

'Biden's phase' of Ukraine war is beginning

by M. K. Bhadrakumar,* India



M. K. Bhadrakumar
(Photo ma)

(Edit.) Renowned American military historian, strategic thinker and war veteran Colonel (ret.) Douglas MacGregor (who served as an advisor to the Pentagon during the Trump administration) predicts that a new "Biden phase of the war" is coming.

[See video link at the end of the text in footnote 6.]

The ground war in Ukraine has run its course, a new phase is beginning. Even diehard supporters of Ukraine in the western media and think tanks are admitting that a military victory over Russia is impossible and a vacation of the territory under Russian control is way beyond Kiev's capability.

Hence the ingenuity of the *Biden* Administration to explore Plan B counselling Kiev to be realistic about loss of territory and pragmatically seek dialogue with Moscow. This was the bitter message that US Secretary of State *Antony Blinken* transmitted to Kiev recently in person.

But President *Zelensky's* caustic reaction in a subsequent *interview with the Economist magazine is revealing*.¹ He hit back that the western leaders still talk the good talk, pledging they will stand with Ukraine "as long as it takes" (Biden mantra), but he, *Zelensky*, has detected a change of mood among some of his partners: "I have this intuition, reading, hearing and seeing their eyes [when they say] 'we'll be always with you.' But I see that he or she is not here, not with us." Certainly, *Zelensky* is reading the body lan-

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Long-range cruise missiles supplied by UK and France, hit Russia's Black Sea fleet at its home port of Sevastopol, Sept 13, 2023. (Photo ma)

guage right, as in the absence of an overwhelming military success shortly, western support for Ukraine is time-limited.

Zelensky knows that sustaining the western support will be difficult. Yet he hopes that if not Americans, European Union will at least keep supplying aid, and but may open negotiations over the accession process for Ukraine possibly even at its summit in December.

But he also held out a veiled threat of terrorist threat to Europe – warning that it would not be a "good story" for Europe if it were to "drive these people [of Ukraine] into a corner". So far, such ominous threats were muted, originating from low ranking activists of the fascist *Bandera* fringe.

But Europe has its limits, too. The western stockpiles of weapons are exhausted and Ukraine is a bottomless pit. Importantly, conviction is lacking whether continued supplies would make any difference to the proxy war that is unwinnable. Besides, European economies are in doldrum, the recession in Germany may slide into depression, with profound consequences of "deindustrialisation".

Suffice to say, *Zelensky's* visit to the White House in the coming days becomes a defining moment. The *Biden* Administration is in a sombre mood that the proxy war is hindering a full-throttle Indo-Pacific strategy against China. Yet, during an appearance on ABC's *This Week*, *Blinken explicitly stated*² for the first time that the

US would not oppose Ukraine using US-supplied longer-range missiles to attack deep inside Russian territory, a move that Moscow has previously called a “red line”, which would make Washington a direct party to the conflict.

The well-known American military historian, strategic thinker and combat veteran Colonel (Retd.) *Douglas MacGregor* (who served as advisor to the Pentagon during the Trump administration), is prescient when he says that a new “Biden’s phase of the war” is about to begin. That is to say, having run out of ground forces, the locus will now shift to long-range strike weapons like the *Storm Shadow*, *Taurus*, ATACMS long-range missiles, etc.

The US is considering sending ATACMS long-range missiles that Ukraine has been asking for a long time with the capability to strike deep inside Russian territory. The most provocative part is that NATO reconnaissance platforms, both manned and unmanned, will be used in such operations, making the US a virtual co-belligerent.

Russia has been exercising restraint in attacking the source of such enemy capabilities but how long such restraint will continue is anybody’s guess. In response to a pointed query about how Washington would see the attacks on Russian territory with American weaponry and technology, Blinken argued that the increasing number of attacks on Russian territory by Ukrainian drones are “about how they’re [Ukrainians] going to defend their territory and how they’re working to take back what’s been seized from them. Our [US] role, the role of dozens of other countries around the world that are supporting them, is to help them do that.”

Russia is not going to accept such a brazen escalation, especially as these advanced weapon systems used to attack Russia are actually manned by NATO personnel – contractors, trained ex-military hands or even serving officers. *President Putin told the media*³ on Friday that “we have detected foreign mercenaries and instructors both on the battlefield and in the units where training is carried out. I think yesterday or the day before yesterday someone was captured again.”

The US calculus is that at some point, Russia will be compelled to negotiate and a frozen conflict will ensue where the NATO allies would retain the option to continue with Ukraine’s military build-up and the process leading to its member-

ship of the Atlantic alliance, and allow the Biden Administration to focus on the Indo-Pacific.

However, Russia will not settle for a “frozen conflict” that falls far short of the objectives of demilitarisation and denazification of Ukraine that are the key objectives of its special military operation.

Faced with this new phase of the proxy war, what form the Russian retaliation will take remains to be seen. There could be multiple ways without Russia directly attacking NATO territories or using nuclear weapons (unless the US stages a nuclear attack – of which the chances are zero as of now.)

Already, it is possible to see the potential resumption of military-technical cooperation between Russia and the *Democratic People’s Republic of Korea* (DPRK) (potentially including ICBM technology) as a natural consequence of the aggressive US policy towards Russia and its support for Ukraine – as much as of the current international situation. The point is, today it is with DPRK; tomorrow it could be with Iran, Cuba or Venezuela – what Col. MacGregor calls “horizontal escalation” by Moscow. The situation in Ukraine has become interconnected with the problems of the Korean Peninsula and Taiwan.

*Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu said on state television*⁴ on Wednesday that Russia has “no other options” but to achieve a victory in its special military operation and will continue to make progress with their key mission of mowing down the enemy’s equipment and personnel. This suggests that the attritional war will be further intensified while the overall strategy may shift to achieving total military victory.

The Ukrainian military is desperate for manpower. In the 15-week “counteroffensive” alone, over 71,000 Ukrainian soldiers have been killed. There is talk of Kiev seeking repatriation of its nationals in military age from among the refugees in Europe. On the other hand, in expectation of a prolonged conflict, the mobilisation in Russia is continuing.

Putin *disclosed*⁵ on Friday that 300,000 people have volunteered and signed contracts to join the armed forces and new units are being formed, equipped with advanced types of weapons and equipment, “and some of them are already 85–90 percent equipped.”

The high likelihood is that once the Ukrainian “counteroffensive” peters out in another few weeks as a massive failure, Russian forces may

launch a large-scale offensive. Conceivably, Russian forces may even cross Dnieper River and take control of Odessa and the coastline leading to the Romanian border, from where NATO has been mounting attacks on Crimea. Make no mistake, for the Anglo-American axis, encircling Russia in the Black Sea has always remained a top priority.

Watch the excellent interview⁶ of Col. Douglas MacGregor by Professor Glenn Diesen at the University of North-Eastern in Norway.

Source: <https://www.indianpunchline.com/bidens-phase-of-ukraine-war-is-beginning/>, 17 September 2023

¹ <https://www.economist.com/europe/2023/09/10/donald-trump-will-never-support-putin-says-volodymyr-zelensky>

² <https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-with-jonathan-karl-of-abc-this-week-2/>

³ <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/72277>

⁴ <https://tass.com/politics/1674313>

⁵ <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/72277>

⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3KlqR3ORYLE>