

Ending Russia's War: Why Ukraine's Victory Is Crucial

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Jan 25, 2025

Also published in *19FortyFive*

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Articles & Testimony

A negotiated settlement is inevitable, but if Putin goes into those talks with all the leverage, the outcome will only lay the foundation for even deadlier conflicts in the future.

Residents Putin and Trump are expected (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2025/01/23/russia-putin-trump-call-ukraine/>) to speak about Ukraine (<https://www.19fortyfive.com/2025/01/f-16-fighter-game-changer-for-ukraine-and-nightmare-for-russia/>) in the coming days. Ending Russia's war in Ukraine will be official US policy, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said (https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=9557BsEoNUQ&ab_channel=CBSMornings) earlier this week during his interview with CBS Morning News. "It's a war and a conflict that was started by Russia, but it is now a stalemate, a protracted and bloody conflict," To be sure, ending the war is an important goal, but on what terms?

Rubio said that peace must be "sustainable." However, Kyiv is currently in a poor negotiating position unless the United States significantly bolsters support. Vladimir Putin remains committed to maximalist goals in a peace settlement. This stance is dangerous. Moscow's goals go beyond Ukraine. To prevent a larger war (<https://www.19fortyfive.com/2024/12/5-places-world-war-111-could-break-out-in-2025/>) and achieve sustainable peace, Russia must lose in Ukraine (<https://www.19fortyfive.com/2025/01/the-russian-air-force-is-running-out-of-planes-for-the-war-in-ukraine/>). It is an attainable goal.

Russia's Waiting Game on Ukraine

The real problem is that Western policymakers do not appear to believe Russia's loss is practically achievable if anything, because Russia simply has more people to throw into the war's meat grinder. Therefore, the argument goes, time is on Russia's side; Moscow can drive Ukrainian forces to exhaustion. Putin, for one, is undoubtedly banking on this approach as he waits for the West to give up.

There are several steps the US can take to help Ukraine win. First, the US can empower Ukrainians to attrite the Russian military at a higher rate than Ukraine's, if Ukraine is allowed to borrow as much as it needs, and purchase quickly the military equipment it needs. The US can also continue to toughen sanctions on [Russia's energy sector \(https://www.19fortyfive.com/2024/12/russia-turns-to-crypto-to-fuel-ukraine-war-and-beat-sanctions-will-it-work/\)](https://www.19fortyfive.com/2024/12/russia-turns-to-crypto-to-fuel-ukraine-war-and-beat-sanctions-will-it-work/).

Second, the US needs to act outside Ukraine. It must impose global costs on Russia outside the West. Thus far, the US has failed to do this consistently and comprehensively. The lack of penalty is the reason why Russia continues to find revenue and other support to wage its war. Without the support of the global south, Russia's resources will dwindle at a faster rate.

Putin has waged his war with the help of Iranian drones, increased trade with the Arab world – especially with the UAE, and help of North Korean soldiers on the [Ukrainian battlefield \(https://www.19fortyfive.com/2025/01/russias-artillery-advantage-in-the-ukraine-war-is-slipping-away/\)](https://www.19fortyfive.com/2025/01/russias-artillery-advantage-in-the-ukraine-war-is-slipping-away/).

China has meanwhile provided crucial components for Russia's defense industry. Thus, Putin has been able to raise revenue and obtain other critical resources to wage his war with the help of the global south, especially the Middle East, which is deeply tied to the European theater.

Tightening the Grip on Russia

Another problem is that the global south simply does not buy the Western narrative on the war, and at best has been ambivalent if not outright sympathetic to Russia. The US must counter Russia's narratives in regions where they resonate the most, including the Middle East, as part of a comprehensive strategy employing multiple influence tools.

Finally, any conversation about raising the costs on Russia comes to nuclear weapons. Russia is a nuclear power, and the potential use of nuclear weapons is a serious concern. Still, [Putin \(https://www.19fortyfive.com/2025/01/putins-fear-of-weakness-the-real-barrier-to-a-ukraine-peace-deal/\)](https://www.19fortyfive.com/2025/01/putins-fear-of-weakness-the-real-barrier-to-a-ukraine-peace-deal/) is not irrational. He must know that the West will be prepared to answer any use of nuclear weapons on the battlefield. Putin also engages in nuclear blackmail to scare the West into concessions or to self-deter and delay or diminish support for Ukraine.

If Putin wanted to use nuclear weapons, he's had plenty of opportunities to do so in Ukraine over the last three years. Yet he has chosen not to, even as the fighting has intensified. And while Western leaders mull every decision on Ukraine through the prism of whether Moscow would perceive it as too escalatory, Putin has shown no such concerns about any escalatory steps taken. Trump should tell Putin that any use of [nuclear weapons \(https://www.19fortyfive.com/2024/12/what-if-ukraine-still-had-nuclear-weapons/\)](https://www.19fortyfive.com/2024/12/what-if-ukraine-still-had-nuclear-weapons/) would result in an immediate and overwhelming response from the United States.

Russia's resources are not infinite, and Putin knows this. This is why, for instance, Putin tried his utmost to avoid a full mobilization for as long as possible and aimed to recruit conscripts mainly outside major cities: Russia's middle class doesn't want to fight, and the poor simply don't have a choice. If Putin didn't care at all about Russia's public opinion, he would not have criminalized referring to the war as anything other than a "small military operation."

Every war ultimately ends in a negotiated settlement. Still, if Putin goes into the talks with leverage over Ukraine, the outcome will only lay the foundation for a more significant future conflict. If anyone doubts that Russia's goals [go beyond Ukraine \(https://www.19fortyfive.com/2023/03/polands-air-force-ready-to-fight-russia-in-a-war/\)](https://www.19fortyfive.com/2023/03/polands-air-force-ready-to-fight-russia-in-a-war/), they only need to recall that Putin himself made the war about the West when he said it was the West that started the war in Ukraine. Further proof comes to light in what former Russian president Dmitry Medvedev [described \(https://tass.com/politics/1432657\)](https://tass.com/politics/1432657) Russia's goal in Ukraine as "the creation of an open Eurasia from Lisbon to

Vladivostok.”

Russia has lost wars in the past. The 1905 war with Japan is a prime example. This loss, followed by a failed internal revolution, resulted in crucial reforms. Chief among them, perhaps, is that for the first time, Russia developed a semblance of a parliament, a nascent step towards [democratization \(https://www.19fortyfive.com/2021/12/rip-soviet-union-one-of-the-greatest-revolutions-of-modern-times/\)](https://www.19fortyfive.com/2021/12/rip-soviet-union-one-of-the-greatest-revolutions-of-modern-times/).

Sometimes only a shattering loss can force internal self-reflection, leading to a positive change. The only way to push Russia in that direction is by helping Ukraine win. But Russia’s victory will shatter [American credibility \(https://www.19fortyfive.com/2024/12/the-eight-great-powers-of-2025/\)](https://www.19fortyfive.com/2024/12/the-eight-great-powers-of-2025/) and lead to the war the West sought to avoid. This year is crucial, and the stakes could not be higher.

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