the rest of our lives, where his mouth is.

Ukrainians would welcome the move. Many Americans would as well. Graham could demonstrate that he isn’t just a showboating blowhard pretending to be tough, finally fighting in one of the wars into which he desperately sought to plunge the U.S.

The overriding duty of American officeholders is to serve the American people. Indeed, that is why the national government exists. Washington’s foreign policy should focus on U.S. national interests, particularly protecting America’s people, territory, prosperity, and constitutional system.

Of course, the means adopted should reflect the rights and interests of others. Washington has often fallen short of that ideal. Support for a murderous medley of repressive regimes during the

Cold War was terrible but at least understandable. Underwriting mass killers and oppressors in such nations as Egypt and Saudi Arabia—particular favorites of dictator fanboy Graham—today is less forgivable.

At least Ukraine deserves our sympathy, in contrast to such ruthless autocracies. Nevertheless, even Kiev's fight is more complicated than commonly presented. Ukraine is hardly a Western-style liberal democracy. Freedom House rates Kiev only "partly free," hardly a ringing endorsement. The latter's leaders indulge in demagoguery and demonization against foreigners who don't kowtow and back their demands. (Russia, of course, is more oppressive and its brutal invasion, which has wreaked such carnage for both countries, was not justified, despite the West's reckless and belligerent behavior. Primary blame for the war remains with Moscow.)

Nevertheless, for Washington, Americans' interests should remain central. It is one thing to wish Kiev well. It is quite another to launch a global nuclear war on its behalf, as proposed by Mississippi's reckless, even unhinged, Sen. Roger Wicker. Those pressing to arm Ukraine irrespective of consequences and undertake the most aggressive ends—retake Crimea, overthrow the Putin government, and break up the Russian Federation—are only slightly less foolish. The U.S. already is responsible for the deaths of thousands of Russian soldiers. With a nuclear arsenal that matches America's, Moscow can respond forcefully, and with a military doctrine that relies on nuclear weapons to cover its relative conventional weakness is likely to do so if it fears defeat.

Nothing about the Russo-Ukrainian conflict warrants risking war with Russia.

Of course, the Ukraine lobby puts forth several reasons why Washington policymakers should put Kiev's desires first. None are persuasive. One is that if victorious, Putin's legions aren't likely to stop, but would surge westward. A new evil empire would be born.

It is difficult to articulate what Moscow would hope to gain from assaulting the rest of the continent. Indeed, Putin, noting such hysterical claims, responded, "The whole of NATO cannot fail to understand that Russia has no reason, no interest—neither geopolitical, nor economic, nor political, nor military—to fight with NATO countries." Of course, nothing he says should be taken on faith, just as it would be foolish to trust U.S. and allied officials who have violated their commitments and lied about their plans.

Nevertheless, while Putin is not a gentle liberal, he also isn't a militaristic lunatic. Indeed, he originally hoped for a positive relationship with the West, telling the German Bundestag in 2001: "No one calls in question the great value of Europe's relations with the United States. I am just of the opinion that Europe will reinforce its reputation of a strong and truly independent center of world politics soundly and for a long time if it succeeds in bringing together its own potential and that of Russia, including its human, territorial and natural resources and its economic, cultural and defense potential."

Nothing Putin has said or done since suggests he is interested in European conquest. His military assaults, while lawless, have been limited to Georgia and Ukraine, and do not make him Hitler reincarnated. Even now President George W. Bush is responsible for far more civilian deaths.

Moscow always viewed Tbilisi and Kiev differently and made clear NATO expansion could trigger a violent response. In 2008, CIA Director William Burns, then U.S. ambassador to Russia, expressed what today would be dismissed as Putin talking points: “Ukrainian entry into NATO is the brightest of all redlines for the Russian elite (not just Putin). In more than two and a half years of conversations with key Russian players.... I have yet to find anyone who views Ukraine in NATO as anything other than a direct challenge to Russian interests.”

Equally important, who imagines that the Russian army, which in more than two years of war in Ukraine has suffered severe losses while making only modest territorial gains, would go on to conquer the Baltics and Poland, march down the Unter den Linden in Berlin, sweep past the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, and reach the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean? Even over the long-term Moscow’s military potential remains limited. Europe possesses a much larger economy and population than Russia; the European governments already spend far more on the military. The key to Europe’s defense is *Europe*, not Ukraine.

Much is made about the supposed malign precedent set by a potential Russian victory. Then authoritarians everywhere—meaning China, North Korea, and Iran, after which the list of expected evildoers and aggressors runs out—would take note and launch their own bids for world domination. Yet this claim also makes little sense.

Aggression almost always reflects local conditions. Iran’s conventional military is weak; Tehran’s main ability is to strike out unconventionally, which it already is doing. Ukraine is meaningless as a precedent for the Korean peninsula, where the U.S. previously defended the South, and with which America retains a defense treaty and troop tripwire

Beijing knows that the U.S. would provide weapons and training to Taiwan since Washington *is already doing so*. In Ukraine Europe has *already demonstrated* its willingness to impose restrictions on commerce and finance. Privately, Chinese officials indicate that their government *already expects* an American military response to any attack, especially since President Joe Biden has several times said that he would intervene. From Beijing’s standpoint, Ukraine is a welcome distraction for Washington. The conflict also drives Russia closer to China.

Finally, advocates of perpetual war argue that failure in Ukraine would hurt America’s credibility. Washington has survived multiple mistakes, disasters, and crimes over the years. Despite Hungary, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, Iran, Poland, Somalia, Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Hong Kong, Venezuela, and Afghanistan, foreign governments, including Ukraine and Taiwan, continue to flock to Washington begging for money, arms, treaties, and promises. After nearly 80 years punctuated by frustration and disappointment, the Europeans still put their defense in Washington’s hands, whining and wailing at the slightest suggestion that the U.S. might leave them responsible for their own defense. America would survive failure in Ukraine.

In short, the conflict, though a humanitarian horror, is not a vital security interest for the U.S. It does not warrant fighting an endless proxy war. There is no “we” when it comes to the Russo–Ukrainian war. America’s interests stand apart.

The U.S. retains a stake in a stable and peaceful Europe. Washington also prefers Kiev's survival as an independent and sovereign government, with its people free to make their own political and economic choices. The best way to achieve both these ends would be to engage Russia over a revised security order. Reaching a workable compromise wouldn't be easy. Nevertheless, with Ukraine as the battlefield, it is in Kiev's as well as America's interest to end the conflict sooner rather than later.

Foreign governments long have sought to influence the U.S. government, distorting American foreign policy for their benefit. Graham and other members of the Washington War Party have been only too willing to do the bidding of favored foreign interests, confusing "them" with "we." American officials should unashamedly act for the American people.