

EXPANDING POLITICAL GOALS: AMERICA'S FAILING STRATEGY IN UKRAINE WAR

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Abstract

Understanding the political goal of a war is essential, as it helps assess the nature of the conflict, its likely duration, the risks adversaries are willing to take, and the costs they are prepared to bear. A political goal can be offensive, as seen in the case of U.S. civil and military support for Ukraine and NATO's enlargement, which Russia perceives as provocative, aiming to diminish its strategic buffer zone. Conversely, a political goal can be defensive, as in Russia's efforts to maintain its sphere of influence over Ukraine, which it has consistently regarded as a red line. Setting the right political objective in war is crucial, as it shapes strategic decisions, the defense of vital national interests, and ultimately, the difference between victory and defeat. This paper analyzes the United States' political goal in the war in Ukraine and examines its implications for how the conflict might end.

Keywords: Russia, Ukraine, United States, Political Goals, Sphere of Influence, National Interests

Introduction

Politics is part and parcel of the war and cannot be kept away from it as the power of politics is enormous. It influences the outcome of any military operation or how an army campaign works. Politics plays a vital role in any war because the pathways of wars are altered by the decisions of the politicians – the political leaders. The politicians sanction the amount of force that may be used during a particular battle, and this decision plays a crucial role in altering the result of a war. The ruling on the amount of force used during a military campaign is more of a political decision taken by the political leadership. Without a clear political goal, any military strategy would lose its direction as it extracts credibility from the political will and a clear political goal set by the political leadership.

If war is an act of politics, as described by Carl Von Clausewitz, then without a clear political goal, army leaders will be hesitant to proceed with the execution of war as a political act. Since using force is political, politicians need to consider the means and the end. Thus, setting the right political objective in war is crucial, as it

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shapes strategic decisions, the defense of vital national interests, and ultimately, the difference between victory and defeat.

In this context, it is necessary to understand the key questions: How is politics playing its role in the American-led war in Ukraine? Is the American political strategy only limited to deterring and coercing Russia? Is this strategy of deterrence and coercion not producing corresponding global repercussions? Is deterring and coercing Russia not harming the entire world, as in the globalised economy, all states are interdependent? The world as a whole will keep suffering if the political element of the American strategy of fighting this war remains without a clear end goal. The starting point to address the political aspect of this strategy is first to clearly understand the United States' political goal of supporting Ukraine in fighting this war. The unlimited power that the United States has acquired is creating two problems. First, the United States finds it challenging to convert this power into influence, a positive influence that breeds global acceptance and approval instead of creating global resentment. Two, power is employed by the United States to only serve its national interests, not global ones.

America must concede that globalisation is a phenomenon that not only enhances but limits the United States' capacity to use power to influence the events overseas.¹ Global challenges cannot be addressed by acting alone, such as 'combating the spread of infectious diseases, preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction, defeating terrorism, securing access to open markets, protecting human rights, promoting democracy, and preserving the environment all of which require the cooperation of other countries.'² Nobody has put it better than Joseph Nye, who states why the US can no longer have a hegemonic foreign policy in his book, 'The Paradox of American Power. He writes, "power today is distributed among countries in a pattern that resembles a complex three-dimensional chess game. "One dimension is military power, where the United States enjoys an unrivaled advantage, and the power distribution is therefore unipolar. The second dimension is economic, where power among the United States, Europe, and Japan is distributed more equally. The third dimension is transnational relations, where power is widely dispersed beyond government control. This is the realm of nonstate actors—from multinational companies and money managers to terrorist organisations and crime syndicates to nongovernmental organisations and the international media."³ Nye concludes by writing, 'When you are in a three-dimensional game, you will lose if you focus on the interstate military board and fail to notice the other boards and the vertical connections among them.'⁴ The problem with the United States is that it has conducted militarised foreign policy since the 9/11 attacks happened.

Through its political and military interventions abroad, it has sought global superiority more than global leadership.

The underlying elements of national power, such as demography, geography, and natural resources, matter. However, history shows these are insufficient to determine how the countries will shape their future. The strategic decisions countries make that matter most—how they organise themselves internally, what they invest in, whom they choose to align with and who wants to align with them, which wars they fight, which they deter, and which they avoid.⁵ When US Secretary of Defense in the Trump administration, James Mattis unveiled the US Defense Strategy, he emphasised using American power not as a means of global leadership but as global superiority.⁶ He said, “For decades the United States has enjoyed uncontested or dominant superiority in every operating domain... we could generally deploy our forces when we wanted, assemble them where we wanted, and operate how we wanted. Every domain is contested today — air, land, sea, space and cyberspace.”⁷ The Washington Post writes that for the United States, ‘Power means, first and foremost, classic military power, as both the new U.S National Security Strategy and the new defense strategy clearly state.’⁸

United States Political Goals

The United States doesn't seem to have a clear political goal for war in Ukraine. This may be due to the United States' unwillingness to take risks. To achieve a political goal, political leaders must take strategic risks. If such risks are not taken, the political objective of any war is difficult to achieve. Non-strategic risks prevent strategic risk taking. Two such non-strategic risks that dominate the Ukrainian war agenda for the United States are public opinion and re-election. Since the start of the Cold War, almost all American administrations have taken strategic risks not for factoring in the ends and means in fighting wars but with public opinion and re-election.⁹ If the wars are to be lost and not won, why engage in such wars? St Augustine says one should only engage in battles one can win, and after him, St Thomas Aquinas.¹⁰ So, what is the United States' agenda of fighting the war in Ukraine? What is at stake for the United States, unlike Russia, it is not an existential threat and thus there is no big motivation to take strategic risks. Winning a war requires necessary and sufficient means; adequate means are only employed if the war is essential enough to win. Maybe the United States is not interested in taking risks, and if that is the case, they should allow the Europeans to lead in the European defense against Russia. The stakes for this conflict are more significant for Europeans than they are for Americans.¹¹

President Zelensky keeps asking the United States and the western world to do more. Still, the question remains what are the United States' strategic interests and ultimate political objective in the Ukraine war? Former United States ambassador to Russia claims, 'we have a security interest in [helping Ukraine defeat Russia]. Let's put it very simply: if Putin wins in Donbas and is encouraged to go further into Ukraine, that will be threatening to our NATO allies.'¹² Former National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley asserts that the United States is concerned about deterring Russian president Vladimir Putin "from thinking he can repeat this performance in the next five or ten years."¹³

Biden administration call for "weaken[ing] Russia" by bleeding it in Ukraine: as a National Security Council spokesperson put it, "one of our goals has been to limit Russia's ability to do something like this again" by undercutting "Russia's economic and military power to threaten and attack its neighbors."¹⁴ Unlike President Donald Trump, who spent four years praising and courting Putin, Biden has cast his Russian policy as part of a broader global contest between democracy and dictatorship.¹⁵ President Joe Biden thinks that the wide version of this war is not related to Russia but potential aggrandisement by other actors like China. Advancing this argument, he wrote in March 2022 that, 'If Russia does not pay a heavy price for its actions, it will send a message to other would-be aggressors that they too can seize territory and subjugate other countries.'¹⁶

President Joe Biden also asserts that, 'throughout our history, we've learned that when dictators do not pay the price for their aggression, they cause more chaos and engage in more aggression.'¹⁷ The United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken considers the West's supported United States war in Ukraine as an attempt to protect the world order. He says that, 'the international rules-based order that's critical to maintaining peace and security is being put to the test by Russia's unprovoked and unjustified invasion of Ukraine.'¹⁸ Not supporting Ukraine would mean the United States failed to back democracies worldwide. It would also mean that the United States is ready to tolerate the violation of state sovereignty, something it cannot afford, as on this principle rests the foundations of the liberal international order. But, does supporting Ukraine mean bringing an end to this conflict? Or is the United States goal more tuned to weaken Russia permanently by destabilising President Putin's regime and his hold on power?

Considering the likely American strategic reasons and its intended political goals for supporting war in Ukraine, one must ask, are the American strategic reasons and political goals for fighting war in Ukraine reasonable and rationale? John Mearsheimer and Sebastian Rosato relate the subject of rationality with two essential elements – outcomes and theory.

To explain outcome as an essential part of rationality, one may consider the American support for war in Ukraine as part of rational policy making. Mearsheimer and Rosato suggest that rational actors often fail to achieve their goals, not because of foolish thinking but because of factors they can neither anticipate nor control.¹⁹ They further propagate that, “there is also a powerful tendency to equate rationality with morality since both qualities are considered features of enlightened thinking. But this might be a mistake as well. Rational policies can violate widely accepted standards of conduct and may even be murderously unjust.”²⁰

American actions both in Ukraine and now in the Middle East are demonstrating how rational policymaking can still be murderously unjust. The second element of rationality is for a policy maker to be theory driven, which may be seen in the light of President Putin’s action in Ukraine. Both Mearsheimer and Rosato write that, ‘there is solid evidence that Putin and his advisers thought in terms of straightforward balance-of-power theory, viewing the West’s efforts to make Ukraine a bulwark on Russia’s border as an existential threat that could not be allowed to stand.’²¹ Both the realist scholars think that for President Putin this was a war of self-defense aimed at preventing the adverse shift in the balance of power.²² In President Putin’s own words he believed that, “with NATO’s eastward expansion the situation for Russia has been becoming worse and more dangerous by the year... We cannot stay idle and passively observe these developments. This would be an absolutely irresponsible thing to do for us. It is not only a real threat to our interests but to the very existence of our state and its sovereignty. It is the redline, which we have spoken about on numerous occasions. They have crossed it.”²³

America’s National Security Strategies and Achievement of Political Goals

The National Security Strategy (NSS) is a formal American document required annually by law. It highlights the president’s vision and priorities for threats at home and abroad. It is interesting to draw a comparison between President Obama’s NSS and that of President Biden. President Obama left office in January 2017 after spending two terms trying to mitigate strategic risks to the United States’ security because his predecessor decided to achieve unachievable political objectives by fighting unnecessary wars. President Obama’s NSS was unique in that it emphasised the role of American leadership, which can be judged from the fact that the word leadership or its derivative appeared more than 90 times in his administration’s 29-page strategy paper.²⁴

The other essential element of Obama's NSS was a warning when he spelled out a cautious approach to United States interventions in hot spots around the world, warning against a rush to 'over reach' and knee-jerk calls for 'military power.'²⁵ He even argued that, 'the challenges we face require strategic patience and persistence.'²⁶ His NSS outlined eight strategic risks to the American interests and they included; catastrophic attack on U.S homeland and critical infrastructure, attacks against U.S citizens abroad and our allies, global economic crisis, proliferation and use of weapons of mass destruction, international infectious disease outbreaks, climate change, major energy market disruptions and security consequences associated with weak and failing states.²⁷ Out of these eight strategic risks highlighted by President Obama to American security, the 'attack against American allies' is the only risk to American interests that one can consider as a motive for the United States' support of Ukraine in this war. However, seen in the historical context, Ukraine is a former republic of the Soviet Union and part of the Russian sphere of influence and the harsh geopolitical reality for Russia is that it needs a non-NATO and non-EU Ukrainian status for maintaining a security balance within its sphere of influence and against Europe. 'It was in 2008, at the Bucharest, Romania summit, that NATO members promised Georgia and Ukraine membership in NATO. Former President George W. Bush had championed a more immediate path to entry but was rebuffed by France and Germany. Since then, Russia, by attacking both nations, has sent unambiguous warnings of the cost if they do.'²⁸ Fifteen years apart, two leaders of France also expressed similar views about how Russia feels insecure because of Ukraine. Firstly, in 2008 former French Prime Minister Francois Fillon said, 'We are opposed to the entry of Georgia and Ukraine [in NATO] because we think it is not the right response to the balance of power in Europe and between Europe and Russia.'²⁹ Secondly, after meeting with President Putin in February 2022, French President Emmanuel Macron said, 'there is no security for Europeans if there is no security for Russia.'³⁰

President Obama's NSS did not consider Russia and China strategic risks to American interests. Still, President Donald Trump in his NSS termed China the most significant long-term threat to the geopolitical and geoeconomic security of the United States.³¹ One of the most crucial aspects of his NSS was the definition of 'America first', an America that was safe, prosperous, and free at home. It was an America with the strength, confidence, and will to lead abroad.³² President Trump's NSS termed China and Russia as powers attempting to erode American security and prosperity. They were determined to make economies less free and fair, growing their militaries, and controlling information and data to repress their societies and expand their influence.³³

Another change in American strategy during President Trump's time was reflected in his national defense strategy (NDS), which stated that, 'inter-state strategic competition and not terrorism was the primary concern in the US national security.'³⁴

President Biden's NSS remained focused on China and Russia as emerging geopolitical threats but was simultaneously focused on preventing the current world order from being reshaped. President Biden's NSS states that, 'The People's Republic of China harbors the intention and, increasingly, the capacity to reshape the international order in favor of one that tilts the global playing field to its benefit, even as the United States remains committed to managing the competition between our countries responsibly and Russia's brutal and unprovoked war on its neighbor Ukraine has shattered peace in Europe and impacted stability everywhere, and its reckless nuclear threats endanger the global non-proliferation regime.'³⁵ President Biden's NSS further emphasises that autocrats are working overtime to undermine democracy and export a model of governance marked by repression at home and coercion abroad.³⁶ His NSS also resolves to ' build the strongest and broadest possible coalition of nations that seek to cooperate, while competing with those powers that offer a darker vision and thwarting their efforts to threaten our interests.'³⁷ President Biden's NSS also claims that, 'the idea that we should compete with major autocratic powers to shape the international order enjoys broad support that is bipartisan at home and deepening abroad.'³⁸ It also claims, 'Americans will support universal human rights and stand in solidarity with those beyond our shores who seek freedom and dignity.'³⁹ President Biden's NSS labels Russia as a power that, 'poses an immediate threat to the free and open international system, recklessly flouting the basic laws of the international order today, as its brutal war of aggression against Ukraine has shown.'⁴⁰

The American-led coalition fought the war in Afghanistan with almost similar strategic interests as described in the NSSs of the succeeding Presidents and with an end goal of promoting democracy in Afghanistan. Two decades later and after many American generals tried different military strategies to give direction to war in Afghanistan, the United States failed to achieve its end goal and had to withdraw. There was a lack of political strategy in Afghanistan as military operations seemed to proceed without any link with the political strategy. If politics understood the use of force, would it use the military to deliver what it cannot? Vietnam, Korea, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen and even Palestine are examples, and politicians have repeatedly proved that they fail to understand the use of military as the instrument of war and how it may be used to achieve any political goal. Americans have the political and institutional mechanism that brings the political and the military strategy on one table.

It has the National Security Council, which the President chairs and its participants include the Vice President, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of the Treasury, the Secretary of Defense and the President's National Security Advisor.⁴¹ So, suppose there is a political mechanism and an institution for continuous political and military consultations. In that case, the United States should do well to formulate not multiple but one clear and achievable political goal for its war in Ukraine, without which it only drags the Ukrainian war for the discomfort of the entire world.

Achievement of Political Goal: Willingness to Take Risks in Theatre of Operations

Strategic settings in any theatre of operations determine the risk the political leadership may be willing to undertake. Such a setting determined the employment of only air power in Kosovo (1999) and Libya (2011).⁴² By employing ground troops, NATO was unprepared to take risks in these military campaigns. The willingness to take risks is related to the sensitivity of national interests served by military operations. For the west, if the end goal of war in Ukraine is to keep Ukraine free and democratic, then that goal cannot be achieved through military means, as despite the military aid, the Ukrainian military is no match for the military might of Russia, and so diplomacy needs to be given a chance to succeed. US Congress also does not seem to be any more anxious about a military solution to this war. US Congress has refused to approve \$6bn as the new aid package for Ukraine.⁴³ This suggests that the support of the biggest supporter of the Ukraine war is no longer guaranteed. It also indicates that the US Congress no longer believes that the US goals in Ukraine are any more achievable. To further contextualise this American support from the point of view of President Joe Biden's commitment of supporting this war 'as long as it takes'⁴⁴, one needs to imagine further what would be the American stand on war in Ukraine if the new President comes to the office in next year's elections, and if he be Donald Trump who boasts to be the only American President since the end of World War 2 who hasn't taken America to war, the prospects of American support to Ukrainian War further look very bleak.⁴⁵ The 29 members of the Congress who have opposed further aid to Ukraine wrote in an open letter in how US strategy in Ukraine is flawed and questioned the 'open-ended commitment to supporting the war in Ukraine of an indeterminate nature, based on strategy that is unclear, to achieve a goal yet to be articulated to the public or the Congress.'⁴⁶

The American Congress considers that the United States strategy and its ultimate political goal for fighting the war in Ukraine is unclear and has not yet been articulated to the public or the Congress. Any strategy requires the setting of priorities and also the allocation of resources.

The problem with the United States is that its policy makers have pursued worldwide disparate objectives under an overstretched and militarised foreign policy. These objectives include, 'NATO enlargement, regime changes in the Middle East, and hedging against China without concerning themselves too much as to where the resources would come from or how the parts fit together.'⁴⁷ No one is clear about the United States' strategic priority. Is it containing the rising Eurasian hegemon China? Or is it to weaken Russia and prevent the conflict from spilling into Eastern Europe? Given the recent surge in the Middle Eastern conflict and the allocation of United States time, effort and resources to address this conflict, the United States is now caught balancing its power distribution in three theatres of operations – Ukraine, Western Pacific and Middle East. The United States military engagement in multiple theatres of operations reduces its willingness to take risks in the war in Ukraine. At the same time, President Putin seems more than willing to take risks as is demonstrated by his mobilisation orders and threats to use nuclear weapons to defend what he considers are legitimate Russian national interests.⁴⁸ With no clear United States political goal to fight this war, the United States military strategy is neither able to stop the rise of China nor does it seem to mitigate Russia's resolve to defend what Russia considers are its legitimate national interests in this war.

Graham Allison, an American political scientist and professor at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, states that the significant United States policy failures have resulted from the United States 'refusal to recognise and accept the realities on the ground.'⁴⁹ He states that, 'from General Douglas MacArthur's rush to the Chinese border during the Korean War (which triggered Chinese intervention and a bloody, inconclusive war) to George W. Bush's insistence that NATO offer membership to Georgia and Ukraine (which led to Georgian overconfidence, ending in the country's partial dismemberment by Russia), a stubborn disregard of brute facts has been counterproductive.'⁵⁰ In case of war in Ukraine, the big reality on the ground is the American interference in the Russian sphere of influence. Geopolitics still revolves around spheres of influence that stand out as a central feature of great powers' interests, but the United States does not seem to recognise this. Some of the statements of United States policy makers suggest how the United States believes that the era of maintaining and sustaining spheres of influence has ended. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice described a new world "in which great power is defined not by spheres of influence . . . or the strong imposing their will on the weak."⁵¹ Secretary of State Hillary Clinton declared that "the United States does not recognise spheres of influence."⁵² Secretary of State John Kerry proclaimed that "the era of the Monroe Doctrine is over."⁵³

However, Graham Allison concludes, 'Spheres of influence hadn't gone away; they had been collapsed into one, by the overwhelming fact of U.S. hegemony.'⁵⁴

The debate of the sphere of influence is a central debate on determining the viability of the war's political goals of the belligerents. United States as a global hegemon is not ready to respect the other powers' sphere of influence. In contrast, the different powers led by Russia and China are unwilling to forego this geographic and historic reality. 'Historically, great powers have always staked out geographic zones within which they have limited the autonomy of the weaker states often as buffer zones between themselves and potential rival.'⁵⁵ It resulted in the respect of rival powers' declared red lines, but the universalisation of the United States world order gave way to the elimination of the sphere of influences, and in the absence of other powers balancing the United States, the grand American sphere of influence came into being. Nevertheless, with Russia's resurgence and China's rise, this equation changed and both powers started asserting their spheres of influence in pursuit of their political, economic and strategic interests. Only by investing considerable resources and taking significant risks can the United States stop these powers from asserting their sphere of influence. This is precisely what the United States is doing in Ukraine, and the end goal it seeks to gain does not seem to match the means it employs to achieve that goal. Given that Ukraine is Russia's red line, the many political goals that the United States seeks to achieve by fighting this war are not good enough to enable Ukraine's imminent break from Russia's asserted sphere of influence. Considering that China's assertions of sphere of influence in the western Pacific do not seem to go beyond Taiwan and the South China Sea, the best way forward for the United States is to accept the spheres of influence of the other great powers and work along with all powers to make them stable and durable.

In explaining why any strategy fails, one must only determine the mismatch between the employed means and the stated ends. Graham Allison terms it as 'vision blindness' and states that the US twenty-first century wars are a vivid example.⁵⁶ Specific military scenarios in Eastern Europe, Western Pacific, and the Middle East are the very scenarios against which President Obama warned in his NSS, which is something that the United States must avoid as its military overreach. In the bipolar world during the Cold War, spheres of influence took the form of ideologically determined blocs. Functionally, the mutual recognition of Cold War spheres in Europe and (for the most part) the Western Hemisphere reassured both superpowers that their core interests were not threatened, thus reducing the prospect of direct military conflict and (potentially) nuclear war.⁵⁷

On February 4, 1945, President Franklin Roosevelt met with Soviet leader Joseph Stalin and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill at Yalta. An urgent private message had arrived from George Kennan in Moscow. Kennan correctly forecast that the Soviet Union would attempt to maintain control of as much of Europe as it could. The question was what the United States should do about that. Kennan asked, "Why could we not make a decent and definitive compromise with it—divide Europe frankly into spheres of influence—keep ourselves out of the Russian sphere and keep the Russians out of ours?"⁵⁸ As seen in hindsight, seventy-eight years earlier, what George Kennan said about spheres of influence is true even today.

Changing Status Quo

War in Ukraine seems to be a long and unending war. United States pursues multiple political goals in this war, and so it is difficult to determine the achievement of which goal will mean an end to this war. If the war has to end favorably for Ukraine, the United States and its allies, and if they want the status quo to end, they will have to take strategic risks because without taking these risks, a new status quo cannot be achieved. On the other hand, all military operations that Russia has carried out so far, including in Georgia, Crimea and Ukraine, are risk-free in the sense that in none of them NATO's article 5 is involved.⁵⁹ For Americans, this war lacks a clear political goal, and although at the operational level, politics has no role. Still, without political strategy and specification of ends no military strategy can be successful. The biggest challenge for the United States, its allies and NATO in this war is how to deter Russia? There are three ways that Russia may be prevented: through threat of nuclear war, conventional war, or coercion. Possession of nuclear weapons makes any state untouchable and history shows that these weapons are not likely to be used against states that have second strike capability. Russia is an enormous nuclear power, so the threat of nuclear attack will not deter Russia. Atomic deterrence also requires political will and resolve, which Russia demonstrates more than its adversaries in this war.

What about conventional deterrence? The problem with traditional deterrence is that it can drag the war into a protracted war, which it is doing now. The United States lacks the will to take risks and to escalate the war. Russia would never like to escalate the war to Article 5 situations because Russia knows that Article 5 will become useless and obsolete if NATO doesn't respond in a given Article 5 situation. When the deterrent has no will to escalate and the deterred will not take strategic risks because of article 5 situation, then stalemate, prolonged war, and status quo will prevail. In the case of conventional deterrence, the role of European countries in this war gets pronounced.

The central assumption is that the United States may honor its role in article 5, but the other European countries may be reluctant.⁶⁰ Opinion surveys have proved that the public of many European countries is skeptical about the obligation of Article 5 in a given situation.⁶¹ “There are two indications of risk aversion in Europe. One is the lack of willingness to reach 2% of GDP defense spending, despite heavy and persistent US pressure and the self-imposed character of this obligation. Few states in NATO are on track to reach 2% by 2024, the due date; and the richest country of them all, Germany aims to reach only 1.5% by the date.”⁶² The second indicator is alliance support and commitment to NATO. “Only 38% of citizens in NATO states say yes to assisting an ally that is attacked, and among those states Germany stands out with a mere 34%. The Greeks and Italians muster only 25% and only 36% of Czechs and 33% of Hungarians are willing to honor article 5. For France, only 41% support the alliance’s solidarity. If public opinion has it, then there will be no article 5 action in Europe if any ally needs it, how can one expect US solidarity with Europeans who are unwilling to defend themselves?”⁶³

The concept of utilising coercion as an instrument of power in the international system is to pressurise states to prevent the state leaders from doing what they are engaged in. Peter Viggo Jakobsen, a renowned expert on coercion, states that the main criterion for success while employing coercion as an instrument of policy is the political willingness to threaten by massive and rapid use of force.⁶⁴ United States, its allies and NATO are unwilling to do that and would therefore find it difficult to put enough pressure on Russia to change the status quo. This shows the importance of military power and how it can be used to back up other instruments of power. Russia and China are prepared to use military power to defend their vital national interests, but the lack of national interests by the European countries in this war shows the split that the US and Europe may have on the achievement of the United States’ declared political goals in this war. So, the threat of nuclear war is unlikely to deter Russia. In that case, conventional war is only making this war endless and coercion is failing as a military strategy, one fails to understand the strategic thinking of the United States and its allies in achieving the political goals that they have set forth to accomplish.

Conclusion

The analysis in this paper concludes that the United States pursues multiple political goals in its war in Ukraine. Most of these political goals’ futility suggests Russia will not be forced to budge. At the end of the war in Afghanistan, President Joe Biden argued that American troops cannot and should not be fighting in a war that Afghan forces are not willing to fight for themselves.

Similar military scenario is developing in Ukraine. United States and its allies cannot send its troops to fight and Ukrainians alone will find it very hard to defend themselves against the Russian military might. Unlike the United States, Russia has at stake its national prestige, insecurity, and the regime's survival, and all these are significant motivating factors and national interests for which Russia will keep fighting. Both deterrence and coercion, as discussed in the main body of this paper, are not giving the results that the United States wants and winning this war continues to demand more strategic resources. President Obama's NSS emphasised the importance of political leadership and asked if the non-strategic factor of elections in the United States next year should be considered. If President Trump returns to power, then he has already claimed that he will finish the Ukraine war in twenty-four hours. President Biden's NSS accused Russia for initiating an unprovoked war against its neighbor, which is factually incorrect as NATO's encroachment eastwards and the United States' interference in Russia's sphere of influence were sufficient causes to provoke a Russian response. It is also concluded that the United States is not prepared to take strategic risks because of the lack of sensitivity of its involved national interests. Its unwillingness to take strategic risks and the unwillingness of Congress to release an aid package to Ukraine suggests the difficulties that the United States will face in the future in fighting this war. United States military overreach and its military commitment in three theatres of operations, including the Western Pacific and the Middle East, also signifies that the changing global geopolitics may further delay and prevent the United States from achieving the multiple political goals it set out to accomplish in this war.

Endnotes

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