

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

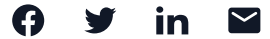
This Time It's Different

Neither we nor our allies are prepared to fight all-out war with Russia, regionally or globally.

An image of Russian President Vladimir Putin is displayed as U.S. President Joe Biden speaks about gas prices in the South Court Auditorium at the White House campus on June 22, 2022. (Drew Angerer/Getty Images)

Douglas Macgregor

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Until it decided to confront Moscow with an existential military threat in Ukraine, [Washington confined the use of American military power](#) to conflicts that Americans could afford to lose, wars with weak opponents in the developing world from Saigon to Baghdad that did not present an existential threat to U.S. forces or American territory. This time—a proxy war with Russia—is different.

Contrary to early Beltway hopes and expectations, Russia neither collapsed internally nor capitulated to the collective West's demands for regime change in Moscow. [Washington underestimated](#) Russia's societal cohesion, its latent military potential, and its relative immunity to [Western economic sanctions](#).

As a result, Washington's proxy war against Russia is failing. U.S. Defense Secretary [Lloyd Austin was unusually candid](#) about the situation in Ukraine when he told the allies in Germany at Ramstein Air Base on January 20, "We have a window of opportunity here, between now and the spring," admitting, "That's not a long time."

[Alexei Arestovich](#), President Zelensky's recently fired advisor and unofficial "Spinmeister," was more direct. He expressed his own doubts that Ukraine can win its war with Russia and he now questions whether Ukraine will even survive the war. [Ukrainian losses—at least 150,000 dead](#) including 35,000 missing in action and presumed dead—have fatally weakened Ukrainian forces resulting in [a fragile Ukrainian defensive posture](#) that will likely shatter under the crushing weight of attacking Russian forces in the next few weeks.

[Ukraine's materiel losses are equally severe](#). These include thousands of [tanks and armored infantry fighting vehicles, artillery systems, air defense platforms](#), and weapons of all calibers. These totals include the equivalent of [seven years of Javelin missile production](#). In a setting where Russian artillery systems can fire nearly 60,000 rounds of all types—rockets, missiles, drones, and hard-shell ammunition—a day, Ukrainian forces are hard-pressed to answer these Russian salvos with 6,000 rounds daily. [New platform and ammunition packages](#) for Ukraine may enrich the Washington community, but they cannot change these conditions.

Predictably, Washington's frustration with the collective West's failure to stem the tide of Ukrainian defeat is growing. In fact, the frustration is rapidly giving way to desperation.

Michael Rubin, a former Bush appointee and avid supporter of America's permanent conflicts in the Middle East and Afghanistan, vented his frustration in a 1945 article asserting that, "if the world allows Russia to remain a unitary state, and if it allows Putinism to survive Putin, then, Ukraine should be allowed to maintain its own nuclear deterrence, whether it joins NATO or not." On its face, the suggestion is reckless, but the statement does accurately reflect the anxiety in Washington circles that Ukrainian defeat is inevitable.

NATO's members were never strongly united behind Washington's crusade to fatally weaken Russia. The governments of Hungary and Croatia are simply acknowledging the wider European public's opposition to war with Russia and lack of support for Washington's desire to postpone Ukraine's foreseeable defeat.

Though sympathetic to the Ukrainian people, Berlin did not support all-out war with Russia on Ukraine's behalf. Now, Germans are also uneasy with the catastrophic condition of the German armed forces.

Retired German Air Force General (four-star equivalent) Harald Kujat, former chairman of the NATO Military Committee, severely criticized Berlin for allowing Washington to railroad Germany into conflict with Russia, noting that several decades of German political leaders actively disarmed Germany and thus deprived Berlin of authority or credibility in Europe. Though actively suppressed by the German government and media, his comments are resonating strongly with the German electorate.

The blunt fact is that in its efforts to secure victory in its proxy war with Russia, Washington ignores historical reality. From the 13th century onward, Ukraine was a region dominated by larger, more powerful national powers, whether Lithuanian, Polish, Swedish, Austrian, or Russian.

In the aftermath of the First World War, abortive Polish designs for an independent Ukrainian State were conceived to weaken Bolshevik Russia. Today, Russia is not communist, nor does Moscow seek the destruction of the Polish State as Trotsky, Lenin, Stalin, and their followers did in 1920.

So where is Washington headed with its proxy war against Russia? The question deserves an answer.

On Sunday December 7, 1941, U.S. Ambassador Averell Harriman was with Prime Minister Sir Winston Churchill having dinner at Churchill's home when the BBC broadcast the news that the Japanese had attacked the U.S. Naval Base at Pearl Harbor.

Harriman was visibly shocked. He simply repeated the words, “The Japanese have raided Pearl Harbor.”

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Harriman need not have been surprised. The Roosevelt administration had practically done everything in its power to goad Tokyo into attacking U.S. forces in the Pacific with a series of hostile policy decisions culminating in Washington’s oil embargo during the summer of 1941.

In the Second World War, Washington was lucky with timing and allies. This time it’s different. Washington and its NATO allies are advocating a full-blown war against Russia, the devastation and breakup of the Russian Federation, as well as the destruction of millions of lives in Russia and Ukraine.

Washington emotes. Washington does not think, and it is also overtly hostile to empiricism and truth. Neither we nor our allies are prepared to fight all-out war with Russia, regionally or globally. The point is, if war breaks out between Russia and the United States, Americans should not be surprised. The Biden administration and its bipartisan supporters in Washington are doing all they possibly can to make it happen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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