



Looking Back and Looking
Forward: Key 2022 Defense
Issues



May 2022

INTRODUCTION	3
THE CASE OF UKRAINE: LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING FORWARD	3
TWO PATHWAYS TO RECOVERING RUSSIA EXPERTISE IN THE U.S. MILITARY	6
TIME TO RELEARN NUCLEAR ESCALATION MANAGEMENT FOR THE 21ST CENTURY	10
LEARN FROM 1983 AND BE CAREFUL WITH THE RHETORIC ABOUT MOSCOW	13
THREE QUESTIONS ABOUT ENDING THE WAR IN UKRAINE	15

Introduction

Aaron Mehta: “These are a series of regular columns by Robbin Laird, where he will tackle current defense issues through the lens of more than 45 years of defense expertise in both the US and abroad. The goal of these columns: to look back at how questions and perspectives of the past should inform decisions being made today.”

The Case of Ukraine: Looking Back and Looking Forward

"The Russian threat to Ukrainian sovereignty is simply not about Ukraine," writes author Robbin Laird. "It is about the stability of the current European order."

January 27, 2022

My first visit to Ukraine was shortly after it became an independent state with the collapse of the Soviet Union. The team I was working with visited Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia, with a focus on securing the nuclear weapons which the Soviet Union had controlled but abandoned inside what was now Ukrainian territory.

This was the wild west period in post-Soviet history, when in Kiev or Minsk or Moscow, the collapse of the Soviet Union left behind a society in shreds, struggling for identity.

Much of the next thirty years would see these states re-focusing on their way ahead as societies and coming to terms with the Soviet past. A major part of the Ukrainian challenge comes from the existence of divisions within Ukrainian society about how to look at their Russian neighbor compared to their European neighbors.

The focus of the United States in the early 1990s was to ensure that the former Soviet Union's nuclear weapons came under control. The agreements reached, which saw nuclear material removed from both Ukraine and Kazakhstan, may have secured the world from a “loose nuke” concern, but in retrospect dramatically strengthened Russia's nuclear position. Although there were no explicit security agreements to defend Ukrainian territory in case of Russian aggression, certainly giving up nuclear weapons put Ukraine in a dependent position. And from my discussions with Ukrainians, there seemed to be an assumption that becoming a non-nuclear power — the country signed the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1994 — meant the West had some sort of responsibility to work with them on their defense.

Since then, NATO and the European Union have expanded, but without both Ukraine and Belarus, the two key former Soviet republics viewed by Russian leaders to be part of the

own security areas. The two have instead served as buffer states between a resurgent Russia and the new European order built since 1991. I did a study for Net Assessment in the early 1990s which focused on how challenging and dangerous this buffer zone could be to any future European order, and now here we are playing out the challenge of Ukrainian sovereignty versus the Russian view of buffer states that are part of their zone of security and influence.

Putin sees the fissures and dynamics of change in Europe and in NATO and has developed information war and hybrid war means to enhance his ability to shape an agenda to his liking. Putin has made it clear that the collapse of the Soviet Union in his view was a major disaster for Russia and has worked throughout his presidencies to restore a credible role for Russia in the world. At the heart of that approach is expanding the Russian influence and its defense perimeter.

But now he faces a very different challenge than did the Soviet leaders. Now he faces several European states who are keenly aware of the Russian threat. The Nordics have closely cooperated; Poland, the Baltic States and Romania, states with very clear proximate interest, have all focused on expanding their defense capabilities since the Crimean seizure in 2014. What this means is that Europeans most significantly affected by any takeover of Ukraine by Russia are prepared to respond forcefully in ways that make sense to them; Washington, in my view, is clearly challenged if it wishes to direct a whole-of-western response and shape a way ahead as the crisis is worked and resolved.

This change is really a dramatic one, and my extensive travels in Northern Europe and recent travels to Poland certainly highlight the scope and nature of the changes within the alliance since 2014. Now, key European states are often leading the deterrent effort for NATO rather than waiting for guidance from Washington.

With regard to Putin's objectives, one can go back to look at his disputes with George W. Bush during the period of the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, to see clearly what he wants. He wants Ukraine to be like Belarus: a state dominated by leaders willing to be the loyal allies of Russia and to be part of the permanent war with the West, which was described in the July 2, 2021, Russian military doctrine statement.

While Bush simply brushed off Putin's objections, Putin never felt persuaded to act differently; instead, he took it as a sign to wait for an appropriate time to achieve the objective of protecting the Russian security zone — Belarus and Ukraine — and rolling back Western influence. That Putin would eventually act on those desires should never have been in doubt.

As Murielle Delaporte and I put it in our 2021 book, The Return of Direct Defense in Europe: Meeting the Challenges of XXIst Century Authoritarian Powers:

“The Orange Revolution in Ukraine (2004-2005) and the prospects for Ukraine to become a member of the EU and perhaps even NATO was a flash point for Putin where the new narrative of the Russian nation was to be joined by the action of seizing the Crimea and ‘returning’ it to Russia, or in this case, the new Russian republic. Put in another way, the narrative about Russia and its legitimate rights to shape its own ethnic destiny and its role as a Euro-Asian power was backed by actions.

“And the seizure of Crimea was very popular in Russia, to say the least. The Putin narrative underscores that revolution and state collapse is inherently bad, and the linking of the protection of Russians ‘abroad’ with the role of the manifest destiny of the Russian state is a core ideological challenge to modern Europe.”

And the current Ukrainian crisis can be seen in a wider context of European developments as well. The Russian threat to Ukrainian sovereignty is simply not about Ukraine. It is about the stability of the current European order.

The region cutting through the European continent from the Black Sea north has been an unsettled part of the post-Soviet European order. To simply take this year, the Black Sea crisis of this summer where we saw significant information war, and the “migrant” crisis generated by the Russians through Belarus against the Poles, the Balts, and the European order more generally are all part of the wider challenges which Russia is generating against the post-Soviet European order.

How Europeans and the United States handle their engagement with the Russians going forward will shape the next phase of the European order. This is not simply a Ukrainian crisis. It is a broader, ongoing process, whereby Brexit and the Turkish de facto exit from NATO have been key parts of reshaping the European order.

The Russian pressure on their former territories is now playing a forcing function to determine who is serious about maintaining the current European order and who is not. German actions in this crisis will be critical in determining how the states who are seriously concerned about the Russian challenge and threat proceed. After the Afghan Blitzkrieg withdrawal strategy of President Joe Biden, how the United States shapes its response, and whether that in any coherent way represents a way ahead for the European states most affected by the Ukrainian invasion threat will be determined by actions not simply zoom meetings.

It is also the case that Russia’s challenge to the European order is part of the wider challenge of 21st century authoritarian powers to the global order as shaped by the United States, the European Union, and the democratic powers in Asia. Whatever transpires in the Ukrainian crisis is not limited to Europe.

<https://breakingdefense.com/2022/01/the-case-of-ukraine-looking-back-and-looking-forward/>

Two Pathways to Recovering Russia Expertise in the U.S. Military

March 7, 2022

Thanks to the end of the Cold War, the focus on counter-terrorism in the Middle East, and an emphasis on concerns over China, "we simply do not have deep knowledge of Russia," writes Robbin Laird.

When I went to Columbia University for my PhD starting in 1969, one of the nation's leading Russian centers was part of my graduate education. There I took classes under Marshal Shulman and Seweryn Bialer, and became a graduate assistant for Zbig Brzezinski. After my graduation, I then worked at Brzezinski's Research Institute on International Change, alongside many of the world's leading experts on Europe and Russia.

When I then entered the US government in 1980 as a Soviet expert, I had a chance to work with a wide range of serving military officers who were very knowledgeable about the Soviet Union. The same was true at the Center for Naval Analysis and the Institute for Defense Analysis, where we brought in European experts in government to discuss their first-hand knowledge about Soviet leaders to share their judgements on what was going on in Soviet policy and how best to handle the Soviet challenges.

Unfortunately, the US military's broad Russian expertise has drained away over the years, thanks to the end of the Cold War, the focus on counter-terrorism in the Middle East, and an emphasis on (legitimate) concerns over China. We simply do not have deep knowledge of Russia, its thinking and its forces readily at hand for the US military today, as Russian President Vladimir Putin [engages in the largest war of conquest](#) Europe has seen since the end of World War II.

The good news is there are ways we might build such capability rapidly, targeting it towards the realm of the practical question of how to deter and how to fight the modern Russian military machine. Two steps, in fact, both of which I will illustrate with cases from my just published book, *The U.S. Marine Corps Transformation Path: Preparing for the High-End Fight*.

The first step is to find ways to leverage the knowledge of the few active-duty officers who are still in the US military who came up in the waning days of the Cold War. I have interviewed several of these officers in recent years and putting them together into a “virtual” university or think tank to advise Pentagon leaders would greatly benefit the majority of general officers who have cut their teeth in the COIN world.

The first chapter of my book identifies how different combat in Iraq and Afghanistan is from engaging in conflict with the Russians. Last year, I had the chance to discuss the way ahead on the Marine Corps side with Col. William McClane, a very experienced Signals Intelligence (SIGINT) officer who is the head of II MEF G-2 and the senior intelligence officer for the MEF. He joined the Marines towards the end of the Cold War. He noted: “We are in a campaign of learning to shift from COIN operations to great power competition. Part of that learning is refocusing on the Russians.”

What McClane noted was that our Nordic allies certainly have not taken a vacation from dealing with Russians, and that their domain knowledge is a key part of shaping a rethink of how to understand Russian behavior, training and operations. And clearly, it is the Russian military we are dealing with, not the Soviet Union. This means that there is a double knowledge challenge. The first is that much of the residual US knowledge remains under a Soviet hangover. And second that fresh knowledge of how the Russians operate under President Putin militarily needs to be built out.

The first place to start, then, is to put the information in one place with the military’s experts on Moscow, then and now.

Putting It In Action

The second step is to leverage the practical knowledge of those who know the Russians best, which in my experience are the militaries from the former Warsaw Pact and the Nordics who engage with the Russians on a variety of issues because of their geographical proximity. We should deploy, on a regular basis, core operating US military forces — if we are talking in terms of aircraft, squadron sized — to one of these nations to train in their techniques and approaches to how they would fight the Russians in both kinetic and non-kinetic war. Doing so would give those troops first-hand how best to approach the fight.

During my visit to 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing in July 2021, I had a chance to talk with MAG-31, notably the VMFA-115 operations officer, about their squadron's time in Finland training with the Finnish Air Force the preceding month. MAG-31 Operations Officer Lt. Col. Waller and VMFA-115 Operations Officer Maj. Simmermon discussed the training effort with me. Originally, VMFA-115 was to participate in a multi-national exercise, Arctic Challenge 2021. But because of COVID-19 restrictions, their engagement became a bilateral exercise with the Finnish Air Force. This provided an important window on how one might modify training going forward.

What VMFA-115 learned was how the Finns fight: how they operate their air force in a truly distributed manner using their roads for landing sites, distribute logistical support and work under the shadow of Russian long-range fires. Clearly, Marines learning to fight as the Finns fight is a good thing, and part of the cross-learning process, which is necessary for US forces to be familiar with various concepts like distributed maritime operations, littoral operations in a contested environment and expeditionary advanced-base operations. All those concepts that provide an understanding of how to operate in the High North back to the Baltic Sea.

This is how Simmermon described the experience: "If we had participated in an Arctic Challenge exercise, it would have been a big mission planning exercise and very scripted. We would have most likely used our own tactics and tried to incorporate into what the other countries were doing for their own tactics. But it became a bilateral exercise called ILVES [Finnish for 'Lynx']. We were able to train with them in their tactics."

A great tactic VMFA-115 was able to observe was the Finns diverting and spreading out to reduce the effects from a potential strike on their location.

"They showed us how they're able to set up expeditionary arresting gear, where they put their support and how they taxi the aircraft. We then had one of their instructor pilots get in their simulator with us, where we practiced road landings which was a relatively benign mission, really just taking off and landing on small, short expeditionary runways," Simmermon said. "The whole system relies largely on the logistics support and the infrastructure for their road runways, which are already in place."

He added: "Doing the bilateral training that we did during ILVES exposed us to smaller level tactics, techniques, and procedures, which I had never seen before. Those

conversations and briefs would not have been available in a big exercise like 'Arctic Challenge,' but it was ... a whole logistics and infrastructure aspect of aviation, as well as a unique divert strategy, and changing the way your force is employed by consolidating in the air and understanding their TTPs.

"It reminds you that even as a globally deployable force, it's important to see that there are a lot of different ways and different geographical locations, specifically Finland and their neighbors that change the way an aviation unit fights or how a conflict in general is executed. Seeing how other nations fight was very valuable. I would emphasize that going to any country that has a different defense strategy or offensive strategy for that matter is very eye opening, if they're willing to share with you some of their considerations and how they employ their forces."

I would note that when visiting Finland in 2018, I met with Lt. Gen. Kim Jäämeri, the former head of the Finnish Air Force. He noted that "It is becoming clear to our partners that you cannot run air operations in a legacy manner under the threat of missile barrages of long-range weapons. The legacy approach to operating from air bases just won't work in these conditions.

"For many of our partners, this is a revelation; for us it has been a fact of life for a long time, and we have operated with this threat in the forefront of operations for a long time."

And in a country like Poland where senior officers in the Polish military served earlier in the Warsaw Pact, it behooves American military personnel not just to learn about the Russians from these officers and personnel, but to understand how their allies would fight in case of conflict with Russia. After all, on the road to the Ukraine invasion, Russian actions in Belarus against the Poles and Balts along with their actions in August in Sea Breeze 21 were already a run up to the invasion, and during my visit to Poland last September, Polish officials and analysts were clearly concerned with what Putin was preparing to do.

It would be nice if we recovered Russian studies, but that's a long-term prospect. A shortcut is to immerse our new generation of military officers into the art of geopolitical combat, which is woven into the Russian soul.

<https://breakingdefense.com/2022/03/two-pathways-to-recovering-russia-expertise-in-the-us-military/>

Time to Relearn Nuclear Escalation Management for the 21st Century

"The US has spent the last three decades siloing nuclear capabilities off into their own box, and hence we are behind the ball on thinking of how to deal with an increasingly desperate foe who sees nuclear weapons not as a final instrument, but as part of the broader orchestra," writes Robbin Laird.

April 11, 2022

No pure conventional warfighting doctrine against 21st century authoritarian powers will work when those powers have the threat of nuclear fire in their pocket. That was always true, but the Ukraine situation has laid it bare — and this should have a profound impact on US and allied thinking about dealing with those powers going forward.

I recently discussed this situation with Paul Bracken, my colleague whom I met when he was working for military strategist Herman Kahn and myself for future National Security Advisor Zbig Brzezinski, where we first started discussing together “thinking about the unthinkable” as a key to deterrence. We represent a legacy of those who dealt with the blending of nuclear and conventional forces in an overall warfighting strategy.

Unfortunately, while that discussion ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union, it has sadly returned with the loose alliance of 21st century authoritarian powers.

Let there be no question: with the war in Ukraine, the nuclear weapons issue has returned as a central one in terms of warfighting, deterrence, and escalation management. The problem is, the US has spent the last three decades siloing nuclear capabilities off into their own box, and hence we are behind the ball on thinking of how to deal with an increasingly desperate foe who sees nuclear weapons not as a final instrument, but as part of the broader orchestra.

President Joe Biden [has declared](#) that Russia leader Vladimir Putin is a war criminal and must go. The general narrative is that Putin is delusional and will lose in Ukraine, and we should blow past any threats from what is, essentially, a madman. After all, nuclear weapons were never used in the Cold War, despite all the tensions and rhetoric of the time.

But we forget how we navigated the [near-nuclear war in 1983](#), where rhetoric needed to be contained, and how back channels managed the crisis. Those type of structures are in short supply today, which is why I have emphasized over the past few years that the missing piece of the puzzle for dealing with 21st century authoritarian powers are crisis management skills designed not for peer competitors but powers who seek ascendancy over the liberal democracies.

As Bracken put it: “The kinds of capabilities you are referring to, which existed in the 1980s, are simply gone today. The Biden Administration is in a hysteria to convince the public that Vladimir Putin is an evil person. End of story, end of paragraph, that’s all you need to know.”

What we have now is a new situation which we have not imagined or thought about: urban warfare and threats to use nuclear weapons to stop any NATO attacks on Russian forces and territory. As Bracken noted, “Putin is creating new doctrine here, but he is clearly winging it — and that is dangerous.”

Which is to say, the idea of Putin using a nuclear weapon — especially a lower-yield, “tactical” nuclear weapon — as part of an otherwise conventional war cannot be ruled out, especially if Ukrainian forces continue to take back territory and fight off the Russian military. How the US and its allies would respond is incredibly unclear.

The President has said that we would respond in kind to the Russian use of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs). I simply don’t think we have anything like proportionate deterrence, and really doubt that NATO has a strategic or operational consensus on any proportionate response to Russia using WMD.

I spent a significant amount of time in Western Europe in the 1980s dealing with the Euromissiles crisis, where there was clearly no consensus among the allies on such weapons, and indeed there was concern on the US side that even if there was a

mobilization towards activating the tactical nuclear force, some allies would forcibly stop us. I have spent a great deal of time in Europe since that time, and there clearly is no consensus on how to attack Russia if Russia were to invade NATO territory.

President Donald Trump questioned the usefulness of Article V several times, and in my view, it's better for a president not to raise that question publicly and cast doubts about American commitments. But the reality is if you look at Europe today, there are some states very serious about defense, and more who are not. So, no matter what one claims, the question of who would fight, how they would fight, and actually what the U.S capabilities and approach are to a nuclear-capable opponent is a key question. That counter terrorism and counter insurgency have dominated operations for the past twenty years has allowed the US defense establishment to not think about this question.

Bracken underscored how he sees this challenge. "I know that people say that it's the threat of World War III that stops the Russians. But it's like Stalin used to say, the NATO treaty is a piece of paper. It does not require that the US go to war to defend Montenegro or France or Britain. It only says that an attack on one is an attack on all. I really wonder if the NATO alliance would hold together if the threat of going nuclear was imminent. [French strategist] Raymond Aron used to come to Hudson meetings and say 'there are no true alliances in the nuclear age.'"

The crisis management elements of this loom especially large. How do you negotiate an end to hostilities? And how do you prepare the ground after a successful negotiation for the new conflict?

Putin has seized the energy and rare earth mineral parts of Ukraine, and is leveling ports on the Black Sea to secure a land bridge in that area. Will anyone really be able to dislodge him without a significant attack on Russia's warfighting capacities on Russia itself? Bracken highlighted this challenge as follows: "There's the whole topic of an armistice, versus a ceasefire, versus an agreed treaty to end the war. It sounds hard at the moment, but I haven't even seen anyone distinguish among these things. It's only a handful of people that are even proposing to consider shifting our policy to getting the war to terminate. What is the future of Ukraine from a US perspective? Finlandization?"

In short, rethinking how to deal with various forms of conflict and warfare with the 21st century authoritarian states, notably because they either are allied with one another or

certainly play off of one another, is being driven by the return of the nuclear weapons dimension.

<https://breakingdefense.com/2022/04/time-to-relearn-nuclear-escalation-management-for-the-21st-century/>

Learn from 1983 and Be Careful With the Rhetoric About Moscow

The White House needs to be careful about what signals it is sending to Moscow with its rhetoric about Russia, writes Robbin Laird in a new column.

May 4, 2022

No one could accuse President Ronald Reagan on being soft on the Russians. Yet over the course of his presidency, at one of the tensest points of the Cold War, he learned to tone down his rhetoric about Russia in order to not trigger nuclear war. It's something the Biden administration should keep in mind: messaging designed for domestic consumption has a global impact as well, and being tone deaf to what your adversary is hearing can only turn out badly.

Recent commentary from the Biden administration brings back memories of the bad old days. First, there was President Joe Biden's [comments in late March](#) that Russian strongman Vladimir Putin "cannot remain in power" following the invasion of Ukraine. Although the White House quickly walked back the idea that Biden was calling for regime change in Moscow, the statement dominated several days of news coverage. More recently, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin [said the US wants](#) a "weakened" Russia at the end of the Ukraine conflict.

You can be sure those comments are setting off big alarms inside the Kremlin, at a time when Russia's failures in Ukraine are already raising concerns that Putin could resort to the use of nuclear weapons, tactical or otherwise, to try and regain an advantage in Europe. And we have historical reason to believe that the message Putin will take away from all this is to prepare for the worst-case scenario.

The initial Reagan administration was staffed by a wide range of hard-liners and anti-communists whose rhetoric, in my view, had a longer reach than their sense of policy

realism. Reagan quickly built a reputation of tough talk towards Moscow. This was especially true before George Schultz, one of the great statesmen of the 20th century, joined the administration in mid-1982.

The unfortunate side of this was the head of the Soviet Union, Yuri Andropov, was interpreting this rhetoric as Reagan legitimizing nuclear war against the Soviet Union. This isn't speculation: thanks to two unique spy channels, which would later be known as the Gordievsky affair in the UK case and the Farewell affair in the French case, Andropov's thinking is well documented. We also know that thinking was communicated through both Reagan's closest political ally abroad, UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, and French president François Mitterrand — the latter someone whom the Reagan administration had little time for due to the inclusion of communists in his cabinet.

I have written in some detail about these two cases in my co-authored book with Murielle Delaporte entitled "[The Return of Direct Defense in Europe: Meeting the Challenge of 21st Century Authoritarian Powers](#)." As we concluded about the two spy inputs: "These two key spy stories of the 1980s could have the impact they would have on Western policy only if there was an ability of Western governments to work together effectively and to have a unity of will to deal with the Soviet threat. President Reagan shaped an Administration which could find ways to work with Western allies, even those whose politics and worldviews were quite different from his."

The problem is that the lines of communication, as I [have written previously](#), are actually more frayed now than during the 1983 near-nuclear-crisis. Which means that it's more important than ever that 1) the White House watch its rhetoric, and 2) that allies and partners can act as go-betweens.

In addition to the blunt inputs which both Thatcher and Mitterrand provided to Reagan, there was a network of Russian and Warsaw Pact officers who interacted with American and allied military and intelligence officers who had a very significant impact on getting their higher ups to understand how out of control the exchanges between Reagan and Andropov were becoming. If readers want greater insight into these issues, I highly recommend my colleague Brian Morra's new novel "The Able Archers," which provides significant insight into how military and intelligence officers on the US and allied side

worked with their counterparts on the Soviet side to shape understanding for their senior leaders of how close we were coming to nuclear war.

And to be clear, shaping Western unity in the face of nuclear threats is never a given. The Euromissile crisis in Europe in the early 1980s was deeply divisive and there is little doubt that today, the presence of a nuclear threat unity lasts as long as you are not the target of a nuclear threat.

We avoided nuclear war in 1983 due to the President learning from his allies and his administration listening to experienced military and intelligence officers. Let us hope we are as fortunate this time around in the Ukrainian crisis.

<https://breakingdefense.com/2022/05/learn-from-1983-and-be-careful-with-the-rhetoric-about-moscow/>

Three Questions About Ending the War in Ukraine

To avoid an Afghanistan situation of open-ended conflict, the US and its partners need to be thinking about how to end the conflict sooner rather than later, writes Robbin Laird.

May 13, 2022

Last August, the Biden Administration led a disastrous exit from [Afghanistan](#), under the justification that the US could no longer take responsibility for a war with no end point in sight. Eight months later, the same administration is [ramping](#) up engagement in the [Ukraine](#) conflict — a conflict with no realistic end point on the horizon.

Of course, there are obvious differences between the 20-year, vaguely defined counter-terrorism effort directly involving American and NATO forces and the situation in Ukraine. But both the White House and bipartisan members of Congress seem to think trips to Kyiv and [open-ended commitments](#) to Ukraine in the context of a war engaged with an adversary with extensive lethal power is virtually risk free.

And it's not: the longer the conflict goes on, the greater the chance Russian leader Vladimir Putin sees the situation as an existential threat to his power, and with that the [chance of escalation](#) — potentially of the nuclear kind — rises.

To avoid an Afghanistan situation of open-ended conflict, the US and its partners need to be thinking about how to end the conflict sooner rather than later. The most likely outcome: a partition of Ukraine, with Russia controlling some aspect of the Donbas and the NATO and EU nations backing the western part of the nation.

No, that's not something that Ukraine, nor some of its more active supporters in Europe, will be happy with. But realism is needed in a situation involving nuclear warheads. Hoping for the democratic coup in Russia is not policy. Political objectives need to be clear for your nation and, while taking into account the concerns of your allies, partners, or adversaries, cannot be driven by their desires. But that is what is precisely happening in Ukraine.

The challenge of negotiation was well laid out in a recent piece by the distinguished British historian Max Hastings. As he wrote in an [op-ed](#) in The Times on April 11: "only a sordid bargain will end Ukraine's war."

If one is to accept that partition is going to happen — and I believe it will — a number of still-unanswered follow-on questions appear. Here are three that need to be sorted out quickly.

First, who should be at the negotiating table? The US and UK have been among the biggest supporters of Ukraine's fight, but they are also not part of the European Union, the body which is most likely to be the host of discussions around economic, civil and commercial support for Ukraine after a war.

The US, one could argue, should have no real role in those discussions; Washington's interest in checking Russia may not mean it will align with Ukraine's interests. And having the US be the lead negotiator will only fuel Russia's propaganda efforts that DC is using Kyiv for its own interests and that the Zelensky government are simply puppets. The Russians and the Chinese clearly want to make their conflicts with the liberal democracies about their relationship with the United States. It is not in our interest to play their game. (I write more about this in my new book, [now available](#).)

Second, what is the role of the non-Russian controlled Ukraine in the Western power structures? Despite efforts from Kyiv in recent years, there has been little support among either EU or NATO member states to let Ukraine in. While the EU now appears

more open in the wake of Putin's invasion, nothing is certain there, and Ukraine's economy — the key factor for many nations' EU membership — will likely be a shambles for years to come as a result of the invasion. And as part of negotiations, will Russia attempt to block Ukraine for being able to join either the EU or NATO — and should those member states accept that, even over Ukraine's wishes, in order to end the conflict?

Third, what happens in terms of arming Ukraine and how Ukraine can use that military capability? It's nice for the US to sit back and say we are simply arming Ukraine for its own defense, but that's going to be a sticking point during negotiations. Statements by senior officials in the UK and the United States suggesting that Ukraine was free to attack Russian territory with the weapons being provided does nothing to help lower the risks.

The Ukrainian people should be commended for the fight they have put up. In the lead up to the invasion, few gave them much chance of lasting more than a few weeks; almost 80 days later, they have clearly bloodied and embarrassed Putin, whose forces have committed war crimes that, in a just world, would see them all sent to a dark prison forever.

But we don't live in a just world, and the reality remains that the longer this conflict grinds on, the greater the risk of miscalculation, misunderstanding or simply a dead-eyed assessment of how Russian forces are doing will lead to the first use of nuclear weapons in anger since 1945. Now is the time to try and end this war. Hopefully leaders around Europe are thinking through the logical steps to do so.

<https://breakingdefense.com/2022/05/three-questions-about-ending-the-war-in-ukraine/>