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Joseph Biden's War

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72–92 minutes

What follows is a letter and analysis of the War in Ukraine sent to the Honorable Mike Johnson, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and other Members of Congress.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Funds for Kyiv need to be cut off in order to send a signal to the Biden Administration that it must initiate direct talks with Moscow to end the carnage and save what is left of Ukraine. This dramatic step must go beyond the curtailing of funds for Ukraine's civil servants – and include the elimination of draw-down authorities, assistance for weapon systems, and loans for Ukraine.

Putin knows that Biden's team pulls all the strings; he will no longer waste time dealing with President Zelensky only to risk a White House veto of an agreement – as happened less than two months into the conflict. Moscow's political-military elites believe they have been double-crossed before by Kyiv – during the Minsk I & II negotiations in 2015 and during negotiations that Washington and London managed to scuttle

six weeks after the Russian invasion began two years ago. Direct talks must begin ASAP – despite resistance from Zelensky.

The Russians will not be duped into negotiating a mere truce or Korea-like “freeze,” as some have suggested. The strategic advantage has shifted decisively in Moscow’s favor. Washington must agree in advance to Putin’s pre-condition that Ukraine remain neutral and out of NATO (Ukraine’s near-term accession into NATO being the proximate “casus belli” of Russia’s invasion in February 2022). If Washington does not, Putin will soon unleash his reconstituted army, now that he has been re-elected (March 17, 2024), to destroy what remains of Zelensky’s military capability.

President Biden, however, is incapable for political reasons of conceding that his administration’s project of degrading Russia’s military capabilities and removing Putin from power has been a failure. His only strategy at this point is to run out the clock – e.g., delay Ukraine’s capitulation until after November 2024.

Biden and his cheerleaders in the media are undertaking an unprecedented campaign to frighten the American public and “virtue-shame” Republican Members of Congress into rubber-stamping the President’s request for an additional \$61 billion for Ukraine. However, any funds appropriated would not alter the outcome of the war; they would only delay it. 30,000 Ukrainian soldiers continue to die or become horribly wounded each month that Washington refuses to initiate peace talks. Ukraine can no longer sustain such losses.

The Biden Administration is outrageously blaming recent Ukrainian defeats – such as the collapse of the highly fortified city of Avdiivka – on House Republicans' failure to approve further assistance. This is nonsense. Any additional funding for Ukraine will take many months, if not a year or more, to have any effect on the battlefield. The issue is not our delay in printing more money. The central problems are the collective West's chronic inability to produce weapons that have already been used up in the war; Kyiv's critical manpower shortage; and the poor strategic and tactical decisions made by President Zelensky, his top generals, and the White House.

Ukraine was running out of ammo and men just two months into its six-month-long “counter-offensive” – after the U.S. and NATO had provided just about every piece of war materiel Kyiv requested. The West's chronic supply-line problems replacing what the Ukrainians expended and the Russians destroyed were well known long before President Biden made his current request.

Biden, Defense Secretary Austin, and NSC Spokesman Kirby have brazenly warned that U.S. troops may have to engage with Russian forces in combat if Congress does not comply with the President's funding request. GOP members need to push back on this hyperbolic forecast.

Putin has no intention of invading a NATO county. This is one of several straw-man scenarios fabricated by Democrats and Russophobes to frighten American and European publics into salvaging the Washington-Brussels scheme to unseat Putin. The rhetoric is specifically motivated to force you and the

Republican majority in the House to approve billions more for Ukraine.

While Putin will not initiate action against Western military forces stationed outside Ukrainian territory, Zelensky may indeed undertake some reckless act of sabotage or Biden might approve the deployment of NATO assets in such a provocative manner that the result would be a direct clash between U.S. and Russian troops. French President Macron just proposed sending a European Union expeditionary force to Ukraine and ignoring all “red lines” regarding offensive weapons. While most Europeans reacted with alarm, Macron’s proposals are not off the table.

A “hail Mary” stunt might extend the war to beyond the U.S. elections; but the conflict would become exponentially more dangerous for the U.S. and its European allies than it is now, and the loss of life and destruction of Ukraine would intensify.

Unlike in Russia, where 420,000 fighting-age males volunteered to join the army in 2023 alone, Zelensky is experiencing a major challenge replenishing his losses – a task which he is now pursuing almost exclusively through a highly unpopular draft. The Ukrainian parliament has passed a series of ineffective bills that will not fix the problem. The average age of a Ukrainian soldier is now 43. Even 72-year-olds have been observed serving at the front. A Ukrainian sniper featured on the front page of the Wall Street Journal last fall was 58.

Reminiscent of kidnappings by Royal Navy press gangs during the Napoleonic Wars, right-wing groups are stepping

up their roaming of the streets of Ukraine's cities – grabbing males and taking them directly to military processing centers. As a throwback to one of the worst totalitarian practices of the German Democratic Republic during the Cold War, guards are patrolling the fence lines along Ukraine's border with Romania, apprehending draft-age males attempting to escape to the West through the rugged Carpathian Mountains. Zelensky is now insisting that European countries, such as Poland and Germany, forcibly repatriate Ukrainian males who have sought refuge from the war.

On January 11, the DoD IG released a report stating that the U.S. was unable to track over \$1B – an astounding 59 percent – of just the sample of “Enhanced End-Use Monitoring” articles sent to Ukraine. A comprehensive audit must be initiated to track the more fungible financial and humanitarian aid that the U.S. has provided to Kyiv (\$30.3B as of September 2023, according to the Council on Foreign Relations). This audit needs to determine, among other things, whether any U.S. assistance has been used to suppress the free speech of Americans or lobby for additional taxpayer funds for the war. Statutory restrictions should restrict this. However, since its independence in 1991, Ukraine has earned a reputation among U.S. Federal program managers as a country where U.S. taxpayer funds tend to disappear.

The House Oversight Committee disclosed several months ago that the SBU (the Ukrainian KGB) provided the FBI with a list of individuals and organizations it claims to have been spreading “disinformation” about the conflict; and the FBI

evidently responded by forwarding the list to the media giants for action. One important issue is whether the U.S. taxpayer is funding the salaries of Ukrainian counter-intelligence organizations or their outside contractors, who are collecting information on U.S. citizens. A number of Americans believe that they have been placed on a Kyiv-sponsored proscription list for challenging the prevailing narrative about the origins of the war and Ukraine's prospects for victory. This includes one U.S. citizen who died on January 11, having been denied medical treatment while under the arrest of the Zelensky government.

Throughout most of the conflict, the Biden Administration has perpetuated the following three myths to keep U.S. taxpayer funds flowing: (a) Putin initiated a full-scale invasion of Ukraine 24 months ago – “with his entire army” – in a “unprovoked act of aggression” (and by inference with little warning); (b) Russia's intent was to conquer all of Ukraine, and next to invade our East European NATO allies; and (c) Putin would be overthrown and the Russian military would be significantly degraded (with the Russian economy laid prostrate) as a result of Ukrainian heroism, Western-supplied military equipment, and “crippling sanctions.” Serious analysts – those who are not beholden to the Washington foreign policy elites, the defense industry, or the legacy press – have had an uphill climb debunking these central tenets of the prevailing narrative.

Historians will conclude that the “trigger” for Russia's invasion of Ukraine was primarily the Biden Administration's acceleration of Ukraine's accession into NATO. The prospect

of Ukraine hosting permanent NATO bases was the “Red Line” that the Russians and U.S. foreign policy specialists alike had been warning about for more than a decade. The entire political-military class of Russia (not just Putin) simply could not tolerate the prospect of U.S./NATO aircraft stationed at airfields located a 35-minute flight from the Kremlin – or the deployment to Ukraine of U.S. intermediate-range missiles capable of decapitating Moscow’s political-military leadership and a large part of its strategic nuclear forces. We almost went to war with the Soviet Union in October 1962 for a similar reason.

Putin offered a reasonable starting point for negotiations in December 2021 – but Biden’s Neocons rejected the overture out-of-hand. Putin’s invasion in February 2022 with just 190,000 untrained conscripts and regional militias (about one-fifth of his army) was a pre-emptive military operation, much like the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 – except that the end-game of Moscow’s coercive diplomacy was never to occupy all of Ukraine but to force Kyiv and the West to the negotiating table. Russian military doctrine required a minimum of 1,200,000 ground troops if Putin’s initial intent had been to conquer the entire Ukraine and 800,000 troops afterwards to occupy it.

Moscow’s policy was initially successful and resulted in a draft armistice reached in April 2022 in Istanbul. However, Washington and London, promising military assistance from the West “as long as it takes,” convinced Zelensky to tear it up. Over 500,000 Ukrainians have died or have been severely wounded since then.

Two years later, the dynamics of the war have fundamentally shifted in Moscow's favor – yet the Biden Administration refuses to initiate negotiations, because doing so would be tantamount to admitting that its project to effect regime change in Moscow on the backs of Ukrainian soldiers and civilians has failed.

Several hundred thousand more Ukrainians and Russians will have to suffer – unless we take dramatic measures to end the war by cutting off further assistance. This is the only means of compelling Biden to pick up the phone, call Putin, and initiate negotiations.

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Dear Speaker Johnson:

I am writing to recommend the termination of funding for the Ukraine War. This action is required to send a clear message to the Biden Administration that *it must begin direct talks with Moscow, the principal objectives of which would be to end the administration's devastating proxy war with Russia and save what is left of Ukraine.*

This approach may seem counter-intuitive. President Biden, however, is incapable for political reasons of admitting that his administration's project of degrading Russia's military capabilities and removing Putin from power on the backs of the Ukrainians has been a failure. His only strategy at this point is to run out the clock – e.g., delay Ukraine's capitulation until after November 2024.

This cynical approach will only make matters worse for the Ukrainians, as Putin will probably not oblige him. Time is of the essence in order to prevent further bloodshed and avoid the

catastrophe now unfolding on the Ukrainian Steppe.

My Motives for Writing This

I have spent 25 years living and working in Russia and Ukraine on U.S. government business. I served two tours as a U.S. Air Force attaché at American Embassy Moscow. I have led U.S. teams on treaty inspections inside Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine. I was the military representative of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff advising Defense Secretary Bill Perry during negotiations that led to the Trilateral Nuclear Statement of 1994, in which Ukraine agreed to give up its nuclear weapons in exchange for commercial nuclear fuel rods and political assurances. As a result, Ukraine acceded to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. During the Administration of George W. Bush, I managed the Energy Department's largest nuclear non-proliferation program in Russia – securing over 80 of Moscow's most sensitive storage sites containing thousands of nuclear warheads. I also taught Russian military strategy at the Air Command and Staff College.

I mention my background only to emphasize that I am not naïve in coming to my conclusions; nor am I an apologist for Putin. While serving in Russia, I was subject to some of the most extreme indignities imposed by the police state. However, I also experienced numerous positive outcomes working with the militaries of both Ukraine and Russia. I am convinced that Americans are not natural enemies of the Russian people – nor of its political and military classes. The Biden and Zelensky Administrations nevertheless continue to fan Russophobia as a means by which to salvage their unattainable goal of defeating Russian forces, removing Putin, and making Ukraine a full member of NATO.

I am expressing my views to you because I believe that President Biden and his advisors have pursued this terrible conflict for the wrong motives. Ukraine's chances of surviving as a sovereign state diminishes every day the war continues. I want to do everything in my power to end the carnage on both sides and preserve what remains of Ukraine.

Earlier Missed Opportunities for Negotiations

Presidents Biden and Zelensky have become ensnared in a "Thucydides's Trap"* of their own making. They dismissed as frivolous a draft proposal from Putin to negotiate a solution on the eve of the war (December 2021). Barely one month into the conflict, Biden and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson then derailed a draft peace plan hammered out by the combatants in Moscow, Gomel (Belarus), and Istanbul. The negotiations had been facilitated by Turkish President Recep Erdoğan and Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett.

According to Bennett, the two central issues of the negotiations were the following: Ukraine's potential entry into NATO, and whether Ukraine would become an unarmed-neutral nation. In a breakthrough moment, Zelensky agreed to renounce NATO membership for Ukraine in exchange for "security guarantees" by the "big nations." The Ukrainian president proposed that such guarantees would only need to come into effect seven years after the treaty's entry-into-force. In exchange, Putin agreed to "limited armed-neutrality" for Ukraine.

The outlines of the draft agreement reached in early April 2022 in Istanbul patterned the "Austrian State Treaty" of 1955 supported by President Dwight D. Eisenhower and Soviet Communist Party

Chief Nikita S. Khrushchev during the height of the Cold War. That earlier solution has ensured Austria's neutrality, sovereignty, and prosperity for over 68 years. Bennet believed that the only details left to be negotiated in the Spring of 2022 were the types and numbers of military equipment that Ukraine could retain for self-defense.

After first consulting with their NATO allies, the Biden Administration and the Johnson Government persuaded Zelensky to tear up the draft agreement. They ensured him that, with massive amounts of Western aid, Ukraine would be able to defeat the Russians and drive them back to the 1991 borders. The clear subtext of their message was that Western aid would be cut off if Zelensky agreed to the deal.

Biden and Johnson cited reports of alleged atrocities by Russian soldiers in the town of Bucha as the chief reason why Putin could not be trusted. This intervention by Washington and London proved disastrous. With the initial Russian invasion force facing unexpected Ukrainian resistance at the time, Zelensky had actually been in a much better bargaining position than he is today to preserve Ukraine's independence. With hundreds of thousands more Ukrainians dead and wounded – and Russian forces now on the move – the Istanbul agreement offered much better terms in April 2022 than Kyiv will now get from Moscow.

Failing to Admit Defeat, Biden and Zelensky Are Leading the West into the Most Dangerous Phase of the War

The Biden Administration has all but lost its proxy war against Putin. The trends are obvious: Even if additional funds were to be approved by Congress, it would take a number of months, if not

years, for U.S. and European arms manufacturers to respond to the demand. The math is simple: The U.S. and NATO cannot make up for the quantitative deficiencies in materiel required to rebuild the combat capability squandered by Kyiv during its failed counteroffensive. Moreover, this war-industry challenge is compounded by Ukraine's chronic shortage of manpower.

However, nearly two years after its beginning, President Biden might order the deployment of NATO assets in such a provocative manner – or President Zelensky may undertake some reckless act of sabotage – so that Russia's survival interests become threatened. It all depends upon the risks that Washington, Kyiv, or the Europeans are willing to take to delay the inevitable collapse. In early March 2024, even French President Macron proposed escalating the conflict by sending a European Union expeditionary force to Ukraine and to ignore all “red lines” on offensive strike weapons. While most European leaders were alarmed at these proposals, the concepts are not completely off the table.

Any event – borne out of desperation – could alter the trajectory of the conflict by provoking direct combat between U.S. and Russian forces – a result that Zelensky so desires; and the duration of the war could very well extend to beyond the U.S. elections, as Biden needs it to be. However, the conflict would become far more dangerous for the U.S. and its European allies than it is at present.

Always Looking for “Wonder Weapons”

Despite the trends, Western elites continue to search for an eleventh-hour “game-changer.” While the stocks of war materiel that Ukraine needs to stay in the fight is in a state of decline, arm-

chair strategists on both sides of the Atlantic continue to push for supplying Kyiv with weapons possessing greater lethality and longer ranges. Several of the systems being considered can reach deep inside Russia.

Since the beginning of the conflict, President Biden has allowed himself to be seduced by his advisors' belief that the war could be won if only the Ukrainians possessed the *right* technology. The routine was always the same: Citing fears of escalating the conflict, the President would first hold back on providing weapons demanded by Zelensky and his supporters – whether the request was for tanks (M1 Abrams), aircraft (MiG-29s and F-16s), or tactical missiles (HIMARS and ATACMS). Then a short time later, he would authorize their transfer or sale. None of these systems have proven to be pivotal in the war.

Thus far, Putin has exhibited considerable restraint responding to Biden's side-shuffling incrementalism; however, Moscow's collective political-military leadership – not just Putin – has its limits.

Providing even more technologically advanced capabilities to Ukraine at this late stage in the conflict might translate into a fleeting morale-booster for the Zelensky government; but they would not make a difference on the outcome of the decisive ground war – due to their expense and limited numbers. However, if weapons with greater range and lethality are sent to Kyiv to support one of the problematic operational concepts now being circulated, they could spark a wider conflict and indeed result in a direct confrontation between U.S. and Russian forces. That is an absolute non-starter!

Horizontal Escalation

Retired U.S. Army Lieutenant General Ben Hodges is one of the half-dozen former flag officers who predicted that, with the infusion of NATO armaments and a quick course in U.S. Army Combined Armed Operations – a concept demonstrated only against the third-rate Iraqi army – Ukraine's forces would be able to slice through Russian defenses and sever Moscow's land bridge to Crimea in less than two-weeks' time. Having fallen short on that prediction, Gen. Hodges is now misreading Russia's movement of its Black Sea Fleet to beyond the range of Ukrainian drones and missiles as a sign of Russian weakness. Hodges sees this as an opening to "evict" Russia from Crimea.

Ignoring the fact that the Russian navy continues to launch devastating *Kalibr* cruise missile attacks against Ukrainian sea-ports from secure locations, Hodges has seized upon the chimera that Ukraine can still win the war by first "isolating" then "liberating" the Crimean Peninsula. He seems confident that Ukraine can at least "make it difficult for the Russians to stay"; however, the West needs to provide Ukraine with the right weapons to do this.

To advance his new strategy, Hodges has been advocating that the Biden Administration provide Kyiv with the 300-kilometer variant of the ATACMS missile system and "long-range precision" strike fires, such as the 400-kilometer-plus Precision Strike Missile (PrSM). The U.S. Army received its first limited allocation of PrSMs in December 2023.

Hodges is also proposing that Germany provide Ukraine with *Taurus* Air-Launched Cruise-Missiles (ALCMS) – systems with maximum ranges of more than 500 kilometers. Hodges estimates

that 60-70 of these advanced systems – “backed up by airpower” – should be sufficient. So far, Berlin has been slow-rolling its decision to provide the Taurus due to supply challenges and production issues.

In late February 2024, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz announced that Taurus missiles could not be provided to Ukraine, because they would require German personnel to operate them.

Unfortunately, the German chancellor is known for his chronic addiction to political dissembling – then his caving into Zelensky's and Biden's demands. This was borne out in early March 2024, when a leak exposed a conversation between senior German military officers regarding plans to use Taurus missiles to attack the Kerch Bridge linking Crimea to the Krasnodar district of the Russian Federation – and also to strike at Russian depots located further to the east. Moreover, the compromised conversation indicated that NATO personnel were already present in Ukraine assisting Kyiv's forces in operating Western systems. It had been rumored for months that U.S. and NATO personnel have been operating or assisting Ukrainians with their air defense and offensive missile launches – and the leaked conference call lent credence to these reports.

One of the problems about Gen. Hodges's recipe for victory is that each of these advanced systems is so expensive that their employment against Russian forces would not be particularly cost-effective.

For instance, if used to interdict Russian ships dispersed on patrol, a few ATACMS or Taurus missiles might get through the air defenses and sink a few ships; however, these high-cost systems would become attrited over time. Russian Navy ports located on

the eastern coast of the Black Sea would be mostly out of range (450-700 kilometers).

In addition, even if Russian naval power in the Black Sea were to be reduced by these more lethal missile systems, Ukraine would have no amphibious capability with which to make a complex Inchon-like end-run around Russian forces located on the Kherson "land-bridge" and disembark troops and supporting armor on Crimea's beaches. Kyiv cannot even mount a successful crossing of the Dnipro River (read below). Such an invasion of the Crimean Peninsula would necessitate the direct employment of significant NATO naval assets.

Admiral Sir Benjamin John Key, the First Sea Lord of the Royal Navy, may share some of Gen. Ben Hodges's enthusiasm for taking on the Russians in the Black Sea – although, as a senior NATO commander still on active service, he is more reticent about pushing the envelope. He did signal his willingness to use Royal Navy combatants to support the transit of ships steaming in and out of the port of Odessa. Speaking at the Royal United Services Institute in September 2023, according to the *Mirror*, Adm. Key told military and security experts the following:

“. . . whilst we could clearly play a role with our mine countermeasures expertise, that is not one we are being asked to do currently because of the geopolitical position. I don't criticize that, and I think the reasons for that are good. But clearly, working with our NATO partners in the Eastern Mediterranean, we continue to keep under review the options of where we may – if asked – could go and help and operate, and I don't rule anything in or out at this stage.”

The Paradox of Providing More Lethal Weapons – Although Few in Number

If provided with long-range ATACMS, PrSMs, and Taurus ALCMs as General Hodges is recommending, Ukraine's leadership would probably turn around and use these more lethal systems for deep strikes into Russian Federation territory to the north. This is a capability that Washington and the Europeans have hoped to deny Kyiv up until now, because it would directly threaten Moscow's survival interests. (In a statement in February 2024, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg shockingly remarked that it was now time for Ukraine to be able to strike deep inside Russia with NATO-supplied long-range offensive systems.)

The problem is that long-range strike capabilities provided by NATO would be matched in numbers several times over with similar systems already fielded by Russian land and naval forces located throughout the theater of military operations. The result would be disastrous for the Ukrainians.

The implications of Russia's vast superiority in numbers and diversity of its drones and missile systems were demonstrated during its recent aerospace campaign, which reached a peak on December 29, 2023, with follow-up strikes on January 2 and 8. While these attacks had targeted a spectrum of Ukrainian military infrastructure, including missile and drone production facilities, their secondary purpose was to further degrade the capabilities of Ukraine's air defenses.

The Ukrainians claimed that over 50 civilians had been killed and 150 had been injured during the first Russian attack (other sources reported the death count at 21 and those injured at 80). Despite

the hype in the Western press, the attacks had not specifically targeted Ukrainian civilians. If they had, given the massive scale of the Russian drone and missile strikes, the civilian loss of life would have been multiple times over the reported numbers.

The next day, December 30, Ukraine retaliated with a much smaller attack on Belgorod, the nearest Russian city, which is situated only 20 miles north of the border. According to Russian authorities, 24 civilians were killed and over 100 injured, with far fewer Ukrainian missile strikes. The Russian Ministry of Defense insisted that there were no legitimate military targets in the city center where many of Ukraine's weapons landed. The Russian MoD challenged the Ukrainian military to identify its intended military targets; but as expected, no reply was forthcoming.

On January 2 and January 8, Russia retaliated with more waves of drone and missile attacks – again on military infrastructure, principally in Kyiv and Kharkiv, Ukraine's largest cities. The attacks resulted in additional civilian deaths and injuries.

The unfortunate loss of life and injuries over the New Year period illustrated a central principle about the relative combat potential of each of the two active combatants: Although the West may be able to provide Ukraine with more advanced missile systems in 2024, the number of units would be limited by costs and production timelines. The inventory of such weapons would be depleted quickly – if used solely against military targets. Faced with this dilemma, Kyiv would soon conclude that it needed to husband these longer-range variants of ATACMS, PrSMs, and Taurus ALCMs – and use them principally as political weapons against “counter-value” targets deep inside Russia. In other words, they would become instruments of “mass terror” – not

counter-force weapons used to destroy military capability.

Attacking Russian cities that contain relatively few military targets may produce bigger headlines for the Zelensky government; however, any such missile campaign would underscore Kyiv's overall weakness. Striking soft targets deep behind Russian lines would have little effect on the overall trajectory of the conflict. It would only serve to harden Moscow's resolve that it needs to end the war on its terms.

General Ingo Gerhartz, the German air force chief, underscored this point in the leaked recording of military officials discussing how Ukraine might destroy the Kerch Bridge between Russia and the Crimean Peninsula. He said, "This [the use of the Taurus missiles against Russian targets] will not change the course of the war, we must be clear about that."

As President Barrack Obama correctly summed up this "correlation of forces" dynamic in an interview back in 2014: ". . . Russia will always be able to maintain escalatory dominance."

Other Washington-Hatched Schemes for Prolonging the Conflict

Congress should keep a sharp eye out for other conflict-widening initiatives that might be cooked up by Washington elites. These include (a) the use of sanctuary airfields in Poland from which to launch F-16 sorties into Ukraine or Russia; (b) the employment of NATO personnel for maintaining and arming aircraft (whether stationed in Poland or Ukraine); and (c) the piloting of Ukrainian F-16s by experienced U.S./NATO volunteers.*** Any one of these notions would be discovered by Moscow and could send Russia's political-military class over the edge.

The Biden Administration has floated two other initiatives that are alarmingly provocative:

First, in his press briefing on January 4, NSC Spokesman John Kirby hyped-up the implications of the Russians' reported use of DPRK-supplied missiles in recent attacks. In doing so, he was implying that the Russians were running short of their own longer-range missile – which is blatantly false. More importantly, he tip-toed around an argument that Moscow's use of systems provided by the sinister Pyongyang regime necessitated a Western response to provide analogous weapons to Kyiv.

Was Kirby laying the groundwork for breaking the genie out of the bottle by providing Ukraine with a significantly more lethal class of weapons, such as the U.S. Navy's Tomahawk Land-Attack Missile (TLAM)? Is the Administration really prepared to provide the Ukrainians at this late stage in the conflict with systems capable of attacking Red Square?

Second, having failed to bring Russia to its knees on its various sanctions regimes instituted since February 2022, the Biden Administration is now seeking European support to seize external Russian assets that had been “frozen” in foreign institutions since the beginning of the war and use them to fund the conflict.

According to experts in international law, only belligerent-parties to a conflict may appropriate frozen assets in such a manner. Will this vindictive financial initiative – one contrary to the rules-based order President Biden claims to champion – be viewed by Putin as a flagrant act of war?

The central question remains: How much longer is the White House going to play chicken with a nuclear power over what has

clearly become a lost cause?

Feeling Increasingly Cornered, What Risks Would Zelensky Take?

As frantic as the White House seems to be about the Ukraine project collapsing before the November elections, President Zelensky is arguably more worried. Given his army's losses on the battlefronts, the devastating Russian drone and missile attacks, and mounting criticism by political rivals, he might be induced into committing some tragic miscalculation – one that escalates the conflict far beyond anything the Biden Administration may be cooking up.

Throughout most of 2023, Zelensky was involved in an acrimonious dispute with General Valery Zaluzhny, the Commander in Chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. Gen. Zaluzhny was finally fired in early February 2024. Before then, in a widely circulated interview in *The Economist* (Nov. 1, 2023), Zaluzhny complained openly about his boss's mis-management of the war – in particular, Zelensky's ignoring of the downsides of the counter-offensive of 2023, his insistence that Ukrainian troops hold insignificant towns, and his increasing "bunker mentality."

Several weeks later, under mysterious circumstances, Major Gennady Chastiakov, Gen. Zaluzhny's military aide, was killed when a birthday gift – a glass decanter shaped like a hand-grenade – exploded during a birthday party. The story was that the alleged murder of the aide may have been intended as a warning to Gen. Zaluzhny. Rumors took on new currency after the wife of Gen. Kirilo Budanov, Chief of Military Intelligence, was hospitalized for having ingested a toxic metallic substance placed

in her cocktail. The implications were that Budanov, a staunch loyalist of Zelensky, had first sent the glass grenade to Zaluzhny's aide; and then one of Zaluzhny's operatives retaliated against Budanov. There is no way to confirm whether the two incidents were related, or the real motives involved. However, the circulation of this tragicomedy in Kyiv served to underscore ongoing reports that the relationship between President Zelensky and Gen. Zaluzhny had reached a dangerous boiling point.

Tensions between the two national leaders reached their zenith when Zelensky, after having prevaricated about firing his unfaithful military chief for several months, signaled in early February that he was finally prepared to demand Zaluzhny's resignation. As expected, Zaluzhny refused to go. If the infighting had sparked a coup in Kyiv on the eve of the Senate's vote on President Biden's funding package for Ukraine, Israel, and Taiwan (e.g., the bill absent the package for the U.S. southern border), that would have been the end of further U.S. financial support for the war in Ukraine. To head off that foreign policy disaster, Victoria Nuland, the U.S. point-person for the conflict, immediately flew to Kyiv to mediate a less-explosive exit for Ukraine's top military officer. Zaluzhny quietly stepped down.

Under Secretary of State Nuland's intervention in Kyiv might have been the final service she would ever render to the Biden Presidency. On March 5, 2024, Secretary of State Anthony Blinken suddenly announced her retirement from the State Department, effective the end of the month. While the reasons for her unanticipated departure were unclear, speculation is that Nuland – who, since the Bush-43 Administration, was the chief

U.S. advocate for confronting Putin and Russia over Ukraine – was no longer in synch with the White House on the course of the very war for which she was the chief architect. Was this a signal that the Biden Administration was cooling towards its own rhetoric that Ukraine could still win the conflict? Is it quietly pivoting toward the Asia-Pacific? Or is it just that, when in Kyiv, Nuland freelanced too far beyond her brief and promised the Ukrainians some advanced strike weapon to avoid a coup – a capability that the White House was not yet prepared to extend?

Weeks after stepping down, Gen. Zaluzhny remains a national hero and popular among his troops – while Zelensky's poll numbers continue to fall. Even before his dismissal, the General had emerged as one of the leading figures to step in as President, should Zelensky falter. Then, after the Russian route of Ukraine's forces from Avdiivka, Zaluzhny's former subordinates began demanding his re-instatement. Avoiding this, Zelensky just announced that he was sending Zaluzhny to London to serve as ambassador.

Other long-time enemies of Zelensky who are boldly signaling their readiness to take over the reins of power include Petro Poroshenko, the former President of Ukraine (2014-2019); Yulia Tymoshenko, former Ukrainian Prime Minister (2007-2010), who announced that it was time for "Plan-B" (meaning peace negotiations); and sports legend Vitaly Klitschko, the popular Mayor of Kyiv (2014-present).

The most controversial figure to throw his hat into the ring of Ukrainian presidential politics is Oleksy Arestovich. Having once served in Zelensky's inner circle, Arestovich is now considered to be the President's leading political "turn-coat." Fearing arrest or

assassination by Budanov, Arestovich relocated last year to Crimea.

Before assuming his position as National Security Communications Advisor to President Zelensky (2020-2023), Arestovich predicted in a 2019 interview that Russia would invade Ukraine to prevent it from joining NATO.

According to Arestovich, Russia would be pushed into a major operation against Ukraine if Kyiv began working on its requested NATO Membership Application Plan. “With a probability of 99.9 percent,” the one-time Zelensky confidant predicted, “our price for joining NATO is a full-scale war with Russia.” His prophecy proved to be correct.

Arestovich was forced to resign his position as one of Zelensky's top national security advisors in January 2023 after revealing that a Russian missile, which had demolished an entire apartment building in Dnipro, had been knocked off course by a Ukrainian air defense missile. Since then, Arestovich has joined the chorus of Zelensky detractors blaming the President for the failed counter-offensive – and demanding a change of the nation's leadership.

Before Zelensky canceled the upcoming March 2024 presidential election, Arestovich declared his candidacy for the nation's highest office. Adding insult to injury, Arestovich recently declared that the West had lost interest in the conflict, and that it was time for Ukraine to re-align its interests with those of Russia.

Resorting to Sabotage

Faced with competing requirements in the Middle East, Ukraine's internal manpower shortages, waning financial support from both the U.S. and Europe, and mounting political discontent, Zelensky

might turn to sabotage as a means for changing headlines and bringing U.S. troops into direct confrontation with Russian forces. Zelensky would rely on the corporate press in the U.S. and Europe to come to his rescue by blaming Moscow for any catastrophic consequences.

On September 26, 2022, three-out-of-four of the Nord Stream pipelines were severed, causing a loss of revenue for Moscow and a huge environmental problem in the Baltic Sea. The damage was immediately blamed on the Russians, although considering Moscow's loss of income, that initial conclusion had made little sense.

Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter Seymour Hersh claimed that the operation had been planned by the White House and carried out secretly by instructors from the Naval Diving and Salvage Training Center in Panama City, Florida. Later, German investigators pointed to the Ukrainians as saboteurs; and several months ago, Kyiv arrested a Colonel Roman Chervinsky of the Special Operations Command on corruption charges, and conveniently fingered him as the culprit. The CIA revealed that it had foreknowledge of the Ukrainian operation but had played no role in it. The U.S. vetoed a U.N. Security Council Resolution to conduct an international probe that might otherwise have gotten to truth about the Nord Stream sabotage operation. Sweden and Denmark conducted their own investigations; but before their findings had been made known, their probes were mysteriously "deep-sixed."

According to the *Wall Street Journal* (Jan. 9, 2024), a separate ongoing investigation by the Germans could deepen cracks within NATO, if it were to be revealed that Warsaw had played a role, as

Berlin suspects, in helping the Ukrainians destroy a major energy project in which Germany had a major stake. Given the crisis in NATO over the current course of the West's proxy war in Ukraine, one should not expect a full report from German investigators in the near future.

At the very least, the severing of the Nord Stream pipelines advanced the Biden Administration's goals of weaning the Europeans off fossil fuels; moreover, it complemented the Washington and European sanctions strategy targeting Russia.

Kyiv and the Western press also accused the Russians of causing another major environmental catastrophe – this time, along the Dnipro River in the Kherson Oblast, when the Kakhovka Dam collapsed on June 6, 2023. Ignoring reports that the Ukrainians had been conducting target practice on the southeastern (Russian-held) portion of the dam – or that an explosion may have been caused by a spark from the dam's chronically unsafe electrical system – John Kirby side-stepped the issue by simply replying that the U.S. could not determine the cause of the breach, but it was “still under investigation.”

As the case with the sabotage of the Nord Stream pipelines, there was no advantage to the Russians resulting from the dam's destruction. The opposite was true. The flooding of the river downstream demolished Russian defenses constructed on the east side of the Dnipro. The Ukrainians tried to take advantage of this by pursuing a limited amphibious operation near the village of Krinky (discussed below). Moreover, as the water level of the reservoir north of the dam lowered, Russian engineers overseeing the large Zaporizhzhya Nuclear Power Plant in Moscow-occupied territory had to take immediate measures to ensure that the

reactors had sufficient water in their cooling ponds.

Kyiv did take responsibility for one recent act of sabotage. At the end of December 2023, Ukrainian special operators attempted to blow up part of the 10-mile-long Severomuysky tunnel in Siberia. Located near Lake Baikal, the tunnel was the longest underground passage on the Baikal-Amur-Mainline (used for shipping between the Russian Far East and Europe). While the attempt failed, it nevertheless demonstrated Ukraine's capabilities to conduct covert sabotage operations deep inside Russian territory.

A Ukrainian Gotterdammerung?

On Dec 29, 2023, President Zelensky's spokesman Milhailo Podolyak made a cryptic prediction. He stated, "Victory will be achieved. . . Ukraine would give an ultimatum to Russia, and Russia would capitulate."

What exactly did he mean? Was he implying that some ambitious sabotage operation was in the planning stages?

Having managed U.S. technical teams working with the Russian military to upgrade the security of over eighty of its most sensitive sites (when it was U.S. policy to do so), I can think of few scenarios – although it is best not to be too specific.

First, the Zaporizhzhya Nuclear Power Plant (mentioned above) offers a relatively soft target for a Ukrainian sabotage operation. While five of the six VVER-1000 Pressurized Light-Water Reactors are in a state of "cold-shutdown," one is kept in "hot-shutdown" to generate enough electrical power for the entire facility. A Ukrainian special operations team might be able to overwhelm the Russian security detachment and take over control the plant for a period of time.

The operation would draw the world's attention; but it would be difficult to imagine what long-term effect it might have on the conflict. A hit-and-run raid, which generated a radioactive event, might well be blamed on supposed Russian incompetence. However, a release of radioactivity would affect Ukraine to a greater extent than Russia. Thus, such a risky venture seems problematic.

NOTE: On 7 April 2024, the Zelensky government launched a significant drone attack on the Zaporizhzhya nuclear facility. As expected, the Western press immediately blamed it on the Russians. In an artfully dissembling statement, State Department spokesman Matt Miller said:

“Our belief is that Russia is playing a very dangerous game with its military seizure of Ukraine’s nuclear power plant, which is the largest in Europe. It’s dangerous that they’ve done that, and we continue to call on Russia to withdraw its military and civilian personnel from the plant, to return full control of the plant to the competent Ukrainian authorities, and refrain from taking any actions that could result in a nuclear incident at the plant.”

Miller made no mention that Kyiv – not Moscow – was clearly behind the attack.

Three other “doomsday scenarios” come to mind: (a) the surreptitious theft of a single Russian nuclear warhead, (b) the temporary seizure of a Russian nuclear weapons storage site, and (c) the detonation of a nuclear warhead at its storage site, near an ICBM silo, or on a bomber base. While none of these scenarios would envision a thermonuclear detonation, their potential for creating a major radiological event resulting from a conventional

explosion of a nuclear warhead would be significant. Back in the 1990s and 2000s, the Departments of Energy and Defense worked tirelessly with Russian counterparts to mitigate these threats. Our cooperative programs, however, were terminated during the Obama years. No American group of technical experts has visited any of these facilities in over a decade. We really do not know the state of their security today.

NOTE: On the eve of the Russian presidential elections in mid-March 2024, Ukrainian forces were repelled by troops of the Russian border guard service while attempting to cross over into the Kursk and Belgorod regions. Unconfirmed reports were that one of the objectives of the Ukrainian incursion was to capture a tactical nuclear storage facility that had been temporarily set up in southern Russia.

Back to the Battle Fronts – Where the Fate of Ukraine Is Being Decided

Russia's armed forces have undergone a dramatic transformation since they first invaded Ukraine in February 2022 with a minimum force of mainly unprepared conscripts. They are now fully armed, manned, trained, and well-led. After initial losses, the Russian military and its defense industry complex quickly adapted to the conditions and the new technologies required for success on large-scale 21st Century battlefields. Western sanctions have not slowed down Russian arms producers or their technological innovations by one beat. They have had the opposite effect.

Despite the “happy talk” by the Biden Administration and the corporate press about the Ukrainians advancing “slowly but methodically” during their six-month-long “Spring Counter-

Offensive,” Kyiv in fact achieved little during the operation beyond a tragic loss of tens of thousands of its soldiers. Hundreds of NATO-supplied armored vehicles were left smoldering on the battlefields of the eastern Ukrainian Steppe. So many Western-made infantry fighting vehicles remain disabled on two of the battlefields that Russian soldiers sarcastically refer to these burnt-out patches of farmland as “Bradley Square” and the “Bradley Parking Lot.”

Often, it was the case of small squads of Ukrainian infantry temporarily moving into abandoned rural hamlets located in the no-man's land in front of Russia's robust Surovikin Defensive Line – then having to withdraw after being decimated by Russian artillery or hunted down by drones. During this Washington-prompted fiasco that ended in December 2023, Ukrainians lost between 60,000 and 80,000 troops killed-in-action, unrecoverable wounded, and those who surrendered.** Russian losses by comparison, fighting on the defensive, were relatively low and easily replenished.

By the time that Kyiv had called off its NATO-sponsored campaign, the Ukrainians had captured a mere 336 square kilometers along a 500-mile front, while the Russians, improving their defensive positions, had captured 504 square kilometers. In essence, Kyiv managed a net loss of the equivalent of 65 square miles. That equates to 1,200 Ukrainian soldiers taken out of the war for each square mile given up to the Russians, who were on the defensive.

Information Warfare – Zelensky, Biden, and the Press Cooking the Books

While the actual numbers remain closely guarded secrets by both

sides (historians will have to sort out the final butcher's toll), on the conservative side, a total of between 500,000 and one million Ukrainians and Russians have already been killed or wounded as a result of this conflict.

Between February 2022 and May 2023 (when Russia won the Battle of Bakhmut), the two sides' losses appear to have been roughly on par with one another – despite contrary press reporting. However, during the six-month counter-offensive that ended in early December 2023, the Ukrainians suffered as high as a 7-to-1 casualty rate compared to the Russians. Thousands of infantry were slaughtered as they attempted to breach Moscow's array of interlocking mine-fields, Dragon's Teeth, concrete bunkers, and pill-boxes. The Russians referred to these senseless Ukrainian attacks as “Kamikaze tactics.”

The Pentagon, however, routinely leaks statistics on Russian losses but rarely discloses Ukrainian casualties. The administration feeds such one-sided statistics to the public because, as the *Reagan National Defense Survey* recently confirmed, it gets a 30-point bump in support for continued funding among Americans who believe that Ukraine is making progress inflicting losses on the Russian military.

Estimates of Russian losses leaked to the press have the hallmark of figures provided by the Ukrainian intelligence services (SBU and GUR). As such, they tend to be overstated – at times by as much as 60 percent – when compared to data compiled by anti-Putin organizations working inside Russia – *Mediazona* and *Meduza*. For instance, these BBC-funded organizations, adding in estimates of undercounted battlefield deaths, calculated that, as of June 2023, 47,000 Russians soldiers had died in the conflict, far

fewer than the numbers circulated in the Western press.

Russia's most dramatic losses occurred while it was on the offensive in 2022 and during the Verdun-like meatgrinder of the Battle of Bakhmut, which ended in May 2023. Since the beginning of the Ukrainian counter-offensive on June 4, 2023, however, Russian forces have suffered much fewer casualties, because until recently, they have been on the defensive.

Ukrainian casualties, when provided, are significantly undercounted, according to independent analysts. There are no similar groups like Mediazona and Meduza providing relatively unbiased counts of Ukrainian battlefield deaths.

In late February 2023, President Zelensky finally stated that Ukrainian battle-related deaths were only 31,000. Independent analysts responded that this statistic is off by at least a factor of ten.

Ukraine's Demographic Nightmare

Washington and the Western press have avoided discussing the war's impact on Ukraine's overall demographics until recently. According to data from a leading scholar based in Kyiv, Ukraine has lost between 10 and 13 million of its citizens who have fled to the West or have come under Russian occupation. Zelensky's government now controls at best 70 percent of its citizens who had resided within Ukraine's 1991 borders. Ukraine's population has plunged to below 30 million people. The Wilson Center estimates that, as of one year ago – before the heavy losses of the counter-offensive – Kyiv had lost 14 million (those who have fled or living in the five provinces under Moscow's authority), and that its population was down to 31 million.*** While hundreds of

thousands have died on the killing fields or are living as invalids, according to a BBC report on November 25, 2023, over 650,000 men of prime draft-age – several armies' worth of individuals – have escaped (many with their families) to countries such as Poland and Germany. Many have said that they have no intention of returning. In many respects, the core of the very generation of men that Ukraine needs to rebuild its future has been lost, and those who remain under Kyiv's authority continue to be sacrificed as the war is prolonged.

A Stalemate? Really?

While now admitting that Ukraine has a critical lack of Western-manufactured artillery rounds, air defense systems, and personnel, the Biden Administration and many of its stakeholders in the corporate media continue to characterize the war as a “stalemate,” and that the situation can still be reversed. It is nothing of the sort. At present, the Russians are concentrating less on “liberating” empty agricultural land and small towns. Instead, they are pursuing a Clausewitzian approach of grinding down the already thinned-out Ukrainian forces in situ, which the Russian High Command has correctly identified as the “center-of-gravity” of Kyiv's resistance.

Moscow is employing Eisenhower's “broad front strategy,” which the U.S. Supreme Allied Commander cautiously pursued during the last six months of the struggle against Nazi Germany. Waging a war of aggressive attrition over the winter months, the Russians have been moving methodically beyond their defensive lines, shoring up their positions and seeking opportunities to annihilate opposing forces, particularly when the stress on Ukrainian lines causes buckling or breaches. At the same time, Russian

aerospace forces (missiles, aircraft, and long-range drones) have been taking down the Ukrainians' power grid – partly because Kyiv's trains, which are required for logistics, run largely on electricity, and also to degrade Ukrainian armaments manufacturing. The Russians are also aggressively eliminating Kyiv's ground-based air defenses and damaging airfields in advance of the arrival of Dutch and Danish F-16s.**** Ukraine is now running dangerously low on air defense missiles and launchers, and the West simply cannot replace them – regardless of how much additional funds that the U.S. and Europeans provide.

The Russians continue to make tactical gains in the east by setting up cul-de-sacs of destruction around pockets of Ukrainian forces. Until early December, Zelensky had refused to allow his isolated troops to retreat. Ukrainian soldiers suffered immensely as a result. Entire Ukrainian units are surrendering as their defenses crumble.

While Washington Delays Negotiating, Deprivations Continue

Moscow's forces are experiencing losses as well, but to a lesser extent. Advancing Russian units have the advantage of temporary facilities located fairly near the fighting, with medical units brought up very close behind the front lines. Russian soldiers are rotated out of their positions every few days.

By comparison, Ukrainians holed up in places such as Avdiivka (the Ukrainians' most fortified city on the front lines until it fell earlier this year) complained that they had not experienced rotation in over three weeks' time.

When it is their turn to be taken back for rest and refitting, typically

only three-to-five Ukrainian soldiers are ferried back to rear areas in pick-up trucks or vans. Vehicles hurl down chewed up roads at high speeds in order to out-race Russian killer-drones patrolling the area for anything that moves.

Throughout the 500-mile-long front, if a Ukrainian soldier becomes severely wounded, the nearest medical facility is so far back to the rear and the route so treacherous that his squad often surrenders to the Russians in order to save their comrade's life. The Russians have provided the Ukrainians with radio frequencies for coordinating battlefield surrenders, including those necessitated for medical reasons. Ukrainian battlefield medicine has become so ineffective – driving up the mortality rate of their severely wounded – that several months ago, Zelensky fired the army general who was the chief of medical services.

Towards the end of December 2023, the Ukrainians became bogged down in a disastrous amphibious assault across the Dnipro River in the southwest corner of the Kherson district, near the settlement of Krinky. The operation was telegraphed to the media as a “game-changing” end-run – one that would lead to the eventual recapture of Crimea. Kyiv even leaked the code-names of the bridge-heads – “Normandy” and “Omaha” – evoking inspiring references to the dramatic Allied cross-channel invasion back in June 1944. (The names seemed to have all the hallmarks of an operation dreamed up in the E-Ring of the Pentagon.)

The Ukrainian cross-river assault and resupply runs were accomplished by small speed boats launched from tributaries on the west side of the river. At best, less than a thousand Ukrainians managed to reach it to the beach-heads; and at any one time, only about 300 were able to cling onto positions by sheltering

underneath the mud-frozen eastern bank of the river. Due to the effectiveness of Russian drones and mortars, the Ukrainian troops remained pinned-down in their positions. According to Ukrainian officers interviewed by the press, the average lifespan of a marine who made it to “Normandy” or “Omaha” was about 72 hours.

The amphibian assault across the Dnipro has been characterized by independent analysts as a “PR stunt” designed to lift the spirits of the Ukrainian public and influence the budget debate in the U.S. By all accounts, it has been another Washington/Kyiv fantasy offensive that ended up in tragic failure.

Will the GOP Give Into Pressure and Help Biden Run Out the Clock?

Back in Washington, the Biden Administration and its supporters in the media have been undertaking an unprecedented attempt to frighten the American public and “virtue-shame” Republican Members of Congress into rubber-stamping the President’s request for an additional \$61 billion for Ukraine.

President Biden, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, and NSC Spokesman John Kirby have brazenly warned that U.S. troops may have to engage with Russian forces in direct combat, if Congress does not comply with their funding request. The chorus repeats the familiar refrain: *If we let Ukraine fall, Putin will certainly invade NATO countries in central Europe.* This is a baseless threat. I would strongly advise you and your colleagues to keep pushing back on such hyperbole and hold your ground!

Putin will be disinclined to give up battleground already purchased with Russian blood; and he is still insisting on a neutral Ukraine – a country where U.S. bombers, missiles, and ABM systems would

never be based. However, he has little interest in tangling with Poland or other established NATO nations, such as the Baltics or Germany. Putin wants to go back to making billions by doing business with them. This will take some time after the war ends.

Debating Points – Who Lost Ukraine?

President Biden's panic-driven alarm about the necessity to provide additional funding for Kyiv may also be the first volley in an election-year debate over "Who lost Ukraine?" It is an audacious salvo, given that it was fired by an administration which, several months before, had found itself dangerously low on supplying powerful high-explosive 155mm shells for the Ukrainian artillery.

To keep Kyiv's guns from falling silent during the Washington-prodded counter-offensive, the Biden Administration decided to send cannister munitions – weapons that had been banned by 112 nations because of their potential to kill or maim innocent civilians. Since the cannister variant of the 155mm system is far less effective against the hardened defenses of Surovikin Line than the unitary round, the Ukrainians have resorted at times to lobbing them into urban areas, such as Donetsk City.

Vanishing Inventories

By all metrics – e.g., the industrial capacity required to mass-produce modern conventional weapons, the adaptation of new technologies to the battlefield, the meeting of recruitment goals, troop morale, and competent leadership – the Russians have surpassed the Ukrainians in both the numbers and those qualitative attributes required to win the conflict.

Even with full funding, the U.S. and its European allies cannot supply the massive amounts of equipment and munitions required

to turn the conflict around. *The New York Times* has reported that the Russians are outproducing the collective West in munitions by 7-to-1. Ukrainian commanders confirmed this by complaining to the press that the Russians enjoy a 10-to-1 advantage in the number of artillery rounds they are able to fire off on any given day. However, the enormous capacity of Russian arms manufacturers goes far beyond just munitions for their long-range guns. It includes the capacity to produce at scale missiles, drones, tanks, fighter aircraft, guided bombs, and other technologies of modern warfare – at a level not foreseen 20 years ago.

The Europeans have emptied most of their inventories in order to support Biden's proxy war against Putin; and their armaments industry cannot keep up with the forecasted demand. For instance, the EU promised Ukraine collectively one million high-explosive rounds in 2023. However, they were only able to supply one-third of that commitment – a fraction of what Kyiv needs, since Ukraine fired off approximately 10 million artillery rounds in just the first 18 months of the war.

According to a U.K. Defense Ministry report written earlier this year, the British Army, which has given up dozens of its armored vehicles for the war, is now down to 157 fully-operational Challenger main battle tanks in its entire inventory. The Germans have provided so many Leopard IIs to Ukraine that Berlin has been trying to make a deal to buy back neutral Switzerland's vintage inventory of German-built Leopards, upgrade them, and then ship them off to the Steppe.

Lastly, President Biden has dipped into our stocks of munitions and equipment that have been pre-positioned abroad to fight wars in more critical conflict zones, such as the Middle East and the

Asia-Pacific.

“Whom Shall I Send?” Chronic Manpower Shortages, Chronic Corruption

The most serious deficit for the Ukrainians, however, remains its lack of military manpower. Most of the volunteers who joined up early in 2022 have already been lost in conflict. Factoring in these losses with low birth rates in the 1990s and the many Ukrainian males now living outside of Kyiv's control, the stark reality is that the available pool of men of prime warfighting-age has all but hollowed out. The result is that the average age for a Ukrainian soldier is now 43, with recruits as old as 72 serving on the front lines, according to press interviews. The Ukrainian sniper featured on the front page of the December 4 *Wall Street Journal* was 58.

In response to the critical shortage of manpower, Zelensky recently fired all the heads of the district draft boards – allegedly for taking bribes. This should come as no surprise. In terms of overall corruption, Ukraine ranks 116 out of 180 nations worldwide, while Russia remains a little worse at 137 out of 180. In Europe, Ukraine ranks 13 out of the 14 most corrupt countries (again just ahead of Russia). However, in terms of Ukrainian public perception of government officials using their positions to feather their own nests, Ukraine actually ranks worse than Russia.

There are several other disturbing problems with the Ukrainian “democracy.” In March 2022, right after the war began, Zelensky banned 11 political parties – those determined to be either pro-Russian or otherwise disinclined to support the President's wartime objectives. That gave Zelensky's “Servant of the People” party and several smaller parties in his coalition a dominant two-

thirds majority in Ukraine's unicameral parliament, the *Verkhovna Rada*. His government also evicted the Ukrainian Orthodox Church from its most sacred shrines, because it remained subordinate to the Moscow Patriarchate.

With popular discontent rising in the wake of the failed counter-offensive of 2023, in early November, Zelensky extended his declaration of martial law by another 90 days. That gave him the constitutional authority to postpone the parliamentary elections that should have taken place in October 2023. More alarmingly, Zelensky announced that he was canceling the March 2024 presidential election, and that the resumption of all elections might have to be postponed until after the end of the war.

Meanwhile, to hold back the advancing Russian forces and replenish his losses, General Valery Zaluzhny, Zelensky's top military commander at the time, demanded another 500,000 soldiers— a figure, by the way, which exceeds by roughly 30,000 the total number of active-duty soldiers in the entire U.S. Army.

In response, Zelensky informed university students in early December 2023 that he would be revoking their draft deferments; and he was considering expanding the age range for the draft. He said that, going forward, all males from age 17 to 65 would be subject to mandatory conscription. Shockingly, he also announced that women would become eligible for the draft. However, in response to protests in mid-December, Zelensky reversed his position on conscription for women and informed General Zaluzhny that he was delaying his decision on a new round of mobilization. He also backed off on reducing the draft age to 17. He told his senior military commander that he did not know where he would get the additional 500,000 men.

Before his dismissal from command, Gen. Zaluzhny tried appealing to the deputies (representatives) in Parliament to get the bill moving, but his speech turned into a rant: “Who are you going to send to me? Either appeal to the world with a request for people or you yourselves go to fight. . .”

In early April 2024, Zelensky reluctantly signed several conscription bills passed the previous year by Parliament. One lowered the floor of the draft age from 27- to 25-year-olds. The second required all eligible males to register for the draft on an electronic data base or face the loss of their driver's licenses. The third mandated that everyone who had received a medical exemption to undergo a new physical examination within nine months.

Presidential rival Yulia Tymoshenko warned Zelensky that he would be in violation of the Ukrainian constitution if he attempted another mass conscription without Parliament's approval. In response to all the pushback, Zelensky, Zaluzhny, and the deputies in Parliament began discussing an alternative draft program – such as conscripting 150,000 male citizens in the spring of 2024, followed by 35,000 each month for the rest of the year. Independent analysts have seized upon the 35,000 per-month-quota as a loss-replacement figure for the Ukrainian ground forces – e.g., just to break even. According to a recent ABC News interview with Ukrainian medical personnel in Dnipro, Kyiv's army is now losing 30,000 soldiers a month – dead and severely wounded, many with amputations.

Finally, on 11 April 2024, Parliament passed a watered-down conscription bill, which focused on ways to incentivize military service. The main provisions include paying soldiers on the front

lines an additional \$1,800 per month, monetary awards for destroying enemy equipment, and death benefits of \$380,000 for families of soldiers killed in action. (By comparison, a U.S. soldier purchases a term life-insurance policy of \$500,000 for a premium of \$25 per month.) No doubt, the U.S. taxpayer will be paying for most of the increases in Kyiv's military benefits.

Zelensky and his parliamentary supporters decided to kick the can down the road on mandatory conscription goals. To compensate for expected low recruitment, Parliament deleted from the final bill a provision that mandated the demobilization of soldiers after 36 months of service – a provision that the Ukrainian public had been demanding for months. General Oleksander Syrskyi, the new Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief, insisted that, if he was not going to get new recruits, he could not allow surviving veterans to leave military service.

Reminiscent of kidnappings by Royal Navy press gangs during the Napoleonic Wars, right-wing groups have stepped up their roaming of the streets of Ukraine's cities, grabbing males and taking them directly to military processing centers.

As a throwback to the worst totalitarian practices of the German Democratic Republic during the Cold War, guards are patrolling the fences along Ukraine's border with Romania, apprehending draft-age males attempting to escape through the rugged Carpathian Mountains. Zelensky is now insisting that European countries, such as Poland and Germany, forcibly repatriate Ukrainian males who have sought refuge from the war.

Responding to pressure, the German government is considering whether to cut off welfare assistance provided to refugees as an inducement for draft-eligible males to return to Ukraine.

Russia's Recruitment Achievements – When Will Putin Use His Expanded Army?

Russia's military enrollment campaign, by contrast, has been surprisingly successful. Moscow just exceeded its recruitment goal for 2023 by adding 420,000 men of prime fighting-age into its contract (enlisted) force. This is due in part to Moscow paying new volunteers a starting salary of \$2,100 per month and offering recruits a death benefit (like our SGLI) of \$55,000. However, it also reflects a growing conviction among the Russian public that their country is winning the war.

Moscow began its Special Military Operation in February 2022 with a maximum total of about 900,000 ground troops thinly stretched across Russia's vast expanse of 11 time zones. Russia actually invaded Ukraine in February 2022 with less than 200,000 fairly green and unprepared conscripts and irregular militias from the break-away regions of Luhansk, Donetsk, and Crimea – not with “his whole army,” as the Biden Administration asserts. Facing them were 400,000 active Ukrainian troops, many NATO-trained; and Kyiv managed to mobilize additional reserves fairly quickly during the first weeks of the war.

Since then, Moscow has replenished all of its initial losses and has built up its ground forces to nearly 1,300,000. Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu's goal is 1,500,000 soldiers; and he is on track to achieve that force level by the middle of 2024. Russia's dramatic turn-around in the number of troops available for the conflict was accomplished in less than 22-months' time through a combination of conscript rotation, reserve call-ups, and volunteers who have signed-up to serve.

The Ukrainian Ministry of Defense reported on January 11 that 460,000 Russian troops were already positioned inside Ukraine's 1991 borders (e.g., in the five regions of Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporozhe, Kherson, and Crimea). After Putin's re-election (March 2024), the Russian High Command was expected to have at its disposal a juggernaut of 800,000 refreshed, fully-armed, and trained ground troops – backed by aerospace forces of missiles, drones, and bombers – positioned in or around Ukraine and poised to move on Kharkiv and the Dnipro River.

Washington elites hope that the additional \$61 billion for Ukraine, if approved, will keep the Zelensky Government on life-support through November 2024 and delay the necessity to conduct embarrassing negotiations that expose President Biden's failed policy for Ukraine and his fraudulent claim that Ukraine can still win the war. Mr. Putin, however, may not be so obliging.

Free Speech in the U.S. and Ukraine – Have Biden and Zelensky Been Suppressing It?

The Zelensky Government has made extraordinary efforts, aided by the Biden Administration, to persuade the American public that sending billions of dollars to Ukraine is vital to U.S. interests. In this respect, Kyiv has apparently taken a page from the manual developed by our friends in the Middle East for keeping the pump primed. Statutory restrictions should restrict foreign assistance from being used for this purpose. However, given Ukraine's rampant corruption, we may never know the full extent to which fungible dollars sent to Kyiv have been plowed back into the U.S. body-politic.

On January 11, the DoD IG released a report stating that it was

unable to track over \$1 billion – an astounding 59 percent – of just the sample of Enhanced End-Use Monitoring articles sent to Ukraine. A comprehensive audit must be initiated to track the much more fungible financial and humanitarian aid provided (\$30.3 billion as of September 2023, according to the Council on Foreign Relations).

This audit needs to determine, in particular, whether any U.S. assistance has been used to suppress the free speech of Americans or lobby for additional taxpayer funds for the war. The House Oversight Committee disclosed several months ago that the SBU (the Ukrainian KGB) provided the FBI with a list of individuals and organizations that it claims to have been spreading “disinformation” about the conflict; and the FBI evidently responded by forwarding the list to the media giants for action.

A number of American commentators believe that their personal details have been placed on a quasi-official Ukrainian proscription list, labeling them as “enemies of Ukraine” for simply speaking out against the war. This list may already be linked to as many as four murders and hundreds of arrests inside Ukraine. A U.S. citizen living in Ukraine – known for his highly controversial views and reporting – died on January 11, 2024, while under the custody of Kyivan authorities. He had been detained for eight months on the charge of justifying Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and had been denied medical treatment.

Congress needs to understand the extent to which the U.S. Government is supporting the efforts of the Zelensky Government – including its contractors – to stamp out dissent in Ukraine and suppress those views expressed by U.S. citizens that take issue with the prevailing narrative.

“Make peace, you fools! What else can you do?”

– *Field Marshal von Rundstedt, replying to Hitler’s chief of staff in July 1944, asking what more might be done to prevent an Allied break-out from Normandy.*

It is advice that the Biden Administration would be well to follow.

* The term “Thucydides’s Trap” was first coined by scholar and Clinton-era Assistant Secretary of Defense Graham Allison in his 2017 book, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides’s Trap?* Using lessons learned from the ancient Greek historian’s timeless account of the Peloponnesian War, Professor Allison makes the case that calamity follows hubris when a nation ignores the core interests of its adversary. Concerned about a potential U.S. war with China, Allison composed his book with former President Donald Trump in mind. President Joe Biden apparently had not yet read it, when in 2021 after taking office, he resolved to accelerate Ukraine’s accession into NATO despite repeated warnings from Putin and a line of Western statesmen.

** During a recent press conference, General-of-the-Army Valery Gerasimov, Chief of the Russian General Staff and Commander of the Special Military Operation in Ukraine, stated that the Ukrainians had lost 160,000 men (presumably killed, wounded, and missing) during their failed counter-offensive. This is double the figure that I have estimated. This statistical difference highlights one of the central problems in reporting about this largely narrative-driven war and may explain how the Biden Administration and the media have so easily manipulated the one-sided Ukrainian leaks of Russian losses in its information

campaign to keep the funds flowing. Estimates of battlefield losses always need to be regarded with some skepticism, whether the source is Moscow, Kyiv, the Pentagon, or *The New York Times*. Moreover, “body counts,” if considered in isolation while ignoring other major factors and trends, are often irrelevant in predicting who will ultimately win the war. We learned this the hard way during the Vietnam conflict.

*** One of the challenges regarding any demographic analysis regarding Ukraine is the fact that the last official census for the country was conducted back in 2001. The other involves built-in political biases, as is the case with military casualty figures. For instance, *A Wall Street Journal* opinion piece, “Will Ukraine’s Refugees Want to Go Back Home?”, which was written by Tamar Jacoby, the director of pro-Ukraine organization, cites the nation’s loss of population since February 2022 as more than 6 million. That figure does not include Ukrainians still residing in the five provinces now under Moscow’s control or those who have relocated to Russia – or losses in population due to the fighting that began in the Donbas in 2014. Moreover, the author cites a statistic that only 23 percent of the 1.1 million Ukrainians who live in Germany want to remain outside of Ukraine. The conclusion of that survey is misleading, since it does not account for the views of the majority of Ukrainian refugees, who live in other European countries, such as Poland, the Czech Republic, and Romania. No doubt, most Ukrainians who have fled their war-torn country are choosing to remain abroad until peace has been restored.

**** Citing logistical issues and problems training Ukrainian pilots, Denmark indicated in December that there could be a six-month delay in providing its F-16s to Kyiv.

In closing, I would like to express my appreciation for your efforts to end the war in Ukraine. Future generations of Ukrainians, Russians, and Europeans will be grateful for your courage.

Warmest regards,

Bruce D. Slawter

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Bruce D. Slawter, Colonel, USAF (Ret.), lived and traveled in Russia, Ukraine, and the newly independent states of the former USSR for 25 years on U.S. Government assignments. He served a total of 44 months (two tours) at U.S. Embassy, Moscow; taught Russian military strategy at the Air Command & Staff College; led U.S. teams on treaty inspections in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus; and established two Pentagon organizations for normalizing relations with Russia, Ukraine, and Eurasia (Air Staff and Joint Staff). As director of the Department of Energy's warhead security program for Russia and director for international nuclear energy policy, his teams upgraded the security and safety of over 85 military storage sites and civilian reactors in Russia and Ukraine containing large quantities of nuclear weapons, weapons-grade material, and nuclear fuel.

The opinions expressed in this monograph do not reflect the views of the U.S. Air Force, the Department of Defense, or the Department of Energy.