

# Next 100 Days of Ukraine War

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*The New York-based Council on Foreign Relations held a videoconference on May 31 titled [Russia’s War in Ukraine: How does it end?](#) The president of the think tank Richard Haas chaired the panel of distinguished participants — Stephen Hadley, Prof. Charles Kupchan, Alina Polyakova and Lt. Gen. (Retd) Stephen Twitty. It was a great discussion dominated by the liberal internationalist stream that has so far guided President Biden’s national security team, which wants to help Ukraine fight a long war against Russia.*

The striking thing about the discussion was the acknowledgement candidly articulated by an ex-general who had actually fought in wars that there is no way Russia can be defeated in Ukraine, and, therefore, there has to be some clarity as to the stated endgame to “weaken” Russia. The gloomy prognosis was that European unity apropos the war is no longer holding.

Third, one plausible scenario would be that Russia turns Ukraine into a “frozen conflict” once the current phase of the war reaches the administrative boundaries of Donbass, connects Donbas to Crimea and incorporates Kherson and a “strategic pause and a stalemate in the not-too-distant future” may open the door for diplomacy.

Conceivably, a cold air of realism is blowing across the Washington establishment that Russia is winning the Battle of Donbass and an ultimate Russian military victory over Ukraine is even within the realms of possibility. Notably, Georgetown faculty member Prof. Kupchan injected a heavy dose of realism:

- “The longer this [war] goes on, the more the negative knock-on effects economically and politically, including here in the United States, where inflation really is... putting Biden in a difficult position”;
- “We need to change that narrative [ that anybody who talks about a territorial settlement is an appeaser] and begin a conversation with Ukraine and, ultimately, with Russia about how to end this war sooner rather than later”;

- “Where the front line ends, how much territory the Ukrainians are able to take back, remains to be seen”;
- “I do think that the hot war aspect of this is more dangerous than many people perceive, not just because of escalation but because of the blowback effects”;
- “I think we’re starting to see cracks in the West... there will be a resurgence of ‘America-first’ Republicanism as we get near the midterms”;
- “This all leads me to believe that we should push for war termination and have a serious conversation after that about a territorial disposition.”

None of the panellists argued that the war must be won, or it still can be. But none recognised Russia’s legitimate security interests, either. Gen. Twitty warned that Ukraine may be close to military exhaustion; Russia has established maritime domain control in the Black Sea — and, yet, “as you look at the DIME—diplomatic, informational, military, and economic—we’re woefully lacking on the diplomatic piece of this. If you notice, there’s no diplomacy going on at all to try to get to some type of negotiations.”

The liberal internationalists mistakenly believe NATO is the cornerstone of US national security. Despite the failure of Biden’s reckless decision to wage a proxy war against Russia, the US is transfixed on NATO and unwilling to consider a security deal with Moscow.

If the old narrative in Washington was about winning the war, the [new narrative](#) is daydreaming about “partisan activity aimed at Russian occupation forces.” Of course, this narrative is even less possible to verify independently than the tall claims previously.

It is in this twilight zone that President Putin situated his [taunting remarks on June 9](#) drawing the historical analogy of Peter the Great’s 21-year long Great Northern War between 1700-1721 — Russia’s successful contestation of the supremacy of the Swedish Empire in Northern, Central and Eastern Europe. After attending a function marking the 350th birth anniversary of the iconic Russian emperor, Putin was chatting up an elite audience of the best and brightest young scientists in Moscow.

Putin said: “Peter the Great waged the Great Northern War for 21 years. On the face of it, he was at war with Sweden taking something away from it. He was not taking away anything, he was returning. This is how it was... He was returning and reinforcing, that is what he was doing...everyone recognised it as part of Sweden. However, from time immemorial, the Slavs lived there along with the Finno-Ugric peoples, and this territory was under Russia’s control.”

“Clearly, it fell to our lot to return and reinforce as well. And if we operate on the premise that these basic values constitute the basis of our existence, we will certainly succeed in achieving our goals.”

Putin gave a complex message here about Russia’s total rejection of NATO supremacy. No matter what it takes, Russia will reclaim its heritage. That is first and foremost a promise to his countrymen, who rally behind Putin, whose poll rating today exceeds 80 percent (as compared to 33% for Biden.)

The point is, there are unspoken fault lines, too. It is no accident that Russian discourses freely use the expression “Anglo-Saxon” to refer to the challenge on the country’s western border. Demons have been unleashed there. Indeed, what was the meaning of the [trip to](#)

[the Vatican](#) by the European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen for an audience with Pope Francis at this point?

The Irish professor Dr. Declan Hayes recently wrote an essay titled [Holy War in Ukraine](#) against the backdrop of violent assaults on Russian Orthodox priests inside their churches in the city of Stryi, Lviv region and in Zelensky-controlled Ukraine in general. He saw NATO's "divide and conquer paw marks" all over them. "Although the fascist assaults on vulnerable Russian priests in front of their Galician congregations are one manifestation that the ghosts of Ukraine's dark past have resurfaced, murals of the Virgin Mary posing with American Javelin missiles are another," Prof. Hayes wrote.

Russian defence minister, [Sergei Shoigu announced last week](#) that a "land bridge" has been established to Crimea, one of Moscow's key war aims, and it is working! It involved the repair of hundreds of kilometres of railway line. Simultaneously, the media reported that rail traffic from Ukraine to the border with Russia has been restored and trucks have begun carrying grain taken from the elevators in the city of Melitopol to Crimea.

Shoigu promised "comprehensive traffic" to and from Russia to Kherson and on to Crimea. Alongside, there's been a steady stream of reports lately that the integration of the southern regions of Ukraine into Russia is rapidly progressing — Russian citizenship, number plates of cars, internet, banks, pensions and salaries, Russian schools, and so on.

Last week, the influential newspaper Izvestiya cited unnamed military sources claiming that any peace settlement at this point should also include Kiev's acceptance of the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia as breakaway regions, in addition to Donbass and Crimea. The key question is no longer whether Kiev can retake the captured south, but how it can stall Russia's "land bridge" from advancing further westward to Moldavia.

On the other hand, obduracy over peace talks may mean Kiev having to accept at a later date the loss of Odessa as well. But who is there in Europe in a position to bell the cat — reason with Zelensky? Besides, Zelensky is also riding a tiger. He survives on Anglo-Saxon support and in turn the Anglo-Saxons swim or sink with him.

There is no clear end in sight yet for this seamless war. At the end of the day, what stands out is that Putin has compared his actions with regard to Ukraine to Peter the Great's reclamation of lost historical and cultural space (and lands) for the Slavic peoples during his 18th-century war against Sweden.

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*Featured image: Ukrainian casualties in the conflict are running at a rate of somewhere between 600 and 1,000 a day, according to Guardian. (Source: Indian Punchline)*

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