

## Backdrop

Despite IAEA and WHO raising alarm over nuclear radiation and health crisis in Ukraine, opposing sides continue aggressive stance alongside making excuses for not talking to each other. With crisis caused by [missile landing in Poland](#) being watered down by NATO to avoid exposing its cracks, Russian pull back from Kherson followed by consistent targeting of energy and critical infrastructure in Ukraine, the twists and turns in War in Ukraine are becoming new normal.

Russia Ukraine War seems to be poised for dangerous escalation with multi-domain threats ranging from nuclear assertions/allegations, satellite references, energy grid targeting, cyber-attacks ever since drone attacks on Crimea and Black Sea Fleet, sabotage of both Nordstream pipelines, Bridge to Crimea giving it a renewed push after nine months. [General Mark A. Milley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of USA](#), who has a thorough understanding of the military aspects of the conflict, has spoken out about the reality of the military situation in Ukraine, urging diplomacy and talks, which calls for serious consideration from American decision-makers, its NATO followers, and Zelensky.



Image source: Reuters

## Existing Reality

The assertion by Ukraine that its counteroffensives are going well, assuming unending financial and military support from US-led NATO, gives them reason to believe that continuing the fight to reclaim all lost territory is doable and preferable instead of negotiating with Russians. This is a risky proposition. Russia, too, finds it worthwhile to redeploy, consolidate, and retain its gains made so far, until the winters start biting the opposing parties, following a hasty referendum in four regions to join Russia, followed by a pullback from Kherson, despite fresh troops from a partial mobilisation of 300,000 reservists. The dimensions of the war are expanding to include targeting dual-use critical infrastructure, energy grid, clandestine operations, enhanced information war, psychological offensive, use of mercenaries, with no clarity of the end state which either side wants to achieve to terminate the war. Both sides seem to be going crazy with one bombarding Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant and other deploying its arsenal there and both raising alarm to helpless IAEA.

## Russian Intention and Strategy

Having suffered a series of setbacks in military operations like Kharkiv and Kherson, heavy casualties to men and material and series of miscalculations about NATO's resolve to support Ukraine, Russians seem to have modified their strategy appreciably. Russia is nowhere close to achieve its strategic aim of liberating complete Donbass Region and remaining southern Ukraine to join up with Transnistria to landlock Ukraine. From a military perspective, consolidating its successes, redeploying soldiers in Russian-friendly areas by drawing back from hostile ones, and regrouping are reasonable options given that it hasn't received significant outside military material help throughout the protracted battle except some hardware from Iran or allegedly North Korea.

Russians realised that they have opened wide frontages beyond sustainable limits with depleting combat resources, hence trading ground for viable defence line is a sensible military strategy. Their logic of pull back from Kherson follows this strategy as it was impractical to hold such large built-up area with shortage of infantry suffering more casualties from insurgent attacks by Ukrainians. It made better sense to pull back to the eastern bank of Dnieper and hold stronger defensive line and spare some more troops to pursue offensive in Donetsk region. From the Russian perspective, Ukraine's energy grid and essential services are just as much a target for dual use (civil and military) as the Russian bridge to Crimea; as a result, attacking them will have a greater impact on undermining Ukrainian resolve to fight than close combat in pro-Ukrainian areas.

The mild nuclear reference by Russia to [use nuclear weapons](#) in Ukraine, if Russian "territorial integrity" is threatened will continue to prevent NATO entering into contact war with Russia in future too, notwithstanding accidental triggers like Poland missile crisis. Russia is cognizant of its limitations in the domains of economic, diplomatic, information warfare, and political warfare, all of which are heavily weighted in favour of US led NATO and Ukraine.

The optimal course of action from a Russian perspective is to hold onto its current territorial gains, extend the war into the winter, which could favour a fresh offensive to achieve remaining military goals, and give itself a stronger bargaining position to have the sanctions withdrawn. Although Russians, as well as Ukrainians, are used to fighting in winters but greater availability of energy with Russians can put them in an advantageous position.



Russian servicemen are seen in Mariupol, Donetsk People's Republic. Ilya Pitalev / Sputnik via AP

## US-led NATO: Intention and Strategy

The overstated successes of the Ukrainian counteroffensives and its own gains in the non-kinetic, non-contact, undeclared war against Russia in the economic, information, diplomatic, and political spheres may encourage NATO, but **it shouldn't be complacent about Putin's nuclear threat since tactical nuclear strike from Russia is not out of the question, if it is cornered beyond dangerous limit.** According to the **realistic military assessment, even if billions of dollars are invested in Ukraine, little will change on the ground.** General Miley is not the lone voice advocating a diplomatic course.

Purely From US point of view, it has achieved many of its objectives. Nordstream 1 and 2 are non-functional, Russia's influence over the EU is decreasing. EU is compelled to keep purchasing its expensive oil and military equipment. Russia is now less powerful, and US dominance over the EU is no longer at risk. Therefore, it is time to "privately" tell

Zelensky to talk because publicly, the US will not like to shoulder the burden of compromise on lost territory. As a result, it is recommending that Zelensky to take the call. The US now needs talks to secure earnings from contracts to rebuild Ukraine, for which the entire EU will pay.

The US is supporting proxy or shadow wars after learning painful lessons in Afghanistan, and they may have taken author [Sean McFate's](#) writings too seriously to be motivated to win without fighting!! In context of waging 'Shadow War', the suffering of the Ukrainian people become conceptually irrelevant for the US. However, as alternative global/localized financial systems evolve, the control of US over the current global financial system will slowly get undermined; hence it can't claim to be outright winner. The Russia-Iran-North Korea axis will also be a concern for US.

While continuing to assist Ukraine in hybrid war until the last Ukrainian battles or for as long as the US desires, NATO's political dispensation will continue to publicly call on Russia to put an end to the conflict. The dilemma is that initiating talks when a major chunk of Ukrainian territory is under Russian control would be seen as NATO's weakness, but not doing so isn't doing any better either. The war is clearly not making Europe more peaceful, with millions of refugees mixed in with activated mercenaries and a longer border with aggressively restructured Russia. It has given up its economic and energy interests to seek security shelter of US. EU states like Hungary have expressed their opposition to providing Ukraine with unending material support.

The EU will have to raise its defence budget while surrendering some sovereign decisions to the US in order to counter unfriendly Russia successfully in the long run. **However, Ukraine and the EU need to ask themselves: Will the US ever risk New York and Washington in order to save Kiev or Poland?**



Photo by SVEN HOPPE / DPA / dpa Picture-Alliance via AFP

## Difficult Choices for Ukraine!

As per compilation by Kiel Institute, the cumulative aid **over \$90 billion** poured into Ukraine, seems to have emboldened Zelensky to talk about defeating Russia and getting back his entire territory. **The rhetoric of Ukraine winning is giving an unrealistic hope to Zelensky that he need not talk to Putin and all taxpayers in US and Europe will continue to deliver whatever he asks.**

One cannot ignore the fact that since gaining independence, Ukraine has lost 15% of its original land area in this war, displaced [more than 6 million people internally, sent nearly 8 million refugees outside](#), suffered significant casualties, destroyed half of its energy infrastructure, and is struggling to maintain its much-touted democracy while operating under martial law. Regaining lost territory from the Russians, who are seen to be digging in for a protracted war during winters and beyond, will be very tough even with the military support and armament of the US-led NATO.

While NATO's military backing of the war effort won't make Ukraine any more peaceful, it could lead to long-term changes in its territorial boundary, an endless proxy conflict, and an increased long-term Russian threat. While President Zelensky seems to continue with the war and the western propaganda campaign depicting him as the undisputed winner as long

as the US desires, but it is unsustainable for too long, as a look at the map tells different story.

## Way Ahead

In the [Big powers' contestation](#) in Ukraine, the world wants that war to end, as it is making everyone more susceptible to inflationary pressures and causing an unprecedented energy and food catastrophe. Because Russia has not yet succeeded in its strategic goals on the ground to convince NATO to withdraw sanctions, the negotiations appear to be challenging. On the other side, the political hierarchy of US led NATO finds ongoing proxy war, without sharing any burden of body bags, as a convenient option.

Russian actions are encouraging NATO to accept the bid of Finland and Sweden to join NATO, as they have strong militaries, to secure its northern flank for better collective security posture in the long run. It's also relevant in context of Sino-Russian footprints in Arctic region and North Atlantic Ocean. Russia, therefore might end up with extension of direct land border with NATO by over 1000 Km with Finland joining it as the final end state, an outcome which it wanted to avoid.

In current phase of offensive, **the economic coercion by West has led to energy coercion by Russia**. Pentagon seems to be coming to terms with reality but US proxy Zelensky, who has been led to garden path to become Hero, finds it difficult to swallow it as he is still parroting no talks till, he gets back entire territory including Crimea, Russians pay for everything he suffered and lately asking for [public negotiations](#). After Poland episode, will US led NATO see some sense in moderating him to get to talking table remains to be seen?

## Subscribe to the International Relations Updates by The Kootneeti

\* indicates required

Full Name

Email Address \*

Subscribe

made with  mailchimp



**CERTIFICATE COURSE IN  
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

SIX-WEEK ONLINE COURSE IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS  
BY THE KOOTNEETI

**JOIN TODAY!**

-  [team@thekootneeti.com](mailto:team@thekootneeti.com)
-  [courses.thekootneeti.in](https://courses.thekootneeti.in)
-  (+91) 120 4565994

*The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Kootneeti Team*

Facebook Comments