

Biden's Existential Angst in Ukraine

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The bipartisan consensus in the Beltway on the United States being the 'indispensable' world power is usually attributed to the neocons who have been the driving force of the US foreign and security policy in successive administrations since the 1970s.

The op-ed in the Washington Post on Saturday titled [Time is not on Ukraine's side](#), coauthored by **former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice** in George W. Bush presidency and **Defence Secretary Robert Gates** (who served under both Bush and Barack Obama), highlights this paradigm.

Rice and Gates are robust cold warriors who are enthusiastic about NATO's war against Russia. But their grouse is that President Biden should 'dramatically' step up in Ukraine.

The op-ed harks back to the two world wars that marked the US' ascendance as world power and warns that the US-led 'rules-based order' since 1990 — code word for US global hegemony — is in peril if Biden fails in Ukraine.

Rice and Gates indirectly acknowledge that Russia is on a winning streak, contrary to the western triumphalist narrative so far. Evidently, the expected Russian offensive ahead is rattling their nerves.

Equally, the op-ed is contextual to American politics. The House speaker stalemate and its dramatic denouement in a bare-knuckle political fight among Republicans [presages a dysfunctional Congress](#) between now and 2024 election.

Kevin McCarthy, who had former president Donald Trump's backing, finally won but only after making a series of concessions to the populist wing of the GOP, which has weakened his authority. The [AP reported](#), "Fingers were pointed, words exchanged and violence apparently just averted... It was the end of a bitter standoff that had shown the strengths and fragility of American democracy."

A [senior Kremlin politician](#) already commented on it. McCarthy himself, in his statement

after election as the new House speaker, listed as his priorities the commitment to a strong economy, counteracting illegal immigration through the Mexican border and competing with China, but omitted any reference to the Ukraine situation or providing funds to Kiev.

Indeed, earlier in November, he had asserted that the Republicans in the House would resist unlimited and unjustified financial aid to Ukraine.

Now, Rice and Gates refuse to march in lockstep with Trump. But, although a diminished player, Trump still remains an active player, a massive presence and exercises functional control and is by far the largest voice in the Republican Party. Arguably, what defines the GOP today is Trump. Therefore, his backing for McCarthy is going to be consequential.

Biden understands that. Conceivably, the Rice-Gates op-ed was mooted by the White House and the US security establishment and scripted by the neocons. The op-ed appeared on the day after the [January 5 joint statement](#) by Biden and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz underscoring their 'unwavering solidarity' with Ukraine.

Under immense pressure from Biden, Germany and France caved in last week to provide Ukraine with Infantry Fighting Vehicles. Scholz also agreed that Germany will supply an additional Patriot air defense battery to Ukraine. (A top SPD politician in Berlin has since voiced reservations.)

On the same day as the op-ed appeared, Pentagon arranged, unusually for a Saturday, a [Press briefing](#) by **Laura Cooper**, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, International Security Affairs for Russia, Ukraine, Eurasia. Cooper stated explicitly that the war in Ukraine threatens the US' global standing:

“From an overall strategic perspective, it is hard to emphasise enough the devastating consequences if Putin were to be successful in achieving his objective of taking over Ukraine. This would rewrite international boundaries in a way that we have not seen since World War II. And our ability to reverse these gains and to support and stand by the sovereignty of a nation, is something that resonates not just in Europe, but all around the world.”

The cat is out of the bag, finally — the US is fighting in Ukraine to preserve its global hegemony. Coincidence or not, in a [sensational interview](#) in Kiev, Ukrainian Defence Minister Oleksii Reznikov also blurted out in the weekend that Kiev has consciously allowed itself to be used by NATO in the bloc's wider conflict with Moscow!

To quote him,

“At the NATO Summit in Madrid (in June 2022), it was clearly delineated that over the coming decade, the main threat to the alliance would be the Russian Federation. Today Ukraine is eliminating this threat. We are carrying out NATO's mission today. They aren't shedding their blood. We're shedding ours. That's why they're required to supply us with weapons.”

Reznikov, an ex-Soviet army officer, claimed that he personally received holiday greeting cards and text messages from Western defense ministers to this effect. The stakes couldn't be higher, with Reznikov also asserting that Ukraine's NATO membership is a done thing.

Indeed, on Saturday, Pentagon [announced](#) the Biden Administration's single biggest security assistance package for Ukraine so far from the Presidential Drawdown. Evidently, the Biden Administration is pulling out all the stops. Another UN Security Council meeting has been scheduled for Jan. 13.

[But Putin has made it clear](#) that "Russia is open to a serious dialogue - under the condition that the Kiev authorities meet the clear demands that have been repeatedly laid out, and recognise the new territorial realities."

As for the war, the tidings from Donbass are extremely worrisome. [Soledar is in Russian hands](#) and the Wagner fighters are tightening the noose around Bakhmut, a strategic communication hub and lynchpin of Ukrainian deployments in Donbass.

On the other hand, contrary to expectations, Moscow is unperturbed about sporadic theatrical Ukrainian drone strikes inside Russia. The Russian public opinion remains firmly supportive of Putin.

The commander of the Russian forces, Gen. Sergey Surovikin has prioritised the fortification of the so-called 'contact line,' which is proving effective against Ukrainian counterattacks.

[Pentagon is unsure](#) of Surovikin's future strategy. From what they know of his brilliant success in evicting NATO officers from Syria's Aleppo in 2016, siege and attrition war are Surovikin's forte. But one never knows. A steady Russian build-up in Belarus is underway. The S-400 and Iskander missile systems have been deployed there. A NATO (Polish) attack on Belarus is no longer realistic.

On January 4, Putin hailed the New Year with the formidable [frigate Admiral Gorshkov](#) carrying "cutting-edge Zircon hypersonic missile system, which has no analogue," embarking on "a long-distance naval mission across the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, as well as the Mediterranean Sea."

A week earlier, the sixth missile-carrying strategic nuclear-powered submarine of the Borei-A class, The Generalissimus Suvorov, joined the Russian Navy. Such submarines are capable of carrying 16 inter-continental ballistic missiles Bulava.

The fog of war envelops Russian intentions. Rice and Gates have warned that time works in favour of Russia: "Ukraine's military capability and economy are now dependent almost entirely on lifelines from the West - primarily, the United States. Absent another major Ukrainian breakthrough and success against Russian forces, Western pressures on Ukraine to negotiate a cease-fire will grow as months of military stalemate pass. Under current circumstances, any negotiated cease-fire would leave Russian forces in a strong position."

This is a brutally frank assessment. Biden's call to Scholz on Friday shows the angst in his mind, too. With the fragmentation of the political class within America, Biden can ill afford cracks in allied unity as well.

Curiously, this was also the main thrust of an article a fortnight ago by a top Russian pundit Andrey Kortunov in the Chinese Communist Party daily Global Times titled [US domestic woes could push Ukraine to sidelines of American public discourse](#).

Kortunov wrote: "Putting emotions aside, one has to accept that the conflict has already become existential not only for Ukraine and Russia, but for the US as well: the Biden

administration cannot accept a defeat in Ukraine without facing major negative implications for the US positions all over the world.”

Kortunov was writing almost a fortnight before Rice and Gates began getting the same metaphysical perception. But the neocons aren't yet prepared to accept that the choice is actually staring at them — Biden swimming alongside Putin toward a multipolar world order, or sinking in the troubled waters.

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Featured image: President Vladimir Putin attending Christmas Mass, Annunciation Cathedral, Kremlin, Moscow, January 7, 2023 (Source: Indian Punchline)

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