



Opinion Column

How to help Ukraine win the war against the Russian Invader and Aggressor ¹

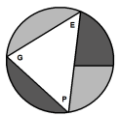
Caspar ten Dam *with* Ab de Buck

Introduction: : violations, losses and prospects of war

Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, instigated, masterminded and ordered by Russia's President Vladimir Putin and his entourage, is utterly unjustified and has been brutal as well, characterised by shelling of residential areas and deliberate maltreatment, torture and killing of civilians and prisoners of war. ² So Russia is violating both the *jus ad bellum* (justice-of-war) 'right aims' and *jus in bello* (justice-in-war) 'right means' principles of justifiable and defensible warfare, mainly codified in the 1899 and 1907 The Hague Conventions and the 1949 Geneva Conventions. Any humanitarian-law violations on the Ukrainian side have been incidental and often prosecuted, so pale in comparison.

Losses

Right now the Ukrainian Armed Forces are still highly determined, capable, inventive and effective—particularly at sea and in the air through long-range aircraft, drone and missile attacks against Russia's Black Sea Fleet and other military assets on the latter's own territory.



Arguably, Ukraine already has won the war at sea, and may do so in the air soon with the final arrival of the first promised F16 fighter jets. Even on land it is continuing to inflict a heavy toll on Russian forces, which is still losing far more men and materiel in absolute numbers than the Ukrainian side (though the latter could afford to lose far fewer men and materiel in the present circumstances).

According to the latest figures in early August 2024 released by the Ukrainian Defence ministry, Russia's invasion force—originally 150,000-strong, eventually 400,000-strong by mid-2023, and expected to peak by late 2024 to well over 500,000 troops (though unlikely to maintain this level into 2025 and beyond) ³—lost at least 178,820 soldiers and other combatants (killed, wounded, missing or captured), 3637 tanks, 7028 armoured vehicles, 307 planes, 292 helicopters, 2750 artillery systems, 534 multiple rocket systems, 2323 drones and numerous other vehicles and weapon systems (debilitatingly damaged, destroyed or captured). ⁴

US estimates speak of 120,000 Russian soldiers killed and as many as 280,000 wounded, surpassing even Ukraine's more recent estimates of total Russian losses mentioned before. ⁵ Arguably more reliable figures by *Oryx*, a Dutch-based open-source defence and warfare research group ⁶, and more precise estimates relying on "photo or videographic evidence" of Russian equipment losses are often much lower than those by the Ukrainian defence ministry—though some are close to the latter, like 3324 lost tanks (2276 destroyed, 156 damaged; 366 abandoned, 526 captured). ⁷

Be that as it may, *Oryx*'s equally precise estimates of Ukrainian equipment losses generally are far lower—generally a ratio of 4 to 1—than its estimates of such losses on the Russian side, like 892 lost tanks



(618 destroyed, 73 damaged: 65 abandoned, 136 captured). Apparently Onyx does estimate manpower losses, probably because it would be undoable to shift through tens or even hundreds of thousands of photo- and videographic recordings of casualties.⁸

In early 2024 Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky claimed 31,000 Ukrainian soldiers had lost their lives since Russia's full-scale invasion in early 2022; yet some Western estimates of Ukrainian battle losses have been much higher, such as US estimates in Augustus 2023 speaking of 70,000 Ukrainian soldiers killed and at least 120,000 injured.⁹ A great concern is that Ukraine can probably afford much fewer personnel and equipment losses than Russia given the latter's much larger population and hinterland.

Crucially, many more Ukrainian injured have been able to return to the frontline after medical treatment, which is far superior to Russia's generally—even though Ukrainian military and civilian medics are often facing shortages and “defective medical equipment and a lack of medical training” as well.¹⁰ Russia's general treatment of their soldiers is infinitely worse to begin with, often executing them when they try to desert or leaving them to die unattended on the battlefield once wounded. And the percentages of relatively minor injuries have been much higher among Ukrainian combatant injuries than among their Russian counterparts, whose injuries have more often been debilitating and life-threatening. In the next sections we explain what steps we can and should take to enable Ukraine to win the war fully, justly and durably for the sake of security, peace and democracy for Ukrainians and us all.

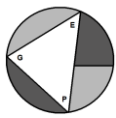


Lost opportunities for a quick Ukrainian victory despite impressive achievements

Despite inflicting heavy losses on the enemy, the Ukrainian army has become beleaguered, outgunned, understaffed and exhausted on the ground due to Russia's recent and current slow-grinding offensives in the eastern Donbas and north-eastern Kharkiv regions, made possible by continuously sending Russian soldiers, mercenaries and 'volunteers' as cannon fodder to the front, forming a war economy effective and sustainable on the medium-term at least, despite or rather because of insufficiently enforced sanctions, and getting aid from 'rogue states' like Iran, North Korea and even (more indirectly) China.

Moreover, as the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) correctly points out, "Western incrementalism in the provision of military aid disrupted Ukraine's battlefield momentum and provided Russia with a three-fold advantage: a chance for Russian forces to build their defense in depth, which monumentally complicated Ukrainian 2023 counteroffensive; a chance for the Kremlin to seize the narrative internationally; and a reduction in domestic pressures on Putin".¹¹

At any rate, Ukraine must take back the occupied territories and thereby win the war in order to discourage kindred aggression by Russia and other authoritarian states in the future and help keep Europe and the entire world safe. The International Crisis Group rightly observes in a recent report that "Ukraine should better mobilise and train front-line troops while bolstering defensive positions. Its Western partners should increase arms production and deliveries, with Europe preparing to compensate if a divided U.S. steps back" (ICG 2024: Principal Findings).¹² Increased arms



production in Europe for Ukraine should at least partially offset any dwindling of American military aid to Ukraine in the more distant future—especially if the war continues well into 2025 and beyond. Moreover, “Ukrainian forces and their Western backers” must “break the current positional warfare and restore maneuver to the battlefield”, to which the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) makes specific recommendations; alas there is no room to describe and discuss these here.¹³ Here, CHI will elaborate on some of these points—like the need to lift Western restrictions on Ukrainian use of its supplied weapons in Russia proper.

Crucial steps to help Ukraine win the war against Russia

True, Russia would probably remain unable to occupy most or all Ukraine in the foreseeable future. But even a partial Russian victory in Ukraine would have dire consequences: any significant and durable illegal occupation of Ukrainian territory would amount to appeasement, Ukrainian and our defeat, and future invasions by future aggressors everywhere. Therefore with our help from the West and elsewhere, the Ukrainians can and must win the war by regaining its entire sovereign territory by the following means and steps:

- 1) To finally install and enforce *maximum sanctions* against Russia and those countries seeking to circumvent these sanctions and profit from these circumventions. If these sanctions were to be applied and enforced fully, then the following steps 2 through 5 would be less urgently needed or even not at all. These sanctions must include a complete stop of Russian oil, gas and LPG (liquefied natural gas) (which many EU countries still continue to do), exports and access to international payments. Additional, maximum sanctions must



happen even if these would badly hurt the economies of those countries able and willing to impose and carry these through; we must share some of the hardships to defeat Russia's aggression, not the Ukrainians only. Many of the countries publicly supporting the limited sanctions against Russia already in place, insufficiently enforce these sanctions on themselves and on other countries trying to circumvent these sanctions by using their ports and other facilities.

Thus the Netherlands, like other EU countries, still import a lot of unsanctioned LNG from Russia (why still unsanctioned?)—and allow transshipments of other sanctioned Russian oil via their own ports to third countries, without monitoring these shipments at all, let alone stopping them. Apart from Dutch authorities neglecting to enforce sanctions, Dutch companies are actively circumventing these, even if not violating these sanctions directly. Thus Dutch microchip companies NXP, Nexperia and STM Microelectronics effectively exported sanctioned microchips to Russia in 2023 for hundreds of millions of Euros, via third countries like China, Turkey and Thailand. These 'indirect exports' include microchips and other microelectronics which Russia cannot produce itself for its guided missiles, helicopters, drones, gliding bombs and other advanced weapons.¹⁴ These practices must cease. The Netherlands and other countries must enforce both existing and additional sanctions to the full; otherwise one just pay lip service to sanctions that actually are circumvented, diminished or even non-existent—thereby showing hypocrisy and lack of will, with ultimately dire consequences for Ukraine and us all.



- 2) To finally, timely and regularly supply Ukraine with any *weaponry and ammunition* it needs to win the war. America's upcoming yet long-delayed package of mainly military aid worth nearly \$61 billion for Ukraine comes as a relief. Yet it is disquieting and scandalous that most Republicans blocked this crucial aid for so many months under pressure from former President Donald Trump, until a sufficient number of them finally helped to pass the required bill in the US Congress in April 2024.¹⁵ We should proceed from the nightmare scenario of a new term by Mr. Trump in the White House after the upcoming American elections in November 2024. Trump would likely reinstall his pro-Russian or rather pro-Putin policies at the expense of Ukraine and practically everyone else right after his inauguration if he wins these elections.

Thus all rightminded countries in Europe, the wider West and beyond—particularly those within the EU or even a NATO without the United States due to any 'USexit' by a reelected Trump—must start to ramp up military capabilities right now beyond the 2% GDP benchmark in order to effectively defend themselves even without US help in the future. And they must start setting up 'wartime economies' right now with enhanced and speedier armament production facilities and purchases in order to massively supply the Ukrainian armed forces in the next weeks, months and even years. The European armies and their defence industries must overcome their current deficiencies, like depleted arsenals and its limited and slow production lines.

- 3) To allow Ukraine to use donated aircraft and long-range missiles to hit military, infrastructural and natural resource (oil, gas) *targets deep*



inside Russia itself, so as to quicken and assure victory. Ukraine has used its own, often homemade weapons against such targets in Russia proper so effectively over the last few months and years. Since August 6, 2024, it has even sent regular troops across the border into Russia proper for the first time, in a major and still-expanding incursion deep into Russia's Kursk region clearly intended to disrupt Russian supply lines—and divert Russian forces and resources away from the frontline in Ukraine's hard-pressed Donbas and Kharkiv regions.¹⁶

Yet Ukraine could have been even more effective earlier and on a wider scale if Western donors would have allowed it to use their donated long-range weaponries beyond its own borders as well. After all, Ukraine has every right to hit military targets in Russia according to current humanitarian law i.e. international rules on sovereignty, self-defense and warfare. Would the West only drop its restrictions after any Russian nuclear bombs would fall on Ukrainian territory, with terrible destruction? Until now, Western donors generally forbid Ukraine to use any weapons directly supplied by them beyond Ukraine's border i.e. in Russia itself.

Finally in early August 2024 the first F-16 fighter aircraft arrived in Ukraine with Ukrainian pilots trained to put these too good use, first of all in protecting its own airspace and lateron helping to gain air superiority once all the F-16s have arrived and become fully operational. However, this good use will be limited so long as the donors forbid Ukraine to use donated aircraft like F-16s and/or long-range missiles like 300 km-range ATACMS (Army Tactical Missile System) missiles against Russia proper.¹⁷ Laudably, countries like the Netherlands and Denmark do allow the Ukrainian Airforce to use their donated F-16s against targets like military airfields in Russia



proper, arguing that Ukraine should not continue fighting with one arm behind its back and can attack the aggressor on its territory as part of its right to self-defence anyway; however 'more cautious' allies like the US still do not allow these American-made F-16s to be used that way and thus have a last say in Ukraine's use of Dutch and Danish supplied F-16s.¹⁸

Even so, countries like France, the UK and even a more reluctant US have finally allowed the Ukrainian armed forces to use their supplied missiles and other weapons against targets inside Russia near the border so as to help disrupt the eventually unsuccessful Russian offensive toward Kharkiv during last May and June.¹⁹ Thus Ukraine reportedly used HIMARS (High Mobility Artillery Rocket System) multiple rocket launchers—which could even fire single long-range ATACMS missiles—in its current incursion into Russia to e.g. destroy several key bridges (and their replacement pontoon bridges) across the Semy river in order to disrupt Russian counter-attacks and isolate Russian forces between the Semy and the Russo-Ukrainian border.²⁰ Yet most other 'beyond-the-border' restrictions remain in force. Ukraine would be unable to win the war fully (liberation of its territories) or even partially any time soon if even well-meaning donors force it to fight with one arm tied behind its back.

- 4) Extra military aid to Ukraine and extra military production in the West, and measures like a 'fast track' membership of Ukraine to NATO and the EU (which already has started, though it will still take years to complete), may prove to be too slow-going or otherwise insufficient to stop Russia's aggression and conceivable victory. Still, we expect these measures to be sufficient given Ukraine's proven military superiority



in the air, on the ground and at sea if well-supplied. But if not, we must consider sending our *own troops* (including more volunteers) to Ukraine, as France's President Emmanuel Macron recently has suggested more than once.²¹ Though Macron's call has gained little support yet, due to fears of provoking Vladimir Putin into World War III, it may have to become reality. Arguably, even Western troops in Ukraine—especially if these keep to defensive roles—would or could not provoke Putin into WWII, because:

- a) since early on in the Russo-Ukrainian War, Putin threatened multiple times that he would use nuclear weapons if the West sent Ukraine even modest weaponry or passed other 'red lines' like sending its own troops; he did not follow up these threats with 'nukes' even after many of these lines were (supposedly) crossed—perhaps because the West deterred him to do so;²²
- b) given the pattern described in a) it is highly unlikely that Putin would dare or be able to use nuclear weapons if any new red lines were crossed;
- c) even if Putin did or were about to use nukes, people high up in the Russian government's hierarchy would stop and depose him to ward off WWII. Then the gloves are off regarding military aid to Ukraine anyway. Basically the same arguments apply regarding Putin's threats to invade those countries aiding Ukraine—unless Putin and his entourage feel emboldened by any durable victory in Ukraine.

Conclusion

The Western response to Russia's largely incompetent yet brutal aggression has been stronger and more resourceful—including the



sending of highly effective Stinger missiles, M777 howitzers, HIMAR (High Mobility Artillery Rocket) systems and other surface-to-air missile and artillery systems including MLRS (Multiple Launch Rocket System)—than some of us initially feared.²³ However, this response still has been too cautious and piecemeal over the last few years in timely ratcheting up effective and enforceable sanctions against Russia and sufficient arms shipments and other aid to Ukraine which it could also use against Russia itself on the latter's own territory. The West imposed these limitations and restrictions out of a misplaced or exaggerated fear in provoking Russia's President Vladimir Putin into World War III.

We believe that the essential steps we propose—far-reaching and enforceable sanctions; full, speedy, sustainable and unrestricted military aid backed up by enhanced armament production; and even sending our own volunteers and regular soldiers if need be—should help to ensure Ukrainian—and our—victory.

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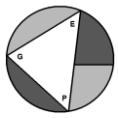
Both Caspar ten Dam and Ab de Buck, currently boardmembers of the Committee for Humanitarian Intervention (CHI), have since 1996 helped to organise the yearly commemoration of the fall of Srebrenica on the nth of



July in The Hague as boardmembers of the former Political Committee Stari Most (PCSM) until 2017. We thank other (former) members and sympathisers of CHI and PCSM for offering their feedback, thereby helping to improve the quality of our article—even if they do not agree with all the standpoints taken in it.¹⁵

Endnotes—Sources

1. This article is built on multiple opinion pieces on the Russo-Ukrainian War published at www.committeehumanitarianintervention.org & www.committeehumanitarianintervention.org
2. The unjustifiability and brutality of the Russian invasion of Ukraine we mentioned in our earlier articles on Bosnian-Serb separatist plans in Bosnia, and argued more extensively in our preceding articles on the Russo-Ukrainian War. One can find these articles, also on Bosnian-Serb separatist plans in Bosnia, esp. at www.committeehumanitarianintervention.org. See further Caspar ten Dam & Ab de Buck, 'How to help Ukraine defeat the Russian Invader and Aggressor' *Forum of EthnoGeoPolitics* Vol.10 Nos.1-2, Winter 2022, pp.205-219.
3. See e.g. Jack Watling and Nick Reynolds, 'Russian Military Objectives and Capacity in Ukraine Through 2024' RUSI (Royal United Services Institute), 13 February 2024; www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/russian-military-objectives-and-capacity-ukraine-through-2024.
4. See for these and other figures <https://uawar.net/stats> (last acc. 7-08-2024). The Ukrainian Defense ministry—whose figures on Russian losses are generally considered reliable, at least far more so than those by its Russian counterpart on both Russian and Ukrainian losses—still refuses to give Ukrainian military losses; on this website and in public statements it suffices with the battle cry 'Heroes don't Die'.
5. Christopher Miller, 'Military briefing: the medics battling on Ukraine's 'second frontline'' *Financial Times*, 26 October 2023;



www.ft.com/content/ofi68efg-d8a8-47c4-8883-017936cdof2f.

6. See www.oryxspioenkop.com (last acc. 18-08-2024). See further <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oryx> (website) (Ibid).

7. Jakub Janovsky, Alexander Black a.o., 'Attack On Europe: Documenting Russian Equipment Losses During The Russian Invasion Of Ukraine' *Oryx*, 24 February 2022 [apparent error: probably meaning sometime early August 2024]; www.oryxspioenkop.com/2022/02/attack-on-europe-documenting-equipment.html.

8. Jakub Janovsky, Alexander Black a.o., 'Attack On Europe: Documenting Ukrainian Equipment Losses During The Russian Invasion Of Ukraine' *Oryx*, 24 February 2022 [apparent error: probably sometime early August 2024].

9. See Kathryn Armstrong, 'Ukraine war: Zelensky says 31,000 troops killed since Russia's full-scale invasion' *BBC News*, 25 February 2024; www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-68397525.

10. Ibid (quote).

11. Nataliya Bugayova, 'Putin Is Vulnerable: Western Policy Masks Russian Weakness' *Institute for the Study of War* (ISW), 14 August 2024, p.2 (downloadable pdf-file); <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/putin-vulnerable-western-policy-masks-russian-weakness>.

12. Ibid, 27-28 May 2024, Principal Findings (quote); www.crisisgroup.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/270-ukraine-hold-the-line_o.pdf.

13. See Frederick W. Kagan, Kimberly Kagan a.o., *Ukraine and the Problem of Restoring Maneuver in Contemporary War* ISW, 12 August 2024; www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/ukraine-and-problem-restoring-maneuver-contemporary-war.

14. See esp. Nieuwsuur (Newshour), 'Steeds nieuwe sancties voor Rusland, maar worden die ook nageleefd? (Each time new sanctions for Russia, but are these complied with?)' *NPO 2*, 25 June 2024; <https://nos.nl/nieuwsuur/artikel/2526040>.

15. See e.g. Anthony Zurcher, James Waterhouse & Jacqueline Howard, 'Ukraine Russia war: US House passes crucial aid deal worth \$61bn' *BBC News*, 21 April 2024; www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-68848277.



16. On early reports see e.g. Ivana Kottasová, Darya Tarasova, Daria Tarasova-Markina & Olga Voitovych, 'Russia says Ukrainian troops crossed into its territory and launched 'massive attack'' *CNN World/Europe*, 7 August 2024; <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/08/07/europe/russia-ukrainian-troops-cross-border-intl/index.html>. Kyiv Post, 'Ukrainian Forces Advance 'Up to 10km' Into Russia's Kursk Region – ISW' *Kyiv Post*, 8 August 2024; www.kyivpost.com/post/37077.
17. See e.g. MENAFN, 'Pentagon claims Ukraine is not permitted to utilize long-range missiles in Kursk' *MENAFN* (Middle East North Africa Financial Network), 18 August 2024; <https://menafn.com/1108572500/Pentagon-claims-Ukraine-is-not-permitted-to-utilize-long-range-missiles-in-Kursk>.
18. Alas, "Even though Ukraine's F-16s do not come directly from the US, but via the Netherlands and Denmark, Washington's [current restrictive] policy may amount to a blanket ban affecting Western weapons": Keir Giles, 'Are Ukraine's F-16s another case of too little, too late?' *Chatham House*, 3 September 2024; www.chathamhouse.org/2024/09/are-ukraines-f-16s-another-case-too-little-too-late. See further e.g. Hugh Cameron, 'Netherlands Says Ukraine Can Use Its F-16s To Strike Russian Territory' *Newsweek*, 29-30 August 2024; www.newsweek.com/netherlands-ukraine-f-16s-russia-territory-1946098.
Sanne Wass, 'Ukraine Must Be Allowed to Use F-16s Inside Russia, Denmark Says' *Bloomberg*, 31 August 2024; www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-08-31/ukraine-must-be-allowed-to-use-f-16s-inside-russia-denmark-says.
19. See e.g. Ben Farmer, 'We need to kill them so they don't come here': Ukrainian troops celebrate chance to strike Russia' *The Telegraph*, 5 June 2024; www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2024/06/05/ukraine-soldiers-russian-territory-joe-biden/. See for more background esp. George Barros, 'Putin's Safe Space: Defeating Russia's Kharkiv Operation Requires Eliminating Russia's Sanctuary' *Institute for the Study of War (ISW)*, 13 May 2024; <https://understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/putins-safe-space-defeating-russias-kharkiv-operation-requires-eliminating-russias/>.
20. See e.g. By Radina Gigova & Maria Kostenko, 'Zelensky says Ukraine 'getting stronger' in Kursk as his troops blow up second bridge' *CNN News*, 18 August



2024; <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/08/18/europe/zelensky-kursk-incursion-second-bridge-intl/index.html>. Andrew E. Kramer, 'Ukraine Strikes Bridges in Russia, Aiming to Entrap Troops' *New York Times*, 19 August 2024; www.nytimes.com/2024/08/19/world/europe/ukraine-attacks-russia-bridges-border.html.

21. See e.g. Le Monde with Agence France-Presse (AFP), 'Macron tells party leaders France's support to Ukraine has 'no limits'' *Le Monde*, 7 March 2024; www.lemonde.fr/en/politics/article/2024/03/07/macron-tells-party-leaders-no-limits-to-france-s-ukraine-support_6595283_5.html.

22. Perhaps the West did threaten Putin with a drop of their military restrictions on Ukraine if he would ever strike Ukraine with nuclear bombs. If so, this warning may have proved effective as a deterrence. Even so it is questionable whether Putin would ever be willing and able to 'go nuclear' at any rate given the likely consequences (including a coup against him). In other words, even without any military restrictions on Ukraine to strike targets in Russia, it would still be very unlikely that Putin can 'go nuclear' even if he wishes to.

23. See Caspar ten Dam, 'State of the World and our Research Projects related to EthnoGeoPolitics: Observations on the Conundrum of Identities, Interests and Resolutions of Conflict by Diplomacy, Deterrence—or War' *Forum of EthnoGeoPolitics* Vol.9 Nos.1-2, Winter 2021, esp. pp.10-12.

24. See <https://starimost.nl> & <https://committeehumanitarianintervention.org>.

NB: do you have any comments on Ten Dam's & De Buck's article? Please send these to info@ethnogeopolitic.org or by contactform at www.ethnogeopolitics.org. We state in our 'Call and Guidelines for Contributions' in every volume of our journal that any controversial and contestable article published here "does not necessarily mean that we approve of everything that these contributors may say. The contributors themselves are responsible and accountable for their statements"—even if any of them happen to be editors of our journal.