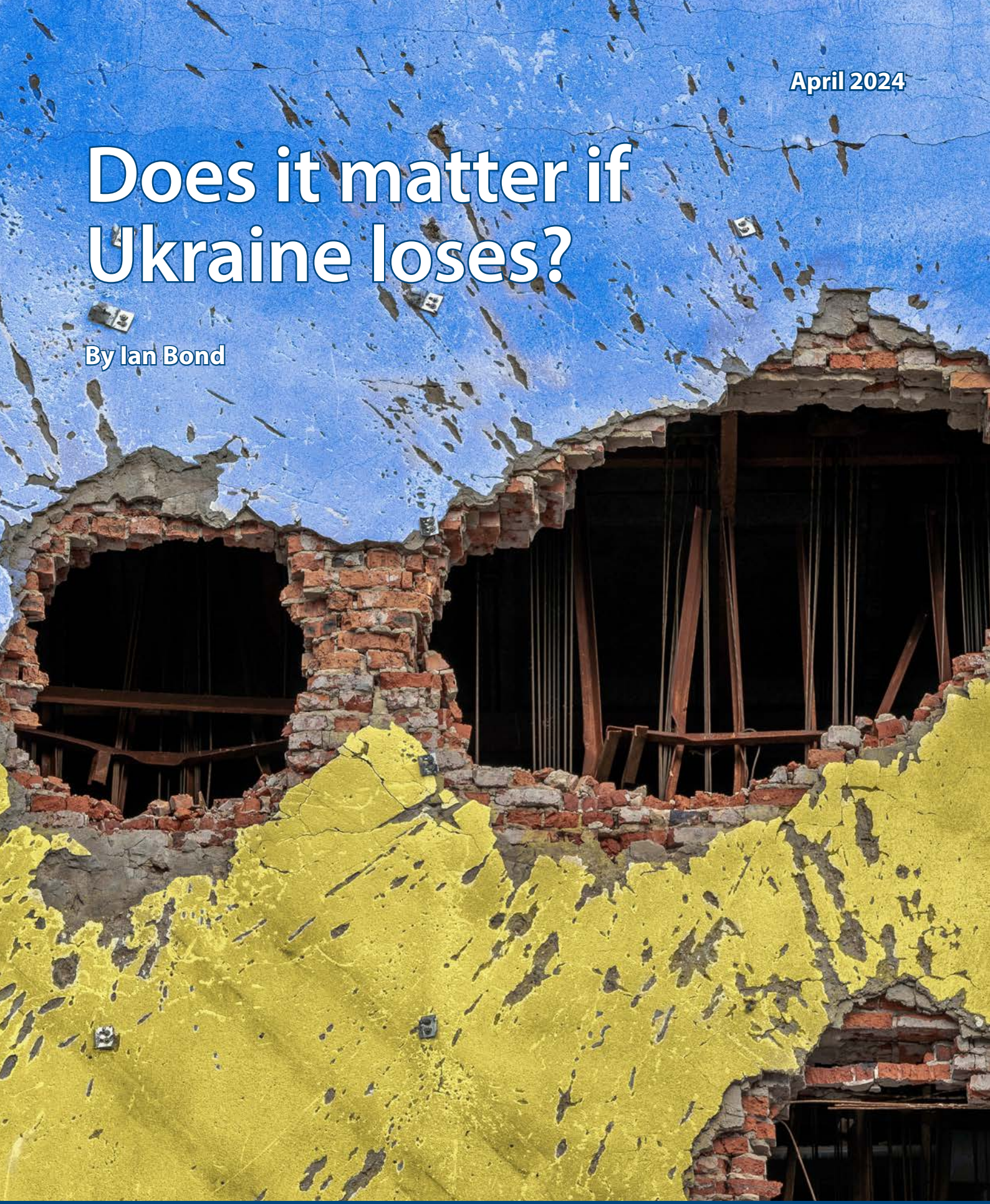
April 2024

Does it matter if Ukraine loses?

By Ian Bond



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Does it matter if Ukraine loses?

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- In war, the 'right' side does not always win. Ukraine could lose. Western action (or inaction) suggests that governments are not worried enough about the consequences of Ukrainian defeat.
- In wars of attrition, sooner or later one side will run out of the resources or resolve to carry on. Ukraine has run short of manpower and munitions – though the US House of Representatives' approval of a new aid package will help with the latter problem. Russia started with more of both troops and materiel, and having put its economy and society on a war footing, it is now recruiting more troops than Ukraine can, and providing them with more equipment and ammunition than the West is supplying to Ukraine.
- Russia is also making progress on the political battlefield in the West. In the US, Donald Trump would apparently try to force Ukraine to give up territory if he were elected president in November. In Europe, parties with close ties to Russia are expected to do well in elections to the European Parliament in June.
- Unless forced to do so, Putin is unlikely to stop short of his objective of destroying Ukraine as a sovereign state. The West must understand the implications if Russia were able to achieve such a victory:
  - a vastly increased threat to the rest of Europe from a militarised Russia that might even be tempted to test the solidity of NATO's Article 5 guarantee, particularly if Trump were president;
  - increased cross-border organised crime and arms-smuggling from Ukraine;
  - migration of millions more Ukrainians to Europe, fleeing from the kind of atrocities already seen in occupied areas of Ukraine;
  - significant damage to global food security, driving migration from vulnerable countries in the Middle East and Africa that have been major markets for Ukrainian food exports;
  - global nuclear proliferation, as countries conclude that having nuclear weapons provides more reliable security than promises of help from allies;
  - diminished international influence for the West, and increased influence for Russia and China.
- Ukraine's defeat is not inevitable, provided it gets more help. The West must increase its defence industrial capacity rapidly. Finance ministries must find ways to facilitate this now, even at the expense of higher deficits in the short term.
- Since increasing defence production will take time, the West should raid its stocks. Countries that face no immediate threat should give more to Ukraine.
- The West should also give Ukraine more ability to strike at military and defence industrial targets deep inside Russia. Oil refineries should not be off limits: they provide the Russian war machine with fuel and the Russian government with revenue.

★ Sanctions enforcement should be tightened, both by targeting Western producers of sensitive items who turn a blind eye to Russia acquiring their goods via third countries, and by putting more pressure on Russia's 'shadow fleet' of oil tankers.

★ The West should not allow Putin to frighten it. He has learned that issuing threats, especially nuclear threats, can delay or deter Western help for Ukraine. Macron was right to say that the deployment of Western troops in Ukraine should not be ruled out. If Western aircraft can be used to defend Israel from Iranian drones and missiles, they can be used to defend Ukraine.

★ There is unlikely to be Western consensus on more direct involvement in the conflict. But there is no good alternative. Confronting Russia in eastern Ukraine would be terrible, but better than confronting it later on NATO territory.

★ Ukraine may not have been a vital strategic interest for the West before 2014, but once Putin had annexed Crimea, he transformed it into one. Europe will never be secure as long as Russia can pursue Putin's imperial dream; Ukraine's victory would be the most important step towards ending it.

In war, the 'right' side does not always win. Franco's Nationalists won the Spanish Civil War; the Taliban drove the West out of Afghanistan. Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, said recently that without more US help, Ukraine would lose the war.[1] The commander of Ukrainian forces, Oleksandr Syrskyy, warned on April 13th that the situation in the east of the country had deteriorated significantly.[2] Even if the aid belatedly approved by the US House of Representatives on April 20th arrives in the next few weeks, democratic Ukraine could still be defeated by authoritarian Russia. Western countries – especially European countries – need to decide how much this matters to them. At present, some, such as the Baltic states, are doing all they can to ensure that Russia does not win. A few, such as Hungary, seem to be actively working against Ukraine. But for most countries, there is a sizeable gap between leaders' rhetoric, proclaiming support for Ukraine, and their revealed priorities, in terms of defence spending, weapons delivery and willingness to talk honestly to their domestic audience about the war.

Western action (or more often, inaction) suggests that governments are not as worried as they should be about the possibility that Ukraine might be defeated and the consequences if it were. In fairness, some countries have done a lot: since the war started, Estonia has given 4.1 per cent of its GDP in bilateral and EU aid to Ukraine; Denmark 3 per cent; and Lithuania 2 per cent.[3] In the early days of the war, the EU surprised many (probably including many inside its institutions) by agreeing to fund weapons supplies for Ukraine – so far, the European Peace Facility has spent €11.1 billion on weapons, munitions and other military aid to Ukraine.[4]

But the West has often taken the right decisions only after long hesitation – in some cases, long enough to allow Russia to prepare its counter-measures. In the autumn of 2022, Ukraine liberated significant areas of territory, particularly in the north and north-east of the country. With large numbers of Western tanks it could have pressed home its advantage. By the time small numbers of Western tanks began to arrive in late winter and early spring 2023, the opportunity had been lost: Russia had laid enormous minefields, and Ukraine's 2023 counter-attack achieved little. Though Ukrainians have welcomed the approval of the latest $60.8 billion US military assistance package, it has been held up for six months by the internal politics of the Republican Party, and Russia has meanwhile been able to profit from Ukraine's lack of artillery and air defence munitions.

Ukrainian victory seems to be a low priority. In Germany, Chancellor Olaf Scholz, worried that Germany might be drawn more deeply into the conflict, doggedly refuses to provide Ukraine with long-range Taurus missiles that would enable it to hit Russian logistic hubs, airbases and infrastructure like the Kerch bridge, via which Russia supplies its forces in Crimea.[5] The US administration is worried about disrupting global oil markets and raising fuel prices in an election year: higher inflation in the US might increase the chances of a victory for Donald Trump. Consequently, it has warned Kyiv to stop targeting Russian oil refineries, even though reducing Russian fuel

1: Christian Edwards and Maria Kostenko, 'Ukraine 'will lose the war' if US fails to approve aid, says Zelensky', CNN, April 8th 2024.
2: Kathryn Carlson, 'Situation in east Ukraine has 'deteriorated significantly,' Kyiv commander says', *Politico*, April 13th 2024.
3: Christoph Trebesch and others, 'Ukraine Support Tracker: A database of military, financial and humanitarian aid to Ukraine', IFW Kiel Institute for the World Economy, data updated February 16th 2024.
4: Council of the European Union, 'European Peace Facility', updated April 19th 2024.
5: Joshua Posaner, 'Germany's Scholz says sending Taurus missiles to Ukraine is 'out of the question'', *Politico*, March 13th 2024.

production hurts both the logistics of Russian forces and the Kremlin's export revenues, and even though Ukraine has carefully avoided cutting Russian crude oil exports, which would have much more effect on world markets.[6] President Emmanuel Macron has said that it is key for Europe's security to defeat Russia in Ukraine.[7] But France and Poland (another vocal supporter of Ukraine) have been instrumental in reducing Ukraine's ability to support itself financially: they have forced the Commission to impose 'safeguard measures' on various Ukrainian agricultural exports, limiting their sale in the EU.[8] EU member-states cannot agree to confiscate more than €200 billion in frozen Russian assets and use them for Ukraine's benefit – although they have at least taken steps towards using the interest on those frozen assets for Ukraine's benefit. European members of NATO also remain reluctant to commit €100 billion of their own money to a fund providing defence supplies for Ukraine, as proposed by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg.[9]

This policy brief looks at Ukraine's military and political situation and how to define defeat. It analyses the catastrophic consequences for the West and especially for Europe if Russia were to achieve a decisive victory. It assesses the real balance of power between Russia and the West as well as the balance of risk between action and inaction, while outlining the steps necessary to ensure that Ukraine both survives in the short term and drives Russia out of all occupied territory in the long term.

Ukraine's situation

Until the last few weeks, the war seemed to have settled into an attritional phase. But in any war of attrition, at some point one of the sides will run out of the resources or resolve to carry on fighting. Until recently, Ukraine showed no sign of losing its confidence in eventual victory, but there is a growing risk that the lack of material resources needed to fight and resultant heavy civilian and military casualties will undermine the country's resolve as well.[10]

"At some point one side will run out of the resources or resolve to carry on fighting."

Russia enjoys big advantages in equipment and troop numbers. Before the war, Russia's population was 144 million; Ukraine's was less than 44 million. Like Russia, Ukraine has suffered large losses – probably considerably more than the 31,000 deaths that President Volodymyr Zelenskyy admitted to in an interview with CNN in February.[11] Ukraine claims to have 850,000 troops in total, but it is finding it hard to replace its losses. It has just lowered the minimum mobilisation age from 27 to 25, in an effort to increase its forces.

Russia, on the other hand, has total forces of more than 1.1 million, of whom more than 600,000 are in Ukraine (according to Vladimir Putin).[12] After mobilising 300,000 troops in September 2022 Russia has not needed to resort to mobilisation again, despite suffering 350,000 casualties, killed and wounded, since the start of the war. A combination of generous pay for 'contract' soldiers and pressure on conscripts to sign contracts at the end of their compulsory military service is giving Russian forces most of the troops they need. Putin claimed at the end of 2023 that 486,000 'contract soldier-volunteers' had been recruited.[13]

In terms of equipment, Ukraine has inflicted serious damage on Russian forces. The UK assessed at the end of January 2024 that Russia had lost 2,600 main battle tanks, 4,900 other armoured vehicles and 1,400 artillery pieces – more than it can replenish with new production.[14] Jack Watling and Nick Reynolds of the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), two of the most reliable observers of the war, wrote in February that Russian defence industry was providing 1,500 tanks and 3,000 other armoured vehicles, new and refurbished, per year – but refurbished vehicles are coming from limited and depleting reserves in storage.[15] That still puts Russia in a much better position than Ukraine, however. At the start of the war, Ukraine reportedly had about 1,000 tanks. Verifiable losses since then have reached almost 800 (the real total is likely to be somewhat higher).[16] Data on Western supplies

6: Peter Martin and Roxana Tiron, 'US Slams Strikes on Russia Oil Refineries as Risk to Oil Markets', Bloomberg UK, April 9th 2024; Aleksandar Djokic, 'Ukrainian Strikes on Russian oil refineries: What's the impact?', Euronews, April 3rd 2024.

7: Jaroslav Lukiv, 'Macron says Russian defeat in Ukraine vital for security in Europe', BBC, February 27th 2024.

8: 'Ukraine: Council backs the renewal of EU's autonomous trade measures', Council of the European Union, April 8th 2024.

9: Julia Payne and Jan Strupczewski, 'EU unlikely to confiscate Russian central bank assets – officials', Reuters, January 23rd 2024; Stuart Lau and Aitor Hernández-Morales, 'NATO ministers' doubts, fears and eye-rolls over €100B Ukraine plan', *Politico*, April 3rd 2024.

10: Jamie Dettmer, 'Ukraine is heading for defeat', *Politico*, April 17th 2024.

11: Stephanie Halasz and Ivana Kottasová, 'Zelensky warns 'millions will be killed' without US aid to Kyiv, as Ukrainian troop deaths reach at least 31,000', CNN, February 25th 2024.

12: 'Putin Says Over 600K Russian Servicemen in Ukraine', *The Moscow Times*, December 15th 2024.

13: 'Putin zaveril, chto seychas nyet neobkhodimosti vo vtoroy volne mobilisatsii' ('Putin assured that there is currently no need for a second wave of mobilisation'), Interfaks, December 14th 2023.

14: 'Russia: Ukraine – Question for Ministry of Defence', Written Answer by James Heappey MP to a question from John Healey MP, parliament.uk, January 29th 2024.

15: Jack Watling and Nick Reynolds, 'Russian Military Objectives and Capacity in Ukraine Through 2024', Royal United Services Insititute, February 13th 2024.

16: 'Attack On Europe: Documenting Ukrainian Equipment Losses During The Russian Invasion Of Ukraine', Oryx (oryxspioenkop.com), accessed April 13th 2024.

is incomplete, since some countries keep it secret, but the number of tanks delivered since the start of the war seems to be around 700, more than half of which are old Soviet or Soviet-derived models; fewer than a quarter are the modern Abrams (provided by the US), Challenger 2 (UK) or Leopard 2 (Germany and other NATO countries).[17] There are no immediate promises of more.

> *"Russian daily shelling rates now exceed Ukraine's by five to one, and the ratio is worsening."*

By the start of 2024, it had become clear that the EU would only be able to deliver about half of the million shells it had promised to send Ukraine by March 2024; delivery of the remainder might be complete by the end of the year. A NATO estimate puts Russian production at 3 million artillery rounds a year, with at least 1 million more rounds supplied by North Korea.[18] As a result, Russian daily shelling rates now exceed Ukraine's by five to one, and the ratio is worsening. As NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe, General Christopher Cavoli, told the US House of Representatives Armed Services Committee on April 10th, "if one side can shoot and the other side can't shoot back, the side that can't shoot back loses".[19]

Russia is now producing 'glide bombs' – free-fall bombs with GPS navigation and wings – weighing as much as 1500 kilograms, with a range of up to 40 kilometres. These can devastate Ukraine's front-line positions. Ukraine has no counter to them: it does not have the short-range air-defence weapons that could shoot down the bombs in flight, and it does not have the longer-range air defence to shoot down or force back the aircraft that launch them. Ukraine is gradually losing ground: since the beginning of the year, the time-lapse maps produced by the Institute for the Study of War and the American Enterprise Institute's Critical Threats Project have shown only small changes in control of territory, but they have all been in favour of Russia.[20]

Russian attacks are not confined to military targets: in recent weeks it has stepped up its attacks on civilian infrastructure, and particularly power plants. According to one estimate, a series of missile strikes in late March knocked out more than 20 per cent of Ukraine's generating capacity.[21] Another attack on April 11th destroyed a large coal-fired plant that generated electricity for Kyiv and several other northern regions of Ukraine. Putin claims that these attacks come in retaliation for Ukrainian drone strikes on a number of Russian oil refineries, but it is more likely that they are planned assaults on Ukraine's industrial capacity, and in particular its efforts to increase defence production, and that 'retaliation' is only a post hoc justification. Putin has also described the strikes on power plants as part of Russia's "demilitarisation" of Ukraine.[22]

Putin has often claimed in the past to be striking civilian targets in Ukraine to retaliate for something Ukraine has done, such as the attack on the Kerch bridge between Russia and Crimea in October 2022, but he has also hit them when there was no obvious act to retaliate for. According to the World Health Organisation, for example, in the first two years of the war there were 1574 attacks on healthcare facilities – those were not claimed as retaliation for anything.[23] Power cuts may simply be intended to demoralise the civilian population. But in this case, as Ukraine has been stepping up domestic production of weapons, partly in order to compensate for falling supplies from the West, Putin has an obvious motivation to cut the power supply to industry. Depending on how long it takes to repair power plants and other elements of the electricity grid, Ukrainians could suffer from power shortages for many months, and the government would have to make difficult choices between domestic, industrial and public service demand for electricity.

Russian political warfare and its Western allies

Russia is not just occupying more Ukrainian territory, producing more materiel and undermining Ukraine physically. It is also advancing on the political battlefield in the West – sometimes without even having to make any effort itself. Donald Trump has claimed that he could bring the war in Ukraine to an end in one day, apparently by stopping military aid to Ukraine and forcing it to cede Crimea and the Donbas to Russia.[24] But Republican opposition to helping Ukraine is not just shaped by Trump: Russian propaganda is also penetrating the Congressional Republican Party, as the (Republican) Chair of the House of Representatives intelligence committee

17: 'Claire Mills, 'Military assistance to Ukraine since the Russian invasion', House of Commons Library Research Briefing, March 27th 2024.
18: 'Katie Bo Lillis, Natasha Bertrand, Oren Liebermann and Haley Britzky, 'Exclusive: Russia producing three times more artillery shells than US and Europe for Ukraine', CNN, March 11th 2024.
19: 'Jeff Seldin, 'Top US general warns Ukraine on brink of being overrun by Russia', Voice of America, April 10th 2024.
20: Interactive Time-lapse: Russia's War in Ukraine', The Institute for the Study of War and the Critical Threats Project, American Enterprise Institute, month-by-month updates since December 2023.
21: Suriya Jayanti, 'Ukraine's lose-lose energy war', *Time*, March 25th 2024.
22: Tom Balmforth, 'Major Russian air strikes destroy Kyiv power plant, damage other stations', Reuters, April 11th 2024.
23: '3 reflections from 2 years: WHO's response to Europe's largest emergency', World Health Organisation, February 22nd 2024.
24: Isaac Arnsdorf, Josh Dawsey and Michael Birnbaum, 'Inside Donald Trump's secret, long-shot plan to end the war in Ukraine', *The Washington Post*, April 7th 2024.

has complained.[25] Russian intelligence agencies have been particularly active in trying to shape the US debate, realising the importance of hindering US military aid to Ukraine. They use different narratives to appeal to different audiences: for some, they suggest that the Biden administration is helping Ukraine at the expense of guarding America's borders against illegal immigration; for others, they attempt to portray Zelenskyy as personally corrupt, and leading an equally corrupt regime that steals American money; for others, they focus on portraying Vladimir Putin as the guardian of traditional Christian values.[26] For some, no Russian narrative is required: they simply want the US to disengage from the rest of the world and not get involved in foreign conflicts.

In Europe, Russia and its witting or unwitting allies use many of the same narratives, but its propaganda also plays on European fears of war and seeks to divide Europe from the US.[27] The governments of Hungary and Slovakia have made clear their opposition to giving further military aid to Ukraine, and – despite EU and NATO leaders having declared that Ukraine should join both at some point – Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán has suggested that Ukraine should be a buffer zone between Russia and the EU/NATO, rather than a member of either organisation.[28] Parties with ties to Russia (and to Russian intelligence agencies) are expected to do well in many EU member-states in the European Parliament elections in June.[29]

Defining Ukrainian defeat

Perhaps one reason that Ukraine is in such danger is that most Western leaders have been so vague about their aims in Ukraine. The Ukrainian government has been clear about its definition of victory, involving the recovery of all occupied territory, including Crimea and the Donbas, the payment of reparations by Russia and accountability for war crimes and for the crime of aggression. The West has stuck to 'supporting Ukraine as long as it takes', without defining what 'it' is.

If the criteria for success are unclear, so are the criteria for failure. A maximalist version might be that anything short of full achievement of Ukraine's aims is a failure; a minimalist version, that only the complete extinction of Ukrainian statehood would be failure – survival, in whatever truncated form, would be success. The West needs to avoid calibrating its help to ensuring a rump Ukraine's survival, and then declaring victory. It should focus on the risk that without Western help on a much greater scale than now, Ukraine will be vulnerable to Russia breaking through its defences and advancing rapidly. Unless he is forced to, Putin is very unlikely to stop short of his maximalist objective of destroying Ukraine as an independent sovereign state.

The implications of defeat

If Putin were able to capture all or most Ukrainian territory, including in particular all of the major cities in the east and south, including Kyiv, Kharkiv, Odesa and Dnipro, what would the implications be for European, Western and wider global security?

★ **Strategic impact in Europe.** Russia under Putin has become an increasingly militarised society. From September 2024, military training will be compulsory for children aged 15 and up, and voluntary for those aged 12 and up.[30] More and more of the Russian curriculum is being taken up with indoctrination, stressing Russia's greatness and the threats to it from the West. The psychological conditioning of the population for war is not just for show: based on the (increasingly opaque) published Russian data, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute estimated last year that in 2024 military spending of various kinds would make up 35 per cent of the federal budget, or 7.1 per cent of GDP – up from an already high 3.6 per cent in 2021.[31] Russia is already a growing long-term threat to European security, but if it defeated and successfully occupied all or most of Ukraine, it would fundamentally alter the balance of power in Europe.

One cannot be sure how ambitious Putin's ultimate objectives are, beyond the end of Ukraine as a sovereign entity (set out in his July 2021 essay 'On the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians'), but the historian Timothy Garton Ash has recorded that as far back as

25: Ramon Antonio Vargas, 'House intelligence chair says Republicans are 'absolutely' repeating Russian propaganda', *The Guardian*, April 8th 2024.

26: See, for example, Catherine Belton and Joseph Menn, 'Russian trolls target U.S. support for Ukraine, Kremlin documents show', *The Washington Post*, April 8th 2024; and Paul Marshall, 'The Real Threat to Religious Freedom in Ukraine', The Hudson Institute, November 22nd 2023.

27: 'Key Narratives in Pro-Kremlin Disinformation Part 3: 'Lost Sovereignty'', EUvsDisinfo, August 13th 2022.

28: 'Orbán says Ukraine should be "buffer zone" outside EU and NATO', *Ukrainska Pravda*, February 11th 2024.

29: 'Czechs Bust Major Russian Propaganda Network', Agence France Presse, March 27th 2024.

30: "Fundamentals of Homeland Security': How Russia is turning schools into training grounds for future soldiers', Meduza, April 1st 2024.

31: Julian Cooper, 'Another budget for a country at war: Military expenditure in Russia's federal budget for 2024 and beyond', Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, SIPRI insights on peace and security, December 2023.

1994 Putin was talking of land beyond Russia's borders "that historically always belonged to Russia".[32] Before he launched the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, he had made proposals for a more far-reaching re-ordering of European security in two draft treaties, one between the US and Russia and one between NATO and Russia.[33] These called, among other things, for the US to cease all military co-operation with former Soviet states and to remove all nuclear weapons from bases outside US territory; and for all NATO forces and military infrastructure to be withdrawn from states that joined the alliance after the Cold War. In effect, Russia wanted Central and Eastern Europe to be left defenceless, and Western Europe no longer covered by the US nuclear umbrella. In 2023 Putin's loyal lieutenant, former Russian president and current deputy chair of the Russian Security Council, Dmitri Medvedev, threatened Poland with "the death of Polish statehood in its entirety".[34]

"The more agricultural land is affected by fighting, the more Ukrainian food production will fall."

If Putin felt emboldened by the West's inability to prevent his victory in Ukraine, however, then he would be more likely to engage in 'deniable' operations in the Baltic states to test NATO's Article 5 guarantee rather than conduct an immediate attack on Poland – a populous and well-armed state. If such actions did not meet with a firm response, a full-scale assault on a NATO state would become more likely. If Trump becomes US president, the risk of such a test would grow, given his anti-NATO rhetoric.[35] European leaders would face the dilemma of whether to make their peace with Russia (which some, like Orbán, might find attractive) or rapidly increase their efforts to build up defence capabilities (which those bordering Russia would be more likely to do). NATO and the EU could find themselves divided and paralysed; if some countries failed to live up to their mutual defence commitments – Article 5 in the case of NATO, Article 42.7 in the case of the EU – then NATO and the EU could both fracture.

★ **Arms smuggling and organised crime.** Ukraine's defeat would also mean large numbers of traumatised ex-service personnel potentially trying to escape Russian occupation. Russia could not be relied on to mount an effective operation to disarm and reintegrate them into society. Given high levels of corruption in both the Russian and Ukrainian armies before the war, there would be a high risk of small arms and light weapons ending up in the hands of organised criminal gangs, as happened in the Western Balkans after the Yugoslav wars.

★ **Migration.** Ukrainians have seen what happens in areas occupied by Russia. If Russia's advance accelerates, it is likely that a significant part of the population (an estimated 31 million still living in areas controlled by the government, including 3.7 million internally displaced persons) will flee to the West. Even 20 per cent of the remaining population, added to the 4.25 million Ukrainians already receiving temporary protection in the EU, would overwhelm Europe's capacity for managing migrant flows at the border, and its short-term ability to house and provide social support for refugees.

★ **Global food security.** Ukraine (like Russia) is one of the world's most important food exporting countries. In 2021, it was responsible for more than 40 per cent of global exports of sunflower oil, more than 10 per cent of global maize exports and 11.5 per cent of global barley exports. The International Food Policy Research Institute has calculated that for Ukraine's top six crops (barley, maize, rapeseed, soybeans, sunflower seeds and wheat), the net harvested area fell by almost a fifth between the 2021/2022 and the 2023/2024 seasons as a result of the war.[36] The United Nations Development Programme already estimates that mines and explosive remnants of war potentially affect almost one-third of Ukrainian territory.[37] In the short term, the further Russia advances and the more agricultural land is affected by fighting, the more production will fall. That will drive up world food prices and create social unrest in food-insecure countries, especially those in Africa and the Middle East that have been major markets for Ukrainian agricultural products – potentially driving further waves of migration towards Europe.

In the long term, if Russia can decontaminate occupied land and restore the area under cultivation to pre-war levels, it would become an even larger agricultural exporter. Combined Russian and Ukrainian wheat exports in 2021 accounted for almost 19 per cent of the global total, ahead of the US with just over 14 per cent. Russian and Ukrainian exports of sunflower oil made up more than 56 per cent of the global total. Russia would be able to use food exports as a political tool (as the US did during the Cold War), rewarding supporters with subsidised supplies.[38]

32: Timoth Garton Ash, 'Homelands: A personal history of Europe', page 256, 2023.
33: Sergei Berezhnoy, 'Rossiya opublikovala trebovania Putina k NATO I SShA: polniy tekst' (Russia published Putin's demands to NATO and the USA: full text), Liga.net, December 17th 2021.
34: 'Putin ally warns 'enemy' Poland: you risk losing your statehood', Reuters, November 2nd 2023.
35: Rudy Chinchilla, 'Trump says he'd let Russia do 'whatever the hell they want' to NATO countries that don't pay enough', NBC News, February 11th 2024.
36: Joseph Glauber, 'Ukraine and global agricultural markets two years later', International Food Policy Research Institute, February 26th 2024.
37: UN Development Programme Ukraine, 'New UNDP and BBC Media Action campaign to raise awareness of dangers of explosive ordnance in Ukraine', UNDP press release, April 3rd 2024.
38: 'USAID and PL–480, 1961–1969', Office of the Historian, US Department of State.

★ **Nuclear proliferation.** It is not clear whether Ukraine could have controlled the Soviet nuclear weapons left on its territory when it gained its independence, and turned them into a deterrent of its own. But in any case, it was persuaded to give them up. In return, in the Budapest Memorandum of 1994, it got security assurances from Russia, the UK and the US that they would respect its independence, sovereignty and existing borders. The UK and US did very little to help Ukraine when Russia violated its commitments in 2014, but in 2022 they and the rest of the West pledged to help Ukraine. If Ukraine is defeated, and Western promises prove to be empty, there is a clear message to other countries in vulnerable positions: develop nuclear weapons. The examples of India, Israel, Pakistan and North Korea suggest that it is better to have nuclear weapons and allies, but if you cannot have both, it is better to have nuclear weapons.

★ **Global influence.** The impact of a Russian victory on Western security would not be limited to Europe. Russia has been strengthening its relations with developing and emerging powers. It has been surprisingly successful in framing its war of aggression against Ukraine as a defensive war against 'Western imperialism'. Many of the countries whose food supplies were curtailed by the Russian blockade of Ukraine's Black Sea ports still blamed their problems on the West. Russia has reinforced its partnerships in the Middle East (especially with Iran and Syria). It has increased its footprint in Africa (in a range of countries in the Sahel) and Latin America (strengthening its ties with Venezuela and Brazil).[39] As Russia's prospects in Ukraine have improved, China has reportedly stepped up its support to Russia's war effort.[40] If Russia can defeat Ukraine, Western promises to support Kyiv "for as long as it takes" will look hollow (indeed, they already look hollow to Ukrainians under Russian bombardment). Other Western partners may conclude that they should seek insurance from Beijing and Moscow, for fear that Washington and Brussels will not be able to help them in a crisis.

What should the West do?

Ukraine's defeat is far from inevitable, however, and these risks will not materialise if Russia is beaten. One of Russia's great successes in this war has been to convey Russian strength and convince the West of its own weakness. Yet on a purchasing power parity basis, the EU's gross national income (GNI) in 2022 was more than five times that of Russia; the GNI of the EU and US combined was more than ten times that of Russia. The European members of NATO alone have almost 2 million military personnel – almost twice Russia's claimed forces.[41]

"Roosevelt called the US "the arsenal of democracy"; Europeans need to take on that role for Ukraine."

A big economy and a large number of troops on their own do not guarantee success in war. The main difference between Russia and the West, at the moment, is that – despite Macron saying in June 2022 that France would enter a "war economy" – no Western country has shifted resources to defence investment on the scale needed to out-produce Russia.[42] It is not (quite) too late to start. President Franklin Roosevelt called the US "the arsenal of democracy" in 1940; Europeans need to take on that role for Ukraine. The EU needs to learn lessons from what has gone well and what has not in the effort to supply Ukraine with ammunition since the March 2023 EU agreement to speed up the delivery and joint procurement of ammunition.[43] France needs to put to one side its preference for an EU-only effort to beef up procurement: those with significant defence sectors, like the UK, should be part of a co-ordinated programme to help Ukraine.

The West must invest in a rapid increase in defence industrial capacity in two ways. First, it should boost production of some complex and expensive equipment. The US can only produce 500 Patriot air defence missiles a year (a number that should increase to 650 by 2027), while Russia fired more than 80 missiles and drones at Ukrainian cities and energy infrastructure on the night of April 10th – 11th alone.[44] France has increased production of its Caesar howitzer from two to eight per month, but needs to go much further.[45] Second, the West should learn the lesson of this war, that cheap weapons systems can be as useful as expensive ones when used effectively. Cheap Ukrainian drones destroy Russian tanks that cost millions of euros; cheap Russian drones force Ukraine to use scarce expensive Western air defence missiles. The West should supply Ukraine with cheap mass-produced systems that are hard for Russia to counter. Zelenskyy has

39: 'Russia, Venezuela To Boost Cooperation in Energy, Including Nuclear', Agence France Presse, February 21st 2024; 'President Lula receives Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov', gov.br, February 22nd 2024.
40: Olha Hlushchenko, 'China provides Russia with satellite imagery to help in war against Ukraine – Bloomberg', *Ukrainska Pravda*, April 7th 2024.
41: 'The Secretary General's annual report 2023', NATO, March 14th 2024.
42: Elise Vincent, 'Macron says France must enter 'war economy', announcing military budget re-evaluation', June 14th 2022.
43: 'Delivery and joint procurement of ammunition for Ukraine', note by the General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union, March 20th 2023.
44: Jen Judson, 'How Patriot proved itself in Ukraine and secured a fresh future', *Defense News*, April 9th 2024; Dan Sabbagh, 'Ukraine air defences overwhelmed as Russia pounds power stations', *The Guardian*, April 13th 2024.
45: 'Canon Caesar : Sébastien Lecornu salue la hausse de la production et la réduction des délais', Ministère des Armées, October 17th 2023.

said that Ukraine will produce 1 million drones this year.[46] The 'drones coalition' announced by the UK and Latvia in February is unambitiously promising Ukraine "thousands" of drones; it should be able to do much better.[47]

Among the major obstacles to increasing European defence production to the required scale are finance ministries – or at least those of some states focused on reducing debt to GDP ratios at all costs, including Germany. The revised EU fiscal rules will allow member states to cut their deficits over seven years rather than four "if they carry out certain reforms and investments that improve resilience and growth potential and support fiscal sustainability and address common priorities of the EU. These include…, where necessary, the build-up of defence capabilities".[48] But the fiscal rules will still force them to cut their budget deficits; they can be penalised if they do not. If budget deficits have to rise to win the war, they should be allowed to: they would have to rise much further if Ukraine lost and the West had to rearm to face an emboldened and aggressive Russia. In 1943, the US budget deficit hit 26.9 per cent of GDP, without the US economy collapsing. As with the Covid pandemic, when countries incurred unprecedented deficits in the interests of keeping their economies functioning, the consequences of not investing in defence now are so serious that finance ministries should focus on how to facilitate it in the shortest time possible, while thinking about how to reduce deficits and debts once the war is won.

"Among the major obstacles to increasing European defence production to the required scale are finance ministries."

Moreover, EU finance ministers, who also make up the board of the European Investment Bank (EIB), are moving at a snail's pace to amend the bank's rules to allow it to invest in or provide guarantees for investment in defence production. In March 2022, with Russia's invasion of Ukraine already underway, the EIB set up the Strategic European Security Initiative (SESI), to make €6 billion in investments available by 2027. But in doing so, it restated its policy of not investing in purely defence-related production or weaponry: "SESI projects must be 'dual-use', and need to be primarily motivated by their civil applications, meaning that projects are expected to have a predominant civilian use".[49] The European Council called in December 2023 for the EIB to step up its role "in European security and defence", and rather more explicitly in February 2024 invited it "to adapt its policy for lending to the defence industry and its current definition of dual-use goods". On April 12th, the EIB board agreed to waive the requirement that dual-use projects get more than half of their projected revenues from civilian uses, but still insisted that the bank should only invest in equipment or infrastructure serving defensive needs "such as reconnaissance, surveillance, spectrum protection and control, decontamination, research and development, equipment, military mobility, border control and protection of other critical infrastructure, and drones".[50] What Europe needs at present is more investment in weapons production, and EU leaders, as the shareholders of the EIB, should take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that the bank supports that objective.

Increasing production of anything takes time. In the interim, the West needs to raid its stocks for equipment that could help Ukraine. Air defence weapons and munitions are a top priority – Russia's recent attacks on Ukrainian power plants have been much more effective than its previous attempts to destroy critical infrastructure. EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell has complained that Western countries have 100 Patriot batteries but cannot supply seven to Ukraine.[51] But Ukraine also needs more weapons to hold back the expected Russian offensive this summer. The West should learn from Russia: Western experts have tended to laugh at 60-year-old Russian tanks being brought out of storage, but they are better than nothing. The US in particular has vast quantities of obsolescent equipment stored in its western deserts, including hundreds of A-10 ground attack aircraft, built in the Cold War to destroy exactly the kind of armoured vehicles that Russia is using. The A-10 is more vulnerable to short range air defence than the US Air Force would like, and is therefore being phased out, but it would give the Ukrainians, who have a small number of similar Soviet-era ground attack aircraft, useful additional capabilities. The US reportedly also has 2,000 Abrams tanks in store, in addition to 6,000 in active service; and there are about 2,000 Leopard 2 tanks in various European countries.[52] Ukraine could make better use of, say, 500 of each (or better still, 1,000) than their current owners can. Countries that are far from the front line have no reason to hoard equipment when a friendly country is fighting an existential war. Stoltenberg underlined

46: 'Ukraine to produce one million drones next year, Zelenskiy says', Reuters, December 19th 2023.
47: 'UK to supply thousands of drones as co-leader of major international capability coalition for Ukraine', gov.uk, February 15th 2024.
48: 'Economic governance review: Council and Parliament strike deal on reform of fiscal rules', Council of the European Union, February 10th 2024.
49: 'The EIB continues its support to the EU's Security and Defence Agenda', European Investment Bank, March 10th 2022.
50: 'EU Finance Ministers set in motion EIB Group Action Plan to further step-up support for Europe's security and defence industry', European Investment Bank, April 12th 2024.
51: 'West Failing to Give Ukraine Air Defences it Needs: EU's Borrell', Agence France Presse, April 9th 2024.
52: 'USA Tanks Brigades & Number Of Tanks US Military Has (2022)' (sic), *Transatlantic Today*, October 21st 2022; Rob Picheta, 'Germany's decision to send tanks to Ukraine is a major moment in the war. Here's how it will change the conflict', CNN, January 25th 2023.

this in a press conference on April 17th, when he said that if countries had to choose between meeting NATO capability targets and providing more aid to Ukraine, his message was clear: they should send more to Ukraine.[53]

> *"The West should stop allowing Putin to frighten it with the threat of escalation."*

The West should also give Ukraine more ability to strike deep into Russian territory. Ukraine is already developing drones with a range of 1,300 kilometres or more, which have been used to target oil refineries and a drone production facility, but these are slow-moving and vulnerable to countermeasures. For most of the war, Russia has been able to strike Ukrainian territory at will, without risking a response. There should not be any obstacle now to Ukraine hitting back at military, defence industrial or economic targets. Every drone factory taken out of production reduces the number of drones Ukraine has to destroy in the air. And if Ukraine can make Russia run short of fuel (it may already have damaged 15 per cent of Russia's refinery capacity), that will force Russia to reduce exports, ration fuel for the domestic market, or spend money on buying fuel elsewhere.[54] The US administration fears that increased fuel prices in an election year will push voters towards backing Trump, but provided that Ukraine continues to avoid targeting crude oil production and export facilities, so Russian oil still reaches refineries elsewhere, the effects on global markets are likely to be limited. Ukrainian strikes would be much less salient than Iranian attacks on Saudi production facilities or blocking of the Strait of Hormuz would be, if Tehran chose to do that at some point as part of its conflict with the West.

The West can do more to ensure that sanctions against Russia are effective. This is partly a matter of increasing domestic enforcement to ensure that firms are not exporting sensitive technology or components to obvious Russian front companies in third countries for re-export to Russia. The EU (and the UK) have opposed US secondary sanctions since the 1980s, but they are effective: Chinese companies that do more business in the US than they do in Russia (of which there are many) have generally complied with US sanctions. There are welcome signs that the EU and UK positions are evolving: they are at least sanctioning Chinese, Indian and other firms involved in re-exporting European components to Russia. A significant part of Russia's crude oil is still being exported at prices above the G7 'cap' by a so-called shadow fleet. The US has begun to sanction tankers from the shadow fleet, making the business much less attractive.[55]

Finally, the West should stop allowing Putin to frighten it with the threat of escalation. Putin does not want direct conflict with NATO; he has shown that in the past, notably when Turkey shot down a Russian fighter aircraft in 2015 without any military response from Russia. Ukraine is important to him; but regime (and personal) survival is even more important. He has seen, however, that threatening war, especially with the use of nuclear weapons, has been enough to prevent or at least delay the supply of various Western military capabilities that Ukraine could have used to mount a more effective defence – whether tanks, missiles or aircraft. Macron was right to say that deploying Western troops in Ukraine should not be ruled out (though he could do much more to help Ukraine even without putting French boots on the ground).[56] Under the UN Charter, Ukraine has the right of collective and individual self-defence; Western countries have the right to help it. Even if a Western presence were limited to air defence units or logistic support, it would show that the EU and NATO did indeed regard Ukraine as "one of us", as European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said in the early days of the war. If France, the UK and the US can risk putting their fighters at risk to protect Israel from Iranian drone and missile strikes, should they not also be willing to protect Ukraine from Russian drone and missile strikes?

Conclusion

It is highly unlikely that there would be consensus in NATO, still less the EU, to increase Western backing for Ukraine to the point of committing Western forces, even in defensive or supporting roles. Escalating Western support for Ukraine may be necessary, but it creates dilemmas.

First, efforts to encourage increased Western involvement might be counterproductive, and erode already shaky support for Ukraine in several EU and NATO members. In Slovakia, polling in 2023 showed that only 40 per cent of those questioned thought Russia was to blame for invading Ukraine; 34 per cent thought the West had provoked Ukraine, and 17 per cent thought Ukraine had oppressed Russian-speakers.[57] A February 2024 survey of 12 EU member-states (11 of them also NATO members) for the European Council on Foreign Relations showed that majorities or pluralities in seven (Austria,

53: 'Joint press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg with the Prime Minister of Czechia, Petr Fiala, the Prime Minister of Denmark, Mette Frederiksen, and the Prime Minister of the Netherlands, Mark Rutte, at NATO Headquarters', NATO Newsroom, April 17th 2024.

54: John Irish, 'Ukraine strikes may have hit 15 per cent of Russian refinery capacity - NATO official', Reuters, April 4th 2024.

55: Craig Kennedy, 'The Shadow Fleet in Crisis (highlights from an upcoming report)', 'Navigating Russia' Substack, April 8th 2024.

56: Clea Caulcutt, Laura Kayali and Veronika Melkozerova, 'Macron doesn't rule out sending Western troops to Ukraine', *Politico*, February 27th 2024.

57: 'GLOBSEC Trends 2023'.

Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands and Romania) thought that Europe should push Ukraine towards negotiating a peace deal with Russia, rather than supporting it in taking back the occupied territories.[58] In no country was an absolute majority in favour of the latter option. Respondents were even more reluctant to increase support for Ukraine when they were asked what Europe should do if the next US president significantly limited aid to Ukraine. Apart from the leaders of the Baltic states and some in Central Europe, few European politicians are setting out for their publics the consequences of Ukrainian defeat, or making an unequivocal case for ensuring its victory.

"Europe will never be secure as long as Russia can pursue Putin's imperial dream."

Second, if some countries decided to deploy forces in Ukraine, others might baulk at the risk of NATO or the EU being drawn into the conflict if Putin retaliated against NATO territory. Even under Biden, the US would probably put pressure on Europeans to stay out of Ukraine, and he would probably have many European leaders on his side; Trump might easily take increased European involvement in the war as an excuse to withdraw US forces from Europe or even pull the US out of NATO.

But there are no good alternatives. The war in Ukraine has reached the point where allowing the 'coalition of the unwilling' to dictate what the West can and cannot do also threatens Europe's security. Confronting Russia while its forces are still in eastern Ukraine is a terrible prospect, but it is better than confronting an emboldened and re-armed Russia on a NATO member's territory in a few years.

The American scholar John Mearsheimer argued in 2015 that "Ukraine is not a vital strategic interest for the West. It is a vital strategic interest for the Russians".[59] A partial response would be to say that it is an even more vital strategic interest for the Ukrainians themselves, and that they, not Putin, should decide their future. But – whether or not Ukraine was a vital strategic interest for the West before 2014 – once Putin had grossly violated international law by annexing Crimea, Ukraine's success became a vital interest for the West. It is not clear, even in 2024, that every Western leader understands that. But the reality is that Europe will never be secure as long as Russia can pursue Putin's imperial dream. Ukraine's defeat is the most important step in realising that dream. Ukraine's victory would be the most important step towards ending it. Perhaps that could even put Russia back on the road to being what many Russians said they wanted it to be after the collapse of the Soviet Union: a normal country.

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April 2024

58: Ivan Krastev and Mark Leonard, 'Wars and elections: How European leaders can maintain public support for Ukraine', European Council on Foreign Relations policy brief, February 21st 2024.

59: 'Why is Ukraine the West's Fault? Featuring John Mearsheimer', University of Chicago YouTube channel, September 25th 2015.