

# Death and Destruction: Europe's War and the End of Ukraine

*By George Manios*

## **Prologue**

Encouraged by the West, specifically, United States, Germany, Great Britain and France, Ukraine engaged in a military counter strike against the Russia invasion for over 1,000 days. Both countries have been locked into a grueling war that continues to inflict loss of human life and destruction of infrastructure on both sides.

The war has displaced more than 10 million Ukrainians across western Europe and caused the brutal and horrific death of more than a million soldiers on both sides.

With the election of Donald Trump, there is the belief that the war will quickly end. But to what cost and who will declare victory.

Here we will discuss how this conflict would possibly end and what will be the consequences for Ukraine and Europe.

## **Europe's War**

Not since WWII has Europe seen such horrific human devastation. The West (USA, France, Canada, Germany, EU and Great Britain) sitting on the sidelines, have provided billions of dollars in military aid and financial assistance to Ukraine to counter the Russia invasion. Now they are preparing to provide new weapons to Ukraine with the capability to hit Russian territory, hoping that this last act will deter Russia and put an end to further encroachment and occupation of Ukrainian territory.

To date the US alone has provided 64 billion dollars to Ukraine. In his last days in office, President Joe Biden has reversed American policy by authorizing Ukraine to strike Russian territory using the US made and supplied long range missiles. Some analysts claim that this reversal of policy was with the consent

of incoming President Trump. Sources say Trump has advised Vladimir Putin not to escalate the war, the Kremlin denies any such conversation. Whether this is true or not, for Russia it is business as usual. Russian military advancements have increased despite Trump's advice.

The MGM-140 Army Tactical Missile Systems (ATACMS) has the capacity to hit targets up to 300 km away. Within hours of the US approval Russia attacked Ukrainian power facilities with around 120 missiles and 90 drones on November 17<sup>th</sup>. Ukraine's air defense claimed that it downed 144 incoming projectiles.

Biden's decision has added "fuel to the fire". Some reports note that the ATACMS authorization came about because of the mounted western fears that Moscow is intended to devastate Ukraine's power generation before winter.

For nearly three years Russia has expended huge amounts of weaponry and human life to steadily gain control of about 20% of Ukrainian territory and they are slowly gaining more territory. "The Russians have paid a very high price to keep advancing, but they're willing to pay that price in lives to gain a few more meters of territory each day," Justin Crump, head of the British strategic advisory firm Sibylline told Associated Press.

The war of attrition has been devastating for both sides, but more so for Ukraine. The Russian troops outnumber the Ukrainian troops 10 to 1. As the war drags on, the death toll rises faster for Ukraine, and they are having difficulties replacing their troops and weapons.

The Associated Press reports that despite the infusion of US and EU weaponry and money, Ukraine's ammunition is dwindling, its outlook has deteriorated significantly as Ukraine and Russia enter the third year of the war. "In February 2024, the town of Avdiivka fell after months of Russian airstrikes, which used highly destructive Soviet-era bombs retrofitted with navigation systems." [1]

Whereas Russia through strategic partnerships with Iran and North Korea has managed to replace its weapons stockpile and troops.

## **Losing War**

As the war continues Ukraine is losing both territory and troops.

The war could have been avoided if President Volodymyr Zelensky would have implemented the Minsk agreements and the spring 2022 Istanbul summit where he was offered to the recognition and relative autonomy of the Russian speaking provinces within a unified Ukraine and the withdrawal of Russian troops.

According to former German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, the deal would have included the following main points:

- Ukraine would abandon its NATO aspirations.
- The bans on the Russian language in Ukraine would be removed,
- Donbas would remain in Ukraine but as an autonomous region (Schroeder: “like South Tyrol”),
- The United Nations Security Council plus Germany should offer and supervise the security arrangements,
- The Crimea problem would be addressed.

Ukraine’s Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba denied that there was such a peace, deal. However, others, including participants at the summit – Fiona Hill, Russia expert and advisor to the White House, former Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennet, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu and former German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, have confirmed that there was a peace deal. The peace deal was abandoned by Zelensky in early April after a meeting with the then British Prime Minister Boris Johnson in Kyiv. [2]

As a leader he should have known that the Russians invaded Ukraine because of Ukraine’s treatment of the Russian speaking population and the failure to implement the Minsk Agreements. He could have avoided the war altogether and kept Ukraine intact.

Zelensky showed that he was not a leader that had the best interest of his people, but a puppet of the West and of the British. He relied on the advice of Boris Johnson, believing that he could dislodge the Russians from his country's territory and reclaim Crimea. A foolish decision that led to dire consequences for the Ukrainian people.

As US Secretary of State Blinken has said about the Russians: the Russians, once they have entered the other country's territory, referring to Georgia, never leave.

Zelensky's false beliefs about the support from the West are evident of their dithering about membership to NATO and the EU. His policies of reclaiming occupied territories are based on false premises, which has caused the destruction of Ukraine's infrastructure, industry and displacement of its people.

Who would have thought Ukrainians in this century would become displaced persons and refugees.

Zelensky should have learned from history about his enemy - the Russian bear.

History teaches the world, except for Zelensky, that the Russian power elite in all wars is willing to sacrifice millions of human lives and weapons to achieve its objectives. Western and American weapons will not make any difference and will not get the Russians to leave Ukraine. On the contrary, this policy has the opposite effect.

Russia has the manpower and the weaponry, as shown with the use of the new shorter-range type missiles that can carry nuclear warheads and have the capability to turn Ukraine back to the stone age.

The war of attrition has given Russia an incremental strategy to slowly occupy and consolidate within its orbit more Ukrainian territory.

Professor Robert Dover, of University of Hull, writes that Russia has significantly taken large parts of territory in eastern Ukraine. Russia's recent

seizure of the strategically important city of Vuhledar has cleared the Russian advances to press deeper into the country, [3] perhaps all the way to Dnieper River, which could become the new border between the Ukraine and Russia, if the Trump plan or other plan goes forward.

According to Wikipedia “due to its size [Ukraine], the region is conditionally subdivided into Upper Dnieper Ukraine, Central Dnieper Ukraine, and Lower Dnieper Ukraine in reference to the Dnieper’s stream flow. Upper and Central separate at the mouth of Desna River, which is roughly the city of Kiev, while Lower and Central around Khortytsia which is roughly the city Zaporizhia.

### **Diplomacy, Negotiations and Consequences**

All wars end on the negotiation table. It appears Zelensky has awakened to this reality and is prepared to diplomatically put an end to the conflict.

Donald Trump on November 6<sup>th</sup> stated that he will resolve the conflict in Ukraine “within 24 hours” of taking office in January. [4]

Whether Trump will succeed, time will tell. Wars do not end within 24 hours. There are too many variables at play here.

First, Zelensky and Putin must agree to the secession of hostilities, before any negotiations can take place. This is an unlikely possibility given Russia’s military momentum in the field. According to the Institute for the Study of War, the “Russia’s offensive is gathering pace, and it is capturing territory more quickly than at any time since the early days of [Russian] invasion.”

In addition, it has been reported that Moscow is preparing for an offensive using around 11,000 North Korean troops and about 40,000 Russians in the Kursk region of Russia to dislodge Ukrainians from the territory. The Ukrainian occupiers are struggling to defend the territory they captured during the summer. This will place further pressure on the general Ukrainian defense. [5]

Secondly, the EU position, specifically UK and France have pledged “unwavering support” for Ukraine. How this will work is not clear since Trump

wants to considerably reduce the US presence in the region. The EU relies heavily on US support - American security guarantee, investment and political support. With the US withdraw, "NATO is likely to be diminished, which in turn will weaken European cohesion around the Ukrainian question." [6]

Should Trump go through with his plan to withdraw American troops, a large and substantial financial and security burden will be placed on Europe. Given the current economic and social conditions, Europe will not be able to further sustain Ukraine. Even before Trump, some EU countries have questioned their continuing support of Ukraine, and the unwavering support has begun to have cracks.

Third, what is Trump's plan? According to Professor Dover, Trump's campaign team has outlined a plan that essentially reduces direct US involvement in the conflict and in European security in general. "The proposal calls for an 800-mile demilitarized buffer zone along the frontlines in Ukraine [which are yet to be determined] policed by UK and European militaries, with Ukraine to shelve its aspirations to join NATO for at least 20 years. The US would provide weaponry to Ukraine to deter further Russian incursions but would not send troops or finance [to] any western military presence in Ukraine." [7]

The question that arises is whether the parties of the conflict would agree to this plan and whether the UK and Europeans could afford the military expenditure to police the buffer zone.

Putin's position has been that Ukraine must be neutral and cannot ever join NATO. The lands annexed and currently occupied are Russian lands and cannot be given back to Ukraine. For him, the borders of the old Soviet-era administrative regions are the borders of Russia.

The Trump plan does not speak about the sanctions imposed on Russia. Would Trump and Europe remove the sanctions imposed on Russia as result of the conflict? Or continue to use the sanctions as another leverage against Russia, which will further push Putin into the arms of Iran, China and North Korea.

Zelensky has made two proposals to Trump. His first proposal calls for Ukrainian troops to replace some American units in Europe after the war, hence reducing the costs to the US.

The second proposal is to open Ukraine's resources to US and other western allies. Opening the resources would mean big Western corporations or foreign countries will exploit the resources with limited benefits to the Ukrainian population. The Chinese own 9% of Ukraine's famously fertile farmland, equal to 5% of the country's total territory, with a 50-year lease, to feed its burgeoning population, and not the Ukrainian people. [8]

## **Conclusion**

A key factor for any plan to work is trust.

By all accounts Putin does not trust the US or Europe. For Putin, the West and US have no intention of keeping their promises or agreements. Remember that the West and US had told the Soviet Union that NATO will not expand east following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The US and the West reneged and pursued a policy of expansion for NATO to undermine the Cold War buffer zone between the West and Russia.

Putin was burned by the Minsk Agreements. Minsk was just a delay to arm Ukraine by the West, as has been revealed by the former German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

Getting Putin to the negotiation table will be the biggest challenge that Trump will face in his discussions with Putin. On the other side, several key Trump nominees in foreign policy and defense Cabinet positions hold views that are likely to heavily influence the new administration's approach to the war.

For Trump and his Cabinet nominees, Ukraine is a nuisance and must be dealt with very quickly at any price, as it appears Russia is not their primary orbit of foreign policy.

Trump's proposal is typical of Trump's "America First" doctrine, which places the risk and costs of European security with European states. Trump's plan has two consequences for NATO and Ukraine.

First it recognizes Russian territorial claims, while undermining NATO unity and Ukrainian's pre-2014 sovereignty. [9]

Marco Rubio, Trump's pick for secretary of state, is likely to want Ukraine to agree to a deal with Russia at nearly any price, as his focus is China. Trump's Vice-President elect, J. D. Vance, back in 2022 stated that "...I don't really care what happens to Ukraine one way or another." [10]

Trump and his team are more obsessed with containing and deterring China and its plans than Russia.

Some have suggested that the peace plan developed at the Istanbul summit be the basis of the deal. [11] However, Trump is not on the same page. He wants the Europeans to bear the burden of his buffer zone and the reconstruction of what remains of Ukraine.

It does not matter how you look at the conflict, Ukraine is the loser, as its leadership through opportunities to the wind without thinking of the deadly consequences it's people will suffer. The result of this foolish policy is the loss of about 20% of Ukrainian territory to Russia and an end to Ukraine's NATO ambitions. [12]

In the end Putin will get his buffer zone, and recover the Russian speaking provinces, while Ukraine will try to recover from loss of population, death and destruction. It will take a new Marshall Plan to get the remaining Ukraine on its feet.

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