

With the conflict at a standstill, the US is narrowing its sights in Ukraine



It has now been over 100 days since the Russian-led invasion of Ukraine began. As the conflict comes to a standstill with little end in sight, Phelan United States Centre Director, [Professor Peter Trubowitz](#) writes that the Biden administration, along with other NATO allies, may be narrowing its strategic objectives in Ukraine.

The war in Ukraine passed the 100-day mark last Friday. Where do things stand?

The conflict between Ukraine and Russia has reached a standstill, with both sides now digging in for a long, hard grind. Neither side is showing any interest in a ceasefire, let alone a diplomatic settlement to the fighting. In the absence of a decisive breakthrough on the battlefield, questions of economic and political resilience will loom larger in the coming weeks and months. For Kyiv the key question is how long Western democracies will remain united behind it. For Russian President Vladimir Putin, the question is how long he can afford to wage a costly war along a long front in hopes that Berlin, Paris, and Washington begin pressuring the Ukrainians to make territorial concessions.

Are we already seeing signs of Western backsliding on Ukraine?

Yes. Last week French President Emmanuel Macron [said](#) it was important not to “humiliate” Russia over the war in Ukraine, which was widely interpreted as meaning Kyiv would have to agree at some point to territorial concessions to Moscow to end the war and avoid further escalation of the conflict. Ukraine quickly rejected Macron’s comment, but the French president is not alone. Indeed, while the Biden administration has now agreed to send Kyiv longer-range missiles, there are signs that it too is narrowing its sights in Ukraine.

How have Biden’s strategic objectives narrowed in Ukraine?

Last week, the *New York Times* ran an important [op-ed by President Biden](#). In place of the administration’s earlier talk about defeating Russia and toppling Putin, Biden sketched out more limited goals: helping Ukraine defend itself; seeking a negotiated peace between Kyiv and Moscow; and reducing the risk of escalation and a larger war involving NATO. Why the change in tone? Recent gains by Russia on the battlefield (e.g., finally capturing the eastern city of Mariupol) has increased the likelihood that the war will drag on, with no clear winner. This has forced the Biden administration to bring its strategy into closer alignment with the facts on the ground.

Yesterday marked the 70th anniversary of the announcement of the Marshall Plan. What do you think George Marshall would make of US foreign policy today?

When Secretary of State Marshall made that [famous speech](#) at Harvard’s commencement on June 5, 1947, beginning the US-initiative to provide aid to support the recovery of post-war Europe, he saw American international engagement as essential to prevent a return of the ideological extremism and nationalism that led to World War II. Today, those dark forces have returned in Europe and alas, in America itself. I think Marshall would be alarmed and wonder how America’s leaders had allowed the country to veer so dangerously close to a political abyss that he, and so many others, did so much to steer clear of.

- *This article is based on comments made by Professor Trubowitz in an interview with Bloomberg Surveillance on June 6, 2022.*
- *Featured image: [P20220420AS-1643-1](#) by [The White House](#) is [United States government work](#).*

[Please read our comments policy before commenting](#)

Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of USAPP– American Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.

Shortened URL for this post: <https://bit.ly/3te7gfZ>

About the author



Peter Trubowitz – *LSE Phelan US Centre*

Peter Trubowitz is Professor of International Relations, and Director of the LSE's Phelan US Centre. His main research interests are in the fields of international security and comparative foreign policy, with special focus on American grand strategy and foreign policy. He also writes and comments frequently on US party politics and elections and how they shape and are shaped by America's changing place in the world.