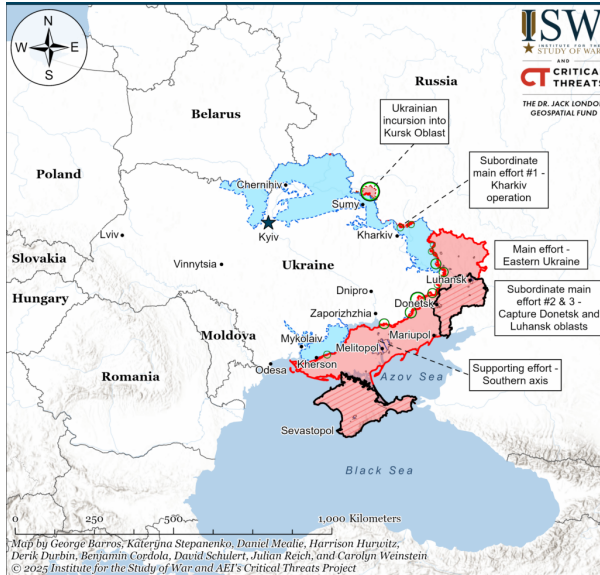


Ukraine: Not a Proxy War

written by Dan La Botz, Stephen R. Shalom | April 2, 2025

A discussion of the New York Times' article, "The Partnership: The Secret History of the War in Ukraine."



The Ukrainian people are currently fighting against Russia's brutal invasion and the occupation of about twenty percent of its territory. The war remains today what it has been from the beginning: A war of national self-defense and self-determination against Russian imperialism as Vladimir Putin attempts to reduce Ukraine to its former colonial status under both the Tsarist and Soviet empires. From the start of the war Ukraine, like any nation in such a position, has had the right to obtain arms wherever it can get them, despite the fact that the U.S. provision of arms and intelligence could influence and pressure Ukraine. And the right to self-defense remains despite the fact that the Ukrainian people are simultaneously challenging the neoliberal policies of the Zelensky government.

Now, thanks to a *New York Times* analysis by Adam Entous, "The Partnership: The Secret History of the War in Ukraine," published on March 29, we have new information about the extent of U.S. military assistance. The Russian press and pro-Putin media have been crowing about the article, claiming it somehow invalidates Ukraine's war of self-defense.

But while the article provides us with the story of the U.S.-Ukrainian military relationship in the Biden years in remarkable detail, significantly **it provides no evidence of U.S. political control of the war**, let alone that Washington pressed Ukraine to fight on when Kyiv preferred to throw in the towel. The article recounts the continual disagreements and tensions between U.S. and Ukrainian generals, as well as among Ukrainian political and military leaders. Most of those tensions arose from Ukraine's legitimate and understandable desire to drive the Russian invader from its territory and, importantly, to free Ukrainians in the occupied territories from the oppression they have been enduring, on the one hand, and the U.S. concern about the dangers of a wider, even a nuclear, war, on the other.

At the center of the article is a long discussion of the attempted Ukrainian counteroffensive of 2023 that ended in "stillborn failure." Entous shows that Zelensky chose to follow the advice of his ground forces commander to deploy forces to the unsuccessful effort to defend Bakhmut, rather than concentrate forces for a push to the south as urged by both his own supreme commander and the

Americans, effectively scuttling the counter-offensive.

There followed more tensions and rifts among the Ukrainians. Never in the course of reading this article does one have the sense that the Americans were dictating to the Ukrainians. And that, of course, is the key issue.

Early on in the article, Entous writes, "In some ways, Ukraine was, on a wider canvas, a rematch in a long history of U.S.-Russia proxy wars — Vietnam in the 1960s, Afghanistan in the 1980s, Syria three decades later." But his article does not substantiate that claim.

What is a proxy war? One in which the parties doing the fighting are not the ones calling the shots. So the Soviet Union and China provided arms to North Vietnam - as they should have - but the decision to resist the American aggression was made in Hanoi and among the South Vietnamese, not Moscow or Beijing. Likewise, Ukrainians are fighting not because any foreign power compelled them to do so, but because they value their own national survival. In the Biden years, the United States supported Ukraine for its own motives—to weaken and prevent the expansion of Russia and to strengthen its relationship with its NATO allies and with the European Union and its economy. Washington and its generals proved incapable of forcing the Ukrainians to do what they thought was best strategically for American goals and never was able to take control of the war politically.

Today, the situation is quite different. At the moment, Pres. Donald Trump is attempting precisely to take control, forcing a solution that essentially splits the spoils of Ukraine between the United States and Russia, with Washington getting mineral rights of the sort that great powers have often demanded of their colonies and Russia getting big chunks of Ukrainian territory, including its population and resources. Putin would also strip Ukraine of its autonomy, denying it the right to join NATO or the European Union. It is Trump's support for Putin's position that forms the basis for a broader U.S.-Russian partnership that would threaten other European nations. So Ukraine's fight for its sovereignty is as important as ever.

But as important as Ukraine's struggle is for the long-term security of other European countries, the latter could not induce Kyiv to soldier on if Ukrainians themselves didn't see the value of resisting Russian subjugation. Unfortunately, given the military imbalance between Russia and Ukraine, Ukraine cannot carry on their war of self-defense if other nations don't contribute arms. We will have to organize to insist that the arms keep flowing until Ukraine can attain the just peace that the majority of the Ukrainian people so desperately desire.