

## What'll it be:

### Settlement or Nuclear Armageddon in Ukraine? Dr. Christopher Zambakari, BS, MBA, MIS, LP.D.

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As the unrelenting war in Ukraine grinds slowly and more deeply into the protracted proxy war it has been from the start, another danger lurks in the shadows of military conflict. Russian President Vladimir Putin talks about introducing nuclear weapons; just four days after the invasion of Ukraine, Putin ordered his country's nuclear forces put on "special alert."<sup>1</sup> U.S. President Joseph Biden declares the world is "faced with the prospect of Armageddon."<sup>2</sup> UN Secretary General António Guterres says we are "just one misunderstanding, one miscalculation away from nuclear annihilation."<sup>3</sup>

The war in Ukraine reverberates, impacting lives and fortunes across the globe. Europe, cutoff from cheap Russia energy, braces for a very cold

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<sup>1</sup> BBC, "Ukraine Invasion: Putin Puts Russia's Nuclear Forces on 'Special Alert'," The British Broadcasting Corporation, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-60547473>.

<sup>2</sup> Katie Rogers, "Biden Calls the 'Prospect of Armageddon' the Highest since the Cuban Missile Crisis," *New York Times (Online)*. Accessible from <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/06/world/europe/biden-armageddon-nuclear-war-risk.html> (2022).

<sup>3</sup> United Nations, "Humanity's Just One Misunderstanding Away from 'Nuclear Annihilation' Warns Un Chief,"

winter. Countries in the Global South hunker against the pressure created by disruptions in the global supply chain. Natural gas and grains, fertilizers, nickel, titanium, palladium, coal, nitrogen, and rare earth metals used in the production of computer chips, electric vehicles and airplanes are staged but undelivered. Global prices soar, especially for oil and natural gas, in response to the disorder in supply. The international economy tinkers on the edge of an inevitable recession, while the International Monetary Fund warns, "the worst is yet to come and, for many people, 2023 will feel like a recession."<sup>4</sup>

The West's concerted efforts to punish Russia for its invasion of Ukraine has neither stopped the fighting nor compelled Moscow to relent in its war effort against Ukraine. A world already racked with socio-political ills and a seemingly endless capacity to hate, finds itself with much more on its plate as the body count of Ukrainians, Russians and those pesky "collaterals" continues to mount.

And now we are faced with the possible deployment of strategic nuclear weapons into the battle zone.<sup>5</sup> The present moment feels like a turning point: Russia's assault on Ukraine has raised the risk of a wider war between nuclear

United Nations Publications,  
<https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/08/1123752>.

<sup>4</sup> The World Bank, "Russian Invasion of Ukraine Impedes Post-Pandemic Economic Recovery in Emerging Europe and Central Asia," The World Bank, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/10/04/russian-invasion-of-ukraine-impedes-post-pandemic-economic-recovery-in-emerging-europe-and-central-asia>.

<sup>5</sup> Jeffrey Taylor, "Deterring Russian Nuclear Threats with Low-Yield Nukes May Encourage Limited Nuclear War," *Journal of Advanced Military Studies* 2022, no. special (2022).

powers. Not since the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 has the world been so publicly reminded of the possibility of nuclear confrontation.<sup>6</sup> Former CIA Director Leon Panetta, puts the risk of the war in Ukraine spiraling into a nuclear conflict as high as one in four. *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* puts the Doomsday Clock at 100 seconds to midnight – less time than it takes to brush your teeth.<sup>7</sup>

Some analysts will have us believe the U.S. is already fighting a Third World War with Russia, sans troops on the ground.<sup>8</sup> Any attempt to contextualize the conflict to understand the conflict, or to advance a nonmilitary solution, is considered appeasement.<sup>9</sup> This was summarized by Jake Sullivan, President Biden's national security adviser, noting that "If Ukraine chose to stop fighting and give up, it would be

the end of Ukraine,"<sup>10</sup> thereby equating diplomacy with surrender.

Calls for diplomacy and a political settlement seemingly have been relegated to the dustbin.<sup>11</sup> Military brain trusts on both sides of the Atlantic call for a decisive military solution in Ukraine;<sup>12</sup> attempts to de-escalate the deadly conflict is fashioned a weakness, therefore prioritizing military solutions only.<sup>13,14</sup>

Earlier this year, a *New York Times* editorial shared its take on the complexities of the war in Ukraine.<sup>15</sup> Questions touched on the Biden administration's mindset. Have this country's goals in Ukraine shifted, asked the paper's editorial board.<sup>16</sup> Can we – how do we – hold

<sup>6</sup> Robin Wright, "What Does Putin's Nuclear Sabre Rattling Mean?," *The New Yorker*, [https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/what-does-putins-nuclear-sabre-rattling-mean?gclid=CjwKCAjwtp2bBhAGEiwAOZZTuP5IPXJDZHu5sNsszTHQsXUs6ju5mf4h78Dhw11YXrtPiT15nwXXAh oCHQsQAvD\\_BwE&gclid=aw.ds](https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/what-does-putins-nuclear-sabre-rattling-mean?gclid=CjwKCAjwtp2bBhAGEiwAOZZTuP5IPXJDZHu5sNsszTHQsXUs6ju5mf4h78Dhw11YXrtPiT15nwXXAh oCHQsQAvD_BwE&gclid=aw.ds).

<sup>7</sup> Bulletin Science and Security Board, "Bulletin Science and Security Board Condemns Russian Invasion of Ukraine; Doomsday Clock Stays at 100 Seconds to Midnight," *Bulletin Science and Security Board*, [https://thebulletin.org/2022/03/bulletin-science-and-security-board-condemns-russian-invasion-of-ukraine-doomsday-clock-stays-at-100-seconds-to-midnight/?utm\\_source=ClockStatementPage&utm\\_medium=Web&utm\\_campaign=DoomsdayClockMarchStatement](https://thebulletin.org/2022/03/bulletin-science-and-security-board-condemns-russian-invasion-of-ukraine-doomsday-clock-stays-at-100-seconds-to-midnight/?utm_source=ClockStatementPage&utm_medium=Web&utm_campaign=DoomsdayClockMarchStatement).

<sup>8</sup> Susan B. Glasser, "What If We're Already Fighting the Third World War with Russia?," *The New Yorker*, [https://www.newyorker.com/news/letter-from-bidens-washington/what-if-were-already-fighting-the-third-world-war-with-russia?utm\\_source=nl&utm\\_brand=tny&utm\\_mailing=TN\\_Y\\_Daily\\_093022&utm\\_campaign=aud-dev&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=tny\\_daily\\_digest&bid=6128c6d](https://www.newyorker.com/news/letter-from-bidens-washington/what-if-were-already-fighting-the-third-world-war-with-russia?utm_source=nl&utm_brand=tny&utm_mailing=TN_Y_Daily_093022&utm_campaign=aud-dev&utm_medium=email&utm_term=tny_daily_digest&bid=6128c6d).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Andrew E. Kramer, Marc Santora, and Katie Rogers, "Amid Joy in Kherson, a Humanitarian Disaster Looms," *New York Times (Online)*. Accessible from <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/12/world/europe/kherson-ukraine-russia.html> (2022).

<sup>11</sup> Katrina vanden Heuvel, "How to End the War in Ukraine? Sit Down and Talk. It's Time.," *The Nation*, [https://www.thenation.com/article/world/how-to-end-the-war-in-ukraine-sit-down-and-talk-its-time/?custno=&utm\\_source=Sailthru&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=Daily%2011.14.2022%20%282%29&utm\\_term=daily](https://www.thenation.com/article/world/how-to-end-the-war-in-ukraine-sit-down-and-talk-its-time/?custno=&utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Daily%2011.14.2022%20%282%29&utm_term=daily).

<sup>12</sup> Reuters, "Kremlin Says Stoltenberg Comments Are Confirmation That Nato Is Fighting in Ukraine," *Reuters*, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/kremlin-says-stoltenberg-comments-are-confirmation-that-nato-is-fighting-ukraine-2022-10-12/>.

<sup>13</sup> Anne Applebaum, "It's Time to Prepare for a Ukrainian Victory," *The Atlantic Monthly Group*, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/09/ukraine-victory-russia-putin/671405/>.

<sup>14</sup> Kramer, Santora, and Rogers.

<sup>15</sup> *New York Times*, "The War in Ukraine Is Getting Complicated, and America Isn't Ready: The Editorial Board," *New York Times (Online)*. Accessible from <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/19/opinion/america-ukraine-war-support.html> (2022).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

Putin accountable as a war criminal?<sup>17</sup> If the U.S. seeks to avoid a wider war with the grizzly Russian Bear, how does the provision of arms and cash to Ukraine facilitate such a de-escalation?<sup>18</sup> Despite Russia's sloppy orchestration of its military's fortunes in the war zone, the Bear is too strong, and its investments too great to back down now, offered the *Times*.<sup>19</sup>

The troubling question remains this: How does one work to end the bloody violence in Ukraine without the total destruction of that country. How does one avoid a protracted war in Eastern Europe or a potential conflict between U.S.-led NATO alliance forces and Russia that could lead to a tactical nuclear strike by either contestant?

The U.S. and Russia possess enough thermonuclear weaponry to reduce much of the world to smoldering, glutinous rubble. The U.S. and Russia are not fighting World War III. The U.S. is, however, fighting a proxy war with Russia in Ukraine that could drag on, joining Vietnam and Afghanistan as sad examples of our country's legacy for global good. What could be different in this case than was in Southeast Asia and the Middle East is the disastrous possibility of nuclear warfare. Avril Haines, director of U.S. National Intelligence recently told the Senate Armed Services Committee that Putin would approve the use of nuclear weapons "if he

perceived an existential threat to the Russian state or regime."<sup>20</sup> Putin, in turn, has told a national TV audience, "In the event of a threat to the territorial integrity of our country and to defend Russia and our people, we will certainly make use of all weapon systems available to us. This is not a bluff." The KGB agent-turned-president warned, "The citizens of Russia can rest assured that the territorial integrity of our Motherland, our independence and freedom will be defended – I repeat – by all the systems available to us. Those who are using nuclear blackmail against us should know that the wind rose can turn around."<sup>21</sup>

### **Nuclear Deterrence: Escalate to Deescalate**

Currently, it is estimated the U.S. has approximately 150 American B-61 nuclear gravity bombs stationed in five countries in Europe.<sup>22</sup> According to the authoritative *Nuclear Notebook* in the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, Russia possess "a stockpile of approximately 4,477 warheads. Of these, about 1,588 strategic warheads are deployed on ballistic missiles and at heavy bomber bases, while an approximate additional 977 strategic warheads, along with 1,912 nonstrategic warheads, are held in reserve."<sup>23</sup>

But, nuclear weapons have little military value. What they carry is political punch.<sup>24</sup> What they

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Connor O'Brien, "Top Intel Official Warns Putin's Invasion Could Become 'More Unpredictable and Potentially Escalatory'," *POLITICO*, <https://www.politico.com/news/2022/05/10/dni-haines-putin-ukraine-invasion-unpredictable-00031375>.

<sup>21</sup> President Vladimir Putin, "Address by the President of the Russian Federation," Presidential Executive Office's Information Office, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/69390>.

<sup>22</sup> Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, "United States Nuclear Weapons in Europe," Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, <https://cnduk.org/resources/united-states-nuclear-weapons-europe/>.

<sup>23</sup> Hans M. Kristensen and Matt Korda, "Nuclear Notebook: How Many Nuclear Weapons Does Russia Have in 2022?," *Bulletin Science and Security Board*, <https://thebulletin.org/premium/2022-02/nuclear-notebook-how-many-nuclear-weapons-does-russia-have-in-2022/>.

<sup>24</sup> Kai Bird, "Not Even Nuclear War Will Stop the Fighting in Ukraine," *The Nation*. Accessible from

project is Armageddon. As former U.S. Secretary of Defense James Mattis has offered, "I do not think there is any such thing as a tactical nuclear weapon. Any nuclear weapon used any time is a strategic game changer."<sup>25</sup>

Scott Ritter, a former U.S. Marine intelligence officer who served in the former Soviet Union and as a UN weapons inspector, notes that only the U.S. has a nuclear doctrine of "escalate to deescalate."<sup>26</sup> The doctrine holds that the U.S. might escalate the conflict in Ukraine to force the Russians to de-escalate. Ritter also contends the U.S. has falsely "mirrored" the doctrine onto the Russians, which could lead to catastrophe, noting, "So, [the U.S.'s] goal was to escalate to get the Russians to deescalate. We have that doctrine. We've exercised that doctrine. And now, we're mirror imaging that doctrine onto Russians, but the Russians don't have that doctrine. So once again, when we talk about miscalculations based upon ignorance, if we believe the Russians have an escalate to deescalate strategy and then we're acting in response to that using our own escalate to deescalate strategy, I think you can figure out that this could lead to a rapid misunderstanding and the release of nuclear weapons."<sup>27</sup>

<https://www.thenation.com/article/world/nuclear-war-ukraine-putin/>, no. October 6 (2022).

<sup>25</sup> House Armed Services Committee, "The National Defense Strategy and the Nuclear Posture Review," (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Publishing Office. Accessible from

<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-115hhrg28970/pdf/CHRG-115hhrg28970.pdf>, 2018).

<sup>26</sup> Scott Ritter, "We're in a Moment When One Mistake Could Start a Nuclear War," ScheerPost.com, <https://scheerpost.com/2022/10/20/scott-ritter-were-in-a-moment-when-one-mistake-could-start-a-nuclear-war/>.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Samantha Lock, Peter Beaumont, and Pjotr Sauer, "Kherson Retreat Shows Russian Military Has 'Real Problems', Says Biden, as Zelenskiy Urges Caution,"

Now is the time for a diplomatic solution to the conflict in Ukraine, not an escalation of military activity or force. According to Gen. Mark A. Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, "When there's an opportunity to negotiate, when peace can be achieved, seize the moment."<sup>28</sup> The Pentagon's top general estimates that each side in the conflict has suffered at least 100,000 casualties.<sup>29</sup>

There is no such thing as a limited nuclear war. The first country to unlock the suitcase and insert the nuclear code sets in motion a worse-than-Orwellian dystopia resulting from the destruction of the human civilization.<sup>30</sup> Political writer and U.S. Peace Prize winner Noam Chomsky fears such a fate is not being taken seriously enough; dismissals of the true threat of nuclear annihilation have grown to highly dangerous levels and "the means for reducing the threat of terminal war are being cast out the window."<sup>31</sup>

The escalation of Western involvement in Ukraine further fertilizes the rich ground of calamity and misunderstanding, triggering military exchanges that could lead to a global fender-bender of historic proportions.<sup>32</sup> Three times in modern history, a martial misstep has

Guardian News & Media Limited, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/nov/10/kherson-retreat-russia-military-real-problems-ukraine-says-biden>.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Noam Chomsky and C.J. Polychroniou, "Humanity Faces Two Existential Threats. One Is Nearly Ignored," Truthout, <https://truthout.org/articles/noam-chomsky-humanity-faces-two-existential-threats-one-is-nearly-ignored/>.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Benjamin Abelow, *How the West Brought War to Ukraine: Understanding How U.S. And Nato Policies Led to Crisis, War, and the Risk of Nuclear Catastrophe* (Great Barrington, MA: Siland Press, 2022).

nearly led to an unholy nuclear mess. History teaches us that even though the warring factions *may* be (emphasis on *may*) rational actors, unexpected miscalculations can lead to catastrophic outcomes. In the case of the Cuban Missile Crisis, Cold War historian and author Michael Dobbs writes, “the biggest danger of nuclear war in October 1962 did not arise from the so-called eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation between Khrushchev and Kennedy, but from their inability to control events that they themselves had set in motion.”<sup>33</sup>

In a nuclear world, is it possible Putin and/or Biden can control the outcome of events they set in motion? Are we willing to take the chance and find out?

### Diplomacy and Political Settlement

The idea of introducing nuclear weaponry into the current Ukrainian conflict is not lost on the U.S. Aside from the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombings at the end of World War Two, a nuclear response to perceived national security threats has been on this country’s table since the start of the Korean War in 1950, beginning during a 10-month window between June 1950 and April 1951.<sup>34</sup> At the time, President Harry Truman – who had warned already warned, “there has always been active consideration”<sup>35</sup> of using nuclear weapons in Korea – was encouraged on a number of occasions by Gen.

Douglas MacArthur to allow the use of the atom bomb to both contain and win the escalating hostilities.

In 1962 – two years after a Francis Gary Powers-steered Lockheed U-2 spy plane was taken down overflying the Soviet Union – pilot Rudolph Anderson Jr. was shot out of his flying machine while photographing nuclear missile sites built by the Soviet Union on the island of Cuba, a mere 90 miles from the Key West shoreline. Once again, U.S. nuclear warheads were dusted off for possible use.<sup>36</sup> The high-stakes game of U.S.-Soviet Union brinkmanship resulted, first, in a U.S. blockade around Cuba to prevent additional arms landing on the island. Next, was President John Kennedy’s insistence the Soviet Union remove the missiles and obliterate the sites. Ultimately, the resultant nuclear sabre rattling was de-escalated when both superpowers recognized the destructive possibilities of a such a military contest. How close did the world come to nuclear war? In the words of then-U.S. Secretary of State Robert McNamara, “We were eyeball-to-eyeball and the other fellow just blinked.”

Over 10 days in 1983, the U.S. and the Soviet Union nearly started a war of mutual destruction – six months after Soviet General Secretary Yuri Andropov had cautioned the U.S. that both countries “may be moving toward a red line,”<sup>37</sup> in which a nuclear war could be sparked with a

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<sup>33</sup> Michael Dobbs, "I've Studied 13 Days of the Cuban Missile Crisis. This Is What I See When I Look at Putin.: Guest Essay," *New York Times (Online)*. Accessible from <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/05/opinion/ukraine-russia-nuclear-war.html> (2022).

<sup>34</sup> Se Young Jang, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/made-by-history/wp/2018/01/02/how-the-korean-war-put-presidents-in-charge-of-nuclear-weapons/>.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> The John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, "Cuban Missile Crisis," The John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/jfk-in-history/cuban-missile-crisis#:~:text=In%20October%201962%2C%20an%20American, days%20to%20discuss%20the%20problem.>

<sup>37</sup> Robert Beckhusen, "New Documents Reveal How a 1980s Nuclear War Scare Became a Full-Blown Crisis," WIRED, <https://www.wired.com/2013/05/able-archer-scare/>.

simple miscalculation by one or the other superpowers. That miscalculation came in the form of NATO military exercise, "Able Archer 83,"<sup>38</sup> which simulated the transition by the international alliance from a conventional war to a nuclear war. At the point of a simulated release of warheads against the Soviet Union, NATO upped its readiness level to DEFCON 1, the highest level. The Soviets interpreted the late-exercise move as a feint to hide a first strike; they readied their nukes.<sup>39</sup> One report has the Kremlin's Central Committee sleeping in shifts, so great was their concern of such an Armageddon.<sup>40</sup>

Consider the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 and the dangerous and provocative placement of weaponry within striking distance of the U.S. There are similarities – maybe not as direct or easily discerned – between the stalemate of 60 years ago and the invasion of Ukraine. Comparing the two, Dmitri Trenin, former director of the Carnegie Russia Center, says, "On the surface the root cause of both confrontations has been acute feelings of insecurity created by the expansion of the rival power's political influence and military presence right to the doorstep of one's own country: Cuba then, Ukraine now." NATO's 21st-century eastward expansion toward Russia,<sup>41</sup> and this country's fixation on Ukraine's entry into the Western-

influenced international police force, has Putin and his charges convinced there is territorial subterfuge afoot – Ukraine as a Western bulwark against Russia.<sup>42</sup>

There can be no absolute victory in Ukraine without a political settlement. Research shows that modern war is resolved through compromises – political-diplomatic settlements.<sup>43</sup> If not through such give-and-take agreement, wars evolve into violent, widespread civil conflicts that last for years, even decades. The sooner the warring factions and their allies realize this, the sooner further destruction is abated and lives preserved. The quicker the more gruesome tragedy of lives lost can be averted.

## Conclusion

The current nine-month conflict in Ukraine has the potential to occupy and busy military planners, armies and governments for years to come; a military solution is as unlikely as winning the lottery, and would most likely result in the destruction of Ukraine.

A military solution must give way to a political-diplomatic settlement that addresses the root-causes of the conflict.<sup>44</sup><sup>45</sup> One could start with the 28-year-old demand first voiced by then-President Boris Yeltsin that NATO stop

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Below.

<sup>42</sup> The Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, "The Causes and Consequences of the Ukraine War a Lecture by John J. Mearsheimer. Accessible from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qcivozntcdm&T=1413s>," (2022).

<sup>43</sup> Anatol Lieven, "No Blob, We Are Not 'Already Fighting' World War Iii," Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2022/10/03/no-blob-we-are-not-already-fighting-world-war-iii/>.

<sup>44</sup> Heuvel.

<sup>45</sup> Peter Baker, "Top U.S. General Urges Diplomacy in Ukraine While Biden Advisers Resist," *New York Times* (Online). Accessible from <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/10/us/politics/biden-ukraine-russia-diplomacy.html> (2022).

<sup>46</sup> Tom Pickering and George Beebe, "Demonization, Danger and Diplomacy," *The Press of Atlantic City*, [https://pressofatlanticcity.com/opinion/columnists/demonization-danger-and-diplomacy-by-tom-pickering-and-george-beebe/article\\_02e941bb-4c76-5957-92de-c794ecb0b746.html](https://pressofatlanticcity.com/opinion/columnists/demonization-danger-and-diplomacy-by-tom-pickering-and-george-beebe/article_02e941bb-4c76-5957-92de-c794ecb0b746.html).

expanding in the direction of Russia. Chas Freeman, retired U.S. diplomat and one-time assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs, notes, "At root, this is a contest over whether Ukraine will be in the U.S. sphere of influence, the Russian sphere of influence, or neither's."<sup>47</sup>

One way or the other, Ukraine's recent success in pushing back Russian forces has set in motion two predictable reactions: a partial mobilization of Russian forces and the heightened threat of nuclear confrontation not seen since the Cuban Missile Crisis.

In a deeply polarized world, the debate surrounding the Ukraine conflict reflects this fragmentation. One side favors growing military and open-ended support for Ukraine – the Western bloc of U.S.-influenced NATO and EU alliances stand here. Across the divide are those encouraging a political settlement and diplomatic solution to the crisis – this is a coalition of 66 UN members, mostly from the Global South, saying, literally, "It's time to stop this global mass destruction, it's time to stop this war."<sup>48</sup>

Meanwhile, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has called for the international community to take "preventive action"<sup>49</sup> to deter

the potential use of nuclear weapons by Russia in the ongoing war. While Zelenskyy's press secretary hurried to clarify that such preventative action did not mean lobbing nuclear warheads into Russia, Putin's warning that he would use "all available means" to deter an attack on his country was seen by one Kremlin insider as a "blunt Russian ultimatum to Ukraine and the West: Ukraine must back off or there will be a nuclear war."<sup>50</sup>

For many years, analysts have warned that military escalation – intended or unintended – or a miscalculation or misinterpretation of battleground developments or other actions, will spark the use of nuclear weapons against warring sides.<sup>51</sup> Russia's invasion of Ukraine has brought this nightmare scenario to life, presenting all sorts of opportunities for misread actions that lead to the most severe of consequences.

This is not the time to press for a military solution in Ukraine. Such insistence only increases the chances of nuclear annihilation. Such a polarizing mindset – one the U.S. and NATO seem to dangerously embrace – moves the Doomsday Clock perilously closer to the pitch-black darkness of midnight. Now is the time to seek a diplomatic way to avoid the nightmare of a nuclear war possessing the

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<sup>47</sup> Aaron Maté, "Us Fighting Russia 'to the Last Ukrainian': Veteran Us Diplomat," The Grayzone, <https://thegrayzone.com/2022/03/24/us-fighting-russia-to-the-last-ukrainian-veteran-us-diplomat/>.

<sup>48</sup> Medea Benjamin and Nicolas J.S. Davies, "End War in Ukraine' Say 66 Nations at Un General Assembly," Common Dreams, <https://www.commondreams.org/views/2022/09/29/end-war-ukraine-say-66-nations-un-general-assembly>.

<sup>49</sup> Julia Mueller, "Zelensky Calls for 'Preventive Action' to Deter Russian Nuclear Strikes," The Hill, <https://thehill.com/policy/international/3677256->

[zelensky-calls-for-preventive-action-to-deter-russian-nuclear-strikes/](https://thehill.com/policy/international/3677256-zelensky-calls-for-preventive-action-to-deter-russian-nuclear-strikes/).

<sup>50</sup> The Associated Press, "Cornered by War, Putin Makes Another Nuclear Threat," The Associated Press, <https://thehill.com/homenews/ap/ap-international/ap-cornered-by-war-putin-makes-another-nuclear-threat/>.

<sup>51</sup> Phyllis Bennis, "It's Time for a Ceasefire in Ukraine," In These Times, <https://inthesetimes.com/article/ukraine-russia-ceasefire-nuclear-war-putin-biden>.

<sup>52</sup> Ed Browne, "Doomsday Clock Today: Are Putin's Threats Pushing It Closer to Midnight?," Newsweek <https://www.newsweek.com/doomsday-clock-midnight-russia-ukraine-war-1749607>.

awesome and destructive power to create global famine and to kill billions of people.<sup>53</sup><sup>54</sup>

Chomsky, the anti-war voice, warns that without a willingness to compromise and cooperate, “the wreckage of human society will be so extreme that no one will care.”<sup>56</sup>

The question remains – as it has for too many decades – what’ll it be: settlement or nuclear Armageddon. One is a known outcome. The other is a devastating one.

### About the Author

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<sup>53</sup> Heuvel.

<sup>54</sup> Baker.

<sup>55</sup> Pickering and Beebe.

<sup>56</sup> Chomsky and Polychroniou.