

The Real Danger for the West in Ukraine



by Conrad Black

No one should be deceived by the modest bump in the polls that the war in [Ukraine](#) has given President [Joe Biden](#). It cannot be justified by a serious examination of the disorganized policy of the United States since the war first impended.

The principal U.S. response is sanctions that look much more serious than they are. Oligarchs and cronies of Russian President Vladimir Putin are being sanctioned randomly, too late, ineffectually, and in any case, this is no way to respond seriously to aggressive war by [Russia](#) on Ukraine. The oil sanctions are nonsense: They kick in late, apply to a minimal amount of Russian oil exports, and will occasion the Kremlin no inconvenience whatever. As China is ignoring the sanctions, Russia may vacate them at leisure.

Behind these noisy gestures, the United States has done practically nothing to assist Ukraine except to continue and,

very late, to accelerate the Trump policy of providing Javelin anti-tank weapons and Stinger anti-aircraft missiles. This certainly greatly enhances Ukraine's war-making ability on the ground and makes the movement of Russian armor very hazardous. The Stingers are a great inconvenience to Russian helicopters but are generally ineffective against fixed-wing aircraft and, in any case, have an altitude limitation of 10,000 feet. The president has endlessly reverted to platitudes about defending "every square inch of [NATO](#) territory," as if oblivious to the fact that no NATO territory has been threatened in this crisis.

In fact, even Biden's most protective media supporters must soon recognize that his position on Ukraine is essentially a fraud. While no doubt genuinely decrying the Russian action, the United States government, unlike the American people, is much more concerned with retention of a working relationship with Russia than it is with anything that happens in Ukraine. If relations with Russia actually were of any use to the United States in the larger game of responding to the greater challenge posed by China, administration policy might be justifiable. Putin has received many importunate pleas for assistance in relieving American strategic discomfort. After a Russian hacker immobilized gasoline distribution in the southeastern states up to and including Washington, D.C. last spring, Biden asked Putin to except a reserve list of American targets Russians would not hack, and the federal government approved a large blackmail payment to the culprit.

Biden appointed a notoriously slavish admirer of the Iranian theocracy (Robert Malley) as his negotiator in trying to revive Obama's Iranian nuclear treaty (arguably the stupidest international agreement the United States ever made); Biden has unctuously declined to deal directly with Iran but has used the good offices of the Kremlin in facilitating the abject surrender that is clearly emerging as the Biden policy to welcome Iran as the world's next nuclear military power.

Most egregiously, the president announced in the State of the Union message last month that he would continue his insane pursuit of high energy costs for Americans and reduced petroleum and gas production for America in pursuit of a minuscule reduction of carbon use in the world, all in the spurious name of fighting climate change. This has not only caused the United States to be a substantial importer of oil again, a status it toiled for 15 years to escape; rather than reviving domestic oil production, the United States is now also begging from door to door between Venezuela and Iran (both more vocal opponents of the United States than Russia) after having had the door slammed in its face by our former Saudi ally.

The United States, Russia, UK, France, and China all guaranteed Ukraine in 1994 when it voluntarily gave up the nuclear weapons it had inherited from the Soviet Union, and all have reneged. The Kremlin will not take seriously any administration that so happily abases itself to Moscow. The posturing about protecting NATO is bunk. If Ukraine survives as an independent country, Biden will claim the credit; if it doesn't, he will disclaim responsibility, and in the meantime, he blames his inflation on Putin. These are all falsehoods.

Of course there should be no exchange of fire between NATO and Russia, but we should start supplying Ukraine at once and in appropriate quantities with sophisticated anti-aircraft defenses and a serious drone bombing capability. I was one of those who clung to the hope that the flip-flop conducted by the U.S. State and Defense departments last week over whether to supply Polish aircraft to Ukraine and replace them with American warplanes for the Poles reflected an improvement in Russo-Ukrainian relations. There is no sign of this. The United States astonished the world when Secretary of State Antony Blinken was publicly repudiated by the Pentagon spokesman, John Kirby; secretaries of state have resigned for less.

Maybe the United States and other NATO countries will provide Ukraine with the assistance it needs to resist the Russian onslaught long enough to make a negotiated compromise imperative for the Kremlin. But the Biden regime thus far appears solemnly resolved to fight this war to the last Ukrainian while quivering in fear that Russia, which is not a quarter of the military power that the United States is, might interpret any direct tampering with its right to exterminate Ukraine as an independent state, as, in Kirby's frightened word, "escalatory."

Putin's introduction of Syrian mercenaries is no sign of strength or confidence; it would have been more convincing if he had introduced a substantial increase in the number of Russian soldiers in Ukraine; 150,000 trigger-pullers cannot occupy such a large and populous country effectively. His threat of recourse to nuclear weapons is equally absurd. Whatever Putin's foibles and despite a great deal of asinine speculation in the Western media about his mental health, there's absolutely no evidence after more than 70 years of Russia as a nuclear power, going back to the piping days of Kremlin mental hygiene under Marshal Stalin, that the Russians would contemplate a recourse to nuclear weapons over a secondary matter like Ukraine when a compromise settlement confirming Russian assimilation of the Russian-speaking provinces of Ukraine is available.

The craven rubbish being spewed out by much of the American media in support of Biden's policy of pious supportive noises but minimal actual assistance to Ukraine, will not avail. And it will certainly not influence historical interpretation successfully if the administration is not more purposeful. The ever-reliable Biden apologist Peggy Noonan in an absurd piece in the [Wall Street Journal](#), opposed any escalation and in effect called only for prayer and other non-belligerent initiatives to assist Ukraine. More surprising but no more helpful to the administration was the formerly serious Chris

Buskirk on the once credible site *American Greatness* warning against the evils of [the neocons' war](#) in Ukraine, as if anyone anywhere had suggested that the United States actually enter into the combat. In this conflict, the generals and the antiwar agitators are both fighting previous wars (which they lost), and are doing the same: uttering non-stop nonsense.

There is no practical danger of a Third World War arising from Ukraine. But there is a danger of another crushing defeat for the West on the heels of the Afghan debacle and the Iranian surrender. This can be avoided by the provision of more sophisticated weaponry. Russia would not consider any policy initiative an act of war unless there was a direct threat to Russia itself, which no one proposes. If the administration does not raise its game and make its assistance to Ukraine more effective and likely to produce a negotiated compromise reasonably promptly, it will suffer a collapse in public support and international credibility of greater velocity than what it sustained after the unutterable and tragic shambles in Afghanistan.

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