

Kiev's NATO-Backed Counteroffensive Is the West's Most Important Military Campaign Since WWII

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This is the first time since then that they've conventionally fought a military peer, albeit by proxy for now. Even so, the West is still receiving the large-scale data that they require in order to fine-tune their plans ahead of possibly waging a direct war against one.

More Than Meets the Eye

Kiev's [NATO-backed counteroffensive](#) has captivated the world's attention as everyone watches to see whether it'll push Russia out of the territory that Ukraine claims as its own. Progress on that direction would likely lead to continued Western support, while the [failure to fulfill expectations](#) might lead to the aforesaid being curtailed and [ceasefire talks commencing](#). Either outcome is important, but what many observers have overlooked is the historical significance of this campaign.

The Unexpected Proxy War

It's the first time since World War II that the West has conventionally fought a military peer, albeit indirectly in this case since they're fighting Russia [via their Ukrainian proxy](#). The US envisaged transforming that former Soviet Republic into a platform for [threatening Russia through conventional, hybrid, and unconventional means](#) with the aim of coercing it into never-ending concessions. The goal was to strategically neutralize [then Balkanize it](#) in order to [facilitate doing the same to China afterwards](#).

While Ukraine was cooperating with NATO to this end prior to the start of Russia's [special operation](#), including through the secret hosting of that bloc's bases as well as joint biological and nuclear weapons programs, everything was supposed to accelerate after its planned reconquest of Donbass in early 2022. [President Putin narrowly preempted](#) his opponents' first move [once he concluded](#) that the West didn't want to resolve their problems through peaceful means after they rejected Russia's security requests.

Mutual Surprises Lead to a Stalemate

The fast-moving events that were set into motion caught [both sides](#) by surprise. The West didn't really expect a large-scale intervention, predicting instead that Russia would likely concentrate its forces in Donbass in the unlikely scenario that it got involved, but they still secretly dispatched plenty of anti-air and -tank missiles to Ukraine ahead of time just in case. Likewise, Russia didn't expect such formidable resistance from Ukraine, but the West was also surprised that [Russia didn't collapse due to sanctions](#).

Neither side has thus far been able to defeat the other as a result of the NATO-Russian [“race of logistics”/“war of attrition”](#) that Secretary-General Stoltenberg finally admitted in mid-February has been going on this whole time. His bloc continued pumping Ukraine full of increasingly higher quality arms and training more of its troops to NATO standards exactly as it planned to do had Donbass been reconquered, while Russia partially mobilized its trained reservists and ramped up its military-industrial production.

The New York Times Spills the Beans

Instead of settling for the present stalemate by seeking to freeze the Line of Contact via a Korean-like armistice, the West saw the opportunity to put its proxy war plans against Russia into action ahead of schedule. Had Donbass been reconquered by Ukraine last spring like NATO envisaged, then Kiev would have been armed to the teeth and extensively trained for years prior to provoking a crisis over Crimea, but the decision was made to test it now since it's partially ready and the pretext already exists.

The New York Times (NYT) hinted at this motivation in their recent article titled [“As Ukraine Launches Counteroffensive, Definitions of ‘Success’ Vary”](#), which revealed that “Essentially, the United States and its allies will be looking at the counteroffensive for evidence that their plan of remaking the Ukrainian army into a modern force that fights with NATO tactics, and that can use complex maneuvers and advanced equipment to allow a smaller force to defeat a larger one, is sound.”

The West's Reality Check

The influx of [over \\$165 billion](#) worth of military support to Ukraine from NATO proved too tempting of an opportunity for the bloc's most hawkish decisionmakers to pass up in terms of finally testing their arms and strategies against a peer competitor. Considering the likelihood of Russia entrenching itself even deeper into those territories that Ukraine claims as its own and recalling the neck-and-neck NATO-Russian “race of logistics”, the decision was made to test it now instead of face greater difficulties later.

The NYT reported that expectations are tempered as a result of this newfound context:

“Privately, U.S. and European officials concede that pushing all of Russia's forces out of occupied Ukrainian land is highly unlikely. Still, two themes emerge as clear ideas of ‘success’: that the Ukrainian army retake and hold on to key swaths of territory previously occupied by the Russians, and that Kyiv deal the Russian military a debilitating blow that forces the Kremlin to question the future of its military options in Ukraine.”

The outlet then proceeded to indicate some tangible benchmarks for “success” such as

“retaking some parts of the Donbas or pushing Russia out of agricultural and mining areas in southeastern Ukraine”, “Seizing the nuclear plant in Zaporizhzhia”, and/or “cut[ting] off, or at least squeez[ing], the so-called land bridge.” These moderate goals are a far cry from the maximalist one that’s officially being pursued by NATO and Ukraine, which shows what a reality check the past 15 months of fighting have been.

NATO’s Utter Humiliation by Russia

Even worse for them is that Russia didn’t just destroy a sizeable amount of their so-called “wunderwaffen” over the past few days, but even [released videos proving](#) its accomplishments, thus utterly humiliating NATO. The bloc’s most hawkish decisionmakers were so eager to receive large-scale battlefield data from their Ukrainian proxies’ fielding of NATO equipment against the West’s Russian peer competitor that they arrogantly overlooked all the signs that this risked tremendously backfiring.

It was wrongly thought after [Russia’s pullbacks in Kharkov and Kherson Regions](#) late last year that the entire front would collapse if it was pushed strongly enough by NATO-trained Ukrainians fielding some of that bloc’s most famous equipment during the planned counteroffensive over half a year later. This assessment ignored the particularities of those two situations and assumed that Russia was incapable of learning from its prior shortcomings, which directly led to the West’s disaster over the past few days.

That’s not to say that Ukraine’s counteroffensive might not achieve some success despite the enormous physical costs that this would certainly entail, but just that global perceptions about Western power have just been shattered after Russia shared videos of it destroying their “wunderwaffen”. If more sober-minded decisionmakers had the final say in whether the counteroffensive should go ahead, they might have calculated that it’s better to preserve the illusion of dominance than risk having it dispelled.

Great Power Competition

It might have been inevitable in hindsight that the greenlight would be given to Kiev’s NATO-backed counteroffensive, however, when remembering that the US has been planning to test its new proxy war model against a peer competitor since at least December 2017. The [National Security Strategy](#) that was released at the time declared that “great power competition has returned”, specifically identifying China and Russia as the two that the US must actively contain.

Despite Trump continuing to arm Ukraine and impose sanctions against Russia during his tenure, he appears to have [sincerely wanted](#) to strike a deal with the Kremlin in order to then focus entirely on containing China, but he was thwarted by his permanent bureaucracy. Upon Biden coming to power, the Democrats’ plot to have Kiev reconquer Donbass as part of their grand strategic plan to contain Russia before China was once again back in play, which would have happened earlier had Hillary won in 2016.

The Biden Administration’s Gamble

The West didn’t expect Russia to stop them, let alone intervene far beyond Donbass in the unlikely scenario that it got involved, and then they wrongly predicted that it would soon collapse under sanctions. They were wrong on all three counts, which led to them being pulled by rapidly accelerating mission creep into waging a proxy war against Russia a lot

earlier than they planned. Instead of being satisfied with their test data and freezing the conflict, they want even more at a much larger scale.

The most hawkish decision-makers downplayed Russia's proven military improvements since its pullback from Kherson last November and authorized the counteroffensive for this purpose since they were convinced that Ukraine's NATO-trained and -armed forces would smash through the entire front. They couldn't resist the chance to finally test their arms and strategies against a peer competitor at this scale after NATO poured over \$165 billion worth of military aid into their proxy these past 15 months.

Concluding Thoughts

Awareness of these real motivations explains why the counteroffensive is the West's most important military campaign since World War II, which was the last time that they conventionally fought a military peer. Even though they're only doing so by proxy right now, they're still receiving the large-scale data that they require in order to fine-tune their plans ahead of possibly waging a direct war against one. What the West has learned over the past few days, however, is that they shouldn't take victory over Russia for granted.

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