



Awarding Medals for the Worst Ukraine Policy Proposals

Ted Galen Carpenter
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As the Russia-Ukraine war rages on, hawkish members of the U.S. political and policy communities have been busy concocting a variety of ideas for dealing with the situation. Three sets of proposals stand out as especially foolish and dangerous, each having some potential to entangle the United States in the Ukraine conflict at the risk of war including nuclear war with Russia. Those schemes deserve to receive medals for sheer recklessness.

The bronze medal goes to the Biden administration and a strong bipartisan coalition that has embraced a policy of sending Javelin anti-tank missiles, Stinger anti-aircraft missiles, and other weapons to Ukraine's military. Advocates toyed with the idea of arming a long-term Ukrainian "resistance force" even before Russia launched the invasion. The plan is reminiscent of the policy the Carter and Reagan administrations adopted in Afghanistan to assist the rebel mujahidin combat the Soviet occupation army.

There are several problems with such a scheme. First, it epitomizes a callous, cynical approach that is indifferent to the fate of the Ukrainian people. Just as Washington was fine with a policy to use Afghans as pawns to harass and bleed the Soviets, the current crop of policymakers seems quite content to use Ukrainians as pawns to harass and bleed Russians. That approach may serve the interests of the US political elite to undermine a great power rival, but a strategy of fighting Russia to the last Ukrainian definitely does not serve the best interests of the Ukrainian people.

Second, Russia could retaliate against the United States in numerous indirect ways. Funding and arming anti-U.S. factions in the Middle East, for example, could make life very difficult for American troops currently stuck with garrison duty in Iraq and northeastern Syria. US policymakers need to understand that the United States is not the only country that can engage in proxy wars.

Finally, by sending weapons to Ukrainian forces, the United States is flirting with becoming a belligerent in the ongoing war. Moscow has already warned that convoys bringing armaments into Ukraine will be subject to attack. What happens if Americans are among the casualties in such an incident? The best way to avoid becoming a belligerent in a war is to avoid flirting with measures that could lead to such an entanglement. Washington is incurring needless risks with its current arms-aid program.

The silver medal for really bad policy ideas goes to members of Congress and their cheerleaders in the news media who have pushed the idea of transferring fighter planes from Poland or other NATO countries to Ukraine. Initially, the Biden administration was tempted to endorse that extremely provocative measure, with Secretary of State Antony Blinken stating in one press interview that the United States was giving a "green light" to Poland's request to make such a transfer.

The administration backed away from that plan, however, when it became clear that Warsaw wanted to ship the jets to a US airbase in Germany. The United States would then be responsible for transferring those planes to Ukraine. Apparently it dawned on administration officials that such a move would make Washington the point man in a very risky confrontation with Russia. If Moscow was displeased about shipments of Javelins and similar weapons, they would be noticeably more so about the United States sending far more lethal jet fighters to Kyiv. One must hope that the Biden administration remains committed to avoiding such an escalation of tensions with the Kremlin. Yet more than 40 GOP senators have signed an open letter chastising the president for failing to embrace Warsaw's dangerous plan.

The gold medal for utter recklessness, though, goes to Rep. Adam Kinzinger (R-IL) and other advocates of imposing a no-fly zone over Ukraine. Fortunately, the administration has firmly and consistently rejected that idea. Even Pentagon spokesman John Kirby and ultra-hawkish Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL) concede that the plan would bring the United States into direct combat with Russian forces and risk triggering World War III.

That horrendous scenario should be obvious to anyone with even a reasonable grasp of logic and knowledge of security issues. Enforcing a no-fly zone would require a willingness to shoot Russian planes out of the sky. It is puzzling how any sane person could conclude that the United States could take that step without it leading to war with Russia.

Proponents, though, engage in sometimes absurd mental gymnastics to avoid acknowledging that inevitable outcome. The most laughable version was contained in an open letter signed by 27 supposed foreign policy experts proposing a "limited no-fly zone." The edict they suggested would be confined to designated evacuation corridors and other "safe areas" rather than all of Ukraine's airspace. It was the epitome of an impractical "half pregnant" strategy that had no connection with the realities of aerial combat.

Some supporters of a no-fly zone cite the successful imposition of such restrictions in Bosnia, Serbia, and Iraq as precedents and models. Such comparisons reflect a worrisome mentality. In the previous cases, Washington was dealing with third-rate adversaries who were in no position to resist US/NATO bullying. Russia is not remotely comparable to such military weaklings; it is a first-class power that possesses several thousand nuclear warheads and the systems to deliver them.

The risk level entailed in imposing a no-fly zone against such an opponent is astronomically greater than doing so against the previous targets. Consequently, proponents deserve the gold medal for pushing such an obtuse and reckless scheme.

Ted Galen Carpenter, a senior fellow in defense and foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute, is the author of 12 books and more than 950 articles on international affairs.