

Ukraine at the Epicenter: How the West Can Win And Guard Against Russia's Nuclear Threats

By Andy J. Semotiuk



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Ukrainian missiles ready for war. Pic: Ukrainian Ministry of Defence

At this moment, Ukraine is the epicentre of a confrontation between a beleaguered West struggling to maintain composure in the face of the loss of America's leadership in NATO, and a newly invigorated Russia following Vladimir Putin's meetings with Donald Trump on U.S. soil and the subsequent grand alliance of authoritarian leaders in Beijing. The stakes could not be higher: a clash of wills between hesitant and uncertain democracies and emboldened and united autocrats.

If we learned anything from the recent Russian drone incursions in Poland and Romania, it is that NATO is alarmingly unprepared for escalation. A disheartening discovery about the downed Russian drones is that they contained American and European components; in short, it appears that, shamelessly, we are unable to disengage from sabotaging ourselves and helping Russia even as we claim otherwise. The rush of fighter jets to intercept a \$10,000 Russian drone with million-dollar missiles highlights a dangerous imbalance: in an extended confrontation, NATO could quickly exhaust its arsenal, leaving Europe vulnerable to Russian pressure or even invasion.

This article discusses two interconnected issues. First, it summarizes the consensus among generals, diplomats, and strategists on what Ukraine needs to accomplish to achieve victory. Second, it examines a possible dissolution of the Russian Federation and the necessity for a nuclear disarmament plan to safeguard Russia's extensive arsenal if the Kremlin were to fall apart.

A Fractured West and Putin's Strength

Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine, which began in 2022, has never been solely about Ukraine. It is increasingly clear that the conflict centers on Russia's inability to accept the existence of a democratic Ukraine on its border, and in that struggle, whether the democratic order in Europe will endure with or without America. Confronted with a more aggressive Russia, American generals H.R. McMaster and David Petraeus emphasize that Putin respects only strength. Furthermore, former NATO commander Wesley Clark warns that, without a clear plan for victory like the one the Allies devised for D-Day, the West risks slipping into a frozen conflict that benefits only Moscow.

Other experts argue Ukraine needs not only resources to survive but also to succeed: long-range missiles, layered air defences, and modern fighter jets. Without the ability to strike Russian launch sites and logistics hubs, as American general Ben Hodges stresses, Ukraine fights

at a disadvantage. In this context, economic warfare remains crucial. Prominent historian [Anne Applebaum](#) advocates for sanctions against Russia's entire ruling class. Meanwhile, Anders Åslund, a leading economist, suggests confiscating \$300 billion of frozen Russian reserves in Western banks to support Ukraine. Diane Francis, a prominent journalist, adds that Ukraine and its allies must also be able to target Russia's oil exports and impose sanctions on those facilitating it.

Meanwhile, Joseph Bosco, a national security consultant, and others emphasize the importance of the information war. Russia's disinformation campaigns weaken Western unity; fighting them involves not only fact-checking but also supporting independent Russian-language media and exposing Putin's corruption domestically.

Europe's Resolve and Containment

Europe often hesitates out of fear of escalation. Analysts like Rym Momtaz describe this as "self-detering." British author John Sullivan characterizes the war as part of a broader hybrid conflict that necessitates a 21st-century containment strategy—encompassing cyber, economic, and political elements. Former American Ambassador to Moscow Michael McFaul emphasizes that a democratic Ukraine integrated into NATO and the EU is Putin's greatest fear. The [Budapest Memorandum](#) of 1994 demonstrated how empty guarantees can be. As Anne Applebaum insists, only a clear Russian defeat can bring lasting peace. Negotiations without battlefield leverage are just another weapon in Moscow's arsenal.

A Brief Report Card Summary On The West

Expert reviews, such as those listed in this article and generally from thought leaders familiar with the subject, suggest that the West earns mediocre marks. Their assessments highlight poorly articulated goals, an unpredictable and unreliable supply of military aid, and weak,

inconsistent economic pressure—all earning a “C” grade. Moreover, in the face of extensive Russian disinformation, our response significantly lags behind. The only aspect that scores higher is our rejection of the “illusions of peace.’

The Collapse of the Russian Federation

History demonstrates that even the mightiest empires eventually fall. This includes the Greek and Roman empires of the past, as well as the Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, and Tsarist empires of the last century. The U.S.S.R. also disintegrated, and during that process, we managed to keep order in the decline of its nuclear arsenal, partly due to the signing of the Budapest Memorandum in 1994. Sadly, it was not adequately enforced, which contributed to current issues.

Today’s Russian Empire spans 11 time zones and includes around 190 different nationalities or ethnic groups. Only about 70 percent are ethnically Russian, and not everyone agrees with how the country is managing the war. Notable minority groups include the Tatars, with nearly 5 million people; the Chechens, with about 1.7 million; the Bashkirs, exceeding 1.5 million; the Chuvash, over 1 million; and the Avars and Armenians, each with roughly 1 million. Is it therefore reasonable to consider that the day when the Russian Empire is about to collapse may be approaching soon? While a nuclear threat is a sobering thought, and some find it hard to accept, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the failure to abide by the Budapest Memorandum compel us to consider it.

The Nuclear Question: Planning for Collapse

As Putin and Dmitry Medvedev threaten nuclear action, not long ago, Trump moved U.S. submarines “to appropriate regions” near Russia. That appeared to lower the military temperature somewhat. More generally, the likelihood of a nuclear clash remains low. For one thing, China’s President Xi Jinping has publicly stated that nuclear weapons

“must not be used” and that “nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.” He made these comments during meetings with European leaders, such as Olaf Scholz, where he explicitly said that “nuclear weapons must not be used in Europe” and called for international opposition to any use or threat of use. The latest meetings in Beijing have underlined that Putin relies on Xi’s support to conduct the war in Ukraine. Additionally, as General Hodges has pointed out, there is no benefit for Putin in resorting to nuclear arms, as it would make him an international pariah.

The greater risk may be a fractured Russia unable to control its nuclear arsenal. Despite the nuclear threat, it’s important to remember that Russia’s nuclear weapons are centrally controlled from Moscow, no matter where the warheads are stationed. Since we managed to handle this threat when the Soviet Union collapsed, it’s reasonable to believe we can do so again. It seems that if such a situation occurred, NATO’s leadership would likely need to be the primary response team.

A potential disarmament plan builds on the success of the Cooperative Threat Reduction Programs.

- **First 100 hours:** Halt all warhead movements, maintain custodial units in position, and secure sites.
- **First 100 days:** Centralize storage, separate delivery systems from warheads, and establish a Joint Custody Commission.
- **First 100 weeks:** Dismantle warheads, convert fissile material into reactor fuel, and verifiably eliminate silos, submarines, and bombers.

A “Lisbon 2.0” treaty would require successor states to verify disarmament in return for recognition, markets, and funding. The incentives are straightforward: prosperity and legitimacy surpass the superficial prestige of aging missiles.

This is a sobering review of what may await us in the days ahead. However, it is well worth considering these matters now, while we are still capable of planning out a coherent strategy without the onslaught of possible immediate strains and clashes.

Conclusion: Strength and Patience

Ukraine does not need just enough to survive—it requires the means to win and lead the battle for a new international world order. The West, with or if necessary without America, must stop deterring itself, tighten sanctions, seize Russian assets, and invest in long-term containment. At the same time, it must prepare for the day after Putin, when the nuclear question becomes the central challenge of global security.

As Viktor Frankl reminded us: *“Since Auschwitz, we know what man is capable of. And since Hiroshima, we know what is at stake.”*

Peace will come not from illusions but from strength, clarity, and the steadfast pursuit of ending Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. At minimum, that means the complete withdrawal of all Russian military forces from Ukrainian territories, including Crimea. If such a Ukrainian victory causes the Russian Federation to fall apart, it may even require dismantling Russia’s nuclear arsenal. What remains, hopefully, will be a realignment of the victorious countries that supported Ukraine into a new, more open, and coherent international order that upholds the rule of law, democracy, and human rights. Let those who seek such a future lead. Let those who do not be left behind to deal with what remains.

Andy J. Semotiuk is a U.S. and Canadian immigration attorney with Pace Law Firm in Toronto. A former United Nations correspondent stationed in New York, Mr. Semotiuk is a Senior Advisor to the Centre for Eastern European Democracy and a contributor to Forbes. A former President of the Canada Ukraine Foundation, Mr. Semotiuk has written four books. For three years, Mr.

Semotiuk served on the Tribunal Panel of the Canadian Human Rights Commission.