

A Terrible Price in Blood

Assessing Responses and Risks

The world faces complex geopolitical challenges – a web of responses and risks confronting the United States and its allies. From Russia’s ongoing war against Ukraine to the active conflicts in the Middle East with Iran, Hamas, and Israel, it explores the changing dynamics and inter-connectedness of global affairs.

Ben Hodges
General



Today, the United States and its Allies face challenges around the Globe. Russia's war against Ukraine continues, well into its ninth year since Russia first invaded Ukraine and now almost two years since the start of its large-scale invasion. Iranian proxy, Hamas, is actively engaged in a deadly battle with Israeli Defense Forces in Gaza following the shocking Hamas atrocities of October 7. Iran's other proxies, the Houthis and Hezbollah, launch missiles and rockets at Israeli and US troops in the region. Meanwhile China watches. Beijing is waiting to see, if the US and UK and other Western nations have the political will, military capability, and industrial capacity to help Ukraine defeat Russia, limit the war in Gaza from escalating beyond the borders of Israel, help bring about a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine, deter Iran from further strikes against US forces in Syria, and still have enough left to deter China from its own aggression against the Philippines or Taiwan. China, Iran and Russia share a disdain for the international rulesbased order created after World War II from which so many of us have benefited and prospered and which we now seem to take for granted. They see weakness and exploit the lack of trust and coherence in so many of our societies. They see the disastrous conclusion to the 20 years of war in Afghanistan as evidence that no nation can really trust the Western powers as reliable partners.

Ukraine is fighting the battle for us all

Ukraine now fears it may be the next to be abandoned, and with good reason. The Kremlin is the biggest beneficiary from Hamas' attack on Israel as Western attention is diverted from Ukraine. It is not a coincidence that Russia's ally, Iran, stands behind the groups which have attacked Israel.

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The right wing of the Republican Party has decided to oppose support for Ukraine, apparently for no better reason than that their domestic political opponents are in favour of it. Incredible to see the “Party of Reagan” using Kremlin talking points and turning their back on Ukraine which is fighting a Russian invader. Support for Ukraine ought to be self-evident for any American. This is not some far off regional border dispute as one Republican Presidential Candidate





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described it. What's happening in Ukraine is about so much more than Ukraine. American prosperity depends on European prosperity, and European prosperity depends on security, stability and secure food and energy supply chains. The aforementioned rules-based order is under threat from Russia – and Ukraine is the front line in defending that order. In light of what's at stake, the monetary cost for supporting Ukraine is trivial, a few percent of our normal defence spending. The Ukrainians – at a terrible price in blood – are fighting a battle for all of us who consider ourselves part of the Democratic West. And, due to our unwillingness to commit to Ukraine actually defeating Russia, the Ukrainians are fighting with their hands tied behind their back.

Changes in the balance of power

The other major beneficiary of Hamas' attack on Israel is Iran. The Hamas attack on Israel has not only diverted attention and resources from Ukraine, it has also severely damaged hopes for progress in the implementation of the Abraham Accord. Even those Arab nations who don't like Hamas and do fear Iran, are unable or co-operate with Israel in light of the large number of innocent Palestinians who have been killed as a result of IDF operations in the last weeks. Clearly, Hamas is a terrorist organization and their use of innocent people and hospitals as shields is a war crime, but the IDF is still bound under international law to protect innocent people in these operations. Hamas, and Iran, knew that the Israeli government would respond with force as a result of the savage murders of 1200 people and the abduction of over 200. The foreseeable response by

the IDF inevitably undermines Arab-Israeli cooperation and thus changes the balance of power in the region in favour of Iran. Unfortunately, the Netanyahu government with its support for continued illegal settlements in the West Bank and its focus on destruction of Hamas versus working towards a two-state solution while punishing Hamas is unlikely to make progress in achieving such a solution. The mission statement from PM Netanyahu to the IDF, “Destroy Hamas”, is not an achievable end state because it doesn't address the root cause of Hamas.

Military force is only part of the solution

There are calls across the West for a ceasefire: an immediate end to Israel's effort to remove Hamas from control of Gaza. President Biden is correctly resisting these calls, while at the same time encouraging Israel to continue providing operational pauses for the delivery of humanitarian aid into Gaza. He and his tireless Secretary of State, Anthony Blinken, are working with other nations to press Israel and Palestinians to move towards the elusive two-state solution. That plan addresses the root causes of Hamas, rather than purely kinetic operations that don't contribute towards a peaceful, sustainable solution. Military force always delivers only part of the solution. As much as the Israeli ruling coalition may dislike the idea, post-Hamas Gaza will need Arab-led governance. Illegal Jewish settlements in the West Bank must be dissolved. And the IDF must comply with the Law of Armed Conflict, accepting responsibility for the protection of innocent civilians even though Hamas is using them as shields.

In Ukraine, Biden should move to end the war by arming Kyiv to win, not merely to help them “for as long as it takes”. The US and Germany should provide the long-range precision strike capability necessary for destruction of Russian naval, air and logistics facilities in Crimea which would render the peninsula untenable for Russian forces. UK and France have shown that long-range weapons can be given to Ukraine without causing a Russian nuclear attack: there is no reason for timidity from Chancellor Scholz, much less from President Biden.

No time for weakness

Russia’s war against Ukraine is the result of failed deterrence by the West. The Kremlin was sure that based on our unwillingness to respond with firmness to their previous aggression that we again would not respond, so they launched their large scale invasion in February 2022.

If we show weakness now, we may be inviting China to make a similar miscalculation which could lead to a far worse conflict than those now underway.►

