

To: Jake Sullivan, William Burns (US); Sir Tim Barrow (UK)

## Ukraine/Russia conflict: a fresh Strategic Options Memo

Our aim: for this to be the most comprehensive (yet concise) document one can read on Ukraine. And to spark imaginative thinking in the minds of decision-makers.

### The West's wants:

- 1) Deterrent credibility for the global order. Chiefly demonstrating to Beijing: you do not get things by breaking international law.
- 2) Russia not to attack any other country in Europe.
- 3) Ukraine to maintain its sovereign territory.

### Russia's wants:

- 1) For Ukraine to be non-NATO (or *de facto* NATO), non-nuclear, and non-long-range missile capable.
- 2) Crimea to be part of Russia. [Independence](#) for Donetsk and Luhansk.
- 3) Preservation of Russian language use in Ukraine.

### Ukraine's wants:

- 1) Withdrawal of Russian troops before negotiations can begin.
- 2) Robust security guarantees for the future.
- 3) Restoration of territorial integrity (2022, 2014, or 1991 borders – parties differ on).

**Russia's perspective, inside 1,000 words:** From [Bill Burns](#) (now director of the CIA)'s 2019 book *The Back Channel: A Memoir of American Diplomacy and the Case for Its Renewal*. All bullets are direct quotations from the book:

- [James] Baker sold the concept to German chancellor Helmut Kohl in early February [1990], to press for rapid German unification and full NATO membership, while **reassuring the Soviets that NATO would not be extended any farther to the east.** Baker said there would be **no extension of NATO's jurisdiction or forces "one inch to the east" of a reunified Germany. The Russians took him at his word and would feel betrayed by NATO enlargement in the years that followed, even though the pledge was never formalized and was made before the breakup of the Soviet Union.**
- As we reported in a cable after Clinton's [1995] visit, "**nowhere are Russian sensitivities about being excluded or taken advantage of more acute than on the broad issue of European security. There is a solid consensus within the Russian elite that NATO expansion is a bad idea, period.**" Yeltsin and the Russian elite assumed, with **considerable justification, that Jim Baker's assurances during the negotiation of German reunification in 1990 would continue to apply after the breakup of the Soviet Union.**
- [Strobe] Talbott, and **later Secretary of Defense Bill Perry, worried that starting down the road to formal enlargement of NATO would undermine hopes** for a more enduring partnership with Russia. **We shared similar concerns at Embassy**

**Moscow. In a 1995 cable, we laid out the quandary: “The challenge for us is to look past the [government of Russia’s] often irritating rhetoric and erratic and reactive diplomacy to our own long-term self-interest. That demands, in particular, that we continue to seek to build a security order in Europe sufficiently in Russia’s interests so that a revived Russia will have no compelling reason to revise it – and so that in the meantime the ‘stab in the back’ theorists will have only limited room for maneuver in Russian politics.” Nevertheless, momentum gathered over the course of 1994 toward enlargement, with Clinton declaring publicly in Warsaw in July that the question was not if but when.**

- In a later private conversation with Clinton, Yeltsin was equally direct about his concerns. **“For me to agree to the borders of NATO expanding toward those of Russia,” he said, “would constitute a betrayal on my part of the Russian people.” “Hostility to early NATO expansion,” we reported just after the Budapest outburst [1994], “is almost universally felt across the domestic political spectrum here.”**
- Sitting at the embassy in Moscow in the mid-1990s, it seemed to me that **NATO expansion was premature at best, and needlessly provocative at worst. No less a statesman than George Kennan, the architect of containment, called the expansion decision “the most fateful error of American policy in the entire post-Cold War era.”** Where we made a serious strategic mistake – and where Kennan was prescient – was in later **letting inertia drive us to push for NATO membership for Ukraine and Georgia, despite Russia’s deep historical attachments to both states and even stronger protestations. That did indelible damage, and fed the appetite of a future Russian leadership for getting even.**
- Putin offered little resistance to Baltic membership, amid all the other preoccupations of his first term. Georgia, and especially Ukraine, were **different animals altogether. There could be no doubt that Putin would fight back hard against any steps in the direction of NATO membership for either state. In Washington, however, there was a kind of geopolitical and ideological inertia at work, with strong interest from Vice President Cheney and large parts of the interagency bureaucracy in a “Membership Action Plan” (MAP) for Ukraine and Georgia. Key European allies, in particular Germany and France, were dead set against offering it.**
- Completing the trifecta of troubles was the vexing issue of missile defense. Anxious about American superiority in missile defense technology since the Soviet era, the Russians were always nervous that US advances in the field, whatever their stated purposes, would put Moscow at a serious strategic disadvantage. More worrying for Putin were American plans to build new radar and interceptor sites in the Czech Republic and Poland to counter a potential Iranian missile threat. **Putin’s specialists told him (not unreasonably) that it would be technically smarter to deploy new missile defense systems in the southeast Mediterranean, or Italy.**
- February 2008: It’s equally **hard to overstate the strategic consequences of a premature MAP [Membership Action Plan] offer, especially to Ukraine. Ukrainian entry into NATO is the brightest of all redlines for the Russian elite (not just Putin).** In more than two and a half years of conversations with key Russian

players, from knuckle-draggers in the dark recesses of the Kremlin to Putin's sharpest liberal critics, **I have yet to find anyone who views Ukraine in NATO as anything other than a direct challenge to Russian interests.** A Membership Action Plan offer would be seen not as a technical step along a long road toward membership, but as throwing down the strategic gauntlet. Today's Russia will respond.

**Russian-Ukrainian relations will go into a deep freeze. It will create fertile soil for Russian meddling in Crimea and eastern Ukraine.**

- If, in the end, we decided to push Membership Action Plan offers for Ukraine and Georgia, I wrote, “you can probably stop reading here. I can conceive of no grand package that would allow the Russians to swallow this pill quietly.”
- In many ways, Bucharest [2008] left us with the worst of both worlds – indulging the Ukrainians and Georgians in hopes of NATO membership on which we were unlikely to deliver, while reinforcing Putin's sense that we were determined to pursue a course he saw as an existential threat.



**Ukraine and the West's perspective:** The United Nations Charter ([Article 2\(4\)](#)) prohibits use of force by one country to invade and take territory from another.

- Russia, the US, Britain, and later France and China [guaranteed](#) Ukraine's security and borders in return for Ukraine giving up what was then the world's third largest nuclear stockpile, in 1994. Not helping defend Ukraine's liberty now would be a [negative example](#) of nuclear disarmament.
- [No document](#) was ever signed by the US restricting NATO enlargement. Putin has conceded [himself](#) this was “a mistake” (by Gorbachev).
- [Michael McFaul](#): What's the counterfactual had NATO never expanded eastwards? Might more countries not have been invaded? Professor Stephen Kotkin [broadly agrees](#): “I have only the greatest respect for George Kennan. [John Mearsheimer](#) is a giant of a scholar. But I respectfully disagree. The problem with their argument is that it assumes that, had NATO not expanded, Russia wouldn't be the same or very likely close to what it is today. What we have today in Russia is not some kind of surprise. It's not some kind of deviation from a historical pattern. Way before NATO existed – in the nineteenth century – Russia looked like this: it had an autocrat. It had repression. It had militarism. It had suspicion of foreigners and the West. This is a Russia that we know, and it's not a Russia that arrived yesterday or in the nineteen-nineties. It's not a response to the actions of the West. There are internal processes in Russia that account for where we are today.”
- Putin has challenged Ukraine's [right](#) to exist (without Russian partnership).
- If Ukraine falls, Russia's threat to Europe surely increases. Defending Ukraine ought to deter further Russian aggression, [weaken](#) Russia's military, and diminish it as a conventional threat.

**Strategic options:** *All conceivable ways this conflict could be managed going forward. Options are categorized: “unpalatable”, “bad”, and “crazy” – including near-unconscionable routes. Why? Without doing so, conflicts tend to veer to the unconscionable, unwittingly. Decision-makers ought to beware that by rejecting moderate (though unpalatable) options, they might be setting themselves up for future unconscionable decisions.*

*“Politics is not the art of the possible. It consists in choosing between the disastrous and the unpalatable.” J. K. Galbraith, 1962 [letter](#) to JFK*

## Unpalatable

**A) “Hold, build, and strike”:** [Encourage](#) the Ukrainian military to take a more defensive posture in 2024, radically ramp up the Western industrial base (US and Europe), and go back on the offensive in 2025 – with the aim of expelling Russia to (at least) 2014 lines.

**Downsides:** The West can, and should (for its general deterrence), radically ramp up production of 155mm artillery shells and [air-defense](#) interceptors. But this approach, short of a game-changing technological breakthrough, still leaves a grave shortage of Ukrainian manpower. It relies on large-scale mobilization. A (politically fraught) mobilization bill has just [been passed](#) and [signed](#) by Zelensky. But it will take many months to properly train new conscripts. Effective new brigades [cannot](#) be created in weeks. And British intelligence has said in answer to this the Kremlin is [seeking](#) to recruit 400,000 people in 2024 to sustain its forces in Ukraine. There is a reality: Russia has more people. In November 2023, General Zaluzhny (then head of Ukraine’s armed forces) [concluded](#) that it would take a massive technological leap: “There will most likely be no deep and beautiful breakthrough.”

A more defensive posture might have the benefit of getting through the US Presidential election, and other Western 2024 leadership elections, such that re- and/or newly-elected leaders can dictate strategy afresh. But this will require a high level of ongoing financing (in 2022, the US contributed roughly \$77 billion, and the rest of NATO \$63 billion; each should expect to have to contribute at least the same amounts per year until a cease-fire occurs) – which there is [little political appetite](#) for. And the approach will take up decision-maker bandwidth that might be better focused in the Indo-Pacific and Middle East.

Critics would [argue](#) this is really “hold politically until November”, without an Afghan-style military collapse, and that it’s not in the best long-term interest of Ukraine. Given the lead-time for increasing industrial capacity, this approach will likely further [deplete](#) Western military reserves throughout 2024, leaving the West further exposed for potential other surprise conflicts.

We include [no option](#) of “wait for the conflict to freeze, as did fighting in eastern Ukraine after Russia’s 2014 invasion”. This is not 2014. A lasting stalemate across the frontline does not look in any way likely to settle in, and violence does not look set to descend to a bearable, steady state.

**B) The South Korea model:** An armistice, no peace treaty, and Western security guarantees for Ukraine. A February 2023 [New Yorker interview](#) with Professor Stephen Kotkin: “If you look at the North Korea–South Korea outcome, it’s a terrible outcome. At the same time, it was an outcome that enabled South Korea to flourish under American security guarantees and protection. And, if there were a Ukraine, however much of it – eighty per cent, ninety per cent – which could flourish as a member of the European Union and which could have some type of security

guarantee – whether that were full NATO accession, whether that were bilateral with the US, whether it were multilateral to include the US and Poland and Baltic countries and Scandinavian countries, potentially – that would be a victory in the war.”

Niall Ferguson, in September 2023, [argued](#) the same: “Rather than risk a protracted war with the added danger of waning Western support, Ukraine needs to lock in what it has already achieved. It has exposed the limits of Russian military power. It has established credible claim to EU membership. It has transformed its international image from a den of corruption to a land of heroes. More than you might think can be achieved while you await the return of enemy-occupied territories. Think only of South Korea’s extraordinary economic and political progress over 70 years, even though the armistice of 1953 has never become a fully fledged peace and there remains a highly dangerous border zone between it and a hostile neighbor.”

Richard Haass has [suggested](#) similar: “Ideally, the cease-fire would hold, leading to a status quo like the one that prevails on the Korean Peninsula, which has remained largely stable without a formal peace pact for 70 years. Cyprus has similarly been divided but stable for decades. This is not an ideal outcome, but it is preferable to a high-intensity war that continues for years.” Such an approach would pause the bloodshed, and depletion of Western military stockpiles.

Downsides: Accepting a ceasefire in which Russia is perceived to have captured a significant part of Ukrainian territory is not something any democratic leader can easily concede. Without extremely robust security guarantees, it would perhaps [embolden](#) Putin, allowing for a pause, and Russia to re-arm and re-invade yet more strongly. It would not be a “genuine” peace; but have ever-present danger of the conflict turning hot again. And “weakness is provocative” – perhaps it would signal weakness to China with respect to Taiwan, and other regions generally. Potential for the US/West to be seen as a fickle ally – even if the outcome achieved is far greater than almost anyone would have imagined in February 2022. Military momentum is presently with Russia, and delay in calling for an armistice means Ukraine will have an increasingly worse line to draw.

**C) US-convened diplomacy:** Aiming at an actual peace agreement. A ceasefire brought. Lines of control frozen. Agree with the Russian Federation to trilateral talks (Ukraine, Russia, and the lead mediating country – Turkey has positioned itself well to be lead contender here).

There were [advanced](#) talks in March/April 2022 between Ukraine and Russia in Istanbul. The [Istanbul Communiqué](#) (which would imply Ukraine’s neutrality) could be revived as a starting point. Putin has [declared](#) himself open to dialogue since, while Zelensky signed a [Presidential decree](#) barring the possibility from Ukrainian leadership in October 2022. It is in Ukraine’s gift to come to the negotiating table.

[The Pope](#) is now calling for this. As, early on, was the late [Henry Kissinger](#) (May 2022: further alienation of the Kremlin will have dire long-term consequences for stability in Europe).

Downsides: Not politically face-saving – especially in an election year. It would be ideal to push Putin into seeking negotiations from him being in a position of political weakness, where a more favorable settlement might be possible. But a [lesson](#) from the 1945–47 Chinese Civil War – the US then having backed Chiang Kai-shek: “[George] Marshall grasped the dynamic at work. Each side overplayed its hand when momentum seemed to be in its favor and then came back to negotiate when the momentum had shifted, at which point the other side was no longer interested.” The US not being able to convince Chiang to see through negotiations led to victory for Mao and the Communists. Woodrow Wilson delaying an armistice by a few months due to a US Presidential election also [led to](#) a fateful turn in WWI.

Terms to be reached: release of prisoners and deportees; future security (guarantees for Ukraine, and distance of military exercises from borders for Russia); territory (the four oblasts and Crimea); intermediate-range missile agreements ([revive](#) the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty?); de-mining; rebuilding infrastructure (and paying for it); trade (EU accession); frozen Russian assets and sanctions.

**D) Involve the United Nations:** Professor [Carter Malkasian](#): “In setting up and carrying out negotiations, the US and NATO should include the UN. Conventional wisdom in Washington today is that the UN is an ineffective diplomatic tool. John Foster Dulles [Secretary of State during the Korean War] mistakenly thought the same in 1953, but the organization’s mediation wound up playing a crucial role in the Korean armistice. Today, Russia may find it easier to accept ideas for compromise that come from neutral or friendly countries at the UN than proposals that come from the United States, NATO, or Ukraine. The fact that important members such as India have stood on the sidelines enhances the organization’s credibility in supervising and inspecting cease-fire arrangements.”

**Downside:** From [T.R. Fehrenbach](#): “As the Foreign Minister of Mexico said in 1945: ‘[The UN] keeps order in the forest for the mice. But it does not keep order among the tigers.’”

**E) America and China to cooperate in mediating the conflict:** Secretary Blinken [in May 2023](#): “In principle, there’s nothing wrong with that [the US working in parallel with China to seek a stable outcome in Ukraine]. If we have a country, whether it’s China or other countries, that are prepared to pursue a just and durable peace, we would welcome that. It’s certainly possible that China would have a role to play in that effort. That could be very beneficial. There were elements in [the plan](#) China put out that were positive.”

Ray Dalio, founder of Bridgewater, the largest (US-based) hedge fund in the world, [Oct 2023](#): “My more attainable stretch goal would be for the US and China to jointly broker peace in Ukraine. While that is a stretch goal, it might be attainable as conditions are ripening for this to happen. Imagine if the two leading and opposing world powers that are currently lining the sides up for a hot war join forces to deliver peace. That would be terrific because besides delivering peace, it would reduce the risks of the Russia-Ukraine war leading to worse wars and would also show that they could work together for peace. If they did that, maybe they [the US and China] could develop a dynamic that would bring about peace rather than conflict in other cases.”

**Downside:** Perhaps politically naïve. It might confer unwanted status to China. And the sincerity of China’s diplomatic intentions can be questioned. But Chinese involvement *might* prevent Russia from attempting to renew the war later. (The Chinese [plan](#) does prominently note: “Principles of the United Nations Charter must be strictly observed. The sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of all countries must be effectively upheld.”)

**F) A vote in disputed territories:** Henry Kissinger [argued](#) in December 2022: “If the pre-war dividing line between Ukraine and Russia cannot be achieved by combat or by negotiation, recourse to the principle of self-determination could be explored. Internationally supervised referendums concerning self-determination could be applied to particularly divisive territories which have changed hands repeatedly over the centuries.” Elon Musk [proposed](#) similar in October 2022: “Redo elections of annexed regions under UN supervision. Russia leaves if that is will of the people.” Adding: “Crimea formally part of Russia, as it has been since 1783 (until Khrushchev’s [1954] mistake). Water supply to Crimea assured. Ukraine remains neutral.”

Downside: Great numbers have fled the region. Both sides would surely contest the outcome of a vote not going their way. Musk ran a poll for this which returned a 59.1% “No” vote, and so it didn’t have public support. Security guarantees for Ukraine would need to be negotiated separately to make this a comprehensive remedy.

## **Bad**

**G) Continue forward posture:** Keep supplying Ukraine arms. Pass more funding (European and US). The unambiguous goal: Ukraine’s victory (at least 2014 lines). Continue ratcheting up sophistication of arms and [sanctions](#) – particularly aimed at limiting Russia’s ability to produce weaponry. Russia is most likely to reform itself after a lost war – with the Western hope of it becoming a real democracy. In an ideal world: Ukraine’s sovereignty respected and reaffirmed.

Downsides: NATO is running low [on arms](#) – particularly artillery shells – and has had to resort to providing [cluster munitions](#). Ukraine is running critically low on manpower. The German economy is [suffering](#) greatly from sanctions already imposed, and continuation here will likely lead to disunity in Europe, and [anti-establishment](#) political forces across Europe.

It was stated “Western sanctions would strangle the Russian economy”, but Russia’s economy [grew quicker](#) in 2023 than either the US or Europe. And Russia is doing [extremely well](#) in continuing to manufacture arms (“Russia appears on track to produce nearly three times more artillery munitions than the US and Europe according to NATO intelligence estimates”). The idea that Ukraine is going to “win” as a result of continued forward posture, and actually beat back Russia, now seems incredibly low. This will most likely prolong Ukraine’s military deterioration, with further demographic and infrastructure destruction. And even if it were somehow successful, it arguably [doesn’t settle matters](#). Russia can attack again from Russian territory.

**H) Do damage inside Russia and Russian-occupied Ukraine:** Give Ukraine long-range weapons. Grant ATACMS, Taurus long-range cruise missiles and equivalents, F-16s. General [Ben Hodges](#): “Every square meter of Russian-occupied Ukraine is inside 300km.” Further [strike](#) oil refineries and energy facilities inside Russian territory. The hope being: long-range precision weapons can take out Russian naval bases, air bases, artillery, logistics, and headquarters in Crimea and beyond. And that this will be sufficiently costly to Russia, it will pull back. (But not be so great that Russia won’t escalate in turn.)

Downsides: This argument doesn’t seem to acknowledge the very real probability it would provoke Russia to escalate in kind. Perhaps not with tactical nuclear weapons (the international system, including China, opposes Russia’s threat or use of nuclear weapons), but there are very undesirable retaliatory options such as undersea cable cuts. Western strategists would be wise to remember how vulnerable their own infrastructure is. The British Prime Minister knows this well, having [personally written](#) a report on it.

Germany [won’t](#) send Taurus missiles to Ukraine, because Russia has told Scholz it will retaliate if he does, and considering this approach has [already](#) led to embarrassing phone-call leaks for Germany. Attacking oil refineries [risks](#) driving up global [oil prices](#) (not desirable to any administration pre-election). Utilizing long-range weaponry requires the need for German (or French or British) troops on the ground to assist with their use. Such long-range attacks would have to be *so numerous* to have any meaningful change at the front that it is inconceivable this can be done without Russian retaliation and meaningful escalation of the conflict. And ATACMS [are a](#) “very precious commodity”; they’re not made anymore ([only](#) about 4,000 ATACMS have

been manufactured since the missile was developed in the 1980s, according to Lockheed Martin, the system's manufacturer), and they would be required for any contingency the US has anywhere in the world: Iran, North Korea, China, or otherwise.

**I) Partner with Russia:** Most vocally put forward by [Vivek Ramaswamy](#) in his run for the Republican nomination; something of a reverse-Kissinger: "Use an end to the Ukraine war as a way to bifurcate the Russia-China relationship and dissolve it. That's our most effective step to deterring Xi Jinping from going after Taiwan. I think there's a mistaken consensus view that the way Xi thinks about Taiwan is to reason by analogy, rather than by actual analysis of the situation. I don't think he reasons by analogy. I think he reasons by hard power."

Russia [helped](#) the US get Syria to relinquish its chemical weapons stockpiles, brokering a deal together in 2013. Though initially seen as a success – [86.5 percent](#) of Syria's chemical weapons were removed within seven months of the 2013 agreement – there have been [chemical attacks since](#), [US dissatisfaction](#), and many have come to see Obama's failure to enforce his "red line" as undermining US credibility.

Is there potential today that Russia could help offer security guarantees for Israel – and be an ally to the US in constructing a [new governing structure](#): Israel having robust security, while allowing the Palestinian people a better life? [Sergey Lavrov](#) (Jan 21, 2024): "There should be the creation of a Palestinian state. I hope that the Israeli leadership will eventually come to this conclusion. So far, not everyone there considers this acceptable for Israel. As they say, it is impossible to do anything here. But without the creation of a Palestinian state, Israel's reliable security cannot be ensured. Russia is interested in Israel and its people living in security. This is our long-time partner. Our country was the first to recognise Israel's independence. There are now about two million citizens there, who are also citizens of Russia. We are ready to play an active role in ensuring a full settlement."

Downsides: It's unlikely Russia would now ally with the US against China. It would be tricky to ask [the US public](#) to accept an alliance with Russia. And this would potentially undermine US credibility (as per Syria).

There is a world in which this *could* strengthen Western footing in the Middle East and Indo-Pacific. But it's a mighty long-shot. That said, taking a multi-decade perspective, it would be wise for the West not to drive Russia into a generation-long alliance with China.

**J) Prepare for a multiyear war and long-term containment of Russia:** A modern-day "Fabian strategy", hoping Russia will buckle first. Take a 20+ year view: outspend Russia, tighten sanctions and export controls (closing off schemes by which they're evaded), and make the conflict unbearable for Russia over a very long period.

Create a new joint venture between Ukrainian and Western firms, to help further build the domestic capacity of Ukraine's defense industry. Western countries allocating a portion of their defense budgets to a fund that incentivises joint ventures with Ukrainian defense enterprises, allowing Ukraine to benefit from US and European innovation.

Continuously pressure Russian positions. Keep a hold of [~\\$300bn](#) in frozen Russian reserves. And generally make life uneasy for Russian-occupied Ukraine.

Downsides: Not enough other countries globally are on side to [enforce sanctions](#). And this is inadvertently strengthening China (making vast profits selling materials to Russia) and [North Korea](#). This is not playing to the US's strengths. As was said by the Taliban in Afghanistan: "You have the watches, but we have the time."



This would be a great distraction from a pivot to Asia. And what's being done in holding Russian funds is undermining confidence in the Western financial system generally, accelerating decline of international dollar usage. [Henry Kissinger](#) in December 2022: "The preferred outcome for some is a Russia rendered impotent by the war. I disagree. For all its propensity to violence, Russia has made decisive contributions to the global equilibrium and to the balance of power for over half a millennium. Its historical role should not be degraded."

## Crazy

**K) Send NATO troops in:** President Macron's recent [comments](#) were mischaracterised. Macron had been attempting to create *strategic ambiguity*, and said the West should not take the option [off the table](#). He was not *advocating* it. Nevertheless, the White House swiftly [declared](#) it would not send US troops to Ukraine. Germany, Britain, Italy, Spain, Poland and the Czech Republic also distanced themselves from the idea. General Ben Hodges, who agrees with Macron's sentiment, suggests such a move would [need](#) a clearly defined objective: "Use of NATO troops to what end? What are you trying to accomplish?"

Western decision-makers should be under no illusions that there [are NATO advisors](#) on the ground in Ukraine already. But if this were to be increased, Putin has made [clear](#): there will be a nuclear answer.

While political and military leaders might have different tolerances for strategic ambiguity and what should be ruled out rhetorically, actually sending NATO troops into Ukraine almost certainly comes with an unpalatably high risk of sparking WWII. And as [noted](#) by former Deputy Under Secretary of Defense, Stephen Bryen: the Russian army would use long-range missiles to target *Western* Ukraine. Europe has little in the way of deployable air defenses. And if transferred to protect troops inserted into Ukraine, home stocks would be worryingly depleted.

**L) Rush Ukraine into NATO:** NATO membership for Ukraine plausibly *could* be the result of a negotiated outcome. The late Henry Kissinger [wrote](#) in December 2022: "This process has mooted the original issues regarding Ukraine's membership in NATO... A peace process should link Ukraine to NATO, however expressed. The alternative of neutrality is no longer meaningful, especially after Finland and Sweden joined NATO." But [NATO works by consensus](#). Right now, with Ukraine still at war, there isn't consensus (chiefly Hungary is opposed).

This might be part of a *desired settlement* – as failure to offer true security guarantees will risk further conflict and instability. But trying to thrust Ukraine into NATO during active conflict is not possible, and continues the 2008 "worst of both worlds".

**M) Foment regime change in Russia:** Get a more pro-Western leader running the country. "[Take out](#)" Putin, in the extreme. [Downside](#): If taking out leaders of major powers becomes the done thing, this sets a *very* dangerous precedent indeed. And it might well lead to a more Western-hostile leader.

**N) Supply Ukraine with tactical nuclear weapons:** *Extremely* radical suggestion [from Michael Rubin](#) and the American Enterprise Institute. "What Biden should instead do is tell Russia clearly that any use of nuclear weapons of any size against Ukraine will lead to US provision of the same types of nuclear weapons to Ukraine without any controls on where and how Ukraine might use them." It [arguably](#) was a [historic mistake](#) for Ukraine to have its nuclear weapons taken away in

1994. But handing Ukraine nuclear weapons now, mid-conflict, is fittingly categorized as “Crazy”.

**O) Abandon Ukraine. Withdraw support completely:** Nobody is seriously advocating for this. We include it just to signify that this is distinct from advocacy for either an armistice or diplomacy. Those who are pro-diplomacy are often unfairly accused of “abandoning” Ukraine and being isolationist. But pro-armistice and pro-security guarantee positions can go together.

Actual *abandonment* would surely lead to Russia conquering as much of Ukraine as it wishes, [unconditional surrender](#) and loss of Ukraine’s independence.

**P) Deport Ukrainians living abroad and conscript them:** General [Ben Hodges](#): “Ukraine has over two million women and men that are military age, but tens of thousands of them are in Germany, Poland, Romania, Baltic countries. They’re not attracted to military service.” He encourages Ukraine’s political leadership to “get serious”. The implication being: conscript them. “I worry that some nations will begin to be less willing to support Ukraine if Ukrainians are not even fully committed themselves.” General Hodges [argued](#) as recently as October 2023: “Manpower is not going to be Ukraine’s problem. I think the Russians actually have a bigger manpower challenge than the Ukrainians.” Seeming to have arrived at this by factoring in all military-aged *civilian women* – on the pretense they can be thrown onto the front line.

When one drills down to the core reason of why retired Generals are encouraging such thinking, it boils down to: “Because China is watching”, and “we have to deter Xi Jinping from invading Taiwan”. But how is sending a generation of civilian women into lethal trench warfare going to deter China from invading Taiwan? Women indeed [ran arms factories](#) in WWII with prodigious output – more so than men had achieved before they were called to the front-line. But for prominent Generals to base “manpower”, and now “womanpower”, estimates on untrained civilian populations, who don’t even reside in the country, is quite insane.

Any step in the [direction](#) of conscripting Ukrainian citizens living abroad would [signify](#) a radical change in Western legal culture, and profoundly go against the grain of international conventions that the US and Europe have created. This cannot conceivably be the best way to strike a sense of sober caution into Beijing.

**Q) Add Russia into NATO – in exchange for it becoming a democracy:** We wish to include a *full spectrum* of imaginative thinking. This was [proposed](#) by none other than James Baker III. In December 1993: “NATO leaders should draw up a clear road map for expanding the alliance eastward to include the states of Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, especially a democratic Russia. Otherwise, the most successful alliance in history is destined to follow the threat that created it into the dustbin of history. It would be tragic to tear down the concrete wall that divided Europe only to replace it with a ‘security’ wall through exclusion from NATO. This is why Russian eligibility for membership is key to any long-term vision for NATO. A democratic Russia can play a constructive role in European security and play it best through NATO’s institutional framework. NATO membership for Russia will mark a milestone on the road to full integration with the West.”

This is extraordinary to read with hindsight. [Force legitimate democratic change before Russia can join, while making clear that Russia is not an enemy](#). It’s a fascinating counterfactual: what would have happened had this been pursued in 1994? Today, the suggestion is more likely to make the reader laugh. It would be perceived only as letting the fox into the henhouse.

**R) Force the Russians to buy Crimea:** Professor Stephen Kotkin in conversation with *The New Yorker*'s David Remnick ([16:20](#)): “Russia doesn’t get to annex it. They have to pay for it. You make it on an installment plan. A five-, or ten-, or twenty-five-year plan. At the end of it, after Russia pays the money – and if they behave in a way that doesn’t threaten Ukrainian sovereignty during that period – we would internationally recognize it as Russian territory. It’s a lot less satisfactory than taking it back, and reinstating it as Ukrainian territory. I get that. But, if you can’t get it back, if you can’t impose the peace that’s morally just, if your partners won’t put boots on the ground to impose that peace on Russia with you, and you can’t pay the costs that might be necessary to take it back on the battlefield – if those things are true, then what do you do? It’s not something that I’m happy about. But I’m aiming for a Ukraine that’s rebuilding, not being bombed and destroyed. If I don’t get it all, I’m not going to acknowledge Russian occupation legally, unless there’s a bargain and behavior modification on the Russian side.”

This is certainly an interesting idea. We categorize it as “good/imaginative crazy” – and some version of it may well play out (holding Russia’s ~\$300bn). But acknowledging it explicitly could set a worrying precedent of territory for cash, and likely be attacked as a new “auction-based order”.

*This memo gets updated regularly. Ensure you are reading the latest version: <http://lttos.org/Ukraine>*