

How will the war in Ukraine end?

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February 21, 2023



In 2014 the Ukrainian people removed from power their leader Viktor Yanukovich, and made their choice to develop as a liberal democracy ruled by law, part of the European Union. This natural desire was met with furious anger by the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, who dreams of re-establishing the Russian Empire, to control Ukraine and exploiting its resources and people. To execute this plan, Putin created a series of lies – that the government in Kyiv is ‘Nazi-like’, that Ukrainian nation does not exist and its people are ‘Russians’ mis-treated and disallowed to speak their language. Putin did not realise he was plagiarizing the same words Hitler used in 1938 when he invaded Czechoslovakia, saying that the Germans in Sudetenland were mis-treated and his mission was to ‘liberate’ them.

The problem with such people is that they start believing in these lies. Also, they surround themselves with yes men. As a result, they all lose connection with the reality. The beauty of democracy is exactly the opposite - when a leader makes a mistake, those around can think, deliberate, speak freely, point to the mistakes and correct it. The difference between Russians and Ukrainians – otherwise very similar people, following Orthodox Christianity, speaking similar language and ethnically the same – is exactly how they want to be governed. Russians prefer the strongman. Ukrainians love freedom. Accordingly, Putin could never understand why one Ukrainian president can demit office and hand over power to another instead of staying on for as long as possible.

Putin expected a quick victory in Ukraine, before the West – in his view weak and disunited – can respond. Big blunder. The Security Conference in Munich few days ago once again re-confirmed the united global position to help Ukraine to liberate all its territories and to bring the Russian aggressors to justice.

The last three options, left to Putin, were to (1) mobilise more troops, (2) target civilian infrastructure, and (3) threaten with nuclear weapons. All three failed dramatically. About 300,000 Russian reservists were recruited since September, to fill the ranks of the initial 190,000 sent to Ukraine. Latest intelligence suggests that about such number – 190,000 Russian troops – have been by now incapacitated: Dead, captured, or injured. Keeping in mind the inefficient Russian military command, lack of equipment, discipline and morale, these 300,000 can be neutralized by the modern Ukrainian weapons. Reservists, in contrast to regular contractors, are poor fighters with little training. For seven months the Russian army, losing tens of thousands soldiers, could not take control of a single small town of Bakhmut. This is the current level of the second ‘mightiest’ army in the world, what Putin thought he had a year ago. Ordering ill-equipped, poorly-trained troops, without proper arms, no air support, no discipline and no purpose, to go forward and die, shows how delusional the Kremlin regime is. In a meeting with aggrieved mothers who lost their sons in Ukraine, Putin attempted to calm them by saying that their sons ‘could have died because of vodka or car accidents’, but now they are ‘heroes’.

The second remaining option - targeting civilian infrastructure, especially electric power stations – produced some damage, but nothing significant as to stop Ukraine re-gaining its territory. The calculation, that the Ukrainians will freeze without electricity in the winter and will surrender, did not achieve anything. Zero. Crimes like this, including the threat of nuclear weapons, can only further strengthen the world’s determination to come together to end this aggression. Even China is no longer supportive of Putin, clearly visible at several recent global high-level meetings.

Some still think that “nuclear powers cannot lose war”. Totally wrong, the US lost the war in Vietnam, the erstwhile Soviet Union lost the war in Afghanistan, and now Russia will lose in Ukraine. The more Putin is cornered and isolated, the less he can resort to nuclear weapons, exactly the opposite of what some still fear. Even if the military losses in Ukraine may push Putin into a corner, the rest of the Russian leadership is not keen on a nuclear war. There is no red button on Putin’s desk, which he can just press and start a nuclear war. It is more complicated: The decision is to be taken by three persons, and even if they all agree, the launch is to be executed by tens of highly qualified officers. Putin, losing domestic support in Russia, faces a real danger that one of these officers could turn against him. But even if all officers co-operate and start such an insane launch, it will be immediately visible from the satellites and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization forces will undertake the necessary to response preemptively with conventional weapons.

This war will end with Russia’s surrender. The interesting question is what will happen with the future world order. Russia, one of the permanent members of the UN Security Council, one of the ‘guardians’ of peace in the current arrangement of the UN Charter, violated everything that this Charter stands for. We need a renewed United Nations without the power of veto in the Security Council.

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