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BY MELVIN GOODMAN

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## Two Wars, Five Losing Nations



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There are only losers in the wars between Russia and Ukraine in Europe and between Israel and the Palestinians in the Middle East. The increased brutalization of the Russian and Israeli military forces against the innocent civilian populations of Ukraine and Gaza has exposed the cruelty and violence that President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu have unleashed. Ukrainian and Gazan civilians and their infrastructures have become the primary targets of both Russia and Israel, respectively. As a result, Ukraine and Gaza are suffering huge civilian losses, and Russia and Israel are suffering a moral and political defeat in terms of isolation and international opposition. The United States, complicit in Israel's genocidal actions and sending conflicting signals regarding Ukraine and Gaza, is also losing in terms of influence and standing. The international community understands the hypocrisy of the Biden administration that

condemns the terrorism of Russia but allows the terrorism of Israel. The United States has been Israel's political shield on the global stage for the past 75 years. A *New York Times* editorial on Monday continued to support Biden's most recent veto of a Security Council resolution calling for an immediate cease-fire in Gaza.

Prime Minister Netanyahu's war against the civilians and children of Gaza have isolated Israel with only the United States blocking the UN Security Council's demands for a cease fire. As a result, Israel is in decline legally, morally, and economically. Israel is isolated at the International Court of Justice, which warned Israel not to resort to genocidal operations in Gaza. This week the Court will also hear testimony on the illegality of Israel's "occupation, settlement and annexation" of Palestinian territories, including the West Bank and East Jerusalem. In addition to bringing the case of Israeli genocide to the Court, South Africa has labeled Israel's treatment of the Palestinians an "extreme form of apartheid."

President Putin's war of terror has isolated Russia as well despite the willingness of China, India and Brazil to purchase Russian energy resources at heavily discounted prices. At war's end, Putin will find Russia facing a phalanx of NATO nations on its western border that is increasing defense spending against a Russia that underestimated the will of Ukrainians and Europeans to counter its aggression. As Professor Raj Menon has reported, the combined annual military spending of Canada and the European members of NATO increased 8 percent in 2023 from 2 percent in 2022. The United States is devoting record amounts of resources to military modernization, including unneeded nuclear modernization.

In terms of blood and treasure, the Ukrainians and the Gazans are losing and suffering the most. The Palestinians have been victims of Israeli ethnic cleansing since Israel's War of Independence. The 1948 war involved one of the largest forced migrations in modern history. Around a million people were expelled from their homes at gunpoint; civilians were massacred; and hundreds of Palestinian villages were destroyed. Currently, Israel is conducting a war against Palestinian children with hundreds of babies being killed before they could be given names, according to the Israeli paper *Haaretz*.

The Ukrainians are similarly outmanned and outgunned, and there is little reason to believe that they can be successful. People who should know better are arguing that more western military weaponry will allow Ukraine to be victorious. Michael O'Hanlon, who holds the Philip H. Knight chair in defense and strategy at the Brookings Institution, argued in the *Washington Post* on February 24th, the second anniversary of the war, that

“Ukraine is stronger than you think,” which understates Russia’s superiority in population, resources, weaponry, and defense industry as well as Putin’s willingness to ignore all the laws of war and morality. Yale historian Timothy Snyder believes that the rule of law will only have a chance in Russia if it “loses this war,” and a leading British historian, Timothy Garton Ash, argues “It’s time for Europe to finally get serious about a Ukrainian victory.” Meanwhile, the United States has gone wobbly in its support of Ukraine, and refuses to stand up to Israel. The new sanctions measures in the wake of the death of Aleksey Navalny against Russia and Putin will have very little near-term impact on the war against Ukraine, and the feckless sanctions measures against the terrorism of Israeli settlers on the West Bank, who are supported by Israeli Defense Forces and Israeli police, have been vilified by Palestinians and by Arab Americans. President Biden’s continued willingness to supply lethal military weaponry and diplomatic cover to Israel will have an impact on important voting blocs in this country, including liberals, progressives, young Americans, African Americans, and Arab Americans. If this leads to the loss of Michigan in November, it could lead to Biden’s overall defeat. Hillary Clinton’s narrow loss of Michigan in 2016 should be a warning to the White House.

So many mistakes have been made, and the pointless slaughter seems to have no end. Putin underestimated the courage and the resolve of Ukrainians who wanted independence. Netanyahu ignored the plight of the hostages and decided on collective punishment of all the Palestinians in Gaza. For 75 years, Israelis have been guilty of showing no sympathy for the suffering of Palestinians and the loss of their territories. Arabs regularly ask “Why should we bear the onerous consequences for Auschwitz?”

U.S. presidents failed to recognize that Ukraine was the key to Russia’s perception of a sphere of influence in Europe, and conducted an expansion of NATO right up to the Russian border. A long-term Cold War between Russia and the West is virtually guaranteed. President Biden’s reference to Putin as a “crazy S.O.B.” indicates that his administration will not pursue an open door for consultation. Worsening hostilities between Israelis and Palestinians is also a certainty with both sides having less security as a result.

We should recall that when CIA director William Burns was a political officer in our embassy in Moscow in the 1990s, he warned Washington that “hostility to NATO expansion is almost universally felt across the political spectrum,” and as Ambassador to Russia in 2008 warned that “Ukrainian entry into NATO is the brightest of all redlines for the Russian elite (not just Putin).” Burns noted, “I have yet to find anyone [in Russia] who

views Ukraine in NATO as anything other than a direct challenge to Russian interests.” “Russia,” Burns explained, “would view further eastward expansion [of NATO] as a potential military threat.”

We’ve read about the barbarism of WWI and WWII in the 20th century; we are now witnessing the worst cruelties of the 21st century. Biden has demonstrated genuine sympathy for the Israeli hostages in Gaza, which is completely appropriate, but insufficient. The correct moral and political choice would include sympathy for and protection of innocent women and children in Ukraine and Gaza from the savagery and terror of Russian and Israeli military forces. In one of his rare appearances before the press, Biden demonstrated deep concern with the fate of the hostages, but totally ignored the fate of two million Palestinians in Gaza who are facing an Israeli war machine that honors no limits. “Never again” has become a bumper sticker, not a guide to operational policy.

*Melvin A. Goodman is a senior fellow at the Center for International Policy and a professor of government at Johns Hopkins University. A former CIA analyst, Goodman is the author of [Failure of Intelligence: The Decline and Fall of the CIA](#) and [National Insecurity: The Cost of American Militarism](#), and [A Whistleblower at the CIA](#). His most recent books are “American Carnage: The Wars of Donald Trump” (Opus Publishing, 2019) and “Containing the National Security State” (Opus Publishing, 2021). Goodman is the national security columnist for [counterpunch.org](#).*

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