

THE CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF THE UKRAINE WAR

John J. Mearsheimer

THE war in Ukraine is a multi-dimensional disaster, which is likely to get much worse in the foreseeable future. When a war is successful, little attention is paid to its causes, but when the outcome is disastrous, understanding how it happened becomes paramount. People want to know: how did we get into this terrible situation?

I have witnessed this phenomenon twice in my lifetime—first with the Vietnam War and second with the Iraq War. In both cases, Americans wanted to know how their country could have miscalculated so badly. Given that the United States and its NATO allies played a crucial role in the events that led to the Ukraine war—and are now playing a central role in the conduct

of that war—it is appropriate to evaluate the West’s responsibility for this calamity.

I will make two main arguments today.

First, the United States is principally responsible for causing the Ukraine crisis. This is not to deny that Putin started the war and that he is responsible for Russia’s conduct on the battlefield. Nor is it to deny that America’s allies bear some responsibility, but they largely follow Washington’s lead on Ukraine. My key point, however, is that the United States has pushed forward policies toward Ukraine that Putin and his colleagues see as an existential threat to their country—a point they have made repeatedly for

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The beginning of trouble? Presidents Yushchenko (Ukraine) and Bush (U.S.) at the 2008 Bucharest NATO Summit

many years. Specifically, I am talking about America’s obsession with bringing Ukraine into NATO and making it a Western bulwark on Russia’s border. The Biden administration was unwilling to eliminate that threat through diplomacy and indeed recommitted itself to bringing Ukraine into NATO in 2021. Putin responded by invading Ukraine on February 24th, 2022.

Second, the Biden administration has reacted to the outbreak of the war by doubling down against Russia. Washington and its Western allies are committed to decisively defeating Russia in Ukraine and employing com-

prehensive sanctions to greatly weaken Russian power. The United States is not seriously interested in finding a diplomatic solution to the war, which means the war is likely to drag on for months, if not years. In the process, Ukraine, which has already suffered grievously, is going to experience even greater harm. In essence, the United States and its allies are helping lead Ukraine down the primrose path.

Furthermore, there is a danger that the war will escalate, as NATO might get dragged into the fighting and nuclear weapons might be used. We live in perilous times.

Let me now lay out my argument in greater detail, starting with a description of the conventional wisdom about the causes of the conflict.

THE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM

It is widely and firmly believed in the West that Putin is solely responsible for causing the Ukraine crisis and certainly the ongoing war. He is said to have imperial ambitions, which is to say he is bent on conquering Ukraine and other countries as well—all for the purpose of creating a greater Russia that bears some resemblance to the former Soviet Union. In other words, Ukraine is Putin’s first target, but not his last. As one scholar put it, he is “acting on a sinister, long-held belief: to erase Ukraine from the map of the world.” Given Putin’s purported goals, it makes perfect sense for Finland and Sweden to join NATO and for the alliance to increase its force levels in Eastern Europe. After all, Imperial Russia must be contained.

While this narrative is repeated over and over in the mainstream media and by virtually every Western leader, there is no evidence to support it. To the extent that purveyors of the conventional wisdom provide evidence, it has little

if any bearing on Putin’s motives for invading Ukraine. For example, some emphasize that he said that Ukraine is an “artificial state” or that it is not a “real state.” Such opaque comments, however, say nothing about his reason for going to war. The same is true of Putin’s statement that he views Russians and Ukrainians as “one people” with a common history. Others point out that he called the collapse of the Soviet

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Union “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century.” Of course, Putin also said, “Whoever does not miss the Soviet Union has no heart. Whoever wants it back has no brain.” Still, others point out that he said that “Modern Ukraine was entirely created by Russia or, to be more precise, by Bolshevik, Communist Russia.” But as he went on to say in that same speech: “Of course, we cannot change past events, but we must at least admit them openly and honestly.”

To make the case that Putin was bent on conquering all of Ukraine and incorporating it into Russia, it is necessary to provide evidence that first, he thought it was a desirable goal, that second, he thought it was a feasible goal, and third, he intended to pursue that goal. There is no evidence in the public record that Putin was contem-

plating, much less intending to put an end to Ukraine as an independent state and make it part of a greater Russia when he sent his troops into Ukraine on February 24th.

In fact, there is significant evidence that Putin recognized Ukraine as an independent country. In his July 12th, 2021, article about Russian-Ukrainian relations, which proponents of the conventional wisdom often point to as evidence of his imperial ambitions, he tells the Ukrainian people, “You want to establish a state of your own: you are welcome!” Regarding how Russia should treat Ukraine, he writes, “There is only one answer: with respect.” He concludes that lengthy article with the following words: “And what Ukraine will be—it is up to its citizens to decide.” It is hard to reconcile these statements with the claim that he wants to incorporate Ukraine within a greater Russia.

In that same July 12th, 2021, article and again in an important speech he gave on February 21st, 2022, Putin emphasized that Russia accepts “the

new geopolitical reality that took shape after the dissolution of the USSR.” He reiterated that same point for a third time on February 24th, 2022, when he announced that Russia would invade Ukraine. He also made it clear that “it is

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not our plan to occupy Ukrainian territory” and that he respected Ukrainian sovereignty, but only up to a point: “Russia cannot feel safe, develop, and exist while facing a permanent threat from the territory of today’s Ukraine.” In essence, Putin was not interested in making Ukraine a part of Russia; he was interested in making sure it did not become a “springboard” for Western aggression against Russia, a subject I will say more about shortly.

One might argue that Putin was lying about his motives, that he was attempting to disguise his imperial ambitions. As it turns out, I have written a book about lying in international politics—*Why Leaders Lie: The Truth about Lying in International Politics*—and it is clear to me that Putin was not lying. For starters, one of my principal findings is that leaders do not lie much to each other; they lie more

often to their own publics. Regarding Putin, whatever one thinks of him, he does not have a history of lying to other leaders. Although some assert that he frequently lies and cannot be trusted, there is little evidence of him lying to foreign audiences. Moreover, he has publicly spelled out his thinking about Ukraine on numerous occasions over the past two years and he has consistently emphasized that his principal concern is Ukraine's relations with the West, especially NATO. He has never once hinted that he wants to make Ukraine part of Russia. If this behavior is part of

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a giant deception campaign, it would be without precedent in recorded history.

Perhaps the best indicator that Putin is not bent on conquering and absorbing Ukraine is the military strategy Moscow has employed from the start of the campaign. The Russian military did not attempt to conquer all of Ukraine. That would have required a classic blitzkrieg strategy that aimed at quickly overrunning all of Ukraine with armored forces supported by tactical airpower. That strategy was not feasible, however, because there were only 190,000 soldiers in Russia's invading army, which is far too small a force to vanquish and occupy Ukraine, which

is not only the largest country between the Atlantic Ocean and Russia, but also has a population over 40 million. Unsurprisingly, the Russians pursued a limited aims strategy, which focused on either capturing or threatening Kyiv and conquering a large swath of territory in eastern and southern Ukraine.

In short, Russia did not have the capability to subdue all of Ukraine, much less conquer other countries in Eastern Europe.

To take this argument a step further, Putin and other Russian leaders surely understand from the Cold War that occu-

pying counties in the age of nationalism is invariably a prescription for never-ending trouble. The Soviet experience in Afghanistan is a glaring example of this phenomenon, but more relevant for the issue at hand is Moscow's relations with its allies in Eastern Europe during the Cold War. The Soviet Union maintained a huge military presence in that region and was involved in the politics of almost every country located there. Those allies, however, were a frequent thorn in Moscow's side. The Soviet Union put down a major insurrection in East Germany in 1953, and then invaded Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968—all for the purpose of keeping those countries in line. There

was serious trouble in Poland in 1956, 1970, and again in 1980-1981. Although Polish authorities dealt with these events, they served as a reminder that intervention might be necessary. Albania, Romania, and Yugoslavia routinely caused Moscow trouble, but Soviet leaders tended to tolerate their mis-

behavior, because their location made them less important for deterring NATO.

What about contemporary Ukraine? It is obvious from Putin's July 12th, 2021, essay that he understood at that time that Ukrainian national-

ism is a powerful force and that the civil war in the Donbass, which had been going on since 2014, had done much to poison relations between Russia and Ukraine. He surely knew that Russia's invasion force would not be welcomed with open arms by Ukrainians, and that it would be a Herculean task for Russia to subjugate Ukraine if it had the necessary forces to conquer the entire country, which it did not have.

Finally, it is worth noting that hardly anyone made the argument that Putin had imperial ambitions from the time he took office in 2000 until the Ukraine crisis first broke out on February 22nd, 2014. In fact, the Russian leader was an

invited guest to the April 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest where the alliance announced that Ukraine and Georgia would eventually become members. Putin's opposition to that announcement had hardly any effect on Washington because Russia was judged to be too weak to stop further NATO enlarge-

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ment, just as it had been too weak to stop the 1999 and 2004 tranches of expansion.

Relatedly, it is important to note that NATO expansion before February 2014 was not aimed at containing Russia. Given the sad state of Russian military

power, Moscow was in no position to pursue revanchist policies in Eastern Europe. Tellingly, former U.S. ambassador to Moscow Michael McFaul notes that Putin's seizure of Crimea was not planned before the crisis broke out in 2014. It was an impulsive move in response to the coup that overthrew Ukraine's pro-Russian leader. In short, NATO enlargement was not intended to contain a Russian threat but was instead as part of a broader policy to spread the liberal international order into Eastern Europe and make the entire continent look like Western Europe.

It was only when the Ukraine crisis broke out in February 2014 that the

United States and its allies suddenly began describing Putin as a dangerous leader with imperial ambitions and Russia as a serious military threat that had to be contained. What caused this shift? This new rhetoric was designed to serve one essential purpose: to enable the West to blame Putin for the outbreak of trouble in Ukraine. And now that the crisis has turned into a full-scale war, it is imperative to make sure that he alone is blamed for this disastrous turn of events. This blame game explains why Putin is now widely portrayed as an imperialist here in the West, even though there is hardly any evidence to support that perspective.

The taproot of the crisis is the American-led effort to make Ukraine a Western bulwark on Russia's borders. That strategy has three prongs turning Ukraine into a pro-Western liberal democracy and most importantly, incorporating Ukraine into NATO.

Let me now turn to the real cause of the Ukraine crisis.

THE REAL CAUSE OF THE CRISIS

The taproot of the crisis is the American-led effort to make Ukraine a Western bulwark on Russia's borders. That strategy has three prongs:

- integrating Ukraine into the EU
- turning Ukraine into a pro-Western liberal democracy and
- most importantly, incorporating Ukraine into NATO.

The strategy was set in motion at NATO's annual summit in Bucharest in April 2008, when the alliance announced that Ukraine and Georgia "will become members." Russian leaders responded immediately with outrage, making it clear that this decision was an existential threat to Russia, and that they had no intention of letting either country join NATO. According to a respected Russian journalist, Putin "flew into a rage," and warned that "if Ukraine joins NATO, it will do so without Crimea and the eastern regions. It will simply fall apart."

William Burns, who is now the head of the CIA, but was the U.S.

ambassador to Moscow at the time of the Bucharest summit. He wrote a memo to then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice that succinctly describes Russian thinking about Ukraine joining NATO. "Ukrainian entry into NATO is the brightest of all red lines for the Russian elite, not just Putin. In more than two and a half years of conversations with key Russian players, from knuckle-draggers in the dark recesses of the Kremlin to Putin's sharpest liberal critics, I have yet to find anyone who views Ukraine in NATO as anything other than a direct challenge to Russian

interests." NATO, he said, "would be seen ... as throwing down the strategic gauntlet. Today's Russia will respond. Russian-Ukrainian relations will go into a deep freeze...It will create fertile soil for Russian meddling in Crimea and eastern Ukraine."

Burns, of course, was not the only policy-maker who understood that bringing Ukraine into NATO was fraught with danger. Indeed, at the Bucharest Summit, both German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Nicolas Sarkozy were opposed to moving forward on NATO membership for Ukraine because they feared it would infuriate Russia. Angela Merkel recently explained her opposition in an interview: "I was very sure [...] that Putin is not going to just let that happen. From his perspective, that would be a declaration of war."

The Bush administration, which was pushing such a decision for NATO however, cared little about Moscow's "brightest of red lines" and pressured the French and German leaders to agree to issuing a public pronouncement that said unequivocally that Ukraine and Georgia would eventually join the alliance.

Unsurprisingly, the American-led effort to integrate Georgia into NATO resulted in a war between Georgia and Russia in August 2008—just four months after the Bucharest summit. Nevertheless, the United States and its

The Western response to the events of 2014 was to double down on the existing strategy and effectively make Ukraine a de facto member of NATO. The alliance began training the Ukrainian military in 2014, averaging 10,000 trained troops annually over the next eight years.

allies continued moving forward with their plans to make Ukraine a Western bastion on Russia's borders. These efforts eventually sparked a major crisis in February 2014, after a U.S.-supported uprising caused Ukraine's pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovich to flee the country. He was replaced by pro-American Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk. In response, Russia seized Crimea from

Ukraine and helped fuel a civil war that broke out in the Donbass between pro-Russian separatists and the Ukrainian government.

One often hears the argument that in the eight years between when the crisis broke out in February 2014 and when the war began in February 2022, the United States and its allies paid little attention to bringing Ukraine into NATO. In effect, the issue had been taken off the table, and thus NATO enlargement could not possibly have been an important cause of

the escalating crisis in 2021 and the subsequent outbreak of war earlier this year. This line of argument is false. In fact, the Western response to the events of 2014 was to double down on the existing strategy and effectively make Ukraine a de facto member of NATO. The alliance began training the Ukrainian military in 2014, averaging 10,000 trained troops annually over the next eight years. In December 2017, the Trump administration decided to provide Kyiv with “defensive weapons.” Other NATO countries quickly got into the act, shipping even more weapons to Ukraine.

In addition, Ukraine’s military began participating in joint military exercises with NATO forces. In July 2021, Kyiv and Washington co-hosted Operation Sea Breeze, a naval exercise in the Black Sea that included navies from 31 countries and was directly aimed at Russia. Two months later in September 2021, the Ukrainian army led Rapid Trident 21, which according to an official press-release from the U.S. Army was a “U.S. Army Europe and Africa assisted annual exercise designed to enhance interoperability among allied and partner nations, to demonstrate units

are poised and ready to respond to any crisis.” NATO’s effort to arm and train Ukraine’s military explains in good part why it has fared so well against Russian forces in the ongoing war. A headline in a recent issue of *The Wall Street Journal* put it quite nicely,

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“The Secret of Ukraine’s Military Success: Years of NATO Training.”

In addition to NATO’s ongoing efforts to make the Ukrainian military a more formidable fighting force, the politics surrounding Ukraine’s membership in NATO and its integration into the West changed in 2021. There was renewed enthusiasm for pursuing those objectives in

both Kyiv and Washington. President Zelensky, who had never shown much enthusiasm for bringing Ukraine into NATO and who was elected in March 2019 on a platform that called for working with Russia to settle the ongoing crisis, reversed course in early 2021 and not only embraced NATO expansion but also adopted a hardline approach toward Moscow. He made a series of moves—like shutting down pro-Russian TV stations and arresting an especially close friend of Putin and charging him with treason—that were sure to anger Moscow.

President Biden, who moved into the White House in January 2021, had long been committed to bringing Ukraine into NATO and was also super-hawkish towards Russia. Unsurprisingly, on June 14th, 2021, NATO issued the following communiqué at its annual Brussels summit:

We reiterate the decision made at the 2008 Bucharest Summit that Ukraine will become a member of the Alliance with the Membership Action Plan (MAP) as an integral part of the process; we reaffirm all elements of that decision, as well as subsequent decisions, including that each partner will be judged on its own merits. We stand firm in our support for Ukraine’s right to decide its own future and foreign policy course free from outside interference.

On September 1st, 2021, Zelensky visited the White House, where Biden made it clear that the United States was “firmly committed” to “Ukraine’s Euro-Atlantic aspirations.” Then on November 10th, 2021, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, and his Ukrainian counterpart, Dmytro Kuleba, signed an important document—the “U.S.-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership.” The aim of both parties, the document stated, is to “underscore [...] a commitment to Ukraine’s implementation of the deep and comprehensive reforms necessary for full integration into European and Euro-Atlantic institutions.” That document explicitly builds not just on “the commitments

made to strengthen the Ukraine-U.S. strategic partnership by Presidents Zelensky and Biden,” but also reaffirms the U.S. commitment to the “2008 Bucharest Summit Declaration.”

In short, there is little doubt that starting in early 2021 Ukraine began moving rapidly toward joining NATO. Even so, some supporters of this policy argue that Moscow should not have been concerned, because “NATO is a defensive alliance and poses no threat to Russia.” But that is not how Putin and other Russian leaders think about NATO and it is what they think that matters. There is no question that Ukraine joining NATO remained the “brightest of red lines” for Moscow.

To deal with this growing threat, Putin stationed ever-increasing numbers of Russian troops on Ukraine’s border between February 2021 and February 2022. His aim was to coerce Biden and Zelensky into altering course and halting their efforts to integrate Ukraine into the West. On December 17th, 2021, the Russians reached a boiling point. And Moscow sent separate letters to the Biden administration and NATO demanding a written guarantee that:

1. Ukraine would not join NATO
2. no offensive weapons would be stationed near Russia’s borders, and
3. NATO troops and equipment moved into eastern Europe since 1997 would be moved back to western Europe.

Putin made numerous public statements during this period that left no doubt that he viewed NATO expansion into Ukraine as an existential threat. Speaking to the Defense Ministry Board on December 21st, 2021, he stated: “what they are doing, or trying or planning to do in Ukraine, is not happening thousands of kilometers away from our national border. It is on the doorstep of our house. They must understand that we simply have nowhere further to retreat to. Do they really think we do not see these threats? Or do they think that we will just stand idly watching threats to Russia emerge?” Two months later at a press conference on February 22nd, 2022, just days before the war started, Putin said: “we are categorically opposed to Ukraine joining NATO because this poses a threat to us, and we have arguments to support this. I have repeatedly spoken about it in this hall.” He then made it clear that he recognized that Ukraine was becoming a de facto member of NATO. The United States and its allies, he said, “continue to pump the current Kyiv authorities full of modern types of weapons.” He went on to say that if this was not stopped, Moscow “would be left with an ‘anti-Russia’ armed to the teeth. This is totally unacceptable.”

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Putin’s logic should be manifestly clear to Americans in the audience, who have long understood that we have the Monroe Doctrine, which stipulates that no distant great power is allowed to place any of its military forces in the Western Hemisphere.

I might note that in all of Putin’s public statements during the months leading up to the war, there is not a scintilla of evidence that he was contemplating conquering Ukraine and making it part of Russia, much less attacking other countries in Eastern Europe. Other Russian leaders—including the defense minister, the foreign minister, the deputy foreign minister, and the Russian ambassador to Washington—also emphasized the centrality of NATO expansion for causing the Ukraine crisis. Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov made the point succinctly at a press conference on January 14th, 2022, when he said, “the key to everything is the guarantee that NATO will not expand eastward.”

Nevertheless, the efforts of Lavrov and Putin to get the United States and its allies to abandon their efforts to make Ukraine a Western bulwark on Russia’s border failed completely. Secretary of State Antony Blinken responded to

Russia’s mid-December demands by simply saying, “There is no change. There will be no change.” Putin then launched an invasion of Ukraine to eliminate the threat he saw from NATO.

WHERE ARE WE NOW & WHERE ARE WE GOING?

The Ukraine war has been raging for almost four months I would like to make three separate points. 1) I would like to talk about the specific consequences of the war for Ukraine; 2) the prospects for escalation; and 3) the prospects for ending the war in the foreseeable future.

This war is an unmitigated disaster for Ukraine. As I noted earlier, Putin made it clear in 2008 that Russia would wreck Ukraine to prevent it from joining NATO. He is delivering on that promise. Russian forces have conquered at least 20 percent of Ukrainian territory and destroyed or badly damaged many Ukrainian cities and towns. More than 6.5 million Ukrainians have fled the country, while more than 8 million have been internally displaced. Many thousands of Ukrainians—

including innocent civilians—are dead or badly wounded and the Ukrainian economy is in shambles. The World Bank estimates that Ukraine’s economy will shrink by almost 50 percent over the course of 2022. Estimates are that ap-

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proximately \$100 billion worth of damage has been inflicted on Ukraine and that it will take close to a trillion dollars to rebuild the country. In the meantime, Kyiv requires about \$5 billion of aid every month just to keep the government running.

Furthermore, there appears to be little hope that Ukraine will be able to regain use of its ports on the Azov and Black Seas anytime soon. Before the war, roughly 70 percent of all Ukrainian exports and imports—and 98 percent of its grain exports—moved through these ports. This is the basic

situation after less than four months of fighting. It is downright scary to contemplate what Ukraine will look like if this war drags on for a few more years.

So, what are the prospects for negotiating a peace agreement and ending the war in the next few months? I am sorry to say that I see no way this

war ends anytime soon. This is a view shared by prominent policymakers on both the Western and the Russian sides. The main reason for my pessimism is that both Russia and the United States are deeply committed to winning the war and it is impossible to fashion an agreement where both sides win. To be more specific, the key to a settlement from Russia's perspective is making Ukraine a neutral state, which means that Ukraine must divorce itself from the West, especially the United States. But that outcome is unacceptable to the Biden administration and a large portion of the American foreign policy establishment, because it would represent a victory for Russia.

Ukrainian leaders have agency of course, and one might hope that—given all the horror being inflicted on their country—they will push for neutralization to spare their country further harm. Indeed, Zelensky briefly mentioned that possibility in the first month of the war, but he never seriously pursued it. There is little chance, however, that Kyiv will push for neutralization, because the ultra-nationalists in Ukraine, who wield significant political power, have zero interest in yielding to any of Russia's demands, especially one that dictates

Ukraine's political alignment with the outside world. The Biden administration and the countries on NATO's eastern flank—Poland and the Baltic states—are likely to support Ukraine's ultra-nationalists on this issue.

To complicate matters further, how does one deal with the large swaths of Ukrainian territory that Russia has conquered since the war started, as well as Crimea's fate? It is hard to fathom Moscow voluntarily giving up any of the Ukrainian territory it now occupies, much less all of it, as Russia's territorial goals today are probably not the ones they started the war with. At the same time, it is difficult to imagine any Ukrainian leader accepting a deal that allows Russia to keep any Ukrainian territory, except possibly Crimea. I certainly hope I am wrong, but I see no end in sight to this ruinous war.

Let me now turn to the matter of escalation. It is widely accepted among international relations scholars that there is a powerful tendency for protracted wars to escalate. Other countries can get dragged into the fight and the level of violence is likely to escalate. The potential for this happening in the Ukraine war is real. There is a danger that the United States and its NATO

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allies will get dragged into the fighting, which they have been able to avoid up to this point, even though we are now effectively at war with Russia. There is also the possibility that nuclear weapons might be used in Ukraine and that might even lead to a nuclear exchange between Russia and the United States. The underlying reason these outcomes might be realized is that the stakes are so high for both sides, and thus neither can afford to lose.

As I have emphasized, Putin and his lieutenants believe that Ukraine joining the West is an existential threat to Russia that must be eliminated. In practical terms, that means Russia must win its war in Ukraine. Defeat is unacceptable. The Biden administration, on the other hand, has stressed that its goal is not only to defeat the Russians in Ukraine, but also to use sanctions to inflict egregious damage on the Russian economy. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin has emphasized that the West's goal is to weaken Russia to the point where it could not invade Ukraine again. In effect, the Biden administration is committed to knocking Russia out of the ranks of the great powers. At the same time, President Biden himself has called Russia's war in Ukraine a "genocide" and charged Putin with being a "war

criminal" who should face a "war crimes trial" after the war. Such rhetoric hardly lends itself to negotiating an end to the war. After all, how do you negotiate with a genocidal state?

American policy has two significant consequences. For starters, it greatly amplifies the existential threat Moscow faces in this war and makes it more important than ever that it prevails in Ukraine. At the same time, it means the United States is deeply committed to making sure that Russia loses. The Biden administration has now invested so much in the Ukraine war—both materially and rhetorically—that a Russian victory would represent a devastating defeat for Washington.

Obviously, both sides cannot win. Moreover, there is a serious possibility that one side will begin to lose badly. If American policy succeeds and the Russians are losing to the Ukrainians on the battlefield, Putin might turn to nuclear weapons to rescue the situation. The U.S. Director of National Intelligence, Avril Haines, told the Senate Armed Services Committee in May 2022 that this was one of the two situations that might lead Putin to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine. For those of you who

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think this is unlikely, please remember that NATO planned to use nuclear weapons in similar circumstances during the Cold War. We were planning to use nuclear weapons in West Germany if the Warsaw Pact overran it. If Russia were to employ nuclear weapons in Ukraine, it is difficult to say how the Biden administration would react, but it surely would be under great pressure to retaliate, thus raising the possibility of a great-power nuclear war. There is a perverse paradox at play here. The more successful the United States and its allies are at achieving their war aims, the more likely it is that the war will turn nuclear.

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pulled into the fighting, which means NATO would literally be at war with Russia. This is the other scenario, according to Avril Haines, where the Russians might turn to nuclear weapons. It is difficult to say precisely how events will play out in the Ukraine war, but there is no question there will be serious potential for escalation, to include nuclear escalation. The mere possibility of that outcome should send shivers down your spine.

There are likely to be other disastrous consequences from this war, which I cannot discuss in any detail because of time constraints. For example, there is reason

to think the war will lead to a world food crisis in which many millions of people will die.

Furthermore, relations between Russia and the West have been so thoroughly poisoned that it will take many years to repair them. In the meantime, that profound hostility will fuel instability around the globe, but especially in Europe. Some will say there is a silver lining: relations among countries in the West have markedly improved, Transatlantic relations, NATO and the EU are in better shape than ever. That is

true for the moment, but there are deep fissures below the surface, and they are likely to manifest themselves over time. For example, relations between the countries of eastern and western Europe are likely to deteriorate as the war drags on.

Finally, the conflict is already damaging the global economy in major ways and this situation is likely to get worse with time. Jamie Diamond, the CEO of JPMorgan Chase says we should brace ourselves for an economic “hurricane.”

These economic shocks will affect the politics of every Western country, undermining liberal democracy, and strengthening its opponents on both the left and the right.

In conclusion, the ongoing conflict in Ukraine is a colossal disaster, which as I noted at the start of my talk, will lead people all around the world to search for its causes. Those who believe in facts and logic will quickly discover that the United States and its allies are mainly responsible for this train wreck. The April 2008 decision to bring

Ukraine and Georgia into NATO was destined to lead to conflict with Russia. The Bush administration was the principal architect of that fateful choice, but the Obama, Trump, and Biden administrations have doubled down

The tragic truth is that if the West had not pursued NATO expansion into Ukraine, it is unlikely there would be a war in Ukraine today and Crimea would still be part of Ukraine.

on that policy at every turn and America’s allies have dutifully followed Washington’s lead. Even though Russian leaders made it perfectly clear that bringing Ukraine into NATO would be crossing “the brightest of red lines,” the United States simply refused to accommodate Russia’s

deepest security concerns and instead moved relentlessly to make Ukraine a Western bulwark on Russia’s border.

The tragic truth is that if the West had not pursued NATO expansion into Ukraine, it is unlikely there would be a war in Ukraine today and Crimea would still be part of Ukraine. In essence, Washington played the central role in leading Ukraine down the path to destruction. History will judge the United States and its allies with abundant harshness for their remarkably foolish policy on Ukraine. Thank you. ●