

# Organizing for Victory...or Self-Deterrence?

The recent North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Summit in Washington D.C. was a commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the signing of the Washington Treaty that created the alliance. NATO is the oldest and most successful alliance in history – never perfect – but always successful in achieving its purpose of collective defense of all of its members.

However, the summit was also a missed opportunity for NATO to improve the strategic security environment of the transatlantic region for generations. Rather than ensuring Ukraine defeats Russia by restoring full sovereignty back to its internationally recognized 1991 borders, the priority of the West is avoiding escalation, giving Ukraine just enough to stay in the war. This, in effect, is actually prolonging the war and the killing of innocent people and will lead eventually to some sort of negotiated settlement that will give Russia the time it needs to rebuild its forces and defense industry while waiting for the West to repeat the historical pattern of losing interest.

Russian victory over Ukraine would result in millions more Ukrainian refugees pouring into Poland and Germany, an enlargement of Russian armed forces as thousands of Ukrainian troops are pressed into the Russian Army, and a continued disruption of food and energy supplies from Ukraine, affecting much of the world. It would also increase the likelihood of a direct conflict between Russia and NATO, the opposite of what the West wants.

Yet, despite these very obvious and predictable threats, the alliance, led by the United States and Germany, is so fearful that Russia might use a tactical nuclear weapon that it self-deters, stopping short of clearly defining a strategic objective for this war and instead implementing an incremental approach to delivering the minimum necessary support to Ukraine. Leaders have good reason to be concerned about the Kremlin's nuclear threats. Russia has thousands of nuclear warheads, and it clearly does not care about how many innocent people are killed, including its own. But the question is why and under what circumstances would it actually use a nuclear weapon. I believe it is extremely unlikely and we should stop giving in to Russian nuclear blackmail.

There are no positive outcomes for Russia if it uses a nuclear weapon. President Biden has warned of “catastrophic consequences” for Russia if it does so. Even China and India have warned Russia not to go down this road – because they fear the disruption of the delivery of their cheap oil and gas. There is no place on the battlefield where Russian employment of a tactical nuclear weapon would actually achieve something more significant than what it is already doing with conventional explosive weapons. In short, Russia does not actually need to use a nuclear weapon to exploit the fear of the West. So the question is: Do we have the political will, industrial capacity, economic leverage and military capability to organize for victory? Or will we just kick the can down the road?

The Kremlin's war against Ukraine continues, ten years since Russia first invaded Ukraine, and now more than two years since the start of its large-scale invasion. And Russia has assistance. Iran, its close ally, delivers Shahed drones to Russia and helpfully distracts Western resources and attention away from Ukraine through the attacks across the Middle East of its proxies Hamas, Hezbollah and the Houthis. North Korea has established a new security

agreement with Russia and provides ammunition to Moscow, including large ballistic missiles that have been used against Ukrainian cities.

China continues to cross President Biden's red lines regarding material support for Russia's war effort, openly providing critical components needed for the production of missiles and drones used to kill innocent Ukrainian civilians. Beijing is waiting to see whether the West has the political will to stop Russia, while determining its own next moves.

Russia, China, Iran and North Korea share a disdain for the international rules-based order created after the Second World War from which so many have benefitted and which seems to be taken for granted. They use multiple means to exploit the lack of trust and coherence. They consider the disastrous conclusion to the 20 years of war in Afghanistan as evidence that no nation can really trust the West as a reliable partner.

These challenges are linked and should be seen as parts of a strategic whole. Doing so will help develop clearly defined strategic objectives and priorities and raise industrial capacity and military capabilities to the necessary levels for effective deterrence and defense.

So how does the West muster the combined political will, unlock the enormous industrial capacity, use all of the economic tools at their disposal and deploy their unmatched military capabilities to meet these threats to strategic interests? The Second World War offers an example.

In January 1942, after nearly three years of disaster for Great Britain at the hands of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, and in the immediate aftermath of Japan's destruction of most of the U.S. Pacific Fleet in Pearl Harbor, U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill met in Washington D.C. to discuss a strategy for winning the war. Without much reason for optimism, and knowing that most Americans opposed a land war in Europe, Roosevelt and Churchill nonetheless agreed on the strategic priority of defeating Nazi Germany first. One year later, in January 1943, at the Casablanca Conference, the leaders met again to agree on the strategic objective: "unconditional surrender" of Germany and Japan. Having thus established the war's strategic objective and priority, the allied leaders organized their defense industries and built the enormous armies, navies and air forces needed to win the war.

There needs to be a return to the clarity of Churchill and Roosevelt. The West must defeat Russia first. This is how an expanded war in Europe and the Middle East is prevented, and China is deterred. The current situation in Ukraine is obviously very difficult but not lost. In fact, I remain confident that Ukraine can eventually defeat Russia and reestablish the 1991 borders.

After ten years of war, with the Kremlin holding every advantage, Russia still only controls one-fifth of Ukraine. The Russian navy and air force have failed their principal tasks and are suffering huge losses. Ukraine has changed the character of naval warfare, winning the battle of the Black Sea without a traditional navy of their own. Over 500,000 Russian soldiers have been killed and wounded. The Russians have not demonstrated the operational capability to achieve significant exploitation of their local tactical successes in the furthest eastern part of Ukraine, nor are they able to knock Ukraine out of the war. Ukraine can still win – but the West must do more.

History has shown that war is a test of will and a test of logistics. We have the industrial potential to deliver the necessary logistics to defeat Russia first, isolate Iran and North Korea, and deter China. Does the West have the political will to organize itself to win? Churchill and Roosevelt communicated clear strategic priorities to the public, industry and the military. Our elected leaders must speak to the people as adults, explain the threats, costs and sacrifices that must be made to protect strategic interests. We do not need to be scared; we need to be prepared.

**Ben Hodges**, FBH Geo-Strat Consulting GmbH, Frankfurt, Germany.