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Brian Berletic

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What's Wrong with Boris Johnson's Plan to "Save" Ukraine?

A September 21, 2024 article published in The Spectator written by former British Prime Minister Boris Johnson titled, "It's time to let Ukraine join NATO," attempts to formulate a theory of victory for Ukraine as war with Russia continues to grind on.



Johnson provides a "three-fold plan for Ukrainian victory."

Johnson demands that the collective West "end the delays" and that the West "get it done and get it won." By this, he means lifting all restrictions on the use of Western long-range weapons on pre-2014 Russian territory.

Next, he demands the US and Europe provide a "package of loans on the scale of Lend-Lease: half a trillion dollars," or "even a trillion." Johnson claims such support will send a

message to the Kremlin that, “*we are going to out-gun you financially and back Ukraine on a scale you cannot hope to match.*”

Western personnel have already been operating in Ukraine since 2014 and have continued to do so throughout Russia’s Special Military Operation

Finally, he demands Ukraine be allowed membership into NATO immediately, even as the conflict rages on. In respect to NATO’s Article 5 regarding “*collective defense,*” Johnson proposes that:

...we could extend the Article 5 security guarantee to all the Ukrainian territory currently controlled by Ukraine (or at the end of this fighting season), while reaffirming the absolute right of the Ukrainians to the whole of their 1991 nation. We could protect most of Ukraine, while simultaneously supporting the Ukrainian right to recapture the rest.

While Johnson points out the political implications of this policy, meaning all of NATO would, “*have to commit to the defence of that Ukrainian territory,*” he falls far short of considering the practical implications.

NATO Intervention in Ukraine: Political vs. Practical Considerations

Far from a lack of political will or financial resources, the collective West has fallen short supplying Ukraine with the military equipment, vehicles, weapons, and ammunition required to match or exceed Russian military capabilities because its collective military industrial base itself is incapable of physically producing the quantities required, regardless of the money allotted to do so.

Military industrial production requires several fundamental factors in order to be expanded – financial resources being only one of many. Expanding production also requires the physical enlargement of existing facilities, the building of new facilities, the expansion of trained workforces which includes reforming and expanding primary, secondary, and specialized education, as well as the expansion of downstream suppliers and the acquisition of additional raw materials required for production across the entire industrial base.

Any one of these measures could take years to implement. Implementing them all would take longer still.

Then there is the very structure of the collective West’s military industrial base. Consisting of corporations prioritizing the maximization of profits, not performance, the collective West’s military industrial base has for years focused on low quantities of highly-sophisticated (and very expensive) weapons systems and munitions.

For the duration of the so-called “Global War on Terror” these weapon systems were adequate, if inefficient. They enabled US-led forces to roll over the antiquated, poorly-

trained, poorly-equipped Iraqi army in 1991 and again in 2003, as well as the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001. Such weapon systems also proved effective in the destruction of Libya in 2011.

But as the global balance of military and economic power has shifted throughout the 21st century, limits to this military industrial approach became apparent. In 2006, Israel's vast Western-backed military machine categorically failed in its invasion of southern Lebanon, confounded by Hezbollah leveraging modern anti-tank weapons.

The US intervention in Syria from 2011 to present day also revealed the growing limitations of expensive Western military hardware, with 100s of cruise missiles fired at targets across Syria with limited success due to vastly better air and missile defenses than previous US adversaries possessed.

The Western media now admits waning US military support for Ukraine stems from dwindling stockpiles and an inability to quickly expand production.

CNN in its September 17, 2024 [article](#) titled, "US military aid packages to Ukraine shrink amid concerns over Pentagon stockpiles," would admit:

US military aid packages for Ukraine have been smaller in recent months, as the stockpiles of weapons and equipment that the Pentagon is willing to send Kyiv from its own inventory have dwindled. The shift comes amid concerns about US military readiness being impacted as US arms manufacturers play catchup to the huge demand created by the war against Russia.

Nothing took place between September 17, 2024 when CNN published this report and September 21, 2024 when The Speculator published Boris Johnson's article to change this reality. Johnson simply chose to ignore it.

NATO committing to the defense of Ukrainian-held territory would require sufficient quantities of artillery, armor, air and missile defense systems, and trained manpower – all of which the collective West, not just Ukraine, has in short supply.

In many ways, the collective West is already waging war against Russian forces. Western personnel have already been operating in Ukraine since 2014 and have continued to do so throughout Russia's Special Military Operation (SMO) from 2022 onward. Russia has not hesitated to target and destroy Western equipment or the Western personnel operating it, though Russia has managed escalation very carefully in the process.

Were NATO to more openly intervene in what is already a NATO proxy war against Russia, Russian forces would likely continue targeting *all* of Ukraine's territory while continuing to manage escalation carefully. NATO itself could escalate, using its long-range missiles and air

power against Russian forces both within Ukraine and within pre-2014 Russian borders, but this would present two major problems.

First, if the West is already out of long-range weapons to transfer to Ukraine, its stockpiles having dwindled to critical levels, and having failed to expand production to reconstitute to them should any contingency of any kind fully deplete them, a more direct role in Ukraine would consume what arms and ammunition the West has left with no means of replacing them in the near-term.

Second, whatever impact the collective West imagines using the remnants of its arms and ammunition on Russia directly will have, it will leave the West far short of any material capabilities to conduct large scale war anywhere else in the world, including in the Middle East against Iran and its allies and across the Asia-Pacific region against China – two areas of concern Johnson himself mentions in his article.

Boris Johnson claims:

If you are truly worried about ‘escalation’, then imagine what happens if Ukraine loses this war – because that is when things really would begin to escalate. Ukraine won’t lose but if it did, we would have the risk of escalation across the whole periphery of the former Soviet empire, including the border with Poland, wherever Putin thought that aggression would pay off.

We would probably see escalation in the South China seas and in the Middle East. We would see a general escalation of global tension and violence because a Ukrainian defeat, and a victory for Putin, would be not only a tragedy for a young, brave and beautiful country; it would mean the global collapse of western credibility.

What Johnson means by “western credibility,” is Western primacy. By “escalation in the South China seas and in the Middle East,” Johnson means regional players displacing unwarranted US-led occupation and interference. Johnson’s plan to commit the West’s waning military power to Ukraine means forfeiting the means to cling to primacy elsewhere around the globe.

Johnson’s plan to incorporate Ukraine into NATO would not be a master stroke up-ending Russia’s escalation dominance, it would be the forfeiture of NATO’s own escalatory leverage regarding Article 5. Success for NATO would depend entirely on Russia failing to call the West’s bluff and avoiding the targeting of Ukrainian territory once NATO intervenes directly.

A very similar strategy was used in Syria by the United States as a means to reverse the flagging fortunes of its proxies there. The US, instead, at most managed to create a stalemate.

Over the past nearly 10 years the US has occupied eastern Syria, its position in Syria as well as in the rest of the region has waned.

Part of this stems from the US' inability to field a large enough military force, armed with sufficient numbers of arms and munitions. US air and missile defense systems in particular are in short supply and have opened up US forces in Syria and Iraq to regular drone, rocket, and missile strikes, compromising US military supremacy in the region.

By stretching US and European military power out even thinner by committing large numbers of troops and equipment to a direct intervention in Ukraine only means accelerating the decline of US-led Western primacy around the globe even faster.

Johnson's plan to "save" Ukraine is borne of desperation, predicated on either a poor understanding of the fundamental factors required for its success, or deliberately ignoring these factors.

It is also a plan born of a lack of imagination. For Boris Johnson and the Western special interests he represents, the only possible future for humanity is one dominated by the West, just as it has done for the past several centuries.

The ultimate irony, however, is Johnson's mention of a "Soviet empire" he claims Russian President Vladimir Putin is intent on rebuilding. At one point, Johnson claims:

The message is: that's it. It's over. You don't have an empire anymore. You don't have a 'near abroad' or a 'sphere of influence'. You don't have the right to tell the Ukrainians what to do, any more than we British have the right to tell our former colonies what to do. It is time for Putin to understand that Russia can have a happy and glorious future, but that like Rome and like Britain, the Russians have decisively joined the ranks of the post-imperial powers, and a good thing, too.

Yet, the conflict in Ukraine stems directly from NATO expansion toward Russia's borders. It was never a matter of Russia telling Ukraine what to do – it was always a matter of the US politically capturing Ukraine in 2014 and transforming it into a national security threat to Russia from 2014 onward.

Russia is responding to the expansion of a modern-day empire – not in any sort of effort to create its own empire. The empire Russia opposes in Ukraine is the same empire Johnson fears will be challenged in the Middle East and the South China Sea should its proxy war fail in Ukraine. While Johnson accuses Russia of being out of touch with reality regarding imagined imperial ambitions in Moscow, his plan reflects very real delusions associated with a desperate desire to perpetuate the US-led "international order" the UK itself is so deeply invested in.

Boris Johnson's attempt to build policy regarding the West's proxy war in Ukraine without a sufficient foundation is a recipe for disaster – the same sort of disaster this proxy war in Ukraine has precipitated that Johnson's desperate plans are meant to address in the first place.

Brian Berletic, September 29

Brian Berletic is a Bangkok-based geopolitical researcher and writer, especially for the online magazine "New Eastern Outlook"