



P E R S P E C T I V E S

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Berlin Redux

Take Back the Initiative

We must do more! What more can we do? These twin phrases have become a refrain throughout western civilization. We are profoundly aware that Russia is committing war crimes in Ukraine on a genocidal scale. We are tormented by a desire to do something “more” but uncertain what that could be. Or how “something more” could be safely effectuated without triggering nuclear war. Every time Vladimir Putin ratchets up the level of confrontation, every time he goes past his last atrocities to ever worse ones, we ask ourselves how we can retaliate, while fearing that our response might provoke him into using chemical, biological, or tactical nuclear weapons. We’re left in a constantly reactive mode. Worse yet, we are letting him determine which acts are an “act of war” and which aren’t. Where does he get that power?

Putin is clearly losing the Ukrainian war. He launched a World War II style Panzer division attack on Ukraine in what he believed would be a repeat of the Polish Blitzkrieg (“lightning strike”) of September 1939, when a coordinated attack from air and fast-moving armored units rolled over Poland in just over a month. What went wrong?

Putin massively miscalculated on four things: 1) the effectiveness and invincibility of his army; 2) that Ukrainians would throw down their weapons and greet the Russians as “older brothers” from the “Mother Country;” 3) that he could drive a wedge between the most Russian gas dependent members of the European Community and their neighbors, while simultaneously increasing the rift within NATO that Trump started; and 4) that his economy could be put into complete free fall by a coordinated set of sanctions.

Clearly his army is underperforming due to logistical mismanagement, food supply failures and dismally low morale. The Ukrainians have put up an extraordinary, even historic defense of their homeland. The European Community has acted with a single voice and just last week authorized a 400 percent increase in the purchase of hydrogen gas over the next seven years to specifically offset Russian gas imports. Meanwhile NATO has never been more unified. And the Russian ruble has lost 45 percent of its value while Putin’s \$650 Billion foreign currency reserve war chest has been totally frozen.

The common person in Russia is beginning to feel what it’s like to be cut off from the international economy. Their country has become a global pariah. Can you imagine a world where every McDonalds, Starbucks, Ikea, KFC, Pizza Hut, H&M, and Nike closed shop the same day? That will attract the attention of the average Russian. So will the fact that Unilever stopped selling its soap brands, and that at once, all major credit cards became next to worthless, with the only cards still functioning being those issued by Russian banks against Russian banks, which will automatically expire in one year or less since none will be renewed after that. The civilian population is already hurting, and about to suffer to a far greater degree. They will not support Putin’s war for very long, making him vulnerable on his domestic front.

There's also the possibility that he won't be able to pay or re-supply his mercenaries and soldiers. Since Putin doesn't understand anything about economics, he hasn't yet realized that he won't be able to finance his war for very long without having a lot of cash coming into to fund it. Russia's economy will be free falling at 15-25 percent this year, with worse to come as the war drags on. That means, as the Ukrainians continue to hold him militarily at bay, Putin will have to retreat to save his own skin before his army totally bogs down and begins to desert, and/or the home front revolts over the increasing number of body bags returning Russian conscripts.

So, what more can we do in the West to stop the current carnage in Ukraine? We must supply the civilian population centers. Given enough time, the Ukrainian army will systematically take the Russian offensive apart with anti-tank Javelins, surface-to-air Stingers, and drones. The Ukrainians need more time to finish Russia off and get them out of their country. The problem is that the Russians are battering the civilians, and leveling towns and cities like Mariupol, Kharkiv, and Chernihiv while maintaining a starvation siege on many more. Soon, this may also be the story of an encircled Kyiv, with only two weeks of food supplies left.

What more can we do to get food, water, and medicine to these besieged civilian populations? To start with, we could stop worrying about whether Putin would see a particular action as an "act of war" and put the shoe on the other foot.

Let's turn the tables on Putin. Let's do what we think is right to stop these war crimes against civilians by repeating a tactic we've successfully used before with the Russians, and let Putin decide if he wants to commit an act of war against the US and our allies. Let's let him worry about what we would consider an "act of war." Let's stop reacting to him and take the initiative.

It's time for the modern-day equivalent of the Berlin Airlift.

Starting on June 24, 1948, the Soviet Union totally encircled the Allied controlled sections of West Berlin in East Germany by imposing a blockade of all supplies into that part of the city. With their blockade of all roads, canals and railways, the Russians cut some 2.5 million civilians in the three western sectors of Berlin off from access to electricity, as well as food, heating coal, and other crucial supplies. The Russian goal was to starve Berlin into submission and capture it. They failed.

Over the next 11 months, British and US air forces delivered more than 2.3 million tons of food, fuel and supplies using over 278,000 airdrops. Those supplies were flown in on unarmed military transports. The Russians were informed that they would be flying unarmed, and that they were delivering humanitarian disaster relief. The Russians were told that we would consider their shooting one down an "act of war." The Russians didn't fire at a single aircraft in 1948-49, and eventually abandoned their blockade. They won't fire on our humanitarian missions today for the same reasons.

Putin may want to bluster, but the truth is he doesn't want us to declare an "act of war", or he would have invaded a NATO country. Let's stand up for universal humanitarian principles and airlift supplies to besieged Ukrainians' cities. Let's Take the Initiative Back.