

# How and When the Ukraine Conflict May Involve a Direct Confrontation Between Russia and NATO, Possibly a Nuclear One

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*Due to the immense suffering of the people of Gaza, the attention of the entire world has understandably been concentrated more on Gaza lately. There is also the risk of escalation here. However both due to human suffering as well as the risk of escalation the situation in Ukraine should also continue to get the world's serious attention. In fact the danger of escalation is even more serious here, and in the worst possible scenario the possibility of the ongoing Ukraine conflict blowing up ultimately into a nuclear war and the Third World War also exists.*

Even if the possibility is just about 5 to 10% just now, its implication, the destruction associated with it is so serious that this should get very serious attention from the point of view of striving to ensure that such a horribly destructive situation never arises. Russia and NATO countries have over 11000 nuclear weapons and if even 5 to 10% of these ever get actually used, this would be the end of the world as we have known it, and probably our own end as well, mine and yours, no matter where we live, even if only from the longer term impacts of the 'nuclear winter'.

Most people would say that the big leaders would never allow such a destructive course of action to take place. However large-scale use of nuclear weapons against Soviet Russia had come up for serious consideration by a section of influential leaders of the USA and its closest ally Britain soon after the Second World War ended even though the Soviet Union had been their close ally in the War and had played such an important role in the defeat of Hitler.

Hawkish sections of US military leadership had considered use of nuclear weapons in the Korea war too, although here Truman (who had cleared the first use of two nuclear weapons against Japan) played a preventive role.

Again hawkish elements in the USA military and security establishment had argued much in favor of nuking the Soviet Union and allies at the time of the Cuban missile crisis, despite the fact that the Soviet Union had acquired its own nuclear weapons by then and would have retaliated. Ultimately it was left to the great statesmanship of two great leaders on both sides, John Kennedy and Khrushchev, to bring back the world from the brink of nuclear war. Unfortunately we do not have anyone like John Kennedy (who ultimately had to sacrifice his life for advocating the path of peace) in the western leadership today, we only have Biden, Sunak and Macron, and they have been as irrationally anti-Russia in times as anyone can possibly be.

Recently the Ukraine conflict has been going very badly for Ukraine forces. Almost everyone agrees that the ill-planned, reluctantly undertaken Ukrainian offensive last year was a big failure and after that there has been no recovery, only further losses, and this is despite all the billions poured into a highly corrupt system by western allies. As future prospects indicate the high possibility of continuing losses, the best course of action at present to prevent further loss of life, human suffering and loss of even more territory is for Ukraine to reach an agreement with Russia for immediate and unconditional ceasefire and peace. The various contentious points can be sorted out later by prolonged talks which should continue whatever the difficulties in reaching agreements. Meanwhile large-scale reconstruction and relief work should start very soon in Ukraine with the help of all countries of the world who can afford to help in this.

However this course of action, which minimizes the further sufferings of the Ukrainian people while increasing possibilities of early start of a big relief and rehabilitation effort, is unacceptable to President Zelenskyy as well as to the USA and its close allies for two reasons. Firstly, Biden has been personally very hawkish in the context of Ukraine and the strategy followed by him and his key officials has been to bleed Russia as much as possible using Ukraine as a proxy regardless of the high costs for Ukrainian ordinary people—several hundred thousand of them have died or suffered serious injuries while millions have been displaced internally and externally. The chosen path of Zelenskyy has been to follow the US-recommended path for his country—his last independent effort was to sincerely participate in a Turkey-mediated peace initiative at an early stage of the war but this was aborted by the USA and Britain.

So under the present circumstances Ukraine is most likely to continue experiencing military reverses and at some stage its military efforts may be almost in a state of collapse. The NATO members led by the USA would be aware of this on the basis of their intelligence. They would never like to see a collapse taking place, but what can they do? They have already sent their billions of dollars. They have already sent as much weapons as they could send, and more of the same may not help much. They have already even sent limited numbers of their trainers to accompany their weapon systems. It is at this stage that they may consider sending their own forces to Ukraine. Macron has already flagged this, indicating his willingness to send some French troops for special types of operations. He does not yet have the support of his own people for this, and his proposal did not get much support from other NATO members, particularly the more important ones. Despite this, it is just possible that due to the very strong reluctance on the part of the USA in particular to

accept anything that looks like a defeat in Ukraine, ultimately there may be wider acceptance for what was initially criticized as a rather wild and highly escalatory proposal of Macron.

If this happens, then this would be a very dangerous beginning of direct confrontation between Russian and NATO forces.

As these forces try to destroy each other using more and more destructive weapons, where will this end? In such a situation, the chances of using nuclear weapons and moving towards the Third World War will be much higher. As such a confrontation will take place in conditions of very high suspicions and tensions, the chances of exchange of nuclear weapons taking place even on the basis of misunderstandings and misjudgment of the intentions of the other side will be a possibility. Either of the two sides can make the first strike, followed by even bigger retaliation and one does not know where this will end. As very fast delivery systems have been developed, chances of start of nuclear war based on misunderstanding and misjudgment have increased. This is also because of the possibilities of launch of certain conventional weapons being confused with the launch of nuclear weapons, in conditions of high tensions and suspicions.

Due to this possibility and potential of destruction on a very massive scale, there is great urgency of preventing the Ukraine conflict from escalating towards such much more horrible possibilities. Due to the inability of the UNO to take up big responsibilities of this kind as seen in recent times (although of course it can still play a helpful supportive role), the lead has to be taken by a renewed effort by senior, not-in-active-service diplomats and statesmen of all the involved countries, helped by fast growing peace activism, to prevent such horrible possibilities under all circumstances and to bring peace to Ukraine as early as possible.

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*Featured image is from South Front*

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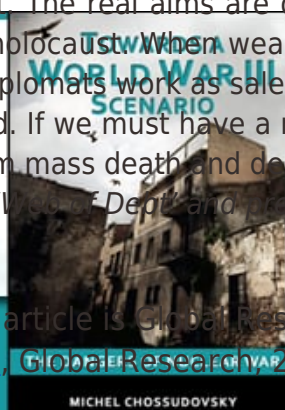
-Denis Halliday, Former Assistant Secretary General of the United Nations

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-Ellen Brown, author of 'Who's Deaf?' and President of the Public Banking Institute

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