

Before Ukraine Conflict's Risks Escalate Further, a Time for Honest Appraisal of All Losses

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All wars are inherently destructive and efforts to avoid all wars must be made. However those wars which involve the biggest powers and nuclear weapon powers, or show high chances of advancing towards such confrontation, are by far the most dangerous wars which must be avoided under all circumstances.

At present among all the conflicts in the world, it is the Ukraine conflict which shows the maximum signs of escalating into such a confrontation of the biggest nuclear weapon powers, hence this is one war that should never have happened, or having started should have ended as early as possible, instead of continuing for over two years already.

Despite the terrible dangers of such escalation, in recent times the dangers of this conflict escalating into or drifting towards a Russia-NATO or Russia-USA war have actually increased with prominent NATO members saying that the chances of sending their soldiers to Ukraine cannot be ruled out, and also saying that longer-range weapons they are supplying to Ukraine can be used by Ukraine to hit deep into Russian mainland. This is just a step away from direct war of big nuclear weapon powers in which use of nuclear weapons cannot be ruled out.

Image: General Charles Q. Brown, Jr. (From the Public Domain)



On May 16 the New York Times reported that General Charles Brown Jr., the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has stated that “NATO trainers will eventually be sent to Ukraine.” He said NATO deployment of trainers seems inevitable. Commenting on this the news report stated that this could draw the US and Europe more directly into the war with Russia. (Report titled ‘NATO considers sending trainers to Ukraine’, May 16).

Before any further escalation takes place, this is a time for an honest appraisal of the losses on all sides to bring out the utter futility of this war.

Several observers have pointed out that this war really started not in 2022 but with the 2014 coup in Ukraine, carried out with the instigation of the USA and close allies, to topple an elected President and his government and take Ukraine on a course where henceforth opposition to Russia would be the one basic and main constant of its policy.

The losses on all sides since then have been very serious and tragic.

In the case of Ukraine, several hundred thousand people have lost their life, or else have been seriously injured and disabled.

According to some estimates, almost 9 million people have been displaced externally or internally at least for some time (about one-fifth of the population).

Nearly 20 per cent of the territory has been lost.

Economy has suffered very badly and has become more dependent on foreign aid than ever before, while high levels of corruption have still continued or increased further.

Foreign domination of important sectors of economy has increased. Democracy has suffered badly, with strong actions taken against opposition parties and leaders, while far right, neo-Nazi militants have been strengthened.

Russian language speaking citizens of Ukraine faced increasing discrimination and aggression against them in East Ukraine in particular. They were victims of various attacks and thousands of them died in the violence against them spread over the years 2014-21,

this increasing aggression also precipitating the Russian invasion of 2022.

Russia has lost a large number of lives and many others have been seriously injured or disabled. Severe economic sanctions have been imposed on Russia by western countries led by the USA.

Those European countries dependent more on oil and gas imports, such as Germany, have suffered heavily in economic and industrial terms. Many European countries have been driven towards heavier militarization. They have to find billions of dollars for Ukraine, although despite this help the sufferings of people of Ukraine remain at high levels.

Many countries of the Global South depending on food, fertilizer, oil and gas imports from Russia and Ukraine have suffered a lot.

These include countries with very serious food shortages. Countries trading with Russia have suffered more generally because of the impact of sanctions. Aid commitments for countries suffering from extreme hunger and poverty have declined because of huge priority commitments for Ukraine.

Environment has been devastated badly by the prolonged and heavy conflict. High risks have appeared for nuclear power plants and dams. The Nord Stream sabotage was as much a huge environmental disaster as an economic one.

USA has been providing many instalments of billions of dollars for Ukraine at a time when its commitments for urgent domestic budgets for pressing needs of weaker sections have been falling short. USA's military challenges have increased because of Russia and China coming closer together more than ever before.

With a war imposing such heavy costs, the case for stopping the war has always been strong but a significant peace effort which had reached an advanced stage as early as April 2022, just two months into the war, was sabotaged by Britain and USA.



A firefighter works to extinguish a burning car following what was said to be Ukrainian forces' shelling in the course of Russia-Ukraine conflict, in Belgorod, Russia December 30, 2023, in this still image taken from video. Russian Emergencies Ministry/Handout via REUTERS

Now with increasing danger of this conflict leading to a direct confrontation between Russia and NATO, it is clearly time to increase the peace efforts and try to clinch a peace deal as early as possible.

The escalation to higher levels can take place in several ways.

At present the Ukraine forces are in a very difficult situation and unable to take further the fight on their own.

Instead of seeking peace, if USA, NATO and Ukraine decide that NATO fighters and trainers will be sent to Ukraine and long range weapons to strike Russian mainland will be provided (in addition to overall increased military and economic aid to Ukraine) then the chances of direct confrontation between Russia and NATO will also increase.

But let us also imagine another scenario in which NATO involvement increases so substantially and there are some other adverse factors also for Russia so as to create an existential threat for Russia.

In such a case the Russian nuclear doctrine allows for the use of nuclear weapons and Russia is very likely to use nuclear weapons. But anticipating this, NATO forces can also be the first to strike with nuclear weapons. In such situations of brinkmanship and prolonged extreme tensions, with hawkish elements present on both sides, with both sides having the capacity of very high speed weapons, the risk of a nuclear weapons war getting started on the basis of misunderstanding and accident is also there of course.

Once this starts, with both sides possessing over eleven thousand nuclear weapons all combined, one doesn't know where this will end but this much is clear that the world will suffer the kind of destruction that has never been seen before and Europe in particular will be almost entirely destroyed.

The possibilities of extreme, unprecedented destruction here are such that the top most priority should be given to stop the war as early as possible. There should be unconditional ceasefire on the basis of the present line of control, and then there can be prolonged negotiations to settle all contentious issues. The negotiations should not break down no matter what the differences. There can be a pause and then resumption of negotiations. Meanwhile a very big but community-based relief and rehabilitation should start with everyone in the world helping to the extent possible. A big effort to restore goodwill among people of Ukraine and Russia should also start. The war should end in such a way that the two neighbors can live peacefully after this.

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