

# U.S. Policy for Ukraine

The Case For Accepting Ukraine into NATO and Committing to the Defense

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## INTRODUCTION

As the Russo-Ukrainian war drags on, red lines are becoming increasingly blurred. Hesitancy in Washington under the Biden administration has prevented large amounts of financial and military aid from supporting Volodymyr Zelenskyy and his exhausted army. Instead, the United States has supported the fight in piecemeal fashion because of mixed domestic support towards the conflict and a fear of crossing Russian lines. Fear grips the West as the possibility of the war pouring over international borders and sprawling into an even deadlier conflict between Russia and NATO on the European continent. Weighing even heavier on the minds of policy makers is the chance of Russian President Putin becoming more comfortable with a nuclear option, stoking fears of a modern nuclear crisis. A codified and clear policy is desperately needed to ensure the security of Europe.

On June 16, 2024, delegates from over 90 countries came from around the world to meet in Singapore. The summit was a significant event, but the outcomes were unfortunately less than fruitful, and the path forward remains unclear. In summary, Russia and China were not present, and several countries did not sign the communique at the conclusion of the two-day summit (Sapuppo, 2024). Ukraine has been a decisive point for the international community, allowing for an



## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Having been created in 1949 in response to the growing Soviet threat after the conclusion of WWII, NATO has grown in membership and has evolved immensely in response to the ever changing geopolitical landscape. Several policy makers and geopolitical analysts have questioned the relevance of NATO after the fall of the Soviet Empire, since the communist threat was the main reason that the alliance was formed. Once a leading geopolitical scientist and well known within the neorealist school of thought, Kenneth Waltz stated in the early

1970s, "The Warsaw Pact is a major strategic threat to the United States and its allies. In 2024, the alliance is now larger than ever with 32 members, and it has taken steps to

expand its reach into Eastern Europe. A comparable fear that the West could have experienced if communism was not defeated if the Warsaw Pact were to expand in Latin America and the Caribbean, violating every aspect of the Monroe Doctrine. It is too late to argue if NATO expansion was a mistake. More importantly, Russia does indeed pose a security threat to Eastern Europe and a strong NATO is a strong deterrence.

In early 2022, it became apparent to military intelligence analysts, to the surprise of even some in the West, that Russia was staging for an attack to seize the capital of Kyiv and topple the Western government of Ukraine. Putin, following the success of the 2014 annexation of Crimea, fully believed that his military had the unrestricted capacity to dominate Ukraine and reach a conclusion in just three days with the goal of capitulating the government and installing a Russian regime (Collins et al., 2023).

As Ed Corcoran, a former Strategic Analyst at the US Army War College, states about President Putin, "He needs a visible enemy to distract public attention from the plutocratic elite, from the oligarchs, and from the military establishment." (Corcoran, 2020). President Putin then, in simpler terms, needed war, and will not risk long term defeat, unless it be the end of his regime. However, his plan to capitulate the government and distract the Russian population quickly turned into a political and military disaster.

To the surprise of the international community, Ukraine was able to sustain control of key terrain, block waves of Russian soldiers, and destroy much of the Russian armor which had been sent to its (Collins et al., 2023). Putin has had a series of obstacles to overcome since the failed invasion, including the near coup staged by now assassinated Yevgeny Prigozhin, the rearrangement of end goals, and the continuous shakeup of military top brass.

Now, the conflict has reached an absolute stalemate due to the advances of drone warfare, flagging morale on both sides, inept military leadership, and limited resources. Scenes from the



front lines grimly represent scenes not observed since the First World War. This war has now crossed the threshold of being longer and deadlier than 90% of all interstate wars within the last 200 years (Jensen and Hoffman, 2024). The casualties have been catastrophic. To put the numbers into perspective, during the War on Terror, the United States lost just over 7,000 soldiers and civilians (Cooper et al., 2023). That is more than 7,000% greater than what the U.S. lost in the war on terror and 1,400 % of the lives lost in Gaza and Israel. This is not to assume that the war in Gaza is less catastrophic, but these statistics clearly represent the sheer immensity of violence within the megaregion that is Eastern Ukraine.

The outbreak of the war gave the United States the chance to portray a good versus evil, autocracy versus democracy, tyranny versus freedom scenario on the world stage and quickly form a coalition of support for Kyiv. Since the beginning of the invasion, the United States has committed over \$51.9 billion in aid to Ukraine, which includes air defense systems, mortars and



Ukrainian accession into NATO would deal a devastating defeat to President Putin, deter future autocratic nations from deciding to use military force to expand their borders, and ensure the security of Ukraine. Ukrainian entry into NATO is the lesser of two evils. President Putin must not be allowed to grab another batch of Ukrainian territory without certain actions that would prove the West is adamant in standing up to the Kremlin. To secure a win for both Ukraine and the West, leaders must remain resolute and stand firm in the face of Russian aggression by eventually accepting Ukraine into the alliance. Not just peace through strength, but peace through a unified West, is our greatest hope.

Secondly, Ukraine and the West must develop a defensive strategy designed to drag the war out and bleed Russia dry while simultaneously building defense networks (both physical and technological), increasing ammunition stockpiles, and increasing air defense capabilities. This does not advocate for further loss of life but instead argues for method of deterrence, a portrayal that the front line is impenetrable, and a cultivation of a sense that the potential risk of an offensive would far outweigh any reward.

Third, the U.S. must not have the end goal of recapturing all Ukrainian territory, but to eventually agree to let Russia retain portions of the Eastern oblasts. Which oblasts is a question that depends on the battle lines years in the future. In essence, Washington and its European allies must convince Kyiv that it will not recapture Russian controlled territories and that it must look instead at NATO accession and building up long term defenses.

The end state of this policy is a cease fire agreement between Russia, Ukraine, and the West, and additionally, to deter actors from potential violent land grabs. Deterrence is a likely outcome due to the sheer loss of life, the stress on the economies, and the geopolitical standing in which the nation now finds itself. The unfortunate reality is that even though this war is broadcast as a paradigm of good versus evil, the West and Kyiv must realize that in the nuclear age, complete Ukrainian victory would never be considered a realistic nor likely outcome.

## POLICY RATIONALE & SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

### *Solidify NATO strength*

Ukrainian accession into NATO would deal a devastating defeat to President Putin, deter future autocratic nations from deciding to use military force to expand their borders, and ensure the security of Ukraine. Ukrainian entry into NATO is the lesser of two evils. President Putin must not be allowed to grab another batch of Ukrainian territory without certain actions that would prove the West is adamant in standing up to the Kremlin. To secure a win for both Ukraine and the West, leaders must remain resolute and stand firm in the face of Russian aggression by eventually accepting Ukraine into the alliance. Not just peace through strength, but peace through a unified West, is our greatest hope.

The United States and its NATO allies undoubtedly find themselves in a perilous position with Russia. However, such a position has brought to the West a unique opportunity to seize the political and military high ground, solidify alliances, and establish a relationship with President Putin on the grounds of open communication, mutual trust, and a secure future. The





state, demilitarization of the Ukrainian military, new leadership in Kyiv, and holding onto land previously captured by Russian forces. Ukraine, on the other hand, demands that Russia recedes from all pre-2014 territory, a demand that Russia could never agree to and would do the unthinkable to prevent (Slantchev and Goemans, 2024).

offering realistic assessments of what can be achieved. According to a Carnegie sponsored research poll in March 2024, Ukrainian adults are 96% in favor of withdrawal of Russian troops from its territory, with only 22% in favor of drawing the line on where it currently stands (Gonick and Ciaramella, 2024). In other words, President Zelenskyy will have the difficult task of gaining support for such a policy. However, with time, the amount of Ukrainian support for a total victory will begin to dwindle.

As Dan Altman, a leading political scientist and member of the Council on Foreign relations, objective is to make Russian leaders fear a long war. That fear is a (2024). With a defensive approach, it would be vital for Ukraine to continue to receive aid in the form of both money and weaponry to continue to resist Russian aggression and build stockpiles. Russia ultimately believes that it can outlast Ukrainian defenses because of the belief that western support will continue to deteriorate over time. With this paradigm, time is and continue to aid Ukraine with the intention of wearing down the Russian war machine, this outlook is bound to change.

## COUNTERARGUMENTS

*Russia must learn that actions have immediate consequences*

T victory of pushing Russian forces out of Russian controlled territory, including Crimea. This is the current view held by Ukrainian President Zelenskyy, who has been consistent in his messaging to world leaders that his armed forces will continue to fight until Ukraine is made whole again to its previous 2014 borders. This view is expected to be held by the President. Any other view would severely compromise the ongoing campaigns on the front. Anne Applebaum, a senior fellow at the Agora Institute at John Hopkins University, argues this case in her 2023 article for The Atlantic. Aligned with views of Ukrainian leaders, she believes that victory can only be achieved if Kyiv retains all internationally recognized territory, including Donetsk, Luhansk, Mariupol, and Crimea (Applebaum and Goldberg, 2023). The main supporting argument for this policy



Unfortunately, the idea victory is extremely idealistic in the nuclear age. Additionally, it comes with a heavy price tag and drives President Putin closer to using his nuclear safety net. It is a near certainty that President Putin would make Ukraine ~~going~~ hellscape if Ukraine continued to see victory in the field. The Kremlin, if it does not resort to a tactical nuclear strike, would continue to bombard Ukrainian energy infrastructure and continue to make life miserable to save face on the international stage. A more specific argument against this case is regarding Crimea. Crimea is composed of 60% ethnic Russians. Any Ukrainian offensive into Crimea would be both costly and destructive. It is a real possibility that doing so would cede the moral highground and put into question if such an offensive would be based on national pride as opposed to liberating an oppressed people (Vohra, 2023).

*The United States should practice neoconservatism and focus less on European security and instead on great power politics*

A second counterargument, at the other end of the policy spectrum, is for the United States to return to its usual peacetime policy of retreating from global agreements and instead focusing on the largest threats, more specifically China. There is ~~source~~ ~~under~~ behind this policy. According to a poll by the Chicago Council of World Affairs, 55% of Republicans argued that the costs outweigh the benefits of maintaining a forward global presence (Byers and Schweller, 2024). Former President Trump famously ~~sponded~~ earlier this year to a question regarding

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President Putin. With a window to expand the conflict, President Putin could be more inclined to attack the Suwalki gap, a land bridge between Poland and Lithuania that connects Belarus to Kaliningrad, an isolated oblast on the Baltic Sea. Such an attack would draw all European powers into a devastating and violent confrontation with Russia.

### *International support*

The international community has not been consistent with its support for Ukraine. Since the inception of the conflict, the Global South has not been vocal against Russia nor supportive of aid to Ukraine. As Kadri Liik, a senior policy fellow at the European Council of Foreign Affairs, writes, much of the global south does not align itself with narratives but instead with pragmatic relationships, which is something that Russia has the distinct advantage (Liik, 2023). In February, 2023, a year into the conflict, the United Nations General Assembly voted on a resolution that would end the war and give Ukraine the territory it had lost to Russia. Although 141 nations voted in favor, 32 nations, including China and India, abstained from voting, and another 7, including Russia, vetoed the resolution (Masih, 2023). The United States must continue to court the Global South, not by narrative but through pragmatic action. Although not a priority for the policy recommendation, it is vital that the United States is seen in more positive light on the world stage, which could result in more favorable outcomes for future U.N. resolutions.

The number one challenge that the United States faces while fulfilling this policy is pressuring NATO allies into making considerable contributions. Domestic support could falter if the bill is heavily footed by Washington. As of April 2024, the United States has provided nearly \$80 billion in aid, while Europe has contributed \$110 billion. The U.S. has spent nearly 5 times as much as the next European country, Germany. In terms of value, the United States has contributed more for tanks, armored personnel carriers (APCs), Howitzer artillery pieces, and

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weapons of choice. World leaders would need to decide if a tactical strike would be worth the escalation.

Any move by the West to secure a rapid victory or to support Ukraine in regaining all lost territory could lead to a potential nuclear standoff. President Putin is vested in nuclear deterrence and is more than capable of bringing the United States to the brink of war. Since the 2022 invasion, Russia has tested its nuclear systems, pulled out from the START treaty, and threatened to start nuclear testing. Several of these threats have been acknowledged but largely ignored by western leaders (Schroeder, 2023). The victory in Ukraine is a paramount Russian objective. Securing Kyiv from Russian forces has been a secondary objective of Washington. President Putin would be more willing to risk war with NATO than the West would be to risk war with Russia, undermining the effectiveness of the deterrent. In the nuclear age, it is in the West's best interest to avoid the possibility of any standoff, and to continue to support Ukraine without supporting the idea of a reunified Ukraine.

### *China, Venezuela, and North Korea are watching*

From a larger perspective, the western response is to retain the global order. Other revisionist actors such as China, Venezuela, and North Korea are all watching this conflict closely. The outcomes will largely influence them in determining if land grabs worth the risk. It is a moral and strategic imperative that they see Russia bleed out and end with a small reward that was not worth the years spent, lives lost, and resources consumed.

Since the nationalist Kuomintang withdrew themselves from mainland China to the island of Taiwan following a defeat from Mao



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Lastly, and potentially most dangerously, North Korea has been developing a more interactive relationship with Moscow. Immediately following the 2022 invasion, North Korea was one of four countries to reject a UN resolution condemning a resolution. Apart from the diplomatic front, the two nations have become increasingly intertwined with arms trades in support of the Ukrainian war. According to a report from the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), Russia has accepted more than 3 million artillery shells from DPRK DPRK military and civilian infrastructure within Ukraine. In return, Russia has provided North Korea vital information that has been threatening the safety and security of South Korea since the beginning of his reign and failure in U make a move into the South, which could spell one of the deadliest initial hours of combat in



## CONCLUSION

It is a grim reality that black and white scenarios do not exist. Compromise, advantages and disadvantages, all influence a world that is increasingly gray. War between the Russian and the Ukrainian people could drag on for decades or as long as both countries exist. Memories of soldiers killed, homes destroyed, and children lost will all continue to burn the ravaging fire of revenge. The only hope as policy makers is to ensure that war is contained, and an eventual cease-fire deal is obtained. It will not be a glorious end to a war: there will be no parades in Kyiv, no flowers flung from overhanging balconies, no waving to masses of soldiers returning home by train or by boat. There will be only a quiet acceptance, a nightmare that will continue to live on in the minds of millions.

The Latin phrase *si vis pacem, para bellum* manifested into policy under the presidential administrations of Andrew Jackson, Theodore Roosevelt, Ronald Reagan, and Donald Trump, is truly the soundest strategy for constructing an American foreign policy for the twenty-first century. *Si vis pacem, para bellum* is not necessarily a call to arms, but a call for stronger, better prepared ground, sea, and air forces, stronger alliances, and an understanding of the realities of the current international order. It is much too late and much too dangerous for Ukraine to try to revert to 2014 order, but it is never too late to ensure a similar invasion of Ukraine or neighboring lands never happens again.





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## ABOUT THE GLOBAL POLICY HORIZONS RESEARCH LAB

Webster University Global Policy Horizons Lab is a policy focused research entity where students, lab researchers, affiliated faculty, as well as members of the policy community across disciplines can explore national and global security issues, generate original research, as well as produce peer-reviewed policy papers and commentaries. The Lab pursues innovative research focusing on unconventional threats, identity and security, role of technology in security, economic security, as well as environmental and food security. The goal of the Lab is to become a knowledge hub that informs national governments and other members of the global policy community on contemporary and future security challenges.



The current Director of the Lab is Professor Dani Belo, PhD.