

## **STANDING BY UKRAINE – THE CASE FOR INCREASING WEAPONS DELIVERIES, RATHER THAN CALLING FOR NEGOTIATIONS TO FREEZE THE STATUS QUO**

It is not surprising that there are growing calls for Ukraine to enter into talks with Russia to end the war and for the West to reduce delivery of weapons and other aid. The shift in sentiment among some is driven by a range of factors: there are elections looming over the course of the next 14 months in Poland, the United States and the United Kingdom, as well as for members of the European Parliament, and conservative nationalist movements and political parties are increasingly popular in a number of countries in Europe. Moreover, there is palpable frustration in some quarters that the much hoped for Ukrainian breakthrough in its counteroffensive has yet to materialize, and weather could soon make it more difficult for the Ukrainian forces to continue to prosecute their counteroffensive this year. There continues to be fear in yet other quarters of dangerous escalation as Ukraine takes the war into Russian territory and Crimea.<sup>1</sup> Add to that litany, growing war fatigue (in both political and financial terms), continued concern over food insecurity and the evolving dynamics in the Global South, including the proffer of peace proposals.

I summarize below the reasons cited as to why the West needs to continue to provide Ukraine with the weapons and other support needed for its forces to achieve their strategic objectives of regaining lost territory and, by extension, ensuring the Kremlin is not emboldened to continue to threaten European security. The corollary is that this is not the time to be pressuring Ukraine to negotiate a settlement that freezes the status quo or is even more damaging to Ukraine's sovereignty. It is, however, the time to identify

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<sup>1</sup> Anne Applebaum, in her Atlantic [article](#) this week (“What Russia Got by Scaring Elon Musk”) notes that Russia, through a combination of conversations with senior officials and veiled public threats, has deliberately fashioned a propaganda narrative alluding to escalation intended to diminish support for Ukraine. She states that “[f]ear of escalation is designed to create self-deterrence – and it works. In 2014, Western leaders, fearing escalation, advised Ukraine not to fight back when Russia invaded Crimea. ... From 2014 to 2022, the United States and European nations, fearing they might provoke a Russia attack, limited or banned weapons sales to Ukraine. ... Even when the full-scale invasion began last year, amorphous fear of Russian reaction again persuaded Americans and Europeans to hold back on long-range weapons to Ukraine, partly because we feared what could happen if they were used to hit Russian targets. But then the Ukrainians used their own weapons to hit Russian targets, first in the border region, then in Moscow, Pskov, and other cities. Nuclear war did not break out .... ”

This morning, it was widely reported that Ukrainian forces had struck Russian naval targets and port infrastructure in Sevastopol (in Russia-annexed Crimea), in what The Guardian characterized as the largest attack on the headquarters of the Russian Black Sea Fleet. The attack highlighted the ability of Ukrainian forces to hit targets in Russian-held territory. The attack follows reports that Ukraine had taken control of several oil and gas drilling platforms in the Black Sea that served as forward deployment bases and helicopter landing sites.

the multilateral security arrangements that will preserve that sovereignty once hostilities cease.

### **Battlefield Assessments**

Ukrainian forces launched their counteroffensive in June. They have recaptured more than a dozen villages, but further progress, particularly in the effort to retake Melitopol as part of the plan to sever Russia's land bridge to Crimea, has been stymied by minefields and heavily entrenched Russian defensive positions.

In his weekly email update late week, Ian Bremmer summarized the current state of the counter-offensive as such: "the counteroffensive is now fully underway—after long delays, 10 of Ukraine's 12 available brigades for the attacks have now been deployed, and following several weeks of serious fighting, not much has changed on the ground. Ukraine has managed to break through one of Russia's three lines of defense in the area of the core offensive, but at the cost of thousands of casualties and massive materiel losses (on both sides). Russia's defensive forces are holding up comparatively well; they're fighting from entrenched positions, with no reports of significant defections. Russia still manages to control some 18% of Ukrainian territory – roughly the same it's controlled since spring – and in the coming month to two, the fighting will get more difficult as the ground turns to mud."

Bremmer notes that Ukraine is running low on troops, and Russia appears to have figured out how to jam Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System (GMLRS) warheads on the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS). The United States reportedly is nearing a decision to deliver long-range Army Tactical Missile Systems (ATACMS) to Ukraine, but perhaps not in sufficient quantities this year to make a difference in the land war. The potential game changer though is the ability of Ukraine to attack Russia, and a key component of strategy appears to be, as Bremmer notes, the domestic production of advanced inexpensive, accurate high-tech drones enabling Ukraine to launch "swarm" drone attacks that have the potential to overwhelm Russian ground defenses.<sup>2</sup>

Bremmer also makes the point that Ukraine now has the most powerful armed forces in Europe, and could well continue to defend itself, even with reduced support from its allies. (That military capability has other implications, but that is a topic for a separate briefing note.)

The gloomy picture notwithstanding, in an interview with *The Economist* ("How the Pentagon assesses Ukraine's progress") published last week, Director of Analysis at the Defense Intelligence Agency, Trent Maul, is more sanguine, stating that Ukraine's recent battlefield successes (the Institute for the Study of War estimates Ukrainian forces have regained close to a third of the 42 square miles of territory taken back by Russia since the

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<sup>2</sup> Other commentators note that Ukraine has shown the capacity to innovate and rapidly deploy new weapons systems that outstrip Russia's ability to do so.

counteroffensive started, according to ABC News) “give its forces a ‘realistic possibility’ – intelligence speak for 40-50% probability – of breaking the remaining Russian lines by the end of the year. But he warns that limited ammunition and worsening weather will make this ‘very difficult.’”

Clearly when and how the war ends is anyone’s guess. That said, should Ukraine now renounce regaining lost territory and enter into peace talks? This question has a direct impact on Ukraine and its citizens – victims of a flagrant violation of the UN Charter and international law, victims of war crimes, a war of aggression and crimes against humanity. It remains a country and a populace subject to indiscriminate attacks targeting civilian and military personnel, as well as determined efforts to demolish the country’s infrastructure and cultural heritage sites. It remains a victim of a malign effort to crush its national identity and culture. And the outcome of the war no doubt will have a wider impact on the West, particularly if Russia is rewarded for its aggression and threats of escalation.

### **Calls for Compromise...**

Last month, in an [interview](#) to promote his memoir, former French President Nicolas Sarkozy said that it was illusory for Ukraine to reverse the Russian annexation of Crimea, and that Ukraine should not be allowed to join the European Union or NATO. He called for “compromises” with Russia, and a search for “balanced solutions.” In the book, he reportedly criticizes US and EU support for Ukraine, describing both Ukraine and Russia as “belligerents.”

While Sarkozy’s statements provoked [condemnation](#) from various French politicians and the Ukrainian ambassador to France, Sarkozy is not alone. As Roger Cohen pointed out last month in his New York Times [op-ed](#) (“A Former French President Gives a Voice to Obstinate Russian Sympathies”), Sarkozy’s statements “underscored the strength of the lingering pockets of pro-Putin sympathy that have persist in Europe.” Germany’s former Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and Italy’s former prime minister Giuseppe Conte both express sympathy for Putin. Last September, Former socialist candidate for the French presidency Ségolène Royal characterized Ukrainian claims of Russian atrocities as “propaganda,” and then [retracted](#) her claim.

In the United States, a CBS News/YouGov [poll](#) conducted last week found 75% of Americans supporting economic sanctions on Russia, 67% supporting sending aid and supplies to Ukraine and 54% supporting sending weapons to Ukraine. That said, our unsettling [partisan divide](#) is ever present: 56% of Republicans and 41% of independents, but only 15% of Democrats, believe the Biden administration should be doing less to help Ukraine. A Fox News [poll](#) found similar polling figures. A [poll](#) conducted for CNN in early August found that overall 45% (64% Democrats and 29% Republican) support additional funding, while 55% (36% Democrats and 70% Republican) do not support additional funding; 51% (40% Democrats and 60% Republican) believe the United States

has done enough, while 48% (59% Democrats and 39% Republican) feel the United States needs to do more.

Washington Post national security reporter Abigail Hauslohner [reported](#) last week that there is a growing rift among Republican lawmakers as to whether US funding for the defense of Ukraine (which, according to a Center for Strategic and International Studies [report](#) that she cites, will reach \$135 billion, if the President’s supplemental budget request of \$40 billion is approved) should continue.<sup>3</sup> While Republican leaders remain largely aligned with the White House and Democrats (with strong echoes of Ronald Reagan), the right wing of the GOP is waging an aggressive campaign to convince voters to support an America-first agenda of vastly reduced (or elimination of) aid.

### **... But Not Any Time Soon**

Yet, as Simon Tisdall, writing in the Guardian two week ago (“Putin is waging a forever war. The West can’t pull the plug on Ukraine Now”) [noted](#), there is a flaw in the argument that there can be a negotiated off-ramp. That flaw is Putin’s imperial ambitions – “his personal crusade” on which he is doubling down – “a geopolitical Russian renaissance.” International relations scholar Constanze Stelzenmüller, in her Brookings [research note](#) (“The return of the enemy: Putin’s war on Ukraine and a cognitive blockage in Western security policy”), poses the existential question: “What if Putin’s system and the Russian president himself are unwilling – even unable – to reach [a compromise solution].” That system, she notes, quoting German historian Karl Schögel, “includes the targeted killing of political opponents, commonplace violence in prisons and camps, impunity for crimes, arbitrariness, conspiracy myths, the notions of ‘enemies of the people.’”

As for Putin himself, Stelzenmüller refers back to Putin’s 2021 [essay](#), “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians,” in which he articulated the stark rationale that drove the invasion – Ukraine has no right to exist as an independent country. This view, she notes, underlies what the Kremlin repeatedly articulates – “only Ukraine’s complete surrender, including the relinquishment of its sovereignty is acceptable as the basis for a peace agreement.” Russia’s war objectives in Ukraine, she posits, are not necessarily ends in themselves, but rather need to be viewed in the context of the draft [US-Russia treaty](#) and draft [NATO-Russia agreement](#) served up in late 2021, which called not only for a veto over Ukrainian membership in NATO, but as well for no deployment of NATO troops in countries that joined the alliance after May 1997. This is nothing short, as International Institute for Strategic Studies senior adviser for Europe François Heisbourg [put it](#), of an attempt by Putin to “break the Euro-Atlantic security and defense system.” Ultimately, discarding the post-Cold War security order puts the Baltic states and

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<sup>3</sup> A breakdown of aid to Ukraine is presented in a July Council on Foreign Relations [report](#) (“How Much Aid Has the US Sent to Ukraine?”).

potentially others within the crosshairs of Putin's goal of re-establishing Russia's sphere of influence in Eastern Europe and the removal of US nuclear weapons based in Europe.

What free democracies now face, she concludes, is that they must confront a "phenomenon they had believed to be historically obsolete: state rivals who see them as ideological enemies ... mortal enemies." She calls out Putin's characterization of the Ukrainian leadership as "Nazis," his characterization of Ukraine as "corrupt" and his characterization of the West as "decadent," as well as his threats to cleanse the "filth and traitors" in Russia and his not so veiled threats around tactical nuclear weapons as clear examples of "linguistic tropes ... familiar from the history of 20<sup>th</sup>-century genocide."

Given not only Putin's own words but his strained credibility, it is fair to ask on what basis can there be a negotiated settlement? As [Tisdall](#) put it, "Even if a Ukraine truce were somehow agreed, Putin would most likely treat it as a "tactical pause,' preceding his next onslaught." [Stelzenmüller](#) describes this as "an end to the war [becoming] an interregnum between wars," necessitating strong security guarantees. Otherwise, it is just a question of time before Putin, having bolstered his military and bolstered his economy, turns his sights back on Ukraine or on other targets.

A Chatham House [report](#) ("How to end Russia's war on Ukraine: Safeguarding Europe's future, and the dangers of a false peace") reaches the same conclusion: "Any temporary solution that preserves, or partially preserves, the battlefield status quo will buy time for Russian forces to regroup after recent heavy losses and prepare for the next onslaught, while leaving Ukraine enfeebled and less than fully sovereign. While a diplomatic solution seems attractive to many in the West, and may suspend hostilities for a period, it would merely postpone an essential reckoning with Russia and is pointless without an achievable long-term plan for Ukraine's security in place."

As Dmytro Natalukha writing in Foreign Affairs in July as part of a [compendium](#) of articles ("There Can Be No Negotiations With Putin") notes, "Any territorial concession to Russia, even a small one, would invite further aggression. The pretext may be different, but the objective would be the same: subduing Ukraine. As long as it avoids outright defeat, Russia will use any disputed territory as a launching pad for its next round of expansion ... ."

Andreas Umland, an analyst at the Stockholm Center for Eastern Affairs at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs, [writing](#) in POLITICO, posits that "[p]owerful lessons from Ukraine's own past, as well as its neighbors' history and present, have taught Ukrainians that Moscow can't be trusted. And according to their experience and comparative analysis, if the Russian state exists in its current form, it will not engage in

sincere negotiations, or sign a peace deal[,] in good faith.” It all comes down to a centuries-old expansionist outlook.<sup>4</sup>

Umland, in a separate piece [published](#) in The Kyiv Independent in May (“Why Russia and Ukraine will not compromise soon”), argues that calls for compromise fail to take account of constraining forces in both Ukraine and Russia, in particularly increasingly large, and politically significant, domestic constituencies that “strictly oppose any territorial concession to the enemy.” Umland cites polling in Ukraine showing most Ukrainians support full restoration of political sovereignty and territorial integrity, demands for justice and opposition to territorial concessions.

Russian domestic support for annexations of Ukrainian territory (particularly Crimea) is high, and the political stakes of returning newly annexed territory, particularly when one factors in the significant loss of life, is growing. Jade McGlynn, in her recent [book](#) (Russia’s War), reports that the war is popular with large segments of the Russian population and acceptable to an even larger number of Russians. She concludes that the war is unlikely to end with a change in president; instead, it will require fundamental changes in deep-seated attitudes in Russian society.

And if Russia is able to maintain the status quo in Crimea and Donbas, that may not only be the prelude to more aggression, but would clearly reward aggression. Where does that leave accountability for the atrocities and reparations?

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<sup>4</sup> As Angela Stent, [writing](#) in Foreign Affairs (“Russia Can Be Stopped Only on the Battlefield”), points out, Moscow has a credibility problem, as it has “broken every security-related agreement it has signed with Ukraine in the past 30 years.” These include the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, under which Ukraine surrendered its nuclear arsenal based on a pledge by Russia, the United States and the United Kingdom to respect its independence, sovereignty and existing borders. Professor Alexander J. Moytl makes a similar point in his August Foreign Policy [essay](#) (“Why We Should Not Bet on a Peaceful Russia”), citing as well the 1997 Ukraine-Russia Friendship Treaty that Putin breached, and noting that Putin never intended to abide by the Minsk agreements. History, he notes, does not provide much comfort to those calling for an immediate negotiated settlement, concluding that “the overwhelming evidence from historical precedent, regime behavior, national ideology, and international relations theory suggests that no durable negotiated peace is on offer.”

The [three Foreign Affairs articles](#) I cite respond to an [article](#) by Samuel Charap (“An Unwinnable War”), in which he proposes, after concluding that neither Ukraine nor Russia “has the capacity to achieve a decisive military victory over the other,” various models to end hostilities, including an armistice along the lines of the Korean War armistice. The danger, as noted by Stent, is that an armistice provides Russia with the time to regroup. Moreover, at the time of the armistice, North Korea did not occupy parts of South Korea, and the enduring peace on the Korean peninsula has been maintained by a large US military presence. Charap also cites the US-Israeli security arrangements, but as [Polyakova/Fried](#) note, Israel is a far stronger militarily than any of its neighbors. Charap cites another model, the Contact Group for the Balkans, but as Stent notes, at the time the Yeltsin government was willing to cooperate with the West and did not view the West as an enemy. (See also Charap’s [response](#) and an [essay](#) by Keith Gessen in The New Yorker, “The case for negotiating with Russia.”)

## Concluding Thoughts

All to say that there is a compelling case to be made that it would be counterproductive to pressure Ukraine to come to the negotiating table at this time and dangerously shortsighted to assume a negotiated settlement would be in the interest of Ukraine, the Baltics or other countries in the region that an emboldened Putin may target. Equally, it would not be in the security interests of western Europe or the United States.

As the [Chatham House report](#) concluded, “Not only is European security under threat, but the viability of the rules-based international order is potentially at stake. With this full-scale invasion, Russia has directly challenged arrangements that have helped to secure peace for over 70 years. The world will be safer with Russia defeated soundly on the battlefield than with an ambiguous outcome that, for instance, institutionalizes Ukrainian territorial losses.” Similarly, Judy Dempsey, a fellow at Carnegie Europe, in her [essay](#) published at the end of August (“The War in Ukraine is About Europe’s Future”), posits that negotiations should only begin when Ukraine is strong enough to set the terms, which terms need to encompass not only restoring territorial integrity but equally ensuring that Russia does not threaten or attack Ukraine again. “An end to the war is about ending Russia’s imperial ambitions in this part of Europe.”

As James Nixey, Director, Russia and Eurasia Programming at Chatham House [noted](#) last month (“Pushing Ukraine to negotiate now would be disastrous”), rowing back on support for Ukraine at this juncture, including pressure to negotiate a settlement, would give Putin leverage “he currently does not possess – especially in view of Russia’s internal turmoil over recent weeks.” It would, he notes, be foolish to even start preparing for negotiations in the context where Russia has not indicated that it is prepared to make any concessions. In fact, Nixey concludes, “Putin’s opening position may be that Ukraine ought to concede more territory, based on the ‘legality’ of Russia’s annexation of new regions.”

Ultimately, there will be negotiations to end the war. But Ukraine should enter these negotiations when it is prepared to (meaning it is in the strongest possible position on the battlefield), and certainly not at a time when Putin shows no sign of offering settlement terms other than Ukraine’s surrender. Complicating the timing is that negotiations, as Alina Polyakova and Daniel Fried, [writing](#) in Foreign Affairs (“Ukraine Should Aim for Victory, Not Compromise”) note, must be accompanied by security guarantees that would dissuade Putin (or his successor) from launching another attack on Ukraine. It is hard to see how anything short of a clear path to NATO membership, with adequate and unambiguous interim arrangements, would suffice.

In the meantime, again to quote the [Chatham House report](#), it is essential on moral as well as practical grounds for the West to back Ukraine’s “full and unambiguous victory,” which means continued delivery of weapons to Ukrainian forces. “Without it, Ukraine will cease to exist as a sovereign state and an emboldened Russia will continue its imperialist campaign of expansionism against neighbors and aggression against perceived

adversaries, democratic and otherwise, the world over. In the longer term, backing Ukraine will serve to deter other aggressors while potentially sowing the seeds for positive political change in Russia.”

Concurrently, Ukraine and its security partners need, as the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace [noted](#) in a June report (“Envisioning a Long-Term Security Arrangement for Ukraine”), to identify sustainable future multilateral security arrangements for Ukraine, and must do so now. If NATO membership remains a distant reality, then commitments to train and equip Ukrainian forces and support for Ukraine’s domestic defense industry, alongside a path to EU accession, will be key to convincing Vladimir Putin that he cannot outlast Ukraine and the West.

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**September 13, 2023**