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Disquiet at Davos and the Unsaid Fear of Failure – The First Shoots of a U.S. Ukraine Shift

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*The unspoken fear disquieting Davos attendees is the fear of another *déba*cle, following that of Afghanistan.*

Klaus Schwab, passionate for Ukraine, essentially configured the *World Economic Forum (WEF)* to [showcase Zelensky](#) and to leverage the argument that Russia should be kicked out of the civilised world. Schwab's target was the assembled *crème de la crème* of the world's business leaders assembled there. Zelensky pitched big: "We want more sanctions and more weapons"; "All trade with the aggressor should be stopped"; "All foreign business should leave Russia so that your brands are not associated with war crimes", he said. Sanctions must be all encompassing; values must matter.

Disquiet ran through the Davos set: The *WEF* is high-octane globalist, right? Yet this Schwab line suggests a decoupling 'on stilts'. It precisely reverses interconnectedness. Plus, the western generals in charge are saying that this conflict may last not just years, but decades. What will this signify for their markets in parts of the world that refuse action against Russia, the moneymen were wondering?

It is unlikely that this whiff of disorientation is what Schwab had intended. Perhaps the latter was more aligned with [Soros' later intervention](#) that a quick victory over Russia was needed to save the 'Open Society' and civilisation itself – and that this was intended as the *WEF* 2022 message.

The Davos ‘greater disquiet’ emerged however, from an unexpected quarter. Just before the *WEF* began, the *NY Times* had run [a piece](#) from the editorial team urging Zelensky to negotiate with Russia. It argued that such engagement implied making painful territorial sacrifices. The piece attracted indignant and angry push-back in Europe and the West, possibly because – albeit couched as advice to Kiev – its target was evidently Washington and London (the arch belligerents).

Eric Cantor, a former whip in the U.S. House of Representatives (a legislator well versed on Iran sanctions), also at Davos, [questioned](#) whether the West would be able to maintain a united front in pursuit of [such maximalist aims](#) as Zelensky and his Military Intelligence Chief have demanded. “We may not get the next vote”, Cantor opined (in wake of the \$40 bn vote [ostensibly](#) earmarked for Ukraine).

Cantor said excluding Russia entirely would require secondary sanctions against other countries. This would place the West into a head on clash with China, India, and the almost 60 states which had refused to back a UN resolution denouncing Russia’s invasion. He warned that the U.S. may be in danger of overplaying its hand.

Then spoke the redoubtable Henry Kissinger, also at Davos. He [warned the West](#) to stop trying to inflict a crushing defeat on Russian forces in Ukraine, saying that such would have disastrous consequences for the long-term stability of Europe. He said it would be fatal for the West to get swept along in the mood of the moment and forget the proper place of Russia in the European balance of power.

Dr Kissinger said the war must not be allowed to drag on and came close to calling on the West to instruct Ukraine to accept terms that fall very far short of its current war aims: “Negotiations need to begin in the next two months, before it creates upheavals and tensions that will not be easily overcome”.

What is going on here? In a nutshell, we are seeing the first inklings of fractures appearing in the U.S. stance on Ukraine. The fissures in Europe are already very plain, both on sanctions and mission aims. But Cantor’s comment that “we may not get the next vote” needs further unpacking.

In an earlier piece, I [argued](#) that Senator JD Vance’s win in the Ohio primaries for a Senate seat could be telling. His candidature was backed by Trump, who later issued an ‘End the war’ call. Now the key tell-tale is Republican Senator Josh Hawley – ambitious and known to have leadership aspirations.

Early in the Ukraine war, Senator Hawley was calling Zelensky, lauding him highly and egging him on. But then he pivoted. Hawley subsequently blasted the \$40 billion in proposed aid to Ukraine, after voting ‘no’ on the procedural vote to move forward with the aid package “as not being in America’s interests”.

At first, as some may recall, there were 6 House votes against the bill – then 60. And in the Senate, first there were zero then there were 11 votes. The Bill was rushed through as vote managers were concerned that the vote could crumble further.

What is going on? Well, the Republican ‘populist’ current, never enamoured at foreign aid, was shocked at the \$ 40 billion for Ukraine when the U.S. lacked baby milk, (and itself had to rely on foreign baby milk aid). This political current is becoming more significant and having more impact as a result of a structural shift. Political candidates, and now even some U.S. think-tanks are turning to crowd-funding as a principal source of finance – moving away from the ‘established’ donors. Thus, the broad ‘anti-foreign entanglement’ sentiment is gaining heft.

Of course, the \$40 billion is [not all going to Ukraine](#). Not at all. According to the details of the Bill, the bulk will go to the Pentagon (for equipment already supplied by the U.S. and its allies). And a big chunk will go to the State Department, to fund all sorts of ‘helpful’ non-state actors and NGOs – i.e. it is a deep state budget with Ukraine

packaging. The six billion allocated directly for new arms to Ukraine in fact comprises *both training* and weapons, so much of that will end in the pockets of states such as UK and Germany, giving ‘out of theatre’ training to Ukrainians in their own, or in neighbouring countries’ territory.

Eric Cantor, and other Americans at *WEF* may frame their disquiet over western objectives in ‘polite company’ as simply articulating their [uncertainties](#) over America’s grand strategy – whether the U.S. is trying to punish Russia for its aggression, or whether the goal is a subtler use of policy that gives the Kremlin a ‘route out of sanctions’, were it to change course. But behind the narrative lies a darker fear. *The unsaid fear of failure.*

What does this mean? It means that the West’s ultimate war aims in Ukraine have so far been able to stay opaque and undefined, the details swept aside in the mood of the moment.

Paradoxically, this opacity has been preserved despite the public failure of the West’s first statement of aims – which was that the seizure of Russia’s offshore foreign reserves; the Russian bank expulsions from SWIFT; the sanctioning of the Central Bank; and the broadside of sanctions would, in and of itself alone, turn the rouble to rubble; cause a run on the domestic banking system; collapse the Russian economy; and provoke a political crisis that Putin might not survive.

In short, ‘victory’ would be quick – if not immediate. We know this, because U.S. officials and the French Finance Minister, Bruno Le Maire bragged about it publicly.

So confident in a quick financial-war success were these western officials that there seemed little need to invest deep strategic reflection on the aims or the course of the secondary Ukrainian military thrust. After all, a Russia already economically collapsed, with its currency ruined and its morale broken, would likely put up little or no fight as the Ukrainian army swept across Donbas and into Crimea.

Well, the sanctions have proved a bust and Russia’s currency and oil revenues are bountiful.

And now, western politicians are being warned in the media, and by their own military, that Russia is ‘close to a major victory’ in Donbas.

This is the unspoken fear disquieting Davos attendees – fear of another *débat*, following that of Afghanistan. One made all the worse as the ‘war’ on Russia boomerangs into an economic collapse in Europe, and with NATO’s [eight-year investment](#) in building-up a successful proxy-army to NATO standards turning to dust.

This is what Kissinger’s comments – decoded – urge: ‘Don’t procrastinate’; get a quick deal (even an unfavourable one), but one that can be dressed up, and somehow spun as a ‘win’. But don’t wait, and let events lead the U.S. into yet another unmistakable, undeniable *débat*.

This is still ‘under the kitchen table talk’ in the U.S. for now, as the power of a narrative, invested with so much emotion, and bolstered by unprecedented info-war peer-pressure has masked such thoughts from public expression. Fractures nonetheless are beginning to be apparent. Something stirs – and Europe inevitably will follow wherever America leads. But for now, the hawks remain firmly in ‘the chair’ (in the U.S., in London, Poland, the EU Commission and in Kiev).

The big question, however, is why Moscow would take such a ‘way out’ (even if it was offered it). A compromise deal would be seen there as simply Kiev given the chance to regroup, and to try again.



<https://www.strategic-culture.org/news/2022/05/30/disquiet-at-davos-and-unsaid-fear-of-failure-the-first-shoots-of-us-ukraine-shift/>

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