

The Silent Slaughter of the Flower of Ukraine's Youth

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As Ukraine prepared to launch its much heralded but long delayed counteroffensive, the media published a photograph of a Ukrainian soldier with his finger on his lips, symbolizing the need for secrecy to retain some element of surprise for this widely telegraphed operation.

Now that the offensive has been under way for two weeks, it is clear that the Ukrainian government and its Western allies are maintaining silence for quite a different reason: to conceal the brutal cost Ukraine's brave young people are paying to recover small scraps of territory from Russian occupation forces, in what some are already calling a [suicide mission](#).

Western pundits at first described these first two weeks of fighting as "probing operations" to find weak spots in Russia's defenses, which Russia has been fortifying since 2022 with multiple layers of minefields, "[dragon's teeth](#)," tank-traps, pre-positioned artillery, and attack helicopters, unopposed in the air, that can fire 12 anti-tank missiles apiece.

On the advice of [British](#) military advisers in Kyiv, Ukraine flung Western tanks and armored vehicles manned by NATO-trained troops into these killing fields without air support or de-mining operations. The results have been predictably disastrous, and it is now clear that these are not just "probing" operations as the propaganda at first claimed, but the long-awaited main offensive.

A [Western official](#) with intelligence access told the Associated Press on June 14, "Intense fighting is now ongoing in nearly all sectors of the front... This is much more than probing. These are full-scale movements of armor and heavy equipment into the Russian security zone."

Other glimpses are emerging of the reality behind the propaganda. At a press conference after a summit at NATO Headquarters, U.S. [General Milley](#) warned that the offensive will be

long, violent and costly in Ukrainian lives.

“This is a very difficult fight. It’s a very violent fight, and it will likely take a considerable amount of time and at high cost,” Milley said.

Russian videos show dozens of Ukrainian tanks and armored vehicles lying smashed in minefields, and NATO military advisers in Ukraine have [confirmed](#) that it lost 38 tanks in one night on June 8th, including newly delivered German-built Leopard IIs.

[Rob Lee](#) of the Foreign Policy Research Institute explained to the New York Times that the Russians are trying to inflict as many casualties and destroy as many vehicles as possible in the areas in front of their main defensive lines, turning those areas into lethal kill zones. If this strategy works, any Ukrainian forces that reach the main Russian defense lines will be too weakened and depleted to break through and achieve their goal of severing Russia’s land bridge between Donbas and Crimea.

Russia’s Ministry of Defense [reported](#) that Ukraine’s forces suffered 7,500 casualties in the first ten days of the offensive. If Ukraine’s real losses are a fraction of that, the long, violent bloodbath that General Milley anticipates will destroy the new armored brigades that NATO has armed and trained, and serve only to escalate the gory [war of attrition](#) that has destroyed Mariupol, Sievierodonetsk and Bakhmut, killing and wounding hundreds of thousands of young Ukrainians and Russians.

A senior European military officer in Ukraine provided [more details](#) of the carnage to Asia Times, calling Ukraine’s operations on June 8th and 9th a “suicide mission” that violated the basic rules of military tactics.

“We tried to tell them to stop these piecemeal tactics, define a main thrust with infantry support and do what they can,” he said. “They were trained by the British, and they’re playing Light Brigade,” he added, comparing the offensive to a suicidal charge into massive Russian cannon fire that wiped out Britain’s Light Cavalry Brigade in Crimea in 1854.

If Ukraine’s “Spring Offensive” plunges on to the bitter end, it could be more like the British and French Somme Offensive, fought near the French River Somme in 1916. After 19,240 British troops were killed on the first day (including Nicolas’s 20-year-old great-uncle, Robert Masterman), the battle raged on for more than four months of pointless, wanton slaughter, with over a million British, French and German casualties. It was finally called off after advancing only six miles and failing to capture either of the two small French towns that were its initial objectives.

The current offensive was delayed for months as Ukraine and its allies grappled with the likelihood of the outcome we are now witnessing. The fact that it went ahead regardless reflects the moral bankruptcy of U.S. and NATO political leaders, who are sacrificing the flower of Ukraine’s youth in a proxy war they will not send their own children or grandchildren to fight.

As Ukraine launches its offensive, NATO is conducting [Air Defender](#), the largest military exercise in its history, from June 12th to 23rd, with 250 warplanes, including nuclear-capable F-35s, flying from German bases to simulate combat operations in and over Germany, Lithuania, Romania, the North Sea and the Baltic Sea. The exercise has led to at

least [15 incidents](#) between NATO and Russian aircraft in the skies near Lithuania.

It seems that nobody involved in NATO has ever stumbled over the concept of a “security dilemma,” in which supposedly defensive actions by one party are perceived as offensive threats by another and lead to a spiral of mutual escalation, as has been the case between NATO and Russia since the 1990s. Professor of Russian history Richard Sakwa [has written](#), “NATO exists to manage the risks created by its existence.”

These risks will be evident in the upcoming NATO Summit in Vilnius on July 11-12, where Ukraine and its eastern allies will be pushing for Ukraine membership, while the U.S. and western Europe [insist](#) that membership cannot be offered while the war rages on and will instead offer “upgraded” status and a shorter route to membership once the war ends.

The continued insistence that Ukraine will one day be a NATO member only means a prolongation of the conflict, as this is a red line that Russia insists cannot be crossed. That’s why negotiations that lead to a neutral Ukraine are key to ending the war.

But the United States will not agree to that as long as President Biden keeps U.S. Ukraine policy firmly under the thumbs of hawkish neoconservative desk warriors like Anthony Blinken and Victoria Nuland at the State Department and National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan at the White House. Pressure to keep escalating U.S. involvement in the war is also coming from Congress, where Republicans [accuse](#) Biden of “hemming and hawing” instead of “going all in” to help Ukraine.

Paradoxically, the Pentagon and intelligence agencies are more realistic than their civilian colleagues about the lack of any military solution. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, [General Milley](#), has called for diplomacy to bring peace to Ukraine, and U.S. intelligence sources have challenged dominant false narratives of the war in leaks to [Newsweek](#) and [Seymour Hersh](#), telling Hersh that the neocons are ignoring genuine intelligence and inventing their own, just as they did to justify the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

With the [retirement](#) of Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman, the State Department is losing the voice of a professional diplomat who was Obama’s chief negotiator for the JCPOA with Iran and urged Biden to rejoin the agreement, and who has taken steps to moderate U.S. brinkmanship toward China. While publicly silent on Ukraine, Sherman was a quiet voice for diplomacy in a war-mad administration.

Many fear that Sherman’s job will now go to Nuland, the leading [architect](#) of the ever-mounting catastrophe in Ukraine for the past decade, who already holds the #3 or #4 job at State as Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs.

Other departures from the senior ranks at State and the Pentagon are likely to cede more ground to the neocons. Colin Kahl, the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, worked with Sherman on the JCPOA, [opposed](#) sending F-16s to Ukraine, and has maintained that China will [not invade](#) Taiwan in the near future. Kahl is leaving the Pentagon to return to his position as a professor at Stanford, just as [China hawk](#) General C.Q. Brown will replace General Milley as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs when Milley retires in September.

Meanwhile, other world leaders continue to push for peace talks. A [delegation](#) of African heads of state led by President Ramaphosa of South Africa met with President Zelenskyy in Kyiv, and President Putin in Moscow on June 17th, to discuss the African peace plan for

Ukraine.

President Putin [showed](#) the African leaders the 18-point Istanbul Agreement that a Ukrainian representative had signed back in March 2022, and told them that Ukraine had thrown it in the “dustbin of history,” after the now [disgraced](#) Boris Johnson told Zelenskyy the “collective West” would only support Ukraine to fight, [not to negotiate](#) with Russia.

The catastrophic results of the first two weeks of Ukraine’s offensive should focus the world’s attention on the urgent need for a ceasefire to halt the daily slaughter and dismemberment of hundreds of brave young Ukrainians, who are being forced to drive through minefields and kill zones in Western gifts that are proving to be no more than U.S.- and NATO-built death-traps.

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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 in November 2022.

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Featured image: “Plans love silence. There’ll be no announcement of the start.” Photo credit: Ukraine Defense Ministry

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