

Ukraine-Russia Crisis: The Danger of the ‘Something Must Be Done’ Mantra

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Today, the dangers of military escalation are beyond description.

*What is now happening in Ukraine has serious geopolitical implications. **It could lead us into a World War III scenario.***

It is important that a peace process be initiated with a view to preventing escalation.

Global Research condemns Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

A Bilateral Peace Agreement is required.

As Americans continue to watch on in shock as the horrors of war in Europe stream across their screens, a familiar refrain reverberates throughout the media echo chamber: Something must be done! But when it comes to American foreign policy, that something is all too often a horror all its own.

Sanctions

First on the usual list of things that must be done are sanctions. And indeed, Washington has already imposed new sanctions on Moscow, with calls seemingly growing each day to sanction more, more, more.

But do sanctions actually work? And are they really as much of an alternative to war as they might appear?

Speaking on sanctions with NPR’s Steve Inskeep, former assistant secretary of the treasury **Juan Zarate** [argued this week](#) that sanctions against Russia, despite their limitations, were

still worth pursuing.

As Zarate explained,

“There are limits to what sanctions can do [but] this is a use of sanctions to deal with an aggression of unprecedented scale and scope from Russia when we aren’t going to put troops on the ground or fight ourselves.”

Inskeep then questioned, “So you don’t think the goal is regime change here, which is something that people talk about on social media. You think the goal is to do something, and this is the thing that is available to do. Do you think, though, that President Putin is likely to feel any pain?”

Zarate went on to answer that Putin “is immune from the effects of this. He is going to continue, obviously, to march forward in Ukraine. And the effects will be felt by the Russian economy, no doubt.”

To be clear, Zarate is admitting here that the sanctions won’t do anything to change Moscow’s behavior. They won’t do anything to stop the war in Ukraine, in other words. But what they most certainly will do is torpedo the Russian economy, a burden which will then be left to bear by ordinary Russians. It’s a strategy of collective punishment undertaken for no other reason than a feeling we simply must do something.

But what of the risks of such punitive and seemingly fruitless measures?

Inskeep continued: “We’re dealing here with a nuclear-armed nation, thousands of nuclear weapons, with a leader who’s turned out to be less predictable than people thought just a week or two ago. And now the U.S. is economically backing Russia into a corner. Is there a scenario where this goes too far?”

“Perhaps,” Zarate answered. “And Putin has warned this.”

Warned he has, as Putin [reiterated](#) just this weekend that Moscow sees sanctions as being “akin to a declaration of war.” So much for sanctions as some sort of alternative to war.

So to summarize, sanctions don’t do anything to change “bad behavior” while actually risking further escalation. Seems like pretty terrible policy. But, hey, something must be done.

Arms

Much like sanctions, the something that must be done in the form of supplying arms to our chosen allies is already a fait accompli in the present case. Since 2014, the U.S. has pumped at least [\\$2.7 billion](#) into Ukraine for “security assistance,” with yet greater amounts in more lethal arms now pledged.

Supplying arms as a means of satiating the ‘something must be done’ demand is typically sold to the public as a somewhat prudent measure. We give arms so others can defend themselves and ultimately fight our wars for us. It will be their blood, not ours.

We saw this most recently when the CIA funneled arms via Libya to Syrian “moderate rebels” fighting Assad. This [rat line](#) from Benghazi ultimately blew up on Washington with

the 2012 consulate attack and the death of U.S. Ambassador Christopher Stevens. The Benghazi attack would notably go on to play an outsized role in American political life, as Donald Trump and the Republicans used it repeatedly against Hillary Clinton in the 2016 presidential campaign, with 'Benghazi' becoming a rallying cry on the right.

Ironic, then, that Clinton would [appear this week](#) to advocate for the U.S. to arm yet more foreign fighters, this time in Ukraine. Ignoring her own intimate experience with the U.S. adventures in Libya and Syria, Clinton instead chose to draw an analogy to the U.S. arming of the Mujahideen in Afghanistan against the Soviets in the 1980s.

"It didn't end well for the Russians," Clinton summed up before noting that "there were other unintended consequences as we know." Those unintended consequences we all know would be minor things like the Taliban, Bin Laden, Al Qaeda, 9/11, etc.

But given all that, and given the role the Benghazi affair played in derailing her own political ambitions, Clinton remains steadfast in advocating for the arming of Ukrainians. As she remarked on the U.S. experience with the Mujahideen, "I think that is now the model people are looking toward."

Unsurprisingly, the *Washington Post* [reports](#) that U.S. training and arming of Ukraine has been focused for months on building the means necessary to sustain a prolonged insurgency against Russian occupation. It's the Mujahideen model at work. But as with any such insurgency, the arms now flooding Ukraine will inherently find their way to the most radical and extreme factions on the right, despite the inevitable claims of supplying only "moderate rebels."

So it's blowback be damned yet again. Something must be done.

No-Fly Zone

The Biden administration has so far been adamant that a NATO no-fly zone is off the table in Ukraine. But the war drums still beat loudly in Washington and Kyiv nonetheless.

The most prominent no-fly zone rallying point thus far has been the much-publicized Russian convoy on the outskirts of Kyiv. Such a ripe target for NATO bombardment, the no-fly zone advocates muse. As NBC News foreign affairs correspondent Richard Engel framed it on [Twitter](#), "Perhaps the biggest risk-calculation/moral dilemma of the war so far. A massive Russian convoy is abt 30 miles from Kyiv. The US/NATO could likely destroy it. But that would be direct involvement against Russia and risk, everything. Does the West watch in silence as it rolls?"

This harkens back once more to Libya and the Western hysteria back in March 2011 over another convoy. Recall that with a column of Ghaddafi forces poised to strike at the heart of the uprising in Benghazi, the cries to do something reverberated throughout Western media. NATO didn't "watch in silence" in 2011, but instead bombed the convoy, imposed a no-fly zone, killed scores of civilians, helped murder Ghaddafi himself, set-up a rat line to Syria, and then left Libya to descend into anarchy.

But the results of NATO's war in Libya are what they are. Something had to be done.

Assassination

For the more lunatic fringe of the Washington establishment, why not just kill Putin?

This past week both Lindsay Graham and [Sean Hannity](#) floated the idea of assassinating Putin as something to do. As Graham [sneered](#), "The only way this ends is for somebody in Russia to take this guy out."

Such fantastical thinking. The criminal act of ordering the murder of a foreign head of state aside, political assassination is an often self-defeating policy. As Andrew Cockburn details in his book [Kill Chain](#), assassinations don't destroy political movements or ideologies, they instead tend to open the door for even more radical and hardline figures to assume power.

But once again, at least assassination is doing something.

Perhaps, though, it's time Washington finally relented and for once stopped stoking the inferno. Perhaps it's time to cease horrors begetting horrors. Perhaps that is ultimately the something that must be done.

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