



# Alexander Temerko: Like every war, the war in Ukraine will be a dead end, then a catastrophe

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The best soldiers “are made from people who, while leaving home in the morning, did not even think about war, and upon returning in the evening, found a crater in the place of their own house, in which their wife, children, and parents had evaporated.”

These are the words of my good friend, Lt. Gen. Alexander Lebed. He was the secretary of Russia’s Security Council in 1996 under President Yeltsin. His words absolutely apply to Ukrainian soldiers who, after Russia’s brutal aggression in February 2022, found craters where their homes had been. These craters keep appearing.

The man he describes “is no longer a man, but a wolf, who will tear as long as he lives, and he will live a long time because he does not value his own life: he does not need it, he does not need money, he does not need medals, he does not need anything at all. He has only one thing — revenge.”

## Better soldiers

Thus, in a sense, Ukrainian soldiers are much better than their Russian counterparts. In three years of this war, Russia has barely conquered a few dozen kilometers of additional territory, and has not taken a single large city of significance.

Just by signing a contract, each Russian recruit earns \$10,000, yet Russia remains unable to recruit enough soldiers to maintain their 650,000-man army along a 2300 mile long front. The Ukrainian soldiers are lions by comparison.

Yet even still, though Ukrainian soldiers are motivated heartily by revenge and the desire to see Ukraine free, the Ukrainian army has also been unable to field more than 600,000 troops. And over the past three years, the population of Ukraine has decreased by half, most of whom are refugees in Europe.

Despite this, Ukraine had chances to win this war — in the heady days of the liberation of Kharkiv and Kherson, or during Ukraine's counter-offensive last year. Yet, when Ukraine had a chance to attack, the Biden administration did everything to prevent this from happening, from delaying funds to slowing the supply of weapons, citing de-escalation.

The rhetoric was of support for Ukraine and endless sanctions against Russia, but the Biden administration achieved only one thing — a continuation of the war, with neither side able to blink for fear of political catastrophe.

The collective West, while pouring money into the war, has always looked at Ukraine with only one eye open. One eye welcomed the courage and fortitude of the Ukrainian people, the bravery and heroism of its army, the talent of military leaders, and the patriotism and unity of the nation.

The other eye, closed, ignored the corruption of the Ukrainian leadership, the incompetence and greed of people around President Volodymyr Zelensky. It also ignored the targeted persecution of opposition politicians, even those supporting the Ukrainian army. The collective West tried not to notice the closure of the free press in Ukraine, the persecution of businesses, the Orthodox Church, and other institutions of a free society.

The West applauded Zelensky's one-man show, where the actor first played the role of Che Guevara, and hopes to continue in the role of Simon Bolivar. It has cost the West, the Ukrainian army and the Ukrainian economy dearly, and undermines the faith of the Ukrainian people in their elected

representatives, especially since elections have been prorogued illegitimately for half a year.

## **Both sides' limits**

The United States has spent more than \$120 billion, and the European Union about €200 billion, in weapons and economic support for Ukraine. Russia has spent twice as much, but was unable to achieve any of the goals of this war declared by President Putin, though it did accomplish several hundred thousand killed and wounded on the Ukrainian side and several times more on the Russian side.

Ukraine's infrastructure and energy sector have been almost completely destroyed as a result of Russian missile attacks, and Russia's economy has been set back 20 years as a result of trading and financial sanctions.

The West has propped up Ukraine but has failed to isolate Russia. Russia has managed to expand its influence among the BRICS countries and has built an axis of evil from Moscow to Tehran to Beijing and to Pyongyang.

Overall, the world has not become safer or more stable. By way of analogy: During World War II, the Soviet Union took more than a year in 1943 to liberate Ukraine from the Nazis. With approximately equal economies and army strengths of the USSR and Germany, losses on the Soviet side alone were three million men. Ukraine is vast, and the armies fighting in it remain formidable.

But there are limits to both sides. Even if tomorrow the West stops helping Ukraine, Russia will not be able to win this war outright, even if it calls in the entire North Korean army.

Lately, the Russian dictator has increased his nuclear threats. This suggests that the Russian military machine is on its last legs, and Putin is now facing a difficult dilemma — either to make peace and agree to a ceasefire and peace talks, or to declare a general mobilisation and transfer the Russian economy to a war footing.

Ukraine, on the other hand, is in a slow but steady retreat across the front, and has no strategic reserves for a counteroffensive. Therefore, the Ukrainian leadership also need a truce and new elections so that the new government with a mandate from the people could either declare a renewed and increased national effort, or a negotiated peace with Russia.

If elections don't occur, our current trajectory is a conflict that continues for years, with hundreds of thousands more killed and wounded, and it is

far from certain that we will see a victory for one side on the battlefield.

The incoming Trump administration has a unique chance to end this slaughter, by offering both sides what they need, but what they cannot tell each other: A ceasefire, the creation of a demilitarized zone, presidential and parliamentary elections in Ukraine, and — with the new Ukrainian government, along with the mediation and guarantees of the collective West — negotiations on peace and guarantees for Ukraine and Russia both.

The appointment of a respected military officer like General Kellogg speaks of the seriousness of President Trump's intentions to achieve a peace in Ukraine in the near future and prepare a package of proposals that will be palatable for Russia and for Ukraine. That Kellogg will be one of the men to deliver that proposal will be understood as a sign of seriousness in Russia and in Ukraine.

## Dead end wars

To finish: as Alexander Lebed once said: “Every war is a dead end, then a catastrophe. All wars, even if they are hundred-year wars, they all end in one thing — negotiations and peace.”

For him, he continued, “the question has long been: Is it worth casting a mountain of corpses, breeding widows, orphans, cripples, throwing the work of dozens of previous generations to the wind, so that later we can sit down and come to an agreement? Maybe we should exclude this uncivilized part altogether.”

*Alexander Temerko is a Ukrainian-British businessman and political activist and member of the advisory council of the Institute of Economic Affairs. His previous article was [“Donald Trump the Peacemonger.”](#)*

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