

Every Escalation Brings Washington Closer to Defeat in Ukraine

By Mike Whitney • June, 2024

There is a vast difference between “not winning” and “losing” a war. In the case of Ukraine, “not winning” means that President Zelensky and his handlers in Washington choose to pursue a negotiated settlement that would allow Russia to keep the territory it captured during the war while addressing Moscow’s modest security demands. (Note—Ukraine must reject any intention of joining NATO)

On the other hand, “losing” the war means that the US and NATO continue on the same path they are today—pumping lethal weapons, trainers and long-range missiles systems into Ukraine—hoping that the Russian offensive is progressively weakened so Ukraine can prevail on the battlefield. This alternate path—which amounts to ‘wishful thinking’—is the path to “losing” the war.

Unlike the “not winning” the war scenario, “losing” the war will have a catastrophic effect on the United States and its future. It would mean that Washington had been unable to prevent a Russian military incursion into Europe which is NATO’s primary raison d’etre. It would challenge the idea that the US is capable of acting as the guarantor of regional security which is the role the US has enjoyed since the end of WW2. The perception of a US defeat at the hands of Russia would unavoidably trigger a re-evaluation of current security relations leading to the dissolution of NATO and, very possibly, the EU as well. Simply put, losing the war would be a disaster. Here’s how Colonel Daniel Davis summed it up just last week:

“We can’t let Russia win.”

I’ve heard that throughout the entire 2-plus years of the war. But here’s what I’m saying: If you keep going down this path—ignoring all the realities we keep talking about—not only will Russia win, we’ll lose. And I assure you if you thought it was bad to ‘let Putin win’—which means having a negotiated settlement in which Putin ends up with territory he didn’t start the war with—...But if you say that—because I don’t want that to happen, I’m going to keep fighting—that implies you think you can win. But if you can’t win, then the likely outcome is that you lose even more, and that’s what’s really going to hurt our credibility because, imagine if the whole force of NATO was shown to be unable to stop Russia from winning? Now our credibility is damaged far worse than having a negotiated settlement Colonel Daniel Davis, You Tube

So, while “not winning” is not the perfect outcome, it is vastly superior to “losing” which would severely undermine the Alliance’s credibility, greatly erode Washington’s power in Europe, and force the US to rethink its plans for projecting power into Central Asia. (pivot to Asia) In short, a US defeat by

Russia in Ukraine would be a serious body-blow to the “rules-based order” and the denouement of the American Century.

So, there’s a lot at stake for the United States. Unfortunately, there is no real debate in elite power circles about the best way forward. And, that’s because the decision has already been made, and that decision hews closely to the maximalist views articulated in an article at the Atlantic Council titled “NATO at 75: The Alliance’s future lies in Ukraine’s victory against Russia”

NATO will mark its seventy-fifth anniversary on April 4 as history’s most successful military alliance. However, its future as a credible deterrent to aggression now lies in the success or failure of Russia’s unjust and brutal invasion of Ukraine.....

Allied leaders have unambiguously bound NATO’s security to this war. NATO summits have repeatedly condemned the invasion and demanded that Russia “completely and unconditionally withdraw all of its forces and equipment from the territory of Ukraine.”

And the rhetoric has escalated. French President Emmanuel Macron recently described the war as “existential” for Europe. “If Russia wins this war, Europe’s credibility would be reduced to zero,” Macron said...

If the upcoming Washington summit is to inspire continued confidence in NATO’s credibility, and thus its future, then the Alliance must take action to place Ukraine onto a clear path to victory...

Allied leaders must unambiguously endorse Ukraine’s war objectives—that is, total territorial reconstitution back to the nation’s 1991 borders. Anything short of that is a disillusioning signal to Ukraine and encouragement to Putin to sustain his invasion. NATO at 75: The Alliance’s future lies in Ukraine’s victory against Russia, atlanticcouncil.org

Repeat: Allied leaders must unambiguously endorse Ukraine’s war objectives—that is, total territorial reconstitution back to the nation’s 1991 borders. Anything short of that is a disillusioning signal to Ukraine and encouragement to Putin to sustain his invasion.

As we said earlier, **this maximalist view of NATO’s objectives is nothing more than wishful thinking.** The anemic UAF is not going to drive the Russian Army out of Ukraine nor are they going to win the war. Even so, the views above are shared by the vast majority of foreign policy elites who have not adjusted their thinking so that it corresponds to Ukraine’s bloody battlefield losses. Here’s more from a *Foreign Affairs* op-ed:

The Biden administration and its European counterparts have failed to articulate their endgame for this war. Three years into the conflict, Western planning continues to be strategically backwards—aiding Kiev

has become an end in itself, divorced from a coherent strategy for bringing the war to a close.

But the “theory of victory” presented by Zagorodnyuk and Cohen to replace the strategic malaise in which the west finds itself is, remarkably, even more dangerous and ill-conceived than the status quo. The authors call on the White House to come out in full-throated support of Kiev’s war aims: namely, ejecting all Russian forces from Ukraine’s 1991 borders including Crimea, subjecting Russian officials to war crimes tribunals, extracting reparations from Moscow, and providing Ukraine with “long-term security arrangements.” Put differently, the West must commit itself to nothing short of Russia’s total and unconditional battlefield defeat.

How is Ukraine, with its battered military, collapsing demography, and an economy entirely reliant on Western cash infusions, to accomplish this lofty task? By doing more of the same, but on a larger scale. The New Theory of Ukrainian Victory Is the Same as the Old, The American Conservative

The point we’re trying to make is that this type of delusional thinking is virtually universal among US foreign policy elites none of whom are prepared to accept the fundamental reality on the ground. As a result, there is no chance that the Biden administration will make a course-correction or make any attempt to prevent a direct clash between the two nuclear-armed adversaries, NATO and Russia.

So, how would a reasonable person approach the current conflict in Ukraine?

They’d look for a way to end it ASAP while inflicting as little damage as possible on the losing side. Here’s what Marymount Professor Mark Episkopos had to say in the same article above:

Western leaders are long overdue in articulating a coherent theory of victory—one that grapples with the trade-offs and limitations confronting Kiev and its backers rather than sweeping them aside in pursuit of maximalist battlefield objectives that are increasingly detached from realities on the ground. This does not mean resigning oneself to Ukraine’s unconditional surrender. Yet it will require policymakers to acknowledge that there is no viable pathway to Russia’s unconditional defeat and to shape their thinking around war termination accordingly. It is not too late to end the war on terms that guarantee Ukraine’s sovereignty while advancing U.S. interests. The West still has substantial leverage on and off the battlefield, but the key to wielding this influence effectively is to finally abandon a zero-sum framing of victory that has prevented leaders from repairing to a more pragmatic, strategically nimble approach. The New Theory of Ukrainian Victory Is the Same as the Old, The American Conservative

Bottom line: A deal can be made that will minimize the overall damage to the United States and Ukraine, but it’s up to US diplomats and foreign policy elites

to identify areas of common ground so an agreement can be reached that will avoid an even bigger catastrophe.

The problem with Professor Episkopos recommendation, is that it is an imminently reasonable suggestion which means it will be dismissed out-of-hand by the warhawks who set policy. Even now, US powerbrokers are certain that the war can be won if they just throw caution-to-the-wind and apply more raw, military force. That ought to do it. (they think)

This is the kind of flawed reasoning that drives the US war machine. Policy elites honestly believe that if they fully embrace a ridiculous platitude like “We can’t lose”, that somehow the reality of superior Russian firepower, manpower, logistical support and industrial capability will vanish into thin air and the “exceptional” nation will prevail once again. But that’s not going to happen.

Okay. So, what will happen?

For that, we turn to military analyst Will Schryver and a recent post on Twitter:

It... must be understood that the US/NATO could not assemble, equip, send, and sustain even a dozen competent combat brigades to engage the Russians in Ukraine.

Do you realize what would happen to 50k NATO combat troops — none of whom have EVER experienced high-intensity warfare — if they were suddenly thrust, with necessarily deficient leadership and coordination, into the Ukraine battlefield?

They would be mercilessly slaughtered. Bleeding the Beast, Will Schryver, Twitter

“Mercilessly slaughtered”? That doesn’t sound very hopeful.

Even so, France has already announced that it will send military trainers to Ukraine, and others will certainly follow. At the same time more lethal weaponry, particularly long-range missiles and F-16s are already en route and will likely be used sometime in the near future. But, will it matter? Will the provision of new weapons and combat troops turn the tide and prevent the collapse of the Ukrainian army? Here’s Schryver again:

Why should the Russians object if the US/NATO sends more of its scant stockpiles of short-range ballistic and longer-range cruise missiles? The success rates for ATACMS and Storm Shadow missiles has been abysmal, and steadily decreases with the passage of time. They are strategically meaningless. And there is effectively zero replenishment capacity!

Why should the Russians object if the US/NATO sends a squadron — or even five — of antiquated F-16s to Ukraine. Yes, of course, they would be piloted by NATO “volunteers”, and they might even achieve a handful of

overhyped and fleeting “successes” in the early going. But if they actually attempt to mount serious sorties over the Ukraine battlefield, old F-16s with inadequate logistics and sustainment are going to have a life span numbered in mere HOURS. Bleeding the Beast, Will Schryver, Twitter

Is Schryver right? Will these prospective long-range missile strikes on targets inside Russia merely be pinprick attacks that Putin will ignore while his troops continue to crush Ukrainian forces along the 800-mile Line of Contact? And should Putin welcome the introduction of US/NATO “ground troops” into Ukraine to face the Russian army? Will that actually bring the war to a swifter end? Here’s Schryver one more time:

At the rate this whole Ukraine debacle is going, essentially all European-based military power... is going to be attrited to “combat-ineffective” for at least a decade, and probably more. If I were the Russians, I would view that objective as the summum bonum (“The highest good”) to be achieved as a result of this war, and I would be loath to interrupt the Masters of Empire while in the process of handing it to me on a silver platter....

So, if I’m Gerasimov, I would say, “Bring ’em on! Bleeding the Beast, Will Schryver, Twitter

The furor over the use of NATO-provided long-range missiles (and deployment of F-16s and French trainers) only diverts attention from the inescapable fact that NATO is going to be defeated by the Russia Armed Forces if they enter the war. So, a wise man would pursue a negotiated settlement now before things get out of hand. But that is not what our leaders are doing, in fact, they are doing the exact opposite and escalating at every turn.

So, let’s examine the facts a bit more thoroughly. Check out this summary analysis by the pros at *War on the Rocks*:

When asked two weeks ago in testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee whether the Army was “outranged” by any adversary, U.S. Army Chief of Staff General Mark Milley said: “Yes ... the ones in Europe, really Russia. We don’t like it, we don’t want it, but yes, technically [we are] outranged, outgunned on the ground.”

Given Russia’s aggression in Ukraine, this is sobering testimony. But is it accurate? Unfortunately, yes: Nearly two years of extensive wargaming and analysis shows that if Russia were to conduct a short-warning attack against the Baltic States, Moscow’s forces could roll to the outskirts of the Estonian capital of Tallinn and the Latvian capital of Riga in 36 to 60 hours. In such a scenario, the United States and its allies would not only be outranged and outgunned, but also outnumbered....

Outgunned? (The Russians) have much more advanced armor, weapons, and sensors, and in some areas — such as active protection systems to

defend against anti-tank guided missiles (ATGMs) — are superior to their Western counterparts....

Beyond the disadvantages of being outnumbered, outranged, and outgunned, a slew of other issues compounds the problem. First, NATO allies and the U.S. military would be of limited immediate help offsetting these disadvantages. European allies followed the American lead by cutting armor and optimizing their remaining forces for “out-of-area” missions like Afghanistan. Thus, Great Britain is continuing with plans to withdraw its last troops from Germany, while Germany has reduced its army from a Cold War level of 10 heavy divisions to the equivalent of two.

But it’s not just the numbers here that matter. The United States and its partners have also steadily reduced the infrastructure necessary to support any kind of substantial deterrent or defensive effort in Europe. Today, there are no U.S. division or corps headquarters forward-based on the continent, nor any Army aviation, engineer, and associated logistics brigades....

Russia fields perhaps the most formidable array of surface-to-air missile (SAM) defenses in the world. Operating from locations within Russian territory, these SAMs far outrange existing defense-suppression weapons and present a credible threat to U.S. and allied airpower that would be costly and time-consuming to counter....

Today NATO is indeed outnumbered, outranged, and outgunned by Russia in Europe and beset by a number of compounding factors that make the situation worse....

A war with Russia would be fraught with escalatory potential from the moment the first shot was fired; and generations born outside the shadow of nuclear Armageddon would suddenly be reintroduced to fears thought long dead and buried. Outnumbered, Outranged, and Outgunned: How Russia Defeats NATO, War On The Rocks

What does this analysis show?

It shows that—despite the delusional fulminations of armchair generals on cable TV braying about inflicting a “strategic defeat” on Russia—it’s not going to happen. Russia has the edge in virtually every area of firepower, manpower, combat-readiness and material. They also have the industrial capability that is unmatched in the West. Here’s how Schryver summed it up:

There has been no meaningful increase in armaments production in the collective west, and there won’t be anytime soon. Europe has been effectively demilitarized, and the US is severely depleted and effectively deindustrialized....

Outside of the hopelessly propagandized populace of the so-called “western democracies”, no one in the world believes Russia looks “meek” at this point in

time. Instead, they realize the Russians have completely defeated the empire's plans and exposed its weakness....

The west has no advantage whatsoever. NATO is an empty shell.... I am utterly convinced a NATO expeditionary force in Ukraine would be massacred AT LEAST as comprehensively as the AFU has been, and quite likely MUCH WORSE, and MUCH MORE RAPIDLY.... Will Schryver, Twitter

There it is in black and white: The “deindustrialized” West is an empty shell that has no chance of prevailing in a combined-arms ground war with Russia. Even so, Washington is determined to proceed with its lunatic plan pushing the world closer to Armageddon while bringing ruin on the American people.