

Americans Differ on Ukraine and Gaza



by Victor Davis Hanson

When Russia invaded Ukraine, Americans overwhelmingly supported Ukraine—as they did with Israel after Oct. 7.

No wonder: Ukraine was surprise attacked by Russia, and Israel was by Hamas.

It seemed an easy binary of good versus evil: Both the attacked Ukraine and Israel are pro-Western. Both their attackers, anti-Western Russia and Hamas, are not.

Now everything is bifurcating. And the politics of the wars in America reflect incoherence.

Both Ukraine and Israel are portrayed in the media as supposedly bogging down in their counteroffensives.

More pro-Israel Republicans are troubled by Ukraine's strategy, or lack thereof, in an increasing Somme-like stalemate.

Yet more pro-Ukrainian Democrats are turning away from Israel as it dismantles Gaza in the messy, bloody slog against Hamas. The left claims either Israel cannot or should not defeat Hamas, or at least at the present cost.

So the left pushes Israel to a cease-fire with Hamas.

It blasts Israeli “disproportionate” responses.

It demands that Israel avoid collateral damage.

It pressures it to form a wartime bipartisan government.

It lobbies to cut it off from American resupply.

It is terrified that Israel will expand the war by responding to aggression from Hezbollah and Iran.

Yet on Ukraine, the left oddly pivots to the very opposite agenda.

It believes Ukraine should not be forced to make peace with Russian "fascists." It must become disproportionate to "win" the war.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy deserves a pass, despite canceling elections while suspending political parties.

America must step up its resupply to Kyiv with more and far deadlier weapons.

Ukraine has a perfect right to hit targets inside Russia.

Russian threats to widen the war should be considered empty and thus ignored. America should hate Russia far more than Hamas.

By contrast, conservatives are less supportive of Ukraine's offensives, if more than ever allied with Israel.

In their realist views, Ukraine is a smaller power, vastly outnumbered by a richer, better-armed Russia. Thus, it should negotiate while it can, rather than eventually losing everything.

Israel, however, is, in their view, defeating Hamas. If allowed to finish the job, it can soon win the war in Gaza and still handle Hezbollah and deter Iran.

Furthermore, the right is wary that Russia is a nuclear power. The Ukraine war is unfortunately creating a new, potent anti-American axis of Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea and drawing in former U.S. allies like Turkey and Qatar.

Yet, in Israel's case, the United States is far more powerful than Hamas's patron, Iran, and can easily deter it should Tehran intervene.

As of now, none of Hamas's allies have nuclear weapons. Israel, however, does, unlike Ukraine.

Many conservatives further point out that Israel is a long-time U.S. democratic ally.

Ukraine's elections are currently suspended while the country remains under martial law.

In realist terms, the old idea of Russian triangulation still makes some sense. Russia should be no friendlier to China than to the United States, and China is no more aligned with Russia than with America.

Hamas, by contrast, is a terrorist clique, as are Hezbollah and all of Iran's terrorist appendages. Their hatred of the United States is long-standing, immutable, and transcends the Gaza war.

How about the public's views in general?

With over \$35 trillion in debt, still smarting over the humiliating withdrawal from Kabul, and the military short 40,000 recruits, the public does not wish to get heavily involved in either war, even as polls still show radically differing left/right attitudes toward both.

Americans once overwhelmingly supported vast aid for Ukraine. Now they decidedly believe the United States is providing too much to Kyiv.

They still poll strong support for Israel over Hamas, but less so for Israel's ongoing destruction of Hamas given the collateral damage that follows.

Given there are few Russian-Americans, there are almost no

demonstrations on behalf of Moscow's war. But there are plenty of protests for Hamas since there are lots of Middle Eastern Americans and visitors within the United States.

What are we to conclude about these contradictory wars and American attitudes toward them?

The more democratic and defensive the power, the more Americans support it—but only up to a point.

Even more, they demand quick victory—and lose interest when the wars stagnate, costs increase, and protests grow.

When Ukraine and Israel began costly counteroffensives, the former losing thousands and the latter killing thousands, the American public began to be less invested in either war.

Final lessons?

Israel should do all it can to destroy Hamas as quickly as possible and end the war.

Ukraine does not have the wherewithal to defeat Russia. It should cease costly offensives against Russia's fortified lines and seek to negotiate.

Or, put another way, fickle Americans sympathize with those who are attacked. But their continuing support seems contingent on whether the victim can remain sympathetic—and win decisively to end the war rapidly.

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