



Washington War Party Edges US Ever Closer to Russo-Ukraine War

by Doug Bandow

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The war over Ukraine is a tragedy. Russia's attack was unjustified but unsurprising. Although virtually no Washington policymaker or analyst thought Moscow would launch a full-scale invasion, anyone who followed US policy understood why Russian President Vladimir Putin believed that the West had used Kyiv to compromise Russian security.

Washington's first and most important priority should be to keep America out of hostilities, despite the Ukrainian government's best efforts to drag the US in. That's no knock on President Volodymyr Zelensky, who understandably wants the war to end like a classic movie Western, with the US cavalry staging a dramatic last minute rescue. However, no American should die for Ukraine.

Moscow's attack is unjustified but does not threaten the US. Kyiv has never mattered much to American security. Throughout most of this nation's short history Ukraine was controlled either by the Russian Empire or the Soviet Union (essentially the Russian Empire under newer, deadlier management). Since Kyiv gained its independence relations with America have been friendly, driven by a sizable Ukrainian expatriate population here. However, Kyiv's status does not impact Americans' freedom and safety.

Humanitarian concerns with the conflict, which is taking a brutal toll, are serious. However, despite Washington's self-serving claims, that also is of little concern to US policymakers. After all, they rarely allow such issues to interfere with their foreign policy objectives. In the aftermath of the Iraq invasion hundreds of thousands of civilians were killed and millions more were displaced.

The US fomented civil wars in Libya and Syria which also killed hundreds of thousands and displaced millions of people. And Washington continues to back Saudi and Emirati aggression in Yemen which, too, has killed hundreds of thousands and displaced millions of civilians. Rather

like its position on democracy, the US is against the killing of civilians except when it is not. Which is often. And Washington is ever ready to finance and arm those doing such killing.

American policy mostly reflects the determination of the infamous Blob, the Washington foreign policy establishment, to run the world, no matter the cost to others. The US always has believed in spheres of influence, starting with the Monroe Doctrine. After the collapse of the Soviet Union American policymakers decided to make the entire world their sphere of influence. They claimed the right to dominate every region on earth, even up to the border of Russia.

Hence the many broken promises about expanding NATO. To be sure, there was no formal, written agreement, but had one existed Washington likely would have felt no compunction about breaking it. Yet the US would never have tolerated comparable Soviet, Russian, or Chinese encroachments in the Western hemisphere. Imagine the hysteria that would have swept Washington if Moscow had sought to expand the Warsaw Pact to Mexico or Canada. The War Party would have been running wild, issuing imprecations and threats. No one would have been affirming the right of America's neighbors to decide their own futures.

Of course, this still doesn't justify Russia's invasion. However, the unspoken reality offers another good reason for America to stay out of the fight. And that means avoiding becoming a de facto combatant, which could easily escalate into full-scale conflict and potential nuclear war.

Some ivory tower warriors insist that Washington not hold off out of fear. Heck, that strategy worked so well in Iraq! Announce that we are virtue personified, plan a glorious cakewalk, pay little attention to the resulting carnage, and conclude by wrecking a nation, ravaging its people, and destabilizing its region. Repeat when the zeitgeist strikes.

So why worry about the consequences of getting into a war with Russia? Who cares about piling pressure on Moscow to turn to tactical nuclear weapons to make up for its conventional deficiencies? So what if escalation could lead increasing destruction and a truly catastrophic denouement? After all, we are the good guys, which means we never have to say we are sorry.

In fact, Washington's most important obligation today is to *not* intervene militarily, whether with ground or air forces, in the current fighting. It would be a real war, not the initial walkovers of Afghanistan and Iraq. Despite Moscow's botched invasion, mostly the result of unrealistic political assumptions, the Russian military is competent and well-equipped. And absent a lengthy and substantial military buildup, that force would retain local superiority. American intervention would turn the conflict into one of national survival for Moscow. Which is prepared to employ battlefield nuclear weapons if necessary to counteract America's conventional superiority.

Intervening also would demonstrate how alone Washington is. European leaders might be waking up to the importance of doing more militarily, but who imagines that their publics would back sending their undersized armed forces against Russia? For nearly eight decades most Europeans have believed their security was America's responsibility. If anything, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has reinforced that presumption. It would be the US alone against Moscow.

Although most Blob members say they are against going to war with Russia, there are a few at the far loony edge who support intervening, [such as Sen. Roger Wicker](#), who would use nuclear

weapons. Do his constituents realize that he is prepared for Russia to incinerate them, along with their families, communities, and country to aid Ukraine? And for what other countries is he willing to sacrifice their lives? Someone should remind him that he took an oath to the *United States Constitution*.

Imposing a no-fly zone appears to be gaining support but is just another form of military intervention, only without "boots on the ground." In the past Washington has imposed NFZs against decrepit states with no means to resist – most notably Bosnia, Iraq, and Libya. Some people apparently believe the US need only declare one to exist and Russian planes would similarly disappear, as if by magic, from the air.

However, to enforce an NFZ over Ukraine would entail shooting down Russian planes and destroying Russian air defenses in both Ukraine *and Russia*. Moscow's forces are modern and would shoot back. Moreover, Russia likely would retaliate against allied bases in neighboring states used to back such a policy. Combat might not be limited to the air. Ironically, as the weaker power it would be even more important for Moscow to resist US coercion and maintain its credibility.

Although providing arms to combatants does not necessarily turn a nation into a belligerent, doing so can create a *casus belli*. The US edged into World War II by arming Great Britain; Washington initiated an undeclared naval war to assist London in transporting supplies across the Atlantic. The ongoing though largely hidden shooting war was one reason Adolf Hitler declared war on the US. The more important the weapons and more ostentatious their delivery, the greater the likelihood of retaliation.

For instance, Poland and the US have rightly remained reluctant to openly send Polish warplanes to Ukraine. Doing so would invite Russian strikes on bases from which those planes operated. Moscow would be reluctant to take such a risk, but open allied involvement in the war would be hard to ignore and create pressure to retaliate.

Similar for the abundant allied shipments of anti-tank Javelin missiles and other weapons. Great powers typically accept such efforts as within their rules of competition – China and Russia backed North Vietnam while the US aided the Afghan Mujahedeen. However, such activities normally are conducted with a modicum of secrecy and deniability. Openly accumulating and shipping weapons to Ukraine creates a legitimate military target. At some point Moscow might be tempted to bomb convoys leaving Poland to discourage Warsaw from acting as a steadily expanding military conduit into Ukraine. What then would Washington do if Poland called for assistance and protection?

Americans understandably favor Ukraine. The Putin government's invasion was unwarranted aggression. A terrible crime has been committed against the Ukrainian people.

However, Washington and its allies behaved recklessly in dismissing Moscow's oft-expressed security concerns. The US should push for a ceasefire and negotiations rather than a broader and longer war, indicating that while Ukrainian independence must be affirmed, so must Russia's

security concerns be accommodated. A stable peace is going to require taking both sides' interests into account.

In the meantime, nothing is more important than preventing the Russo-Ukraine conflict expanding and going nuclear. The world survived some close calls during the Cold War. Vigilance and restraint are needed to avoid catastrophe while containing and hopefully ending the current battle.

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