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*Opinion*

## Why US arrogance, not the Russia-China relationship, is the biggest barrier to peace in Ukraine



- Peace pleas directed at the Kremlin must be extended to Washington: its ‘mission creep’ tendencies and hostility towards Beijing – whose influence with Moscow might have made all the difference – threaten to extinguish hopes of a near-term diplomatic solution in Europe

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It’s just possible that a favourable diplomatic wind is forming that could alter the trajectory of the storm of war raging over Ukraine, the second-largest country in Europe.

Pushing this war out to sea might help clear the gathering clouds of world economic collapse. It could energise the humanitarian obligation to get Ukraine back on its feet and its exiled millions repatriated. And it could affirm not just within Kremlin circles but among the elite everywhere that military aggression is always an exceedingly poor choice – especially when someone, somewhere might prove desperate enough to consider nuclear war.

A plea for “peace now” would appear directed mainly at Russian President [Vladimir Putin](#). This is reasonable, but it does not go nearly far enough if we are to secure a stable peace, not just a performative one.

The Biden administration, along with the UK and Australia, are playing a dangerous game of proxy warfare, despite the angelic posturing; desperate Ukraine has no choice but to be the proxy, embellished by the [public-relations savvy](#) of its president.

Of all involved players, the one most capable of further fuelling the war is Washington. Like a moth to an old-fashioned light bulb, the US is prone to pull failure from the jaws of victory by the time-honoured, self-destructive process of “mission creep”. Even candid US military studies now admit to a long pattern of overreach, whether in Iraq, Libya or Vietnam.

In retrospect, even the Korean war makes the mission-creep list: the original mission was to save South Korea from communism but, no, that was not enough; the brave US military had to stomp north into Chinese territory to unite all Korea.

Fortunately, the thinking portions of the US intelligence and military network are fully aware of the American propensity for “mission creep”. They now accept that if you cannot build back an Iraq or an Afghanistan, what chances would you have of piecing back together the largest country in Europe?

Try to destroy Russia now that it looks to be on its heels? Try to occupy it and risk triggering nuclear war? Trying to chop up Mother Russia would be an even bigger blunder than staying in Iraq and

concocting play-as-you-go missions on the fly. Those looking to go down that route prove that Putin isn't the only one losing his mind.

I admit to having had hopes that Beijing would play a quietly proactive peace role. Yes, having “wolf diplomacy” as your calling card hardly suggests peaceful intent; still, switching to a posture of peace on the premise of protecting the sovereign integrity of Ukraine could have yielded much, diplomatically.

Alas, the virtues of Chinese diplomacy rarely include the ability to make a quick pivot under real-time pressure. Worse yet, amid barbed Sino-US relations, Beijing's international diplomatic space was squeezed by the Biden administration to make it clear Beijing should butt out. So Chinese weaponry would not be sent to Russia and President Xi Jinping would simply say that European security issues had to be solved by Europeans.

Still, there was a deft dose of Machiavellian common sense in Beijing's friendliness with Russia that is perhaps lost on simple-minded Western media and governments. For starters, consider that the historically prickly geographical border between the two nations is even longer than that between Mexico and the US.

Xi's government certainly needs no reminder that, to Putin, borders are little more than annoying certifications of the average map's lack of imagination or flexibility.

In February, a kind of [concordat](#) (5,000 words, no less) between them vowed that “friendship between the two states has no limits” – surely a comfort to Putin, then surmising that even after what he was about to do to Ukraine, he would not be totally isolated.

But it was a bonus for Xi as well. The proverb, “a friend in need is a friend indeed” suggests that China may have gained more from the concordat than Moscow: isn't a “true friend” someone who hangs with you when others are holding their noses up in disdain?

And so the Xi government may have slipped into a role that almost no one else can play at the moment: it can wolf-talk to Moscow. This offers international value.

Success is often the necessary precursor to failure. America still has the best military but tends to field bad strategies that morph over time into political disasters. I worry less about Beijing's Moscow connection interfering in the favourable wind of diplomacy than Washington's mission-creep hubris and arrogance.

If diplomacy fails now, the winds of war are sure to whip up new [levels of ferocity](#). This geopolitical and humanitarian nightmare must be settled now – without hubristic inflexibility from any quarter. Staying involved in Ukraine to the bloody bitter end, years from now, would prove the biggest blunder since the US invasion and attempted occupation of Iraq in 2003.

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