

Ukraine: A Crusade for NATO and the Western Powers

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For Russian President Vladimir Putin, the Ukraine war is, in the immediate-to-short-term, a strategic defeat on the military, economic and political fronts.

First and foremost, the Russian units sent into Ukraine were too few to mount a successful offensive, as the military high commanders did not stick to the iron-clad ratio of three-to-one for attackers to defenders.

Secondly, the Ukrainian army and national guard were unexpectedly well trained and armed and unexpectedly effective in halting the initial Russian thrust into Ukrainian territory.

Thirdly, the Russian forces performed unexpectedly poorly although technological and tactical improvements had, reportedly, been made in recent years. Although the Kremlin appeared to believe its troops and tanks would capture or besiege Kyiv, the Ukrainian capital, within days, the advance of hundreds of armoured vehicles stalled enroute and many were picked off by Ukrainian drones, mortars and artillery fire. The failure to achieve this objective undermined Russian morale from the outset and appears to have confounded Russian military commanders and caused them to adopt a scorched earth policy while exerting little control over Russian troops, prompting them to kill, abuse and rob civilians.

The Russian army’s poor performance can, partly, be explained by the fact that from early December last year until February 24th, 90,000 Russian troops were reported to have massed on the Ukrainian frontier and their number had swelled to 120,000 when they crossed the border. During the 11 months the troops remained encamped in snow in freezing winter weather, they lost their edge, their equipment was not properly maintained, food was not sufficient, and fuel was in short supply. Therefore, the attacking army was physically unable to achieve the objectives set by the generals.

Fourthly, while not expecting NATO to intervene directly, Moscow clearly did not predict that

the West would pour billions of dollars worth of weapons into Ukraine to enable its armed forces to halt Russian advances and defend the country. The Ukraine war has become a crusade for NATO and the Western powers. Their media have whipped up public opinion in favour of the war in order to sustain it and justify expenditures to taxpayers. It is impossible to read, listen to or watch news these days without being overwhelmed by events in Ukraine, although wars and suffering elsewhere has not paused and needs to be tackled. The flow of news has become a constant barrage of propaganda against Russia.

On the economic front, Putin clearly did not believe the divided Western powers capable of uniting to impose a wide range of punitive sanctions on Russia. But, the West has frozen \$600 billion in hard currency reserves in foreign banks, sanctioned Russian business and banking, closed down Western firms in Russia, and pressed European countries to cut their dependency on Russian oil, natural gas and coal. No such comprehensive sanctions have been previously imposed elsewhere. Instead, other aggressors and violators of human rights have not been punished. For example, Israel enjoys impunity for committing war crimes and crimes against humanity against Palestinians, Lebanese and Syrians.

On the political front, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has united and strengthened NATO, which had been moribund until February 24. Isolated and derided during the Trump administration, the US has taken the lead in NATO and on the international scene and has pretensions, once again, of being the global hyperpower. This is bad news for everyone. The US vows adherence to but does not enforce the rule of law and accountability and has long been committed to weakening rather than coexisting with Russia which Washington's ideologues continue to see as the heir of the Soviet Union rather than its orphan.

Despite these strategic losses, the outlook for Russia is not as bleak as it appears. NATO is not as firmly united as it would appear. Some 20 countries, not all members of NATO, have been providing arms for Ukraine. While 21 of the 27 European Union (EU) states are NATO members,

those involved in supplying weaponry are doing so not as members of the alliance or the EU but as individual states, due to the fiction they are observing "neutrality". This has not fooled Moscow, which has threatened to bomb NATO weapons as soon as they are delivered and has carried out airstrikes on Ukraine's railway lines to prevent the dispersal of weapons to hot fronts.

The original list of suppliers consisted of Belgium, Canada, the Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Holland, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Britain and the United States.

Hungary not only refuses to arm Ukraine but also does not permit weapons to transit its territory to reach Ukraine. Before the war Turkey supplied Ukraine with drones, which have played a large role in the battle against Russia, but has refused to send more drones and other weaponry to Ukraine since war erupted. Bulgaria is upgrading its own defences rather than sending arms from its small arsenal to Ukraine. As Iceland does not have its own military, it has offered to transport but not supply weapons for Ukraine.

The EU has been divided from the outset, with France and Germany, which sought to prevent the war the US and UK promoted, reluctantly decided to provide arms. Slovakia and Hungary do not support sanctions on Russia while Cyprus, Malta and Greece object to the full range of sanctions. Italy, Hungary, Greece, Cyprus and Austria, which, traditionally, have

close relations with Russia, call for exemptions and the early removal of sanctions.

Once a ceasefire is in place and credible negotiations begin between Ukraine and Russia, pressure is certain to mount for the lifting of sanctions despite US President Joe Biden's determination to "weaken" Russia permanently. This pressure will come from the Eastern Arab World, North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Balkans, Asia, and Latin America as well as global big shots China and India. Many countries across the world do not want to return to the immediate post-Soviet Union era when the US was the hyper-power, particularly since disruptive and dangerous Donald Trump could very well be elected to a second term in office in 2024.

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