

US: Ukraine: Is a “Negotiated Settlement” a Euphemism for Defeat of Ukraine?

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“Russian artillery is shooting from morning until evening,’ said Volodymyr Pohorilyy, 43, intelligence commander of the Dnipro-1 battalion, which holds several key positions in the region. ‘If our side shoots one their way, we get 10 or 15 back.’

“In some respects, this is one war but two distinct campaigns,’ said Michael Kofman, a Russian military analyst at Virginia-based CNA. ‘The first was to decide whether or not Ukraine would survive as an independent state — and Russia lost that conflict decisively. ... This second phase is about what territory that independent Ukrainian state will ultimately control, and that remains very much in contest.’” So [reported](#) the *Washington Post* on June 3.

You didn’t have to be a military genius to see this coming.

By the end of March, Russia’s attempt to capture Kyiv was stalling and within a couple of weeks it was clear that their new targets would be the Donbas basin and the east coast of Ukraine at least as far as Crimea. Reports made clear that this would be a different battle because that region was flat and wide open, giving Russia’s superior artillery fire power a big advantage.

Biden Delays

That was why by mid April Zelensky was [asking the US](#) for longer range artillery, including the M142 HIMARS medium range missiles which have a range of about 45 miles. Yet it is only now that Biden has committed to sending them, and then it will take several weeks for them to arrive and for the Ukrainian troops be trained to use them. In other words, there will be at least a two month delay.

Plus the fact that the US is sending only *four* of these HIMARS systems.

Nor is the US sending its longest range missiles that can reach about 70 miles. Biden claims that is because he doesn’t want Ukraine to shoot into Russia itself, but that makes no sense for two reasons: First is that Zelensky has pledged not to and it is highly unlikely that he can or will violate his pledge to Biden. Second, and more to the point, much of the border with Russia is still under Ukrainian control. Kharkiv, which apparently is still under Ukrainian control, is only 10 miles from the border. So Ukrainian forces could still bombard Russia itself even with these medium range HIMARS missiles.

A Negotiated Settlement?

So, why the extended delay? Why the pitifully small numbers of HIMARS missiles sent? Why not the longer range ones?

The answer to these related questions can only be found in the short and longer term goals of the

Biden administration. For weeks now, Oaklandsocialist has been warning that Biden is likely to try to pressure Ukraine into a settlement that will be less than a full withdrawal of Russian troops from all its newly occupied territory. We have seen comments to that effect from various academics, foreign policy “experts”, etc.

Biden himself is making that clear: In a [May 31 op-ed](#) in the *New York Times*, Biden himself wrote: “The United States will continue to work to strengthen Ukraine and support its efforts to achieve a negotiated end to the conflict.” This was not a one-off comment. On June 3, CNN reported that “US officials have in recent weeks been meeting regularly with their British and European counterparts to discuss the potential frameworks for a ceasefire and for ending the war through a negotiated settlement.”

Biden swears up and down that the terms of such a settlement would be entirely up to Zelensky, that he won’t pressure Zelensky into agreeing to anything that he (Zelensky) doesn’t want to accept. Biden doesn’t have to say a word; he can just let the situation itself create the pressure.

Biden’s Goals

Biden’s goals are clear:

He and the major wings of the US capitalist class see the necessity of making the US still seem to be the wealthier and more stable option to Russian capitalism. Also, complete passivity would leave US allies around the world look even more for other potential allies, especially both Russia and China. His appeals for “democracy” and “international order and rule of law” have to have some sort of basis in action. Also, if Putin and Russian imperialism is allowed to invade Ukraine without any loss, that will encourage them to go even further, thereby weakening the influence of US and Western European imperialism. And finally, of course, they want to keep Ukraine as a source of raw materials and an outlet for US capital investment. Those are the reasons why he could not just stand passively by and simply oppose the invasion with words (as Trump would have done, if even that.)

On the other hand, he and the bulk of US imperialism are terrified of an all-out conflagration in Ukraine, to say nothing of a direct military confrontation between the US and Russia. That is why he hesitated so long and did so little as far as providing the more powerful artillery.

However, the possibility of negotiations leading to the withdrawal of Russian forces even to their situation prior to February 24 is just about zero. In fact, those forces have started shelling Odessa, which may mean Putin intends to try to advance all the way down the coast of Ukraine. This would create a continuous land bridge from Russia to Moldova and the Russian seized enclave of Transnistria. Russian troops also seem to be advancing in Luhansk.

So, the four HIMARS systems being sent to Ukraine seem to be more to appease Zelensky and slow down Russia’s advance than to actually reverse the present tide. It’s probably more of a threat to Putin along the lines of “You see these missiles? You’d better come to the negotiating table and negotiate in good faith with Zelensky before we send some *serious* weaponry to Ukraine.”

Putin’s Position

This does not seem it will work. On June 3, the Washington Post [reported](#) “Russian President Vladimir Putin is digging in for a long war of attrition over Ukraine and will be relentless in trying to use economic weapons, such as a blockade of Ukrainian grain exports, to whittle away Western support for Kyiv, according to members of Russia’s economic elite.... Putin ‘believes the West will become exhausted,’ said one well-connected Russian billionaire... Western leaders are vulnerable to election cycles, and ‘he believes public opinion can flip in one day.’”

In any case, regardless of what Putin believes the US and Western Europe will do, he cannot concede all that newly-seized territory back to Ukraine. Doing so would almost certainly mean his removal from office and possibly from this planet (i.e. death). So no negotiations at this point can possibly lead to a complete Russian withdrawal from its newly seized territories. That can only be accomplished by a complete rout of Russian forces.

There may be something we are missing here, but it is very difficult to see such a rout being accomplished unless (a) Ukraine receives far more heavy duty artillery and similar weaponry; or (b) the Russian troops break out in open revolt. Or a combination of the two. There are signs of the latter, but it's impossible to tell from here how close a mass open revolt may be. In any case, the more the Russian troops are defeated on the battlefield, the more such a revolt is possible.

Zelensky

Meanwhile, Zelensky recently reported that Ukraine is experiencing between 60 to 100 troops killed per day and several times that number being wounded. Previously, he had had a policy of refusing to reveal Ukraine casualties. Is Zelensky trying to prepare the Ukrainian people for a concession to Putin's invasion?

More to the point, what is likely to happen if Zelensky makes any significant concession to Putin's invasion? From here it's impossible to know for sure, but it seems very possible that Zelensky's popularity would suffer significantly. What would replace him? There is a brave but small left in Ukraine. It seems possible (and this is the guess of an outsider) that the nationalist far right would gain a greater base. If Putin manages to retain a significant portion of Donbas as well as the coast down to Crimea, that would leave any Kyiv government and Ukraine itself in an extremely weak situation, with a much weakened economy. It would have lost much of its industrial base as well as much of its access to maritime export of grain.

Possible Outcome

We also have to consider the situation in any territory that Putin has seized. So far, a reported 6.7 million Ukrainians have fled their homes since the invasion. The overwhelming majority of them would be from the areas where fighting has happened and/or are controlled by Russia. Luhansk had [2.1 million people](#) prior to the invasion. Mariupol had about 430,000 and an estimated 100,000 are [reported](#) to remain as of May 19.

Already, Russia is moving towards overtly annexing some of these regions. They are giving residents Russian passports, establishing Russian as the official language and introducing the Russian ruble as the official currency. It is difficult to see how most of these residents would return and even more difficult to see why Putin would want them to return if he retains control over these regions. In that case, it seems likely that Putin would introduce a settlement program in any regions he retains control over. Something similar to what Israel is doing on the West Bank, but not into formal distinct settlements but as part of the general population. After all, the remaining Ukrainian population would be simmering with rage and rebellion. "Why not simply replace them?" would be Putin's logic.

Militarily, this would also seem necessary from Putin's point of view. His forces would have conquered the area through bombardment from afar - not entirely different from aerial bombardment - at least as much as through ground troops. As the US learned in Iraq, though, it's one thing to overthrow a government (or in Ukraine's case, a government's control in a region) through bombardment; it's something entirely different to control the population without "boots on the ground". That is exactly what seems to be Putin's weak point, so if the population won't yield, then replace them. Similar to the Israeli settlers in the West Bank, these Russian settlers would

likely be the most extreme, far right, nationalists. They would be an attractive objective for attacks from Ukrainian nationalists both within and outside those annexed regions.

In other words, what seems very possible is a situation in some ways similar to Israel's occupation of the West Bank but many times more intense and more widespread if a negotiated settlement is reached before a mass military defeat of the Russian invasion. This sort of destabilization is exactly what Biden and the Western governments are trying to avert, but being the capitalist governments that they are, they cannot engage in anything more than short term pragmatic thinking.

“NATO made him invade?”

Overall, the course of this entire invasion makes a mockery of the claim that the expansion of NATO was even a serious motive. From massive Russian war crimes and atrocities to its steps toward outright annexation, the invasion is clearly and overwhelmingly motivated by old fashioned imperialist expansion. Period.

Western left

The Western left is divided into several camps. Almost all of it ritually “opposes” the invasion, but most of it equally opposes establishing the conditions for that invasion's defeat - namely, arming Ukraine. Some call for a negotiated settlement.

This means in effect supporting the worst part of Biden's policy while opposing the part that can actually help Ukraine. They in effect [take the position](#) of Putin's puppet Donald Trump! (See the quote to the left.) Others don't offer illusions in negotiations but simply call for unity between the Russian and the Ukrainian working class. That sounds very nice in the abstract, but such unity is impossible until the bulk of the Russian working class opposes Putin's invasion and Great Russian chauvinism in action. Such opposition is highly unlikely unless the invasion is militarily defeated, and that cannot happen without Ukraine receiving arms from the West. So this wing of the socialist left advances a call that is correct in the abstract while at the same time in effect opposing the very steps that can lead to exactly that unity - the military defeat of the invasion.

These left forces include such “peace and justice” and “anti-imperialist” groups in the US as Code Pink, socialist groups like “Left Voice”, and in Europe such groups as “[The Left](#)”, which is a group of “left” delegates to the EU parliament as well as various socialist groups of various sizes.

Unions' Support for Ukraine

So far a few unions in the West have taken a principled position. In Britain, the Commercial and Public Services Union has taken a very [positive position](#) and also voted to affiliate with the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign. In the United States, the Communication Workers of America (CWA) Local 7250 has passed an [excellent resolution](#). Union members can use these two examples to encourage their own unions to follow suit. Within the socialist left a serious discussion is necessary about how and why so much of it has sunk to such a state of confusion and even worse and how we can advance from here. In this process, the forces of the left in Ukraine can play a central role. We are facing some grave dangers, but as they say, every danger is also an opportunity.

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