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Putting the War in Ukraine in Context

5-7 minutes

Western media, pundits and politicians grudgingly are coming to grips that Russia is winning the ground in Ukraine and defeating the Ukrainian Army. Still, they are bending over backwards to perpetuate the illusion that Ukraine still has a fighting chance if only they get a super game changing weapon. Let me take you on a tour of representative media accounts of the conflict so that you can savor the flavor of coverage. First up, CNN:

The US Defense Department maintained during a press briefing Friday that Russia is continuing to make “incremental gains” in Donbas.

Russian forces are [intensifying their bombardment](#) of areas in eastern Ukraine still under Ukrainian control. Ukrainian officials in the east admit their defenses are [outmanned and outgunned](#).

MSNBC is ignoring Ukraine completely. It does offer a section titled, [Ukraine: Freedom or Death](#), but it is populated with videos made more than a month ago.

FOX NEWS echoes the CNN meme of “incremental progress”:

Russia-backed separatists claimed they captured a railway hub city in eastern Ukraine as [Moscow’s forces](#) strived to gain more ground Friday by pounding another Ukrainian-held area where authorities say 1,500 people have died since the start of the war.

With Russia's offensive in Ukraine's industrial Donbas region showing incremental progress, Ukrainian officials characterized the battle there in grave terms and renewed their appeals for more sophisticated Western-supplied weaponry.

[Ukraine's foreign minister](#) pleaded for "weapons, weapons and weapons again," warning that without a new injection of foreign arms, Ukrainian forces would not be able to stop Russia's advance on the east.

The Washington Post is focused on a CNN report that Biden is going to send [long range missiles to Ukraine](#):

The Biden administration is preparing to send advanced long-range rocket systems to Ukraine as the country suffers losses in the east from advancing Russian forces, said U.S. administration officials and congressional staffers. . . .

The rocket system has been a top request from Ukrainian officials who say it is necessary to curb [the advance of Russian forces](#), which claimed full control of the strategic eastern city of Lyman on Friday, handing Moscow another victory in its offensive in Ukraine's eastern Donbas region. CNN first reported on U.S. preparations to send the system.

The New York Times is leading the chorus in claiming that Russia has been beaten back and has to go for sloppy seconds in the Donbas:

After failing to topple Ukraine's government in Kyiv, Russia redeployed troops for a far less ambitious goal: Seize the rest of the Donbas, beyond the area where Russia had already advanced a month ago.

Russia's military has overwhelming superiority in weapons, if not men — tanks, warplanes, helicopters and heavy artillery. But

a month into the battle for the East, Russia has made only gradual progress along the Eastern front.

Again and again, Russia's military has had to accept the difficult reality that it doesn't have the force necessary to fight in too many places at once.

The area with the most critical battles is only 75 miles wide and includes three key cities: Sloviansk, Kramatorsk and Sievierodonetsk.

So, let me put this into context. Russia is fighting across a broad front and is taking on Ukrainian troops crouching in heavily fortified trenches and bunkers. Since the start of the "Special Military Operation" aka invasion on February 24th, Russia has taken most of the southern coast of Ukraine. The battle for Mariupol stands as the most consequential urban battle of the 21st century. At the same time, Russia and the militias of the Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk are nearing the complete defeat of Ukrainian forces based in the Donbas.

Besides Mariupol, Russia has taken control of major cities in the Donbas and adjacent regions, such as Vasilevka in the Zaporozhye region, Kherson, Lyman, Popasna. Russia now has surrounded Sievierodonetsk and trapped several thousand Ukrainian troops. My point? Russia has accomplished this against well armed, NATO trained forces fighting from defensive positions. The Ukrainians had artillery and some drones/missiles. Russia has achieved all of this in less than two months.

So here is a comparison. Look what the United States did in Vietnam and Iraq fighting against forces that were not as well trained or well armed as the Ukrainians:

The Battle of [Huế](#)—7 battalions of the U.S. Army and Marine

Corps, accompanied by 11 South Vietnamese battalions, fought for [more than a month to recapture Huế](#), the ancient imperial capital city of Vietnam, following the Viet Cong Tet Offensive in January 1968.

The Second Battle of Fallujah—Twelve thousand five hundred Marines plus 850 British troops fought for more than a month (November 7 to December 23, 2004) to capture and secure Fallujah, Iraq from Iraqi Islamic insurgents.

The Viet Cong and the Iraqi Insurgents did not have javelins, Stingers, artillery, drones and heavily fortified positions (i.e., reinforced concrete built up over the last 8 years) like Ukrainian troops. This is not Russian cheerleading to acknowledge that Russian troops, with the support of the LPR and DPR militias, have made remarkable and substantive progress on the ground and that Ukraine has lost effective control of the Donbas (not to mention its southern coastline).

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