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CENJOWS

# POINT OF INFLECTION IN RUSSO-UKRAINE WAR: WHAT MAY LIE AHEAD?

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# CENTRE FOR JOINT WARFARE STUDIES



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WHAT MAY LIE AHEAD?**



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### Premise

This work is based on the premise that the on-going Russo-Ukraine war has just passed a point of inflection, as the 'real winners' of the war continue to keep the war flames burning. The warring nations and the suffering peoples are only the 'tools' to keep the war machine (read windfall profit machine) running for the said winners (sic). What may lie ahead on this trajectory is the end product of the work.



Source: <https://www.voanews.com/a/moscow-blames-west-for-ukraine-s-long-range-weapon-strikes-inside-russia-/7616955.html>

## The Point of Inflection

In close to 900 days that have gone by, much has happened in the Russo-Ukraine war. For the starters, there was a nearly failed Russian pre-emptive strike followed by a classic example of how an armoured thrust in the blitzkrieg style should not have been conducted. There was massacre by the Ukrainian small drones and anti-tank missiles scoring big kills on the Russian fire arm. There were MANPADs at every nook and corner of the tactical battle area overwhelming the Russian attack helicopters and scoring many a kill. There were rock-solid Russian defensive lines that stood firm as the Ukrainian counter offensive petered out...<sup>1</sup>. There were big gains by Ukraine in the naval kills on the Russian Black Sea fleet<sup>2</sup>. Finally, there is an emergence of a renewed Russian onslaught threatening to penetrate deep into the Ukrainian heartland. \

This onslaught has brought about some of the bloodiest battles in the entire war. Starting with the Battle of Bakmut in eastern Donbas region that raged for nearly a year (Jul 2022 to May 2023) and culminated just prior to the counteroffensive rolling in. It resulted in more than 20,000 Russian soldiers killed and some 80000 injured, making it the bloodiest battle after WWII. The Russian offensive soaked in heavy human and material loss continued. The next major success came in Feb 2024 in the fall of the city of Avdiivka. This also took the heavy toll of 17000 Russian soldiers killed and some 30000 injured (per Ukraine). In all this while in the war, one thing remained constant; i.e. except for the drones (both in air and on sea) that struck far inside Russian territory and in the Black Sea, the war arsenal of the US and West that Ukraine had got over the years, continued to be used only in the Ukrainian battlefields. Something started to change in May 2024

Continuing on the spree of inching forward to capture more and more of the Ukrainian territory (albeit at cost of heavy casualties) the Russian forces, in early May 2024 started to advance towards the North and NE side of Kharkiv the second biggest city of Ukraine. A three pronged drive headed towards the town centre, fighting a bloody battle as Ukrainians fought bravely village-to-village. (see map).



Ukrainians were in a precarious state. They were running low on ammunition and were getting thinly spread across a nearly 1000+ km frontline. Kharkiv Oblast sits very close (25 miles) to the Russian town of Belgorod. Belgorod fortifications served as a firm base to amass Russian troops, as well as, rendered support to the offensive through massed artillery and air attacks.<sup>3</sup> Ukraine could not hit Belgorod with EU/US weapons as these were mandated not to be used inside Russian territory. Ukraine was getting desperate as the Russian advance continued fighting bloody battles inch-by-inch. The point of inflection was here.

On 29 May French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz stated on record that Ukraine should be allowed to neutralise the military sites (in Russia) from which the attacks (missile and air attacks were originating (Belgorod) in support of the Kharkiv offensive.<sup>4</sup> Within two days of this statement, Germany and France on 31 May, allowed Ukraine to use their weapons in striking inside Russian territory.<sup>5</sup> Preceding this by a day, US President Joe Biden also green-lighted the use of US weapons to strike inside Russian territory.<sup>6</sup>

Following the time and tide and surprising no one, British Foreign Secretary, Lord Cameron also stated that it was for Ukraine to decide how to use the British weapons which could definitely hit Russian targets inside Russian territory.<sup>7</sup> The EU permissions had an insignificant footnote. France and German permission carried the caveat that only the Russian territory from where the Russian offensive in Kharkiv is being supported could be attacked with their weapons<sup>8</sup> while the US put the tag of strikes for 'limited purpose' (implying a NO to the use of long-range missiles such as ATACMS or Army tactical missile systems; range 300 km deep inside Russia<sup>9</sup>). That these lame-duck restrictions were dead-on-arrival (being easily manoeuvrable) was visible even to a blind eye.<sup>10</sup> Ceasing the opportunity without losing a moment, Ukraine started to hit Russian defences in the Belgorod region. In a renewed confidence, Ukraine on Jun 3 reportedly hit a mighty Russian air defence system (PMU 300) using US missiles. 'It burns beautifully' screamed the headlines in vengeance.<sup>11</sup>



Source: <https://www.cnn.com/2024/06/03/europe/ukraine-western-weapons-hit-russian-territory-intl-latam/index.html>

## Ukraine hits a PMU 300 Air Defence System in Russian Territory

It is the sense of the author that it is a point of inflection in the on-going war. Why so? Here are some points in response to this poser:-

- This status represents a new and an unprecedented level of escalation in the war.
- This is for the first time that US weapons are being fired in a direct confrontation inside Russian territory.
- Never ever in the history of NATO it has come into this level direct conflict with Russia.
- As stated, the loose restrictions on the use weapons are at best 'manoeuvrable'.
- The said permissions fundamentally change the status of the west and US from 'supporting Ukraine' to a new high.

The reactions from Russia were on expected lines. Sample what President Putin stated on record :-<sup>12</sup>

- The permission given to Ukraine by some western countries and US to strike inside Russian territory will lead to 'serious problems'.
- Such an action will give Russia the right to supply the weapons of the same class to those parts of the world from where they could strike sensitive facilities of the countries having accorded this permission.
- Our response in responding with similar weapons could be 'asymmetric and disproportionate'.

That the President walked the talk is history. Here is a brief capture of the latest developments :-

- Russia sent a naval 'strike group' that included a nuclear power submarine (Kazan) to Cuba. The Russian vessels came within 100 miles of the US coast.<sup>13</sup> The strike group is reportedly had on board the Kalibr missiles with a range of 340-370 miles.



### **Russian Warships visit Cuba**

Source: <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/americas/cuba/article289062299.html>

- Living up to the cliché 'enemies of enemies are friends', Russia in sending the strike group to Cuba (not a friendly neighbour of US), has in fact, cozied up to its cold war ally. The 'meet-n-greet' was warm and professional. The Flagship (Russian Frigate Gorshkov) fired a 21-gun salute after entering the harbour at Havana only to be acknowledged and responded by Cubans with a cannon fire from colonial era fort built by Spain in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century<sup>14</sup>.
- 'Messaging done', the Russian Strike group composed of Admiral Gorshkov, Nuclear submarine Kazan, oil tanker Pashin and the tug Nikolai Chiker departed the Havana port on 17 Jun 2024.<sup>15</sup> Intelligence reports say that the group's next port of call in the Caribbean may be Venezuela (again, not so friendly neighbour of US).
- Not failing to respond in a kind of return to cold war days, US also sent its nuclear-powered submarine, USS Helena, in the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base in Cuban waters. The Cuban Government considers this base as illegally occupied by US (leased to US as per a treaty in 1903)<sup>16</sup>. Expectedly Cuba declared that USS Helena was 'uninvited and unwelcome'.



Source: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/videos/toi-original/russia-us-face-to-face-in-cuba>

- Not to be left behind either, Canada also sent a patrol Boat Margaret Brooke to the Havana port on 14 Jun.

The tit-for-tat sabre rattling in this manner brought the two cold war rivals dangerously close.

### Ensuring the War in Perpetuity

What happened in the aftermath of the above ominous development is even more sinister. Here are the salient points:-

- In the recently concluded G7 Summit (The Group of Seven Summit) in Apulia Italy, the members have resolved to use the proceeds from the interests generated by the frozen Russia assets (some \$260 Bn; interest \$3.24-5.4 Bn pa)<sup>17</sup> to advance loans to Ukraine to continue its war efforts.<sup>18</sup>
- The said loans will be serviced with the interest proceeds from the Russian frozen assets and hence not to be paid back by Ukraine.
- Since a frozen asset is a locked fund and the interest generation thereon is an activity only governed by time (and not by any geo-political activity), this source of funding is bottom-less and can thus perpetuate the war till eternity. For the starters, there is a plan to engineer a \$50 Bn dollar loan to Ukraine. The funds could be made available as early as the end of the year<sup>19</sup>.

### Some Reflections

Some points are stated:-

- With the point of inflection as described above, the Russo Ukraine war has touched a new and an unprecedented high.

- After WWII, it is for the first time that NATO and Russia and US and Russia are at such a stage of direct and open confrontation, dragging the world to a new level of a danger of an all-out war.
- The tit-for-tat sabre rattling has touched a new high. The world saw a small trailer of it recently (a la Cuba 1962).
- The real winners of this war are neither Russia nor Ukraine, they are the defence and oil companies in US and Europe which are sending (selling) munitions and fuel to Ukraine to keep the war aglow. The year-on-year profits of these companies ever since the war started have pierced the sky and have gone beyond. (further details not covered)
- For such winners, arrangements to keep the war flames torching is a great time of boom. The recent arrangement arrived at by G7 can only be 'music to their ears'.

In this scenario, talking of peace or imagining the end of war is like hoping against hope. Sample the two ends of the Pole as reflected in the diagonally opposite stands of the warring nations for starting peace talks:-

Russia (only stated in parts)<sup>20</sup>

- Complete withdrawal of all Ukrainian troops from the territories of Donesk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson.
- Ukraine to officially notify the abandonment of plans to join NATO.

Ukraine 10-point Proposal (Only stated in part) <sup>21</sup>

- Restoration of country's territorial integrity under the UN Charter.
- Complete withdrawal of Russian forces from occupied lands including the Crimean Peninsula annexed in 2014.

The much publicised Summit for Peace in Ukraine hosted by the Swiss President Voila Amherd on 15-16 Jun 2024 was at best a whimper that fell much short of what they set out to achieve:-

- Climbing down from the initial agenda of 'bringing peace in Ukraine' the same was a watered down to 'building a consensus' for peace in Ukraine. The title of the Summit- 'Path-to Peace' thus sums up its purport and purpose.
- With Russia not joining in, the Summit lost much of its relevance. Not surprisingly Russia dubbed it as an 'irrelevant exercise' and a waste of time and effort.<sup>22</sup>



- Out of 160 countries on the invitee list (that excluded Russia and China) only 78 attended.<sup>23</sup>
- Even the communique issued at the end of the Summit was not signed by several countries of the global South citing Russia's absence and Israel's presence. Some of these countries were India, Saudi Arabia, Mexico, Thailand, South Africa, Indonesia, UAE etc. <sup>24</sup>
- Probably the participants took solace in the understanding that this summit has set into motion the Peace process and hoped that Russia would join sometime into the future.
- The content of the final communique actually reflected the impotency in its end-effect. This was aptly summed up in three non-controversial and non-impacting agreements arrived at after two days of hectic negotiations (1. Nuclear safety and security; 2. Freedom of navigation and food safety and 3. Humanitarian aspects- return of Ukrainian prisoners of war especially the children)

This is where the world stands today – more divided than ever! This is where the two warring nations – at diametrically opposite positions stand! And this is how the war is set out to continue in perpetuity with real winners continuing to make windfall gains all at the cost of great human tragedy and catastrophic doom.

### **DISCLAIMER**

The paper is author's individual scholastic articulation and does not necessarily reflect the views of CENJOWS. The author certifies that the article is original in content, unpublished and it has not been submitted for publication/ web upload elsewhere and that the facts and figures quoted are duly referenced, as needed and are believed to be correct.

### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> "An year of air and air defence war," at [www.vifindia.org](http://www.vifindia.org). Accessed on 10 Jun 2024.

<sup>2</sup> "Russia Ukraine conflict: the down end of the see-saw," at [www.vifindia.org](http://www.vifindia.org). Accessed on 10 Jun 2024

<sup>3</sup> "Kalibr missile Putin's safe space: defeating Russia's Kharkiv operations," at [www.understandingwar.org](http://www.understandingwar.org), Accessed on 15 Jun 2024

<sup>4</sup> "France and Germany say Ukraine should be able to use their weapons to strike inside Russia," at [www.cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com) . Accessed on 17 Jun 2024.

<sup>5</sup> Germany allows Ukraine to strike targets inside Russia with German Weapons," at [www.politico.eu](http://www.politico.eu) . Accessed on 17 Jun 2024.

<sup>6</sup> "Biden allows Ukraine to use US arms in strikes on Russian territory," at [www.apnews.com](http://www.apnews.com). Accessed on 17 Jun 2024.

<sup>7</sup> "Putin warns Russia could provide weapons to strike west," at [www.bbc.com](http://www.bbc.com). Accessed on 18 Jun 2024.

<sup>8</sup> 8 ibid

<sup>9</sup> "Will using western weapons on Russia help Ukraine change the war/" at [www.bbc.com](http://www.bbc.com) . Accessed on 18 Jun 2024.

<sup>10</sup> 9 ibid.

<sup>11</sup> "Ukraine claims it hit missile system in Russian territory with western weapons.," at [www.cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com) . Accessed on 18 Jun 2024.

<sup>12</sup> 10 ibid.

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<sup>13</sup> “Putin ‘flexes his missiles by sending warships within 100 miles of US,” at [www.cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com). Accessed on 18 Jun 2024.

<sup>14</sup> “Russian ships arrive in Cuba as cold war allies strengthen their ties,” at [www.cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com). Accessed on 18 Jun 2024.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid*

<sup>16</sup> “How did Americans acquire the Guantanamo Base.” at [www.quora.com](http://www.quora.com). Accessed on 18 Jun 2024.

<sup>17</sup> “New \$50 bn loan to Ukraine is backed by frozen assets.” at [www.pbs-org.cdn.ampproject.org](http://www.pbs-org.cdn.ampproject.org). Accessed on 18 Jun 2024.

<sup>18</sup> “Why using Russian assets to fund Ukraine is fraught,” at [www.bloomberg.com](http://www.bloomberg.com). Accessed on 18 Jun 2024.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid*

<sup>20</sup> “Russia’s Putin sets out conditions for peace talks with Ukraine.” Accessed on 19 Jun 2024.

<sup>21</sup> “What is Zelenskyy’s 10-point peace plan?” at [www.ukraine.ua](http://www.ukraine.ua). Accessed on 19 Jun 2024.

<sup>22</sup> “Ukraine news: Russia absent from Swiss peace summit,” at [www.ctvnews.ca](http://www.ctvnews.ca). Accessed on 20 Jun 2024.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid*

<sup>24</sup> “Ukraine peace summit: Why some countries refused to sign the plan?” at [www.aljazeera.com](http://www.aljazeera.com). Accessed on 20 Jun 2024.