

# How Spin and Lies Fuel a Bloody War of Attrition in Ukraine

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*In a recent [column](#), military analyst William Astore wrote, "[Congressman] George Santos is a symptom of a much larger disease: a lack of honor, a lack of shame, in America. Honor, truth, integrity, simply don't seem to matter, or matter much, in America today... But how do you have a democracy where there is no truth?"*

*Astore went on to compare America's political and military leaders to the disgraced Congressman Santos. "[U.S. military leaders](#) appeared before Congress to testify the Iraq War was being won," Astore wrote. "They appeared before Congress to testify the Afghan War was being won. They talked of "progress," of corners being turned, of Iraqi and Afghan forces being [successfully trained](#) and ready to assume their duties as U.S. forces withdrew. As events showed, it was all spin. All lies."*

Now America is at war again, in Ukraine, and the spin continues. This war involves Russia, Ukraine, the [United States](#) and its NATO allies. No party to this conflict has leveled with its own people to honestly explain what it is fighting for, what it really hopes to achieve and how it plans to achieve it. All sides claim to be fighting for noble causes and insist that it is the other side that refuses to negotiate a peaceful resolution. They are all manipulating and lying, and compliant media (on all sides) trumpet their lies.

It is a truism that the first casualty of war is the truth. But spinning and lying has real-world impacts in a war in which [hundreds of thousands](#) of real people are fighting and dying, while their homes, on both sides of the front lines, are reduced to rubble by hundreds of thousands of [howitzer shells](#).

Yves Smith, the editor of Naked Capitalism, explored this insidious linkage between the information war and the real one in an [article](#) titled,

"What if Russia won the Ukraine War, but the Western press didn't notice?"

He observed that Ukraine's total dependence on the supply of weapons and money from its Western allies has given a life of its own to a triumphalist narrative that Ukraine is defeating Russia, and will keep scoring victories as long as the West keeps sending it more money and increasingly powerful and deadly weapons.

But the need to keep recreating the illusion that Ukraine is winning by hyping limited gains on the battlefield has forced Ukraine to keep [sacrificing](#) its forces in extremely bloody battles, like its counter-offensive around Kherson and the Russian sieges of Bakhmut and Soledar. Lt. Col. Alexander Vershinin, a retired U.S. tank commander, [wrote](#) on Harvard's Russia Matters website, "In some ways, Ukraine has no choice but to launch attacks no matter the human and material cost."

Objective analyses of the war in Ukraine are hard to come by through the thick fog of war propaganda. But we should pay attention when a series of senior Western military leaders, active and retired, make urgent calls for diplomacy to reopen peace negotiations, and warn that prolonging and escalating the war is risking a [full-scale](#) war between Russia and the United States that could escalate into [nuclear war](#).

General Erich Vad, who was German Chancellor Angela Merkel's senior military adviser for seven years, [recently](#) spoke to Emma, a German news website. He called the war in Ukraine a "war of attrition," and compared it to the First World War, and to the Battle of Verdun in particular, in which hundreds of thousands of French and German soldiers were killed with no major gain for either side.

Vad asked the same persistent unanswered [question](#) that the New York Times editorial board asked of President Biden last May. What are the U.S. and NATO's real war aims?

"Do you want to achieve a willingness to negotiate with the deliveries of the tanks? Do you want to reconquer Donbas or Crimea? Or do you want to defeat Russia completely?" asked General Vad.

He concluded,

"There is no realistic end state definition. And without an overall political and strategic concept, arms deliveries are pure militarism. We have a militarily operational stalemate, which we cannot solve militarily. Incidentally, this is also the opinion of the American Chief of Staff Mark Milley. He said that Ukraine's military victory is not to be expected and that negotiations are the only possible way. Anything else is a senseless waste of human life."

Whenever Western officials are put on the spot by these unanswered questions, they are forced to reply, as [Biden did](#) to the Times eight months ago, that they are sending weapons to help Ukraine defend itself and to put it in a stronger position at the negotiating table. But what would this "stronger position" look like?

When Ukrainian forces were advancing toward Kherson in November, NATO officials [agreed](#) that the fall of Kherson would give Ukraine an opportunity to reopen negotiations from a position of strength. But when Russia withdrew from Kherson, no negotiations ensued, and both sides are now planning new offensives.

The U.S. media keep [repeating](#) the narrative that Russia will never negotiate in good faith,

and it has hidden from the public the fruitful negotiations that began soon after the Russian invasion but were quashed by the United States and United Kingdom. Few outlets reported the recent revelations by former Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett about the ceasefire negotiations between Russia and Ukraine in Turkey that he helped to mediate in March 2022. Bennett said explicitly that the West [“blocked”](#) or “stopped” (depending on the translation) the negotiations.

Bennett confirmed what has been reported by other sources since April 21, 2022, when Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu, one of the other mediators, [told](#) CNN Turk after a NATO foreign ministers’ meeting, “There are countries within NATO who want the war to continue... They want Russia to become weaker.”

Advisers to Prime Minister Zelenskyy [provided](#) the details of Boris Johnson’s April 9 visit to Kyiv that were published in Ukrayinska Pravda on May 5th. They said Johnson delivered two messages. The first was that Putin and Russia “should be pressured, not negotiated with.” The second was that, even if Ukraine completed an agreement with Russia, the “collective West,” who Johnson claimed to represent, would take no part in it.

The Western corporate media has generally only weighed in on these early negotiations to cast doubt on this story or smear any who repeat it as Putin apologists, despite multiple-source confirmation by Ukrainian officials, Turkish diplomats and now the former Israeli prime minister.

The propaganda frame that Western establishment politicians and media use to explain the war in Ukraine to their own publics is a classic “white hats vs black hats” narrative, in which Russia’s guilt for the invasion doubles as proof of the West’s innocence and righteousness. The growing mountain of evidence that the U.S. and its allies share responsibility for many aspects of this crisis is swept under the proverbial carpet, which looks more and more like The Little Prince’s [drawing](#) of a boa constrictor that swallowed an elephant.

Western media and officials were even more ridiculous when they tried to [blame Russia](#) for blowing up its own pipelines, the Nord Stream underwater natural gas pipelines that channeled Russian gas to Germany. According to NATO, the explosions that released half a million tons of methane into the atmosphere were “deliberate, reckless, and irresponsible acts of sabotage.” The Washington Post, in what could be considered journalistic malpractice, [quoted](#) an anonymous “senior European environmental official” saying, “No one on the European side of the ocean is thinking this is anything other than Russian sabotage.”

It took former New York Times investigative reporter Seymour Hersh to break the silence. He published, in a blog post on his own Substack, a spectacular [whistleblower’s](#) account of how U.S. Navy divers teamed up with the Norwegian navy to plant the explosives under cover of a NATO naval exercise, and how they were detonated by a sophisticated signal from a buoy dropped by a Norwegian surveillance plane. According to Hersh, President Biden took an active role in the plan, and amended it to include the use of the signaling buoy so that he could personally dictate the precise timing of the operation, three months after the explosives were planted.

The White House predictably [dismissed](#) Hersh’s report as “utterly false and complete fiction”, but has never offered any reasonable explanation for this historic act of environmental terrorism.

President [Eisenhower](#) famously said that only an “alert and knowledgeable citizenry” can “guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.”

So what should an alert and knowledgeable American citizenry know about the role our government has played in fomenting the crisis in Ukraine, a role that the corporate media has swept under the rug? That is one of the main questions we have tried to answer in [our book](#) War in Ukraine: Making Sense of a Senseless Conflict. The answers include:

- The U.S. broke its [promises](#) not to expand NATO into Eastern Europe. In 1997, before Americans had ever heard of Vladimir Putin, 50 former senators, retired military officers, diplomats and academics [wrote to](#) President Clinton to oppose NATO expansion, calling it a policy error of “historic proportions.” Elder statesman George Kennan [condemned](#) it as “the beginning of a new cold war.”
- NATO provoked Russia by its open-ended [promise](#) to Ukraine in 2008 that it would become a member of NATO. William Burns, who was then the U.S. Ambassador to Moscow and is now the CIA Director, warned in a State Department [memo](#), “Ukrainian entry into NATO is the brightest of all red-lines for the Russian elite (not just Putin).”
- The [U.S. backed a coup](#) in Ukraine in 2014 that installed a government that [only half](#) its people recognized as legitimate, causing the disintegration of Ukraine and a civil war that [killed](#) 14,000 people.
- The 2015 [Minsk II](#) peace accord achieved a stable ceasefire line and steady [reductions](#) in casualties, but Ukraine failed to grant autonomy to Donetsk and Luhansk as agreed. Angela [Merkel](#) and Francois [Hollande](#) now admit that Western leaders only supported Minsk II to buy time for NATO to arm and train Ukraine’s military to recover Donbas by force.
- During the week before the invasion, OSCE monitors in Donbas documented a huge escalation in explosions around the ceasefire line. Most of the [4,093 explosions](#) in four days were in rebel-held territory, indicating incoming shell-fire by Ukrainian government forces. U.S. and U.K. officials claimed these were “[false flag](#)” attacks, as if Donetsk and Luhansk’s forces were shelling themselves, just as they later suggested that Russia blew up its own pipelines.
- After the invasion, instead of supporting Ukraine’s efforts to make peace, the United States and the United Kingdom blocked or stopped them in their tracks. The U.K.’s Boris Johnson said they saw a chance to “[press](#)” Russia and wanted to make the most of it, and U.S. Defense Secretary Austin said their goal was to “[weaken](#)” Russia.

What would an alert and knowledgeable citizenry make of all this? We would clearly condemn Russia for invading Ukraine. But then what? Surely we would also demand that U.S. political and military leaders tell us the truth about this horrific war and our country’s role in it, and demand that the media transmit the truth to the public. An “alert and knowledgeable citizenry” would surely then demand that our government stop fueling this war and instead support immediate peace negotiations.

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Medea Benjamin and Nicolas J. S. Davies are the authors of [War in Ukraine: Making Sense of a Senseless Conflict](#), published by OR Books. They are regular contributors to Global Research.

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