

# The West's Real Ukraine Strategy Is Russian Regime Change

March 14, 2022

“Threaten our homeland, our way of life, and most importantly our leader, and yes, we will nuke the sh-t of out you. I guarantee it.” That’s what a senior retired Russian diplomat told me on the sidelines of a Track 2.0 dialogue in 2012 when I asked him what would happen during a [NATO-Russian war](#) or a [threat to the Russian government itself](#).

He was pretty clear: Threats Russia’s sovereignty, ability to control its territory, run its economy—and most of all, ensure leadership survival—were all things it might go to nuclear war over. Isn’t that what we are doing today regarding the Ukraine crisis?

While surely we should do all we can to help Ukraine in its time of need, we should also ask how far are we willing to go in that effort. To be clear, we are putting a [historic amount of pressure](#) on Russia, more than some countries endure in a real, kinetic war. In the months to come, that pressure [will have a combined impact](#), and we have not stopped at all to consider the ramifications.

In fact, we have chosen by accident a new de facto Ukraine strategy. It’s so terrifying and stupid that it’s never been tried before on a nuclear-armed superpower capable of ending nearly all human life in 30 minutes.

The West’s undeclared goal is simple: Putin has to go. Or, [Putin has to die](#), as some on right are now [cheerleading](#).

Yes, that means regime change, wrapped in all of its fantastical failures, is making a comeback in Washington, and no one seems to notice or even care. No one also seems to understand that's our new goal now, what that means, and the ramifications for our world—like a full-blown nuclear war if we push Putin too far into the geopolitical gutter.

Now, one would think the idea of trying to depose the leader of the largest nation on earth, with the third most powerful military and 140 million citizens, would be at least debated in full view. But clearly, in our rush for a moral victory, we have seemingly chosen the most damaging of actions against Russia time and time again.

We haven't even stopped to grasp what sort of future awaits us mere months down the road. That's because we don't even know what we are doing, as feel-good hashtags on social media, trending topics, and activism-based policy lead us down a dark path.

## **How Many Arms Are We Sending to Ukraine?**

Take, for example, our arms shipments to Ukraine, which, to be clear, is needed and is the right decision, are of a scale we haven't even begun to grasp. The West has [committed to sending](#) 17,000 anti-tank weapons to Ukraine, even though Russia *has just 12,000 tanks* in its entire military arsenal, a fraction of which are in Ukraine fighting.

Then there are the anti-air missiles. Again, while surely needed, the numbers are astounding, as the West has committed to at least [several thousand](#) shoulder-fired missiles, including the vaunted [Stinger missile](#) that gave the old Soviet Union such headaches in Afghanistan. We will indeed send more anti-air missiles than Russian fighter jets, bombers, and drones that Russia can place in the skies.

Western leaders are even now trying to secure older air defense systems of Soviet vintage to tighten up Ukraine's air defense and shoot down more Russian planes—many of which could come from North Atlantic Treaty Organization nations, something that will surely enrage Moscow.

Then there are those Polish MiG-29s every so-called expert calls the Biden administration stupid for not wanting to send to Ukraine. The simple reality is that such fighters could be seen by Russia as NATO directly intervening in the conflict, especially if those MiGs decided to attack targets in Russia itself, which is highly possible at this point.

But of course—and maybe the only saving grace in this insane idea—the jets likely will never head to Ukraine in the first place, as they have been [upgraded so dramatically](#) they are not nearly the same as what Ukraine uses now. You can't train for combat operations in what amounts to a new jet in a time of war against an enemy that has advanced air defenses. It could take weeks, maybe even months, to get pilots trained, ground crews trained, and make sure the systems on the plane aren't in Polish but Ukrainian.

Western foreign policy elites surely have bigger dreams, and that of course is a no-fly zone or the newly repackaged idea of a [limited no-fly zone](#), which is basically the same thing. Yet they won't ever admit that to implement anything like this you would need to destroy any Russian air defenses that would threaten our pilots, some of which means attacking targets in Russia. That means war with Russia.

On top of all of this, the Biden administration will likely [send](#) another [\\$6.5 billion in arms](#) to assist Ukraine. Some are now even calling for Team Biden to send used F-15s and A-10 Warthogs to help Ukraine,

turning out aid from something that is purely defensive to taking an offensive tone in nature, with no ability to control escalation, as is the case even with thousands of defensive missiles.

## **We Have Unleashed an Economic War on Russia**

While gas prices here at home are already at record highs and could climb still further thanks to Biden's banning of Russian energy, Putin is facing what is easily the most damaging package of sanctions any nation has ever faced [in human history](#). Such sanctions, in their totality, aren't designed to get Vlad to pull out of Ukraine but to slaughter Russia's economy. Indeed, when combined with the amount of bleeding we want his forces to endure on the battlefield, declared or not, it's clear Western elites want Putin's regime to go down in flames.

The facts don't lie. In just a few weeks' time, we have kicked most Russian banks out of the [SWIFT payment verification system](#), meaning trying to send and receive money from Russian banks has now effectively ended, a possible death sentence to Russia's banking system.

Russia also has lost the ability to use its more than \$600 billion in foreign exchange reserves to stop the death of its currency. Those two actions alone guarantee Moscow's economy is now certain to not only go into a historic economic depression but lose [as much as 35 percent of its current value](#), with Russia now even unable to even take out debt to try and save itself. Even Visa and Mastercard [won't operate in Russia anymore](#).

Then there are the more stealthy private economic sanctions that don't

get as much attention but could, over the long term, be even more damaging. Almost every major Western recognized brand is [pulling out](#) of any meaningful business operation in Russia or taking the dramatic step of divesting its assets there altogether, taking huge losses in the process.

Tech and computer chip companies won't do business with Russia now. Banks are leaving in droves. Even oil colossus BP will take a [\\$25 billion loss](#) and exit its oil partnerships in Russia. With oil being Russia's most precious and sellable asset, such actions should only be seen for what they are: something far beyond the size and scale to get Russia to back off in Ukraine.

## **This Means Regime Change Is the Policy**

The sad thing is, even though we haven't come to admit to what the world de facto collectively wants, we aren't able to connect the policy dots and see the threat we have made against a nation with more than 5,000 nuclear weapons. Putin certainly gets it. And he is trying to remind us of that fact.

Just a few weeks ago, Putin put his forces on a strange "[nuclear alert](#)" that seemed to shock even his most senior military officials in the room, seemingly not knowing that was coming. His rationale was simple: he understood that the West, in all of its high-minded moral outrage, has placed so much pressure on his regime that they will only accept one outcome now.

He sees the number of weapons being placed in Ukraine, the financial nuclear war that has been unleashed on his country, and the calls to send fighter jets and set up no-fly zones as all targets on his back. His

nuclear alert was to remind the world he will use those weapons if his rule is questioned.

## **Accepting An Unjust Ending in an Unjust World**

Sadly, history tells us how the war in Ukraine will end if we are lucky. Ukraine will be destroyed. Russia will take parts of its territory. Kyiv will join the European Union and NATO but not officially, integrating itself economically and getting billions in weapons to deter another Russian invasion. Russia will be massively weakened and completely dependent on China for its economic survival, selling anything it can to Beijing, [including its best weapons](#), to survive.

What if we aren't lucky, and the war drags on for months? Putin will keep upping the pressure, and we will do the same. With every bomb Russia drops on Ukraine, the moral outrage will keep rising and Western nations will give Ukraine more and more arms and sanction Russia in every way possible to the point that Russia will come close to collapse.

At some point, when Putin sees the Ukraine crisis as not a giant mistake but instead a fight for his own survival, true hell will break loose.

---

*Harry J. Kazianis is director of defense studies at the Center for the National Interest in Washington DC and executive editor of their publishing arm, The National Interest. The views expressed in this article are his own. He's on Twitter @grecianformula.*