**Defining “Enduring Strategic Defeat”: Ethical Dilemmas or Security Dilemmas?**

**by Jesse Driscoll**

I worked on the Joint Staff beginning in January 2022, taking a year’s leave from my university to conduct participant observation embedded in the U.S. military.[[1]](#footnote-1) In an unusual piece of long-form journalism, on August 16 2022 the Washington Post described some of the work of my group. They even re-printed the content of some of our products used in the run-up to the Russia-Ukraine war: talking point cards laying out U.S. strategic goals in rehearse-able bullets.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Problem: “How do you underwrite and enforce the rules-based international order” [RBIO] against a country with extraordinary nuclear capability, “without going to World War III?”**

**No. 1: “Don’t have a kinetic conflict between the U.S. military and NATO with Russia.”**

**No. 2: “Contain war inside the geographical boundaries of Ukraine.”**

**No. 3: “Strengthen and maintain NATO unity.”**

**No. 4: “Empower Ukraine and give them the means to fight.”**

In this memo I share a few insights from my time writing talking points, going to meetings, and drafting ghost emails in a cubicle in the Department of Defense. I use well-studied concepts from International Relations (IR), especially the work of Robert Jervis, to expand upon the themes of the bullet points. To position my work, I begin with a short introductory preamble.

**About Me**

Political leaders understand that World War III would be bad and should be avoided, but it falls on military professionals in the Department of Defense to provide options to political leaders in the shadow of this truism. I decided to embed inside the military for a year because I wanted to learn directly from those professionals. I did. I now appreciate the policy-making process is analogous to a giant mutually-edited wiki, with thousands of people coordinating on language. I was recognized as a good member of our team and sufficiently competent to receive a medal.

Participant observation changed me. It changed what I was asked to read, what I thought was worth reading outside of the office, and left me with very little time for normal academic labor. Before this year, I had never noticed how comparatively “flat” the academic hierarchy is. I had not, as a result, considered how that “flatness” is critical to the freedom of speech we cherish. The experience of laboring daily in a hierarchical pyramid that peaks unambiguously on a single person introduced me to the alternative extreme. I began to think, day in and day out, about what “my” principal wanted to say. As an “action offer” (AO) my job was to write in the voice of someone else: The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), General Mark Milley.[[3]](#footnote-3)

My “J-der”, J-5, is “Plans”, distinct from “Operations” (J3) or “Intel” (J2). Planners develop concrete plans for the defeat of an enemy. This way of thinking was genuinely new to me. In fact, for most of my adult life, I have tended to distrust academics who play at engagement with this way of thinking. Under the broad heading of the Global War on Terror (GWOT), the U.S. military became engaged in large-scale transformative projects in the greater Middle East that I considered unattractive and worthy of sustained normative criticism. A persistent worry has been that my (or my students’) academic knowledge could be repurposed for targeting.[[4]](#footnote-4) In the context of the GWOT, “defeating the enemy” can be read literally, with the requirement of precise targeting (to sort the terrorist wheat from the neck-bearded chaff). Very high-quality ethnographic data can be (and has been) weaponized. It is important to be self-aware about this reality. No one wants to wake up in their late 40s and realize that they accidentally spent their 20s and 30s as a subcontractor for an institution reminiscent of the Empire in Star Wars.

Part of why I wanted to walk a mile in the shoes of the professionals who work on these issues was to get a sense of what the real professionals do. I opted into the part of the DoD that works the Russia problem set for that reason. I met serious people who readily conceded that the GWOT was a ridiculous and ill-conceived project, but were quick to counter that there *are* *other Empires* out there, with StormtroopersTM and Death StarsTM and all the rest, right here and right now, not in a metaphorical galaxy far far away. Indeed, my time of service in the DoD coincided with a time that the US foreign policy machine is making a hard turn back to the problem of deterrence between nuclear-armed major power competitors. All of this is to say it would have been a disorienting year for me even without the war.

Then there was a war. Suffice to say that it became clear on my first day at work that a war was likelier-than-not to break out. I started pulling very long days and writing under great pressure. Seven weeks later, steel started flying. The days got longer. I adapted. I kept a diary (outside the building, of course). Writing under these kinds of conditions is constitutive.

For one thing, I feel more ownership over U.S. policy outputs, and more comfort speaking from a U.S. position in the geopolitical imaginary, than when I onboarded in January. Probably this is temporary (time will tell). It reduced cognitive dissonance and made it easier to do the job.

For another, I admit I *personally* desire Russia’s overall strategic defeat. This weaponization of academic knowledge in a competitive frame, in the service of “my” national interest, is not how I thought about the enterprise at earlier stages of my life. Yet here I am. I have lost most sympathy for Russia that (upon examination of my diary and some published work) I am certain I used to have. I can easily recall a time – most of the time I was researching and writing my first book, living and working in Central Asia and the Caucasus – when I felt empathy, even solidarity, with Russians. I imagined there would be long-term complementarity of interests between our countries. I imagined extensive intelligence sharing as we battled certain extremist Sunni dark networks, co-policed the nuclear nonproliferation regime, updated arms control agreements, postured to respond quickly to humanitarian disasters related to ethnic violence or water shortages in Central Asia, managed the rise of China, and more. The reality is that the Ukraine war crowds out bandwidth for these topics. I strongly believe interest convergence between the U.S. and Russia is possible and broadly desirable. When I sat down to reflect on ethical dilemmas for the forum, however, it did not take long for me to decide to organize my essay around the task of defining/describing “enduring strategic defeat”, rather than compiling thoughts about conflict resolution or settlement specifics.

My group on the Joint Staff devoted significant energy to creative solutions for security assistance – colloquially “porcupining Ukraine” – while managing escalation risks. As an academic in these conversations, and often the token “Russia understandist”, in the frantic weeks pre-invasion I spent a lot of time trying to understand Russia’s perspective and communicate it to my chain. For a while, I had the English Language text of the Minsk Accords taped to the door as a conversation starter for visitors.

New to the building, I found the work of Robert Jervis (RIP, 1940-2021, 1976, 1978) a very useful companion. The idea that posturing forces for deterrence *might actually* make things *worse* is not comfortable to this community, but it is not alien, either. I learned “Russia doves” from the defensive realist tradition can ask: “Might we, by behaviors that we see as fundamentally defensive, convince Russian leaders that the US is itself hostile, aggressive, and expansionist? Might this lead to a “spiral” of hostile beliefs that cumulatively makes everyone less safe?” The “hawk” is rarely caught flat-footed, however, and can answer, “Maybe Russian leaders *do* feel threatened by NATO expansion and alliance-friendly talk with Ukraine…but what if the practical alternative is abandoning Russia’s neighbors a hostile (from a U.S. perspective) and dehumanizing (from the perspective of those poor, poor people in Ukraine) Russian sphere of influence? What if the alternative to the behaviors you criticize is giving in to a bully? That has both risks and moral costs.” Interesting conversations about specifics follow (sometimes).

Since February 24, 2022, those colleagues’ arguments decisively carried the day, at least in J5. The position that Russian behaviors can be understood through the lens of “pure security seeking” is marginal. While Jervis and the defensive realist position wins rhetorical points for third-image parsimony, I do not anymore bother to argue that the security dilemma can be the whole story. If you want to understand why Russia is revisionist towards Ukraine since 2014, the truth is there *are* relevant Ukraine-Russia specific second-image and first-image variables.[[5]](#footnote-5) This *is* a colonial war. Ugly strains of Russian nationalism (and the relative status concerns intrinsic to their narrative) *are relevant* to understanding the war being waged. The U.S. and Russia *are both* fundamentally revisionist with respect to both each other, and Ukraine’s regime, and *both know this about the other* (and Ukrainians know it too).[[6]](#footnote-6) It is not a matter of tragic misperception or misapprehension of defensive intentions, which is the heart of the Jervis/dove/”Russia understandist” story. Misperception and genuine conflict of interests are not incompatible. The Russian foreign policy blob may be “wired” to systematically misperceive U.S. intentions *and also* powerful people in Russia that want to dismember Ukraine for reasons that are more-or-less independent of stated NATO-centric Kremlin talking points.

Positionality evolves. Enough Me-Search. Let’s get back to those cards.

The first thing to notice is what’s *not* there. There’s no bullet about inflicting enduring strategic defeat on Russia. All of the bullets presuppose that is the desired end state. Bullets do not state the obvious, but rather define distinct lines of effort. There’s also nothing on regime change in Russia (not U.S. policy). There is nothing about the security dilemma (too academic, and too easily misunderstood).[[7]](#footnote-7) Certainly nothing getting into the weeds of specifics about Ukrainian territorial definitions or compromise (better left to the State Department).

**No. 1: Don’t have a kinetic conflict between the US military and NATO with Russia**

American and Russian war planners must strategize in the shadow of possible nuclear use without very much warning. The interaction of hair-trigger weapon systems, bureaucratized militaries, the fog of war, Clausewitzian friction, and the possibility of human or mechanical error make it depressingly easy to concoct scenarios whereby millions die in just few hours.

Viewed through this lens, Russian strategy since February 2022 provides an example of what Thomas Schelling (1960: 188) called “the threat that leaves something to chance.” President Putin chose to initiate a large-scale militarized crisis. It could spiral out of control at any time. Of course this is something that both sides want to avoid, and both understand this about the other, but they might not be able to. War takes on momentum of its own. Accidents happen. Competition between nuclear states can be understood as a competition in competitive risk-taking, like a passenger in a rowboat standing and rocking to threaten to tip it over, or teenagers testing each other’s risk tolerance in a game of chicken to see who will “serve” first. [[8]](#footnote-8) Putin’s argument is that the U.S. could end the game by just “swerving” and giving Russia what it wants (a re-definition of Ukraine’s borders and sovereignty). Perhaps Putin cannot credibly threaten to launch nuclear weapons, but he *can* remind us that Russia can rock the boat.

Inter-war deterrence, in this context, is a matter of signaling, clearly and unambiguously, that some tools are just off of the table and not being considered. Clear public statements by US leaders that the US would not put boots on the ground in Ukraine are one side of the coin. The other side of the coin is that Russian leaders’ behavior suggests they have also been deterred. Russia has not attacked Polish logistics hubs, for instance.

Many friends of Ukraine wonder why seemingly arbitrary limitations on proxy warfare settled where they did. The U.S. could do a lot more – like police a no-fly zone – and Russia mightnot go nuclear. As cocktail party rhetoric, this has the benefit of being true*:* Russia *might* not.

I would challenge these armchair hawks, however, to sit for a few quiet hours with *Inadvertent Escalation* (1991), Barry Posen’s now-classic case study of US military planning in Europe. Policing a no-fly zone would mean doing classified things very high in the air – and some classified things on the ground – that very people at cocktail parties can educate themselves about (even if they are inclined to). Posen’s description of submarine and air fighter operations is 30 years out of date and unclassified (and, frankly, all the more informative for that). Posen explains that cost-effective assets for the defense of European allies were also clearly capable of striking strategic targets inside Russia *and of operating without any practical oversight* by political leaders. Civilians lack technical expertise of the systems. They cannot possibly track what commanders are up to. This problem of lack of operational civilian oversight persists. No one reading this memo has any idea what is really going on kilometers under the ocean or at very high altitudes. Or in the cyber domain. Or in outer space.

It is also important to remember that this war in Europe is taking place geographically close to Russian cities. Planners on the U.S. side, shielded by distance and oceans, can build a few critical minutes of “lag time” into our response to the threat of incoming missiles or planes. Russians must plan to respond in minutes or seconds. Russian strategic thinkers have long expressed fears that a theater conflict could provide an opportunity to move military assets around undetected. They can read Posen, too, and are thus well-aware that military professionals prefer offensive doctrines as they plan and budget. The security dilemma, the fog of war, and the dependence on offensive doctrines suggest that Russian military capabilities could be quickly degraded, pushing Russian leadership to perceive regime-threatening crisis is imminent. This might happen before US policymakers realize it is time to pump the brakes.

**No. 2: Keep The War Contained Within the Geographical Boundaries of Ukraine**

A partial solution to the problem of inadvertent escalation is for US/NATO war planners, Ukrainian war planners, and Russian war planners to endeavor create separate silos in each other’s’ minds to the greatest extent possible. Russians should be given clear signals that the conventional ground war is not being used a pretext to reposition NATO assets in a way that prepares for a first strike. This strategic desirability of keeping the conflict contained was messaged in a straightforward way, but actions speak louder than words, and neither Russian nor U.S. planners may be fully convinced that the other is interested in containing the war.

I offer two unoriginal observations.

First, what it means to “keep the conflict contained” requires constant re-negotiation and communication. Particulars of the Russia-Ukraine conflict make this difficult. Crimea’s contested status is especially problematic.[[9]](#footnote-9) To some, there is a compelling face validity argument that Crimea “has been” a *de facto* part of Russia since 2014, even though of course that “reality” is not recognized *de jure* by the government of Ukraine or the U.S. (nor (almost) any other government on the planet). Crimea presents a practical complication to clear, unambiguous communication on high-stakes matters. It is not, and has not been, U.S. policy to differentiate between Crimea and Ukraine in any way. U.S. diplomats cannot just say to their Ukrainian counterparts “do not fire weapons the West provides for Ukrainian territorial defense into Russia…and when we say ‘Russia,’ that includes Crimea, since it isRussia’s clearly-stated policy to defend Crimea as if it were Russia.” High-level debates on whether the provision of ATACAMS system to Ukraine crosses a unique escalation threshold hinged on this.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Second, keeping a conflict “geographically contained” can be a moving target. Does training “count” as participation?[[11]](#footnote-11) Does aggressive intelligence sharing? Some important domains of modern warfare are intrinsically non-territorial in nature (cyber, space, and information).[[12]](#footnote-12)

**No. 3: Strengthen and Maintain NATO Unity**

To quote the 2022 National Defense Strategy: “Mutually-beneficial Alliances and partnerships are our greatest global strategic advantage – and they are a center of gravity for this strategy.” This is clear in the European theater. It is difficult for the U.S. to plan to participate, directly or indirectly, in any Eurasian conflict without docking ships or unloading planes. Since the end of the Second World War, the U.S. has accomplished this in Europe with a special alliance that brings many wealthy, highly capable states in Western Europe under its nuclear umbrella: NATO. Russia, understanding this as a major impediment to its interests, has organized a great deal of energy towards sowing divisions among NATO capitals (just as the USSR once did).

NATO is currently unified and energized by the conflict. Member states are promising to spend more on their defense industrial bases and admit new members. Sweden and Finland want to join. A large alliance will always be unwieldy, however, requiring a blend of policies to manage the expectations of diverse allies. Concretely, some NATO allies want to quietly return to transactional “business as usual” with the Kremlin. Other allies want nothing more than to see Russia’s leaders punished, its soldiers humiliated, and its hardware smashed.

Whether, and how long, to exile Russia from the family of civilized nations is contested. What drives the workflow in day-to-day grind of our part of the Pentagon life is the need for talking points to smooth distributional politics problems as they crop up. We often chase the news cycle, trying to strike baroque policy compromises requiring subject matter expertise. The details of these compromises are reviewed and renewed, week-in and week-out.[[13]](#footnote-13) If war burns hot for years, battlefield horrors will continue to pit “doves” pleading for settlement against “hawks” screaming for revenge. The emotions will continue to be intense. The identities of hawk and dove governments in the alliance will shift across issues and over time, as domestic political coalitions change in the U.S. and in European capitals.

**No. 4 Give Ukraine the means to fight**

If Russian planners expected the rest of the world to stand by and do nothing while their soldiers wrecked Ukraine, they were disappointed.[[14]](#footnote-14) Once Ukraine demonstrated that its military was not the military that embarrassed itself so completely in 2014 – that Ukraine had the ability to survive the initial Russian assault – Western policy converged rapidly on policies to strengthen Ukrainian armed forces. The initial goal was to make Ukraine as difficult to digest as possible. The goal has evolved somewhat towards ensuring that Ukraine has as strong a hand as possible on the battlefield. As ugly as the war of attrition on Ukrainian territory is, Western assistance combined with Ukrainian patriotic heroism has make the fight far costlier than Russian planners imagined it would be. The idea is that this will translate into a stronger bargaining hand at the negotiating table.

How will Ukrainian and Russian leaders decide when the killing has gone on long enough? How might it end? Likely a negotiated settlement that leaves everyone feeling like they deserved more than they received at the table.[[15]](#footnote-15) It might be useful to imagine settlement negotiations as a metaphorical 3-way conversation. Russia, the US, and Ukraine are all seated at a table, each with different kinds of leverage.Russian can control the timing and tempo of an war fought inside Ukraine’s borders. It can escalate and de-escalate, raze cities, test missiles, sink ships, poison people, turn the gas off and on, hold more sham voting exercises, declare ceasefires, break them, etc.. Ukrainian leverage is to just not play along, refuse Russian terms, and continue the ground fight, gambling that raising “occupation costs” will gradually damage Putin’s regime and force a total Russian exit. US leverage, indirect, is to manage global partnerships, subsidize Ukraine economy and war effort, share intelligence, and keep economic sanctions on Russia. All three players must agree on terms to end the war.

The problem, from a Russian policy perspective, is that the U.S. is probably not going to lift sanctions ever or stop supporting Ukraine no matter what. The problem, from a U.S. policy perspective, is that that Russian leadership does not want to settle. Their political aims seem well-served by an ongoing war. There are a few distinct logics supporting this position. First, a war of attrition confined to Ukraine makes Ukraine a poorer EU candidate, and thus a less-likely NATO candidate, with each passing month. Second, autocracies like Putin’s are threatened by the existence of nearby democracies, especially from near-kin cultural groups. Ukraine’s example provides subject populations with encouragement to revolt. The only way forward, by this logic, is to “absorb” the Ukrainian nation “back into” the Russian nation. Even if this is called a colonial (or genocidal) impulse in the West, for some regime-worshipping Russians inclined to view history centuries at a time, the ends justify the means. Third, the short distances from Ukrainian to Russian cities makes Ukrainian ability to fabricate its own long-range missiles a threat. The technology is not exotic. It will be hard to convince Ukraine that it does not need an indigenous deterrent in the future. Russian leaders may believe it is a military necessity to de-industrialize, or minimally de-nuclearize, Ukraine. Fourth, because the U.S. has competitive elections every 2-4 years, the Russian blob can imagine in the future there might be a less-hawkish coalition in power in the U.S. someday (or at least one willing to bargain transactionally according to more flexible principles than the current administration).[[16]](#footnote-16)

It is not possible to hide these rationales from Ukrainians. (Putin’s regime does not much bother to try.) Ukrainians feel, reasonably, they are fighting for their sovereignty, even survival. It remains to be seen if Russia can resign itself to more minimal aims in the future, what those war aims are, and if their government can provide any compelling rationale as to why they would not just use a settlement as an excuse to rebuild its power and re-attack Ukraine again. When the guns go quiet, Ukrainians might feel they can be more secure in a Ukrainian state with different borders – but, again, that remains to be seen. It is also not really the point, from the perspective of U.S. policy. The point is that if Ukrainians and Russians decide they have reached a mutually hurting stalemate, it will probably not be because Kyiv fell to an occupation force or ran out of ammunition. Probably, gradually accumulating human costs of attrition warfare will cause Russian and Ukrainian policy elites to decide they have had enough and strike an imperfect compromise. This is true even if they suspect war will just break out again.

**Conclusion: Defining “Enduring Strategic Defeat”**

Kremlin propagandists want badly to portray Russia to be fighting heroically as David against the NATO Goliath. Their perverse self-determination narrative of fighting to liberate Ukraine from Western imperialism resonates with many audiences in the Global South. My hunch is that if the U.S. just does not play along – by not showing up for the fight in the land domain – every observer on the planet will gradually come around to the obvious conclusion: It is a *Ukrainian* David fighting against a *Russian* Goliath. Whatever battlefield outcomes are obtained on Ukrainian territory will be the result of heroic *Ukrainian* sacrifice. Russians will be forced to remember, forever, that Russia was militarily defeated at the hands of Ukrainians. When Russians admit that to themselves, Putinism will have suffered enduring strategic defeat.

**SOURCES**

Dominique Arel and Jesse Driscoll. 2023. *Ukraine’s Unnamed War: Before The Russian Invasion of 2022*. Cambridge University Press.

Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall. 2005. “Power in International Politics.” *International Organization.* 59(1). Winter 2005. 39-75.

James Fearon. 2022. *H-Diplo Tribute to the Life, Scholarship, and Legacy of Robert Jervis,,* <https://networks.h-net.org/node/28443/discussions/9663546/h-diplo-issf-tribute-life-scholarship-and-legacy-robert-jervis>

Robert Jervis, 1978. “Cooperation Under The Security Dilemma,” *World Politics* 30, 2 (January 1978), 167-214.

Robert Jervis, 1976. *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*. Princeton University Press.

Joint Publication 5-0, Joint Planning, December 2020.

Andrew Kydd, 1997. “Sheep in Sheep’s Clothing: Why Security Seekers Do Not Fight Each Other,” *Security Studies* 7:1 (Autumn 1997).

New York Times, September 18, 2022, “Ukraine Wants the U.S. to Send More Powerful Weapons. Biden Is Not So Sure.” By David E. Sanger, Anton Troianovski, Julian E. Barnes and Eric Schmitt <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/17/us/politics/ukraine-biden-weapons.html>

Barry Posen, 1991. Inadvertent Escalation: Conventional War and Nuclear Risks, Cornell University Press, 1991.

National Defense Strategy, 2022. (https://media.defense.gov/2022/Oct/27/2003103845/-1/-1/1/2022-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-NPR-MDR.PDF)

Thomas Schelling, 1960. The Strategy of Conflict, Harvard University Press, 1960.

# Randall Schweller, 1996. “Neorealism’s Status Quo Bias: What Security Dilemma?” *Security Studies* 5:3 (Spring 1996), 90-121.

# Washington Post, August 16, 2022, “Road to War: U.S. Struggled to Convince Allies, and Zelensky, of Risk of Invasion,” by Shane Harris, Karen DeYoung, Isabelle Khurshudyan, Ashley Parker, and Liz Sly. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/interactive/2022/ukraine-road-to-war>

1. I worked in the Plans division of the Joint Staff (J5, Europe/NATO/Russia Division). All content in this memo was cleared to ensure it contains no classified material. Nothing in this document should be understood as a statement of US policy or a reflection of the official position of the Department of Defense. A draft was shared with participants at the Yale meeting on Political Ethnography in the Shadow of the Russian Invasion of Ukraine, December 9-10 2022, and I am grateful for preliminary comments from Caress Schenk, Peter Rutland, Egor Lazarev, Lauren McCarthy, Tomila Lankina, and Irina Busygina. Special thanks to Jim Fearon for numerous off-the-record conversations and reflections. All interpretative errors are my own and I have no authority over anything. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. “Cards”: just what they sound like, printed on cardstock, 5x8, 16-point font. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The Joint Staff is nota General Staff, but rather a *personal* staff to the Chairman, who *advises* the Secretary of Defense and the President of the United States. CJCS does not actually give orders directly to combatant commands. I admit I did not understand this completely prior to onboarding. As I educated myself, I asked my boss (an air force civilian, Mr. Jeff Slayton), what AOs are supposed to *do*, day-to-day, on the Joint Staff. Jeff quipped: “We’re supposed to wear ties, not uniforms, and to put words in the mouth of the Chairman. That’s us.” [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. I have written about this problem at length elsewhere. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The content of Putin’s revisionist beliefs, and how Russian geopolitical revisionism (*even if* it *is in part* a response to Western revisionism, which is contestable) ricochets through Ukrainian domestic politics, is described in Arel and Driscoll (2023). For arguments that the security dilemma is not an adequate analytic construct without second image, see the neoclassical synthesis in Schweller (1996) or the formal treatment in Kydd (1997). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. I borrow this phrasing from my mentor James Fearon, who coincidentally was also working in [a different part of] the Pentagon at the same time. In an obituary essay he described how Jervis’s insights affected his work in a different part of the building (Fearon 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. I cannot resist sharing an anecdote that I do not believe is apocryphal: Fearon used the term “security dilemma” in a conversation with a highly capable and impressive officer. This officer nodded along. When it was his turn to speak, the officer replied “Yeah, I’m tracking perfectly! We need to *create* security *dilemmas* for the *adversary*!” [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Schelling compared the behavior of Kennedy and Kruschev in the Cuban Missile Crisis to two teenagers playing a game of chicken with cars (Kruschev “swerved”). The existential mutual risks forced the U.S. to recognize just how much the USSR cared about the matters being bargained over. It is as if the species were forced to roll a six-sided dice. A four came up. Normal life continued. If a six had come up, a war would have snuffed out the lives of tens of millions of Russians and Americans. The argument is that willingness to force a roll the dice with those stakes communicates Russian perceptions of its own vital interests to Americans. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The territorial dispute over the DNR/LNR, and the annexed land bridge, are likewise increasingly problematic. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. According to New York Times reporting on Sunday, September 18 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. “What if the training occurs only outside Ukraine? What about IT-enabled *remote* training?” [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. For those who doubt that information is a domain of warfare, I recommend Joint Publication 5-0, Joint Planning, December 2020, Chapter IV, IV-8, Figure IV-2. For teachers designing syllabi and looking for an academic framework that disaggregates the “information domain” in a useful way, I recommend Barnett and Duvall (2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Consider DPICMs. An aggressive “coalition of the willing” within NATO has substantial stocks of cluster munitions that could be provided to Ukraine on short notice. These munitions could let Ukrainians defend themselves more efficiently against Russian invaders (who, it might be noted, are themselves employing cluster munitions in Ukraine). The problem is that many NATO member states are led by political coalitions that represent Western European voters that sincerely believe cluster munitions are an abhorrent weapon system from a bygone era. One can look carefully at the signatories of the relevant treaty (and note the geographic locations of the non-signatories) for a sense of the underlying problem: <https://www.clusterconvention.org/oslo-process/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Leaving the humanitarian, moral, and legal case for defensive assistance to Ukraine, from a strategic perspective inaction might have given the impression that nuclear saber rattling was effective at causing the U.S. to abandon security commitments (with implications for future deterrence conversations with great power competitors). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. That is a well-studied feature of attrition games. It is not difficult to model strategic settings where the worst deal available to player in an early stage is better than the best deal they can achieve in a late stage (e.g., WWI). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Though of course no one knows for sure, for the record I believe this Russian hope is misplaced. I do not detect much issue-specific daylight between the two U.S. parties. The foreign policy establishment is bipartisan. Giving Ukraine means to defend itself (so long as the Russia-Ukraine war continues to be contained to Ukraine and contained to the land domain as much as possible) simply makes a great deal of sense. A crisis in another part of the globe may divert attention and redirect priorities, but even a very large crisis is unlikely to “distract” the Department of Defense (which is sufficiently staffed to walk and chew gum in different parts of the world). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)