



Europe is not worried enough about the possibility of Ukrainian defeat; it must increase support for Kyiv now.

Western countries need to decide how much Ukraine's security matters to them. There seems to be a sizeable gap between most leaders' rhetoric, supporting Ukraine, and the priorities revealed by their defence spending, weapons deliveries and willingness to talk honestly to their voters about the war. Decisions to provide Kyiv with weapons have often come about after long hesitation, allowing Russia time to plan counter-measures. The latest \$60.8 billion US military assistance package has been held up for six months by the internal politics of the Republican Party. And German Chancellor Olaf Scholz doggedly refuses to provide Ukraine with long-range Taurus missiles that would enable it to hit Russian logistic hubs, airbases and infrastructure.

A new policy brief from the Centre for European Reform argues that Western leaders' hesitancy to act suggests they are underestimating both the impact of Ukraine's defeat and the West's ability to prevent it. ['Does it matter if Ukraine loses?'](#) sets out the implications to the West if Russia were able to achieve such a victory. These are:

- 1. Strategic impact on Europe:** A vastly increased threat to the rest of Europe from a militarised Russia.
- 2. Arms smuggling and organised crime:** Increased cross-border organised crime and arms-smuggling from Ukraine.
- 3. Migration:** Millions more Ukrainians in Europe, fleeing from the kind of atrocities already seen in occupied areas of Ukraine.
- 4. Global food security:** Damage to Ukrainian food exports would drive migration from vulnerable countries in the Middle East and Africa.
- 5. Nuclear proliferation:** Countries will conclude that having nuclear weapons provides more reliable security than promises of help from allies.
- 6. Global influence:** Diminished international influence for the West, and increased influence for Russia and China.

Ukraine's defeat is far from inevitable, however, and these risks will not materialise if Russia is beaten. Europe is sitting on many assets. On a purchasing power parity basis, the EU's gross national income (GNI) in 2022 was more than five times that of Russia and the European members of NATO have nearly 2 million military personnel – almost twice Russia's claimed forces. If Europe were to enter a "war economy", as Russia already has, the tables could be turned.

The West should invest in a rapid increase in defence industrial capacity, boosting production of both complex and expensive equipment and of cheap weapons systems that can be extremely useful when used effectively. The European Investment Bank rules blocking investment in defence production should be amended to reflect the current security threat to Europe. Russian sanctions should be tightened and the West should stop allowing Putin to frighten it with the threat of escalation. Putin has shown time and again that he does not want to enter into a direct conflict with NATO.

Western leaders must understand that while Ukraine may not have been a vital strategic interest for the West before 2014, 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, and Ukraine's victory would be the most important step towards ending it.

Ian Bond, the author of the policy brief, said: *"The US military aid approved this week will be a welcome relief to Ukrainians, but it isn't enough for victory. Until the West understands what is at stake in this war, it will keep doing too little, too late."*

Notes for editors:

For further information on the new research and to request an interview with Ian Bond [@CER_IanBond](#) and [@cerianbond.bsky.social](#) please contact Octavia Hughes in the CER press office on pressoffice@cer.eu or +44 (0) 20 7233 1199.

The Centre for European Reform is a think-tank devoted to making the EU work better and strengthening its role in the world. The CER is pro-European but not uncritical.

Follow us on X: [@CER_EU](#) on BlueSky: [@centreeuropeanref.bsky.social](#) on Threads: [@cer_eu](#)