



THE BULWARK

Ukraine Needs NATO—and NATO Needs Ukraine, Too

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Last week, an opinion article in *Foreign Affairs* argued for locking Ukraine out of NATO. The authors, Justin Logan and Joshua Shiffrinson of the Cato Institute, offered five claims to support their arguments. But as is typical of the genre, their article is long on opinion and short on facts. Because articles like this are so useful in Kremlin propagandists' disinformation campaigns, it is worth refuting Logan and Shiffrinson's five claims one by one.

Claim 1: Russia does not threaten NATO. "The idea that Russia could pose a serious threat to Poland, much less to France or Germany, is outlandish."

This claim is so divorced from reality, so historically illiterate, that it shocks. For more than fifteen years, Vladimir Putin has waged war on NATO, directly and indirectly. When democratic Georgia sought NATO membership of its own free will, Putin invaded. When Ukrainian citizens marched in the pro-European Maidan Revolution (the Revolution of Dignity) in 2014, Putin invaded Ukraine. Putin and his Wagner Group proxies carpet-bombed hospitals in Syria, on the border of another NATO member, Turkey. And they armed coups around the world, with the aim of undermining democracy everywhere.

Russian state agents have murdered British citizens, attempted to conduct a coup in a country that had already signed a NATO accession protocol, kidnapped an Estonian border guard, and are currently holding multiple American hostages. Russian influence operations left fingerprints on the pro-Brexit campaign in the United Kingdom and Yevgeny Prigozhin rose in the Kremlin's mafia ranks by helping Putin interfere with U.S. elections. And when Putin deemed NATO nations weak—mistakenly, this time—he invaded Ukraine again. Every action Putin has taken, every person Putin's forces have killed in his bloody-minded fixation on

undermining NATO, demonstrates clearly his intentions. If you are still fooled by Putin, I cannot help you.

Claim 2: “If Ukraine were in NATO, the United States could be pushed to come to Ukraine’s defense by deploying troops and even threatening to use nuclear weapons on Ukraine’s behalf.”

Claim 3: The United States would not defend Ukraine. “Extending Article 5 protections to Ukraine could also undermine their overall credibility.”

These two claims are linked, so we can refute them together. First, it is important to clarify that Ukraine is not asking for membership today. It is asking, by virtue of all the blood it has shed and the benefits it offers to NATO, for membership *in the future*, after Ukrainian forces have liberated their lands and people.

It is the same situation that NATO already faces. Russia already borders Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Norway, and Finland. NATO faces no new threat by including Ukraine.

Moreover, the Cato Institute authors’ claims rest on the spurious theory of “escalation,” which holds that the West has more to fear from Russia by deterrence than by appeasement. It is worth debunking this theory so that it does not further hinder the Ukrainian war effort and endanger countless Ukrainian lives.

Needless fretting about escalation has already had real-world consequences. Ever since Putin reinvaded Ukraine in February 2022, Western leaders have hesitated to fully support Ukraine. Every time Ukraine asked for weapons to defend itself, NATO leaders worried publicly about how each piece of aid to Ukraine might cause Putin to escalate the conflict. So, they withheld long-range missiles. Then they withheld tanks. Then they withheld jets.

And all the while, innocent Ukrainians died.

Ukrainian soldiers died waiting for armor.

Ukrainian civilians died waiting for air cover.

The Russian occupation of Ukraine is not a thought experiment; while politicians and think-tankers quailed about what Putin might do, Ukrainians died because of what he did do.

The theory of escalation rests upon the idea that Putin is so vengeful or irrational that he will never accept any form of defeat, and would even begin a nuclear war rather than retreat from Ukrainian territory. To plant this theory in the Western mind, Putin and his mafia capos have toyed with nuclear threats. Putin is playing a weak version of Richard Nixon's "madman theory." Falling for it means accepting the paradox that a dictator unhinged enough to start a nuclear war over Ukrainian land he doesn't need is also rational enough to broker a lasting peace.

But Putin has himself already refuted escalation theory several times by forcibly crossing borders—unprovoked—whenever he feels it necessary to rally domestic support and expand his grasp. And the theory of escalation to nuclear warfare has been disproven by Yevgeny Prigozhin's failed coup. The Wagner rebellion showed the entire world that the emperor has no clothes. When the decisive moment came, Putin blinked. He was humiliated, and immediately made concessions in order to maintain his total grip on power and to keep the money flowing. Prigozhin lives free, for now anyway, and it turns out that when facing defeat, Putin can be pragmatic.

And Prigozhin also showed that Putin has no loyalists left. Throughout the insurrection, Russian soldiers were not willing to fire a bullet for Putin—much less take one. So why would they obey a suicidal order from the Kremlin to begin nuclear armageddon?

Moreover, Putin may be an idiot, but he is not suicidal. He knows that using any so-called 'tactical' nuclear weapon would certainly mean the end of his regime and then his life, especially since Xi Jinping personally ordered Putin not to. In short, Russian nuclear threats are non-credible and Prigozhin has discredited the silly notion that Putin must somehow be appeased for life to continue.

Claim 4: Defending Ukraine would be expensive. "There is also the question of the costs of defending Ukraine."

Here, the article's authors have it backwards. Ukrainians are not asking to hide behind the shield of NATO, they are asking for recognition from the alliance whose peace they have bled and died to protect. Ukraine today has the strongest army in all of Europe, and it's not close. The chief of Germany's army openly laments that he leads a "bare" force. The United Kingdom's army is the

smallest it has been since the Napoleonic Wars. NATO should be begging Europe's strongest army to lead its ranks, not the other way around.

Then again, the article's authors have long underestimated Ukraine. Justin Logan spent the month before Putin's second invasion arguing for Ukrainian concessions, capitulations, and surrender. He predicted Ukrainian defeat, saying, "If the Russians came into Ukraine . . . they would simply destroy the Ukrainian army," and "Ukraine prevailing in a conflict . . . is just not in the cards." A year ago, Kremlin propaganda said Russia's was the second-strongest army in the world. Today, Russian conscripts compete with Wagner ex-convicts to be the second-strongest army in Ukraine.

These so-called realists have been wrong about Ukraine at every step. They argued that we should abandon Ukraine and that NATO has outlived its usefulness. Their fellow realists' Kremlin apologism has benefited the Russian war effort. It was the "realist" theory that led America to offer Zelensky a white flag, instead of arms and ammunition, in the opening days of the war.

These are not new problems. I wrote *Winter is Coming* in 2015 to combat the lies already then emerging from the Kremlin. I'm proud of my record on Putin. Are they? The "realists" have a record, too, and it is an embarrassing one. Instead of foisting their opinions upon the world, they should have the good sense to clam up until Ukraine claws back every inch from the occupier.

Claim 5: "Tragically, offering Ukraine a path into NATO is therefore likely to give Russia reason to continue its war against Ukraine for as long as possible in order to avoid creating conditions in which Ukraine can start on the road to NATO membership."

Are you kidding? After watching Russian troops commit daily acts of terror against Ukrainian civilians, rape little girls and boys, torture Ukrainian citizens for sport, and deport millions of Ukrainians to Siberia, the article's authors are worried that Russia might fight harder? They think that we should consider abandoning more Ukrainians to torture and genocide? This war began because Putin hoped he could subjugate Ukraine before it acceded to NATO membership. The only way to stop further Kremlin imperial dreams is for Ukraine to defeat the Russian army in the field and to accept Ukraine into NATO.

The NATO alliance was built in 1949 with one goal: to prevent a Russian land invasion of democratic Europe. With every meter of territory they liberate, Ukrainian soldiers win the war

NATO was created to fight. Ukrainian heroes fight and die daily to defend NATO's peace. Today, Ukraine offers NATO the greatest deal ever presented in military history: It is singlehandedly destroying the alliance's greatest rival at the cost of no NATO lives. All Ukraine asks in return for winning NATO's war is the past-expiration equipment sitting in storage facilities that NATO allies were going to throw away anyway.

Fifteen years ago, NATO welcomed Ukrainian aspirations for membership. Ukraine has waited long enough, fought hard enough, died enough. When the Ukrainians win this war, NATO must welcome them into the alliance at long last.

Slava Ukraini. Glory to the heroes.