

Ukraine Propagandists Demand U.S. Abandon Caution, Go All in on War

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Ukraine appears to be losing its war with Russia. It is America's fault, according to many of Kiev's advocates. If only the U.S. had tossed caution and prudence aside in backing the Zelensky government, Russia's President Vladimir Putin and his barbaric hordes would have been put to flight. The lion would have lain down with the lamb.

Two years ago, Ukraine surprised even its friends by rebuffing much of Russia's initial invasion. Many of Kiev's backers convinced themselves that Ukraine could win the war. Fantastic schemes were proposed for Kiev to reclaim the Donbass and Crimea, and perhaps even oust Putin and break up the Russian Federation.

These hopes have gone dark after Ukraine's failed counteroffensive and Moscow's recent battlefield gains. The Ukrainian people are paying a terrible price. President Volodymyr Zelensky recently offered a number for his nation's dead, 31,000, that no serious analyst believes. Apparently, U.S. officials privately estimate 70,000. Recent experience, as well as the admission of others in the Kiev government, indicate far more casualties, perhaps a half million dead and seriously wounded overall.

While it would be foolish to presume a Russian military victory—Putin's authoritarian rule offers the opposite of inspired leadership—Kiev faces a daunting path forward. It is resource poor, with its economy under siege, and its defense industrial base enfeebled. The Ukrainian army has been impressing middle-aged civilians off the street and tossing ill-trained conscripts into battle. Internal political and military divisions have widened dramatically.

Moreover, the American and European peoples are growing more reluctant to continue their governments' open-ended financial and military commitment to Ukraine. This very hesitation, contend Kiev's propaganda stalwarts, is placing the otherwise inevitable Ukrainian victory in doubt. Indeed, if only Washington had not been so hesitant to join the European murderfest, Zelensky might even now have been enjoying a victory parade through his capital's Independence Square.

Wrote the *Financial Times*' Martin Sandbu: Ukraine's "concrete shortcomings are the result of western leaders' early denial of Kyiv's appeal for fighter jets or their failure to match a promise of ammunition with the urgent action needed to produce it." He accused "Ukraine's Western friends" of maintaining "a timidity that all the support and contributions they have extended are

insufficient to hide.” Indeed, he insisted, “more decisive action two years ago would have left Ukraine, and the west, in a much better position today.” So too with sanctions: “Earlier enforcement would have been better.” Finally, Russian financial reserves should have been confiscated and sent to Kiev.

Western timidity. That’s the problem! Wrote Sanbu, “The lesson on both the military and the economic side is the danger of believing in the virtue of caution when that in practice means delay.” It’s time for bold action! Don’t look before you leap! “Evil benefits, too, when good people are too cautious. Don’t keep making that mistake.” Forward, march, irrespective of the consequences!

Passion on Ukraine’s behalf is understandable. Although the allies did much to trigger the current conflict—recklessly expanding NATO to Russia’s border despite a multitude of warnings against doing so—Putin’s aggressive war is monstrous morally and horrendous practically. Ukrainians are entitled to choose their own future.

Nevertheless, neither the devastation nor the injustice of the Russo-Ukraine war is unique. The Saudis and Emiratis spent years killing tens or hundreds of thousands of Yemeni civilians, with U.S. assistance. The Western world ignored years of war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which may have killed more than 5 million people. Washington’s own illegal invasion of Iraq based on false WMD claims resulted in hundreds of thousands of civilian deaths. American attempts to overthrow Syria’s President Bashar al Assad aided radical jihadists of various stripes, while current sanctions policy impoverishes the Syrian people for no good reason. There’s a lot of villainy to go around, often worsened by Western—and especially American—action as well as inaction.

Moreover, no war should be casually fought. The list of expected quick victories that turned into lengthy catastrophes is long. All the major powers expected the First World War to be short, “over by Christmas.” Both North and South thought the Civil War would be settled by a quick decisive battle or two. Saddam Hussein’s Iraq planned to make short work of Iran’s revolutionary regime. America’s invasion of Iraq was to be a cakewalk. The allies’ Afghan campaign was “won” in a few weeks. The list goes on.

Ukraine is far more dangerous. None of these other campaigns were waged against a nuclear power. Today, Washington is leading the Europeans in a brutal proxy war against Russia in Ukraine. The fight could get worse—much worse. Moscow views Kiev’s status as a vital interest, one obviously important enough to justify war. Indeed, over the last two decades numerous American officials, including then-ambassador William Burns, current head of the CIA, warned successive administrations that turning Ukraine into a NATO outpost could lead to war.

With so many nations stirring the geopolitical pot, a broader war could result from accident, carelessness, or design. For instance, the Putin government might expand or escalate. Tens or hundreds of thousands of Russians are believed to have died so far. American and allied weapons, meaning the U.S. and European governments, are responsible for many of these deaths. Moscow would be fully entitled to retaliate against the West for making the conflict its own.

Remember how Russia's domestic critics, led by presidential candidate Joe Biden, demanded a response to what turned out to be the false claim that Moscow was paying the Taliban to kill U.S. military personnel in Afghanistan? Russians probably want to exact a much greater price.

So long as Moscow believes that it is winning, it has reason not to act on threats to strike NATO members or use nuclear weapons. Should momentum shift, however, so might the former's policy, especially if Russian territory is threatened. Moreover, Ukraine wants America and European nations in. Zelensky desperately attempted to lie NATO into the war by claiming that a Ukrainian missile strike on Poland came from Russia. Western officials collectively held their breath until Kiev's responsibility was established.

Although the Biden administration has foolishly enmeshed America in a conflict not its own, its relative caution, at least, in escalating that involvement deserves credit, not censure. It is easy for ivory tower warriors, especially those living in Europe, to demand decisive action against Moscow. Even some government officials, such as France's President Emmanuel Macron, casually talk about sending troops to Ukraine. If events went badly, those same people would besiege Washington, wailing about the horror of it all and demanding that America race to their rescue. The contretemps over Donald Trump's recent crack about delinquent European governments caused Washington's allies to admit how far behind they were. Everyone knows who would be expected to battle Russia.

Sandbu and other war advocates are careless with the money and lives of others. Perhaps they should join their respective armed forces. Then they could at least share the consequences they would have others risk suffering.

Ukraine has preserved its sovereignty and independence. Yet the war is destroying that nation's future. Of course, Ukrainians are free to fight on, forever if they desire. But they are not entitled to American support to do so. Washington has spent two years funding war. It is time for Washington to emphasize establishing peace.

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