

## Take The Win And End The Ukraine War Now

### Description

The fact is that up to this point, Russia has suffered a significant deterioration of its armed forces, a serious shock to its economy, and will require many years – perhaps decades – to fully recover to its pre-2022 levels. If weakening Russia was our strategic objective, that has already been accomplished. We would be wise to take that win and not get greedy by trying to push for an outright military defeat of Putin and his forces.



A Marine with Company G, 2nd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, Special Purpose Marine Air Ground rocket launcher in the Central Command area of operations, March 23, 2015. The 2/7 Marines participated in an assault against a simulated enemy position. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl. Will Perkins/Released)

The Wall Street Journal on Monday reported a number of military experts and international leaders saying they don't know how to end the fighting on terms favorable to Kyiv once Ukraine's upcoming spring or summer offensive concludes. They nevertheless signaled confidence Russia would not be able to win. An unemotional and balanced examination of the combat fundamentals at play, however, reveals a growing potential that Ukraine will struggle merely to hold what it has, let alone to

defeat Russia.

Western leaders should start recalibrating their expectations in light of current trends. Persisting in the unchallenged view that Russia is going to lose the war could leave the West to be caught off guard if the Ukrainian offensive fails to materially degrade Russian positions.

French President Emmanuel Macron worries about what Putin might do if Russia were “humiliated” as a result of losing, and British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak declares the war is far more than just a war between Russia and Ukraine. It is, he says, “fundamentally a fight about the values that we believe about democracy, about the rule of law, territorial integrity, about freedom.”

Yet fundamentally, Sunak is not correct. Values, democracy, and rule of law are certainly critically important concepts, but in terms of winning a war, they are almost irrelevant. Combat fundamentals and military power reign supreme. If there is not a viable military path to success, then values become inconsequential.

## **The Fundamentals of Combat Always Apply**

In 1939, Poland fought for its freedom and was badly defeated by a fascist regime. In May 1940 France fought for its freedom and was likewise defeated in a lightning war. And in June 1941 the Soviet Union fought for its freedom. Up until late in 1942, however, all of those states were crushed on the battlefields for one primary reason: the balance of military power and combat fundamentals favored the attacking Nazis.

The Allies did not ultimately defeat Hitler’s forces because they promoted democratic values. (Obviously, the forms of governments of the allied West and the USSR were as different as night and day.) They won because they built the combat power that ultimately obliterated the Germans. The U.S. State Department’s history of World War II openly admits that without the “remarkable efforts of the Soviet Union on the Eastern Front, the United States and Great Britain would have been hard pressed to score a decisive military victory over Nazi Germany.”

This war likewise will not be won by which side shows the most courage and fearless willingness to fight, but by which side is best able to build national combat power. It is about the fundamentals: the military industrial capacity to churn out adequate quantities of weapons and ammunition, the largest number of sufficiently trained troops, and the political stamina to keep fighting.

Today, both sides (and their allies) have a desire to win. Both sides fight tenaciously. Both populations believe they are in the moral right, and neither has any intention of surrendering to the other. Both governments show they have considerable political stamina to keep fighting for the foreseeable future. What isn’t the same, however, is the industrial capacity and the number of troops potentially available to each side. In those categories, the Russians have a distinct advantage.

## **Russia’s Nuclear Option Is Legitimate**

There is one other category that exerts influence at every turn and lurks behind every plan, strategy, or hope Ukraine has in trying to win the war against Russia: the nuclear card.

In Kyiv and the capitals of most Western states, the debate about how to wage the war takes place from the curious belief that conventional forces are the only ones at play. Whether stated or not, the actions and statements of the various Western leaders expose their belief that if only the right strategy can be found, if enough modern NATO equipment can be delivered, and if enough ammunition can be produced, then Ukraine can defeat Russia and drive Putin's forces from Ukraine.

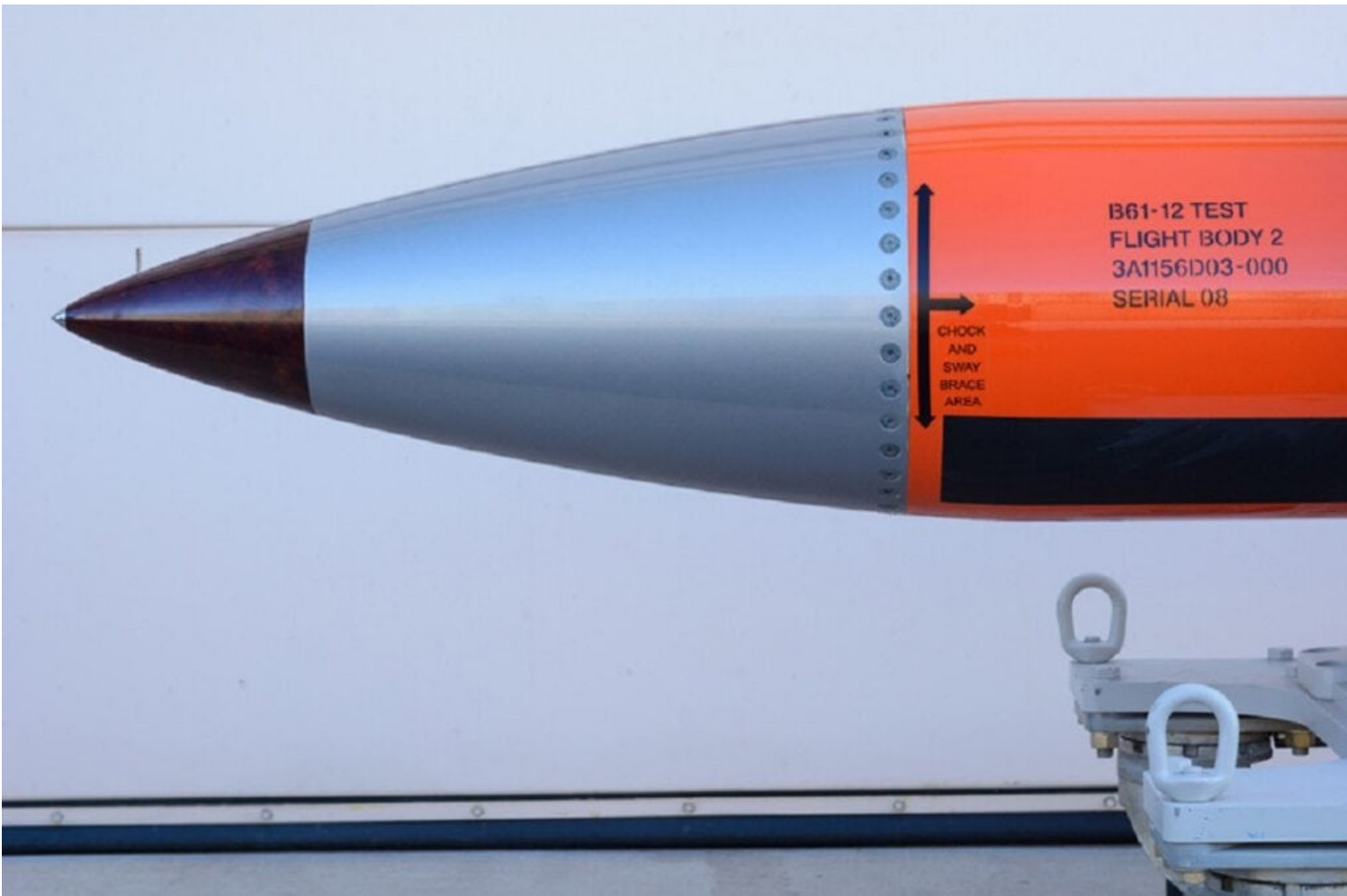
Such thinking is in stark contrast to the world that exists. Continuing to ignore the multi-megaton elephant in the room could lead to a dark, potentially catastrophic outcome for the West. Just last Saturday, Putin took one step forward on the escalation ladder when he announced Russia was going to station tactical nuclear weapons on Belarusian territory. Many in the West dismiss this action as mere rhetoric.

Too many leaders in Western capitals and members of the foreign policy elite think that things are as they have been since the early 1990s, that we can deal with Russia as we have dealt with adversaries over the past 30 years. Whether it was Iraq's [Saddam Hussein in 1991](#) and [2003](#), Haiti's [Raoul Cédras in 1994](#), Afghanistan's [Mullah Omar in 2001](#), Moammar [Gadhafi's Libya in 2011](#), Syria's Bashar al-Assad since [2014](#), [al-Baghdadi's ISIS](#) from 2014-2022, or [Maduro's Venezuela in 2020](#), we have gotten accustomed to being able to behave, speak, and act against foes as we see fit.

For 30 years we have had to worry little over what any given adversary might do in response to the actions or military operations we undertake, because we knew that no matter what their response, we could overwhelm it. The rules stated that regardless of the rightness or wrongness of any justification, regardless of whether "democracy" or other values might be at play, we could act with near impunity. And we were right: There was nothing those states could do that we could not crush.

In this current situation with Russia, those rules do not apply.

We don't have a trump card to defeat the Russian adversary. For every nuclear ace in our deck, Putin has a corresponding nuclear ace. Dealing with Moscow requires us to play by a different set of rules.



US Military B-61 nuclear weapon. Image Credit: US DOD.

Recognizing that reality does not mean submitting anything to Russia. It does not mean our hands are tied, or that we can't behave aggressively to benefit our national security and values. Certainly we do have more and better cards to play than Putin, and we should unhesitatingly use them to our advantage when required. Yet having a better hand than Russia doesn't mean we can do as we see fit without considering the response, as we have been able to do since 1991.

Especially when it comes to war, there are limits on our freedom of action in regards to both Russia and China that never applied to the likes of Saddam. Putin has nuclear weapons, and in a desperate set of circumstances, he is entirely capable of using them.

Some, like retired General Ben Hodges, cavalierly dismiss the threat that Putin could ever use nuclear weapons. The chances that Putin will do so, Hodges said in February, "are almost non-existent," advocating the West ignore all Putin's warnings and move forward with long-range missiles and attacks to retake Crimea. On Monday, Nikolai Patrushev, secretary of Russia's National Security Council, issued one of the most direct counters to Hodges' dismissive claims.

Russia has a "unique weapon" Patrushev said, capable of "destroying any opponent, mainly the US, in case there is a threat to Russia's existence." He addressed comments from U.S. politicians and public figures like Hodges. "American politicians' certainty that Russia will not be able to respond" to an



existential threat to Russia “is a short-sighted and dangerous foolishness.”



Russian Tanks in Ukraine. Image Credit: Creative Commons.

Certainly that could be bluster and empty rhetoric by a Russian leader intended to scare the U.S. from getting too aggressive supporting Ukraine on the battlefield. But such a statement, coming from a senior military advisor to the president of the nation with the largest stockpile of strategic nuclear weapons on the planet – an adversary that could literally wipe out most of the population of our country – cannot be blithely dismissed.

Without question, such a strike would concurrently result in the destruction of most of Russia, and that would weigh heavily on any Putin decision. But to literally gamble the existence of the United States on the hope that Putin would allow the U.S.-led West to facilitate a military defeat of the Russian Armed Forces, and then hope that a desperate Putin would not use his vast nuclear arsenal, is incomprehensibly unwise.

The fact is that up to this point, Russia has suffered a significant deterioration of its armed forces, a serious shock to its economy, and will require many years – perhaps decades – to fully recover to its pre-2022 levels. If weakening Russia was our strategic objective, that has already been accomplished.

# End the Ukraine War

We would be wise to take that win and not get greedy by trying to push for an outright military defeat of Putin and his forces. Doing so would play into Russia's greatest fears – a Western attack against Russian territory – and pointlessly raise the specter of sending a desperate Putin into a corner from which he may calculate that using tactical nuclear weapons is his only recourse. No matter what we feel about the war in Ukraine, we should not risk nuclear escalation that in the worst case could condemn millions of Americans to death. It is time to take the win and end the war.

by Daniel L. Davis

## Category

1. Uncategorized

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