

Vicarious Zeal: Fighting to the Last Ukrainian

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Global Research, July 13, 2022

Region: [Europe](#), [Russia and FSU](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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As the bloody conflict in Ukraine continues, the rhetoric from the imperial spear-holders in Washington and some allies is becoming increasingly fixated with one object: victory against Russia. Such words should be used sparingly, especially given their binding, and blinding tendencies. When the term “[unconditional surrender](#)” was first used by US President Franklin D. Roosevelt at the January 1943 Casablanca conference in the context of defeating Nazi Germany, not all cheered. It meant a fight to the finish, climbing the summit and dictating terms from a blood-soaked peak.

With such language crowning the efforts of the Allies, the Axis powers – certainly Germany and Japan – could continue fighting the war of extermination, aware that no terms they could submit would be taken seriously. There would be no compromise in this existential confrontation. It made the Allied advance in Western Europe slower and enabled the Soviet Union to expel German forces and duly occupy most of Eastern Europe. It made negotiations about whether Japan would retain its emperor on surrendering nigh impossible, leaving the route open for the use of atomic weapons against Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The supply of weapons to Ukraine in its efforts against Russia has become a zealous mission that will supposedly achieve victory. Messianic impulses tingle and move through the Washington and London establishment, with some echo in Warsaw and the capitals of the Baltic states. An air of unreality – be it in terms of negotiating the future of Ukrainian territory under Russian occupation – fills such corridors of power.

On May 1, after travelling to Kyiv, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi raised the colours. “America,” she [declared](#) with earnestness, “stands with Ukraine until victory is won.” She made little effort to expound on what this would entail, be it the expulsion of Russian forces from all Ukrainian territory, including Crimea, or the “meat grinder” solution, leaving Kyiv and Moscow to bleed, weakening the latter and strengthening NATO security over a dead generation.

Her remarks [did enough to worry](#) Michael T. Klare, defence correspondent for *The Nation*.

“Nowhere, in her comments or those of other high-ranking officials, is there any talk of a negotiated settlement in Ukraine, only of scenarios leading to Russia’s defeat, at whatever cost in human lives.”

The vagueness of the term has led to grand, sanguinary calls to battle unenlightened Russian barbarism, with the UK and US governments repeatedly calling this a conflict that involves the whole west, even the world. Peering more closely at the rhetoric, and another sentiment comes to the fore: the desire to bloody Russia vicariously while arms manufacturers take stock.

For over a decade, Ukraine has been something of a plaything in branches of the US State Department, and US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy R. Sherman can be found [telling](#) the BBC’s Newshour that Russia had to “suffer a strategic failure” in Ukraine.

The checklist for doing so, as [outlined](#) by US President Joe Biden, is lengthy. “We will continue providing Ukraine with advanced weaponry, including Javelin anti-tank missiles, Stinger anti-aircraft missiles, powerful artillery and precision rocket systems, radars, unmanned aerial vehicles, Mi-17 helicopters and ammunition.”

On this score, the hawks are in the ascendancy. Anyone uttering the view that a Ukrainian victory would hardly be total, let alone likely, have been reviled, as British military historian and journalist Max Hastings [writes](#). They are tarred and feathered as either “ultra-realists” or appeasers.

Hard-headed peace talks, let alone anything approximating to negotiations have, as a result, also become taboo. The early June [suggestion](#) by French President Emmanuel Macron that, “We must not humiliate Russia, so that the day the fighting stops, we can build a way out through diplomatic channels” was met with disdain and fury in Kyiv.

The previous month, the world’s oldest Machiavellian devotee, former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, [dared mention](#) the need for the warring parties to commence talks. Unconvicted war criminal he may be, his view that “negotiations need to begin in the next two months before it creates upheavals and tensions that will not be easily overcome” was hardly controversial. But the Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy responded by foraging in the dustbin of history. “It seems that Mr Kissinger’s calendar is not 2022, but 1938.”

In Kyiv, the very idea of making a deal with Moscow is being met with revulsion.

“They have killed too many people,” [opines](#) Oleksii Movchan of the Ukrainian Parliament representing Zelenskyy’s Servant of the People Party. “They have destroyed too many cities. They have raped too many women. If the war stops now and the world tries to accommodate Putin, then international law will have no meaning.”

For the moment, support from the US is taking the form of logistical and material assistance in what has already been [called](#) by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov a proxy war against Moscow. With each ghoulish weapons update, we can read about the types of murderous devices used, and how effective they were. The latest [featured an attack](#) on Nova Kakhovka in the Kherson region by Ukrainian forces using US-supplied HIMARS missiles. Kyiv’s line: the attack was a success, destroying a Russian ammunition depot, killing dozens of Russian military personnel. The Russian angle: homes and warehouses

storing fertiliser had been pulverised, killing five and wounding 80.

Ukrainians have become surrogate democrats and freedom fighters (these terms are not necessarily identical) and Washington is willing to ensure, at least for the moment, that they have the weapons. Other countries in Europe are willing to keep the borders open to Ukraine's refugees. But how long will this last? Hearts can, in time, harden, leaving way for national self-interest to take hold. At some point, the weapons will have to be put down, the war making way for the jaw. Till then, the unofficial policy of fighting to the last Ukrainian will be in vogue.

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