



TIMES

UKRAINE WAR

America has no Ukraine Plan B except more war

US foreign policy establishment blindly intent on beating Russia on the battlefield and crushing its economy. Neither will happen



By DAVID P GOLDMAN

MARCH 25, 2024



A dark shadow has descended on Ukraine's war prospects. Image: Instagram Screenshot

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Somewhere last weekend a few dozen former Cabinet members, senior military officers, academics and think tank analysts met to evaluate the world military situation.

I can say that I haven't been so scared since the fall of 1983, when I was a junior contract researcher doing odd jobs for then Special Assistant to the President Norman A Bailey at the National Security Council. That was the peak of the Cold War and the too-realistic [Able Archer 83](#) exercise nearly set off a nuclear war.

AsiaTimes



Now, the US foreign policy establishment has staked its credibility on humiliating Russia by pushing NATO's borders to within a few hundred kilometers of Moscow, while crushing Moscow's economy through sanctions.

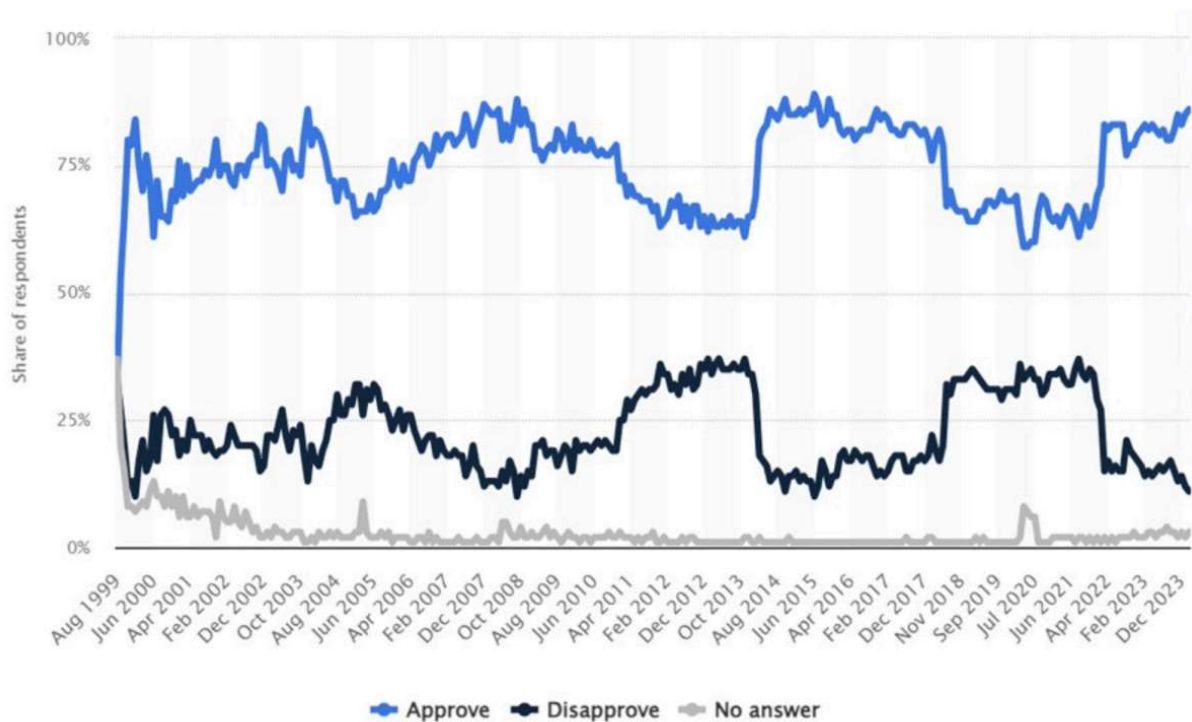
It has pulled every chit it has with European governments, mobilizing its legion of journalists, think tankers and stipended politicians to promote the Ukrainian proxy war, with the intent of degrading Russia's armed forces and ultimately forcing regime change in Russia.

The messaging from the most distinguished participants – former Cabinet members with defense and national security portfolios – is that NATO is still determined to win at any cost. “The question is whether Russia can generate strategic reserves,” one rapporteur said, “Its officer corps is at 50% strength and it has no depth of non-commissioned officers.”

“The Russians are taking massive losses of 25,000 to 30,000 a month,” the former official added. “They can’t sustain the will to fight on the battlefield. The Russians are close to a breaking point. Can they sustain their national will? Not if the rigged election [of Vladimir Putin this month] was any indication. Their economy has real vulnerability. We need to redouble sanctions and financial interdiction of supplies getting to Russia. The Russians have a Potemkin portrayal of strength.”

All the above is demonstrably false and known to be false by the rapporteur in question. The notion that Russia is taking 25,000 to 30,000 casualties a month is ludicrous. Artillery accounts for about 70% of casualties on both sides and by every estimate Russia is firing five or ten times as many shells as Ukraine. Russia has carefully avoided frontal assaults to preserve manpower.

The most important fact about Putin’s re-election is that 88% of Russians voted, a much higher turnout than in any Western democracy. Russians may not have had much choice of candidate but they had a choice of voting or not. The massive turnout is consistent with Putin’s 85% approval rating according to the independent Levada poll.



Putin's Approval or Disapproval Rating in the Levada Poll. Source: Statista

Instead of collapsing, Russia has become the focal point for a reorganization of global supply chains and their financing, and its economy is growing, rather than shrinking by half, as President Biden promised in March 2022.

Ukraine is running out of soldiers and can't agree on a new conscription law. One prominent military historian expostulated, “Everywhere you go in Ukraine you see young men hanging around and not in

uniform! Ukraine refuses to go all in.”

Russia produces anywhere between four and seven times more artillery shells than Ukraine. Ukraine’s air defenses are exhausted as its old Soviet-era anti-aircraft missiles have been fired and NATO’s stocks of Patriot missiles are dwindling.

Russia has an inexhaustible supply of Soviet-era large bombs fitted with cheap guidance systems, fired accurately at Ukrainian targets from Russian aircraft standing 60 miles (96.5 kilometers) off. With five times Ukraine’s population, Russia is winning the war of attrition.

Another rapporteur at the weekend meeting denounced Germany’s Chancellor Olaf Scholz and other European leaders for worrying too much about the “nuclear threshold” – the point of escalation after which Russia might use nuclear weapons. He demanded that Germany supply its long-range Taurus cruise missile to Ukraine, with a 1,000-kilometer range and a two-stage warhead suitable for destroying major infrastructure.

[Senior German air force officers](#) last month discussed using 20 of the Taurus missiles to destroy the Kerch Bridge linking Crimea to the Russian mainland, in a conversation covertly recorded and published by Russian media. The conversation also revealed the presence of hundreds of British and other NATO personnel on the ground in Ukraine.

Taking the war to Russia’s homeland and destroying major infrastructure is one way to transform the proxy war with Ukraine into a general European war. Another is to deploy NATO soldiers in Ukraine, something that French President Emmanuel Macron has broached (but almost certainly does not intend to do).

Remarkably, not a word was said about a possible negotiated solution to the conflict. Any negotiated outcome at this juncture would award Russia the Eastern Ukrainian oblasts that it has annexed and probably give Russia a buffer zone reaching to the east bank of the Dnieper River – followed by a normalization of economic relations with Western Europe.

Russia would emerge triumphant and American assets in Western Europe would be degraded. The impact on America's world standing would be devastating: As several attendees observed, Taiwan is watching carefully to see what happens to American proxies.

The rules of the meeting prevent me from saying much more but I am free to report what I told the gathering: Sanctions against Russia have failed miserably because Russia had access to unlimited amounts of Chinese (as well as Indian and other) imports, both directly and through a host of intermediaries including Turkey and the former Soviet republics.

But Russia's economic resilience in the face of supposedly devastating sanctions is only one reflection of a great transformation of world trade. China's exports to the Global South doubled during the past three years and China now exports more to the South than to developed markets. China's unprecedented exporting success, in turn, stems from the rapid automation of Chinese industry, which now installs more industrial robots per year than the rest of the world combined.

This is evident, I added, in China's newfound dominance in the world automotive market but it also has critical military implications. China claims that it has automated plants that can make 1,000 cruise missiles a day—not impossible given that it can manufacture 1,000 EVs a day, or thousands of 5G base stations.

The implication is that China can produce the equivalent of America's inventory of 4,000 cruise missiles in a week while American defense contractors take years to assemble them by hand.

No one disputed the data I presented. And no one believed that Russia is taking 25,000 casualties a month. Facts weren't the issue: The assembled dignitaries, a representative sampling of the foreign policy establishment's intellectual and executive leadership, simply couldn't imagine a world in which America no longer gave the orders.

They are accustomed to running things and they will gamble the world away to keep their position.

Follow David P Goldman on X, formerly Twitter, at @davidpgoldman

April 1, 2024 at 4:59 AM

You don't understand the quagmire.

Sorry I came to this post late by a few days (which in internet terms means i'm probably going to get zero eyeballs).

The 2 wars ARE LINKED.

The US NSC NEEDS Russia busy and occupied so that Netanyahu can redecorate the middle east in blood to his liking. The minute the Russia war is allowed to end, Netanyahu loses free hand.

It's a very big neocon miscalculation. But they are very privileged group of people in America. So you are seeing the lack of plan B. everything hinges on Netanyahu. The neocons planned this provocation of Russia through Zelensky and bet all their marbles on this situation being hands down slam dunk. Oops they were wrong. But now the entire edifice is built on this foundation.

I fear the US is looking for a new "Ukraine" in Asia to take on China in a similar hybrid war too.

**cokerjg**

March 27, 2024 at 2:29 AM

I'll post this again (Spengler !) Why have you neglected demographics ?

Ukr has carp demographics, but much worse is Russland. For over 40yrs ethnic Russ have been below 2 TFR, sure it picked up under Putin, but it's now dropped again. 200k casualties in the 'special military operation', young men who won't have children. Sure many won't be ethnic Russians, but the 0.3m ? who got out of 'Dodge' to dodge the draft were mainly ethnic, young, intelligent Russians from Moskau or Leningrad. Your Russian future !

Your Russian future is also 30% Muslim in the short term. And the Ukr's who suffered and fought side by side with you for 300yrs have now joined the Balts and exWarsaw Pact in hating Russland.

China, Mid East and the West do have major problems. But nothing compared to Russia.

**The Cat is a Hat**

March 26, 2024 at 7:15 AM

Looking at this war objectively, there are coarsely granular similarities between it and WW2. Firstly, Russia invades a neighbouring country, last time Poland. Secondly, Russia receives a whipping, last time Operation Barbarossa, this time Ukraine's counter offensives of 2022. Thirdly, Russia holds the line, last time Stalingrad and Kursk, this time Ukraine's thwarted counteroffensive of 2023. Fourthly, Russia goes over to the offensive this year.

Because this is a war of industrial production, any calculation of Russia's ability has to factor in the output of Belarus, China, Iran and North Korea. China won't send any finished weapons, however, only technology. North Korea in particular has an outsized armaments industry due to their policy of self sufficiency, Juche. The Ukraine War has solved their problem of food insecurity, they will get Russian produce in exchange for military goods. The more they produce the better they eat.

This war is a harbinger of Apocalypse. Unwillingness to negotiate its end is pure folly.

**cokerjg**

March 27, 2024 at 2:17 AM

Brusilov offensive. Initially successful, but the usual Russian canon fodder methods of gaining a few square meters leading to the end of the Czar.

In WW1 & 2 it's estimated 6 Russ died for every 1 of their adversaries. Today the peoples of the Russian federation much better educated and won't accept those sort of casualties.

The Ukr's just have to defend, and Russ lose men in their special military operation of 3 weeks.

Russia is now China's ditch (with a b). Siberia is being taken over by Xi.

The oligarchs want to holiday in their yachts/villa's in the West (not in Peking).

I'm with you, we are in WW3 but with the wrong enemy.

**Galen Linder**

March 26, 2024 at 4:37 AM

Why was this proxy war engineered? It was engineered by those who believe in their own propaganda. It was engineered by those who thought Russia was a paper tiger. It was engineered by those who thought the world outside of the US/NATO propaganda bubble would accept the absurd narrative about a deranged Putin planning to seize Europe starting with Ukraine. They thought they had all these small countries over which they had the power to line up and be counted. They thought they had India! Now it is known that these same people continually wrecked the peace negotiations. Now hundreds of thousands are dead, Ukraine is a wreck and it is all their fault!! These people need to be in the dock.

**cokerjg**

March 27, 2024 at 2:35 AM

Russia is a paper tiger, NATO has played a blinder. 200k Russ casualties for a few sq m's, good practice for NATO weapons, a drowned Putinkim Navy, and Siberia being taken over by Xi.
A pyhrric victory indeed. But for who ?

**Leo K**

March 28, 2024 at 6:46 PM

The biggest problem is the widespread absence of realistic thinking and basic fear of provoking war and escalating it against major nuclear power who will not hesitate to go nuclear at some point. It's the worst situation when blind leads blind into abyss...

**Edwin Lindgren**

March 26, 2024 at 1:20 AM

During the 20th Century, three U.S. presidents (all Democrats) who were running for re-election swore up and down to the voters that they would not send American 'boys' to fight in ongoing overseas wars. They were Wilson in 1916, FDR in 1940 and LBJ in 1964. Following their re-election victories, all three sent U.S. troops into battle.

Biden has repeatedly stated no U.S. boots on the ground in Ukraine (or at least none that will be acknowledged). He has also mumbled repeatedly that "Putin must not win." I have no doubt that if Biden manages to get re-elected in November, he will double down on US/NATO support for Ukraine. What form this will take remains to be seen, but negotiations with the Russians will not be an option.

A final thought. As Mr. Goldman makes clear, America's "intellectual and executive leadership" have no intention of losing this war. If nuclear weapons are eventually used within the Ukraine battlespace, it will be the US/NATO who will use them first.

**northernguy**

March 26, 2024 at 12:56 AM

The author says the Taurus cruise missile has a range of two thousand miles. Absolutely everything I have read says that its range is about three hundred miles max.

NATO is not geared to fight a war with a near peer. Even if all their super duper weapons performed as originally claimed to be capable of when operating in Ukrainian conditions, it just doesn't have enough to make a difference. And they don't actually perform as advertised despite their extreme cost.

**Tony Ji**

March 25, 2024 at 1:00 PM

no one will listen, they had all gone war crazy and in denial of reality.

**Paul Shui**

March 25, 2024 at 12:13 PM

A younger president without the cold war mentality, who recognizes that the US has to change it's ways, to accept that it is not capable to boss the world any longer, will do America and the world a huge favor. Alas, it's not happening.

**peter-goodman**

March 26, 2024 at 2:17 AM

My feelings exactly. In the upcoming election, we have a choice between Biden and Trump, both of whom are too old. I keep hoping Biden will step aside for...somebody. I would not expect Trump's foreign policies to be much different than Biden's—just a lot more shouting and bellowing.

**kiers**

April 1, 2024 at 5:00 AM

world's biggest democracy, has no peace candidate! Only in Murica!

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