



WAR IN UKRAINE

OPINION

Henry Kissinger's advice on ending the War in Ukraine is pragmatic

Henry Kissinger's argument is that war has to eventually end at the negotiating table. Then why not now?

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He has been saying it loudly, at every forum and at every opportunity for the last two months. Tightly wrapped in his trademark philosophy of *realpolitik*, Henry Kissinger has been consistently expressing his rather “meekish” views on the war in Ukraine.

And now, a big chunk of the NATO leadership, too, it appears, is also thinking on the same pattern but is unable to say it openly. The proceedings of the Madrid summit, where the pro-dialogue cluster seemed to have a clear run over the relatively hawkish group within NATO, have also indirectly vindicated Kissinger's views on the matter.

Just a few weeks back at the World Economic Forum in Davos, when Kissinger quite ardently pleaded to the NATO leadership to not seek an embarrassing defeat for Russia in Ukraine, cautioning about the catastrophic impact on the whole fabric of European stability, he was literally rebuked and ridiculed by some of the European leaders, including President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, as somewhat pusillanimous advice from the 99-year-old statesman.

The main thrust of doctrine of the former U.S. national security adviser and secretary of state on Ukraine war has three prongs.

One: the war will not linger on for an indefinite period. Sooner or later, it will be stopped, however, if the negotiations are not resumed within next two months — he meant end-July — then it would become extremely intricate for all the stakeholders to manage and contain its side-effects later on.

Two: Russia is an integral part of the European politics for the last 400 years and its role cannot be ignored, undervalued and degraded. Russia should not be subjected to embarrassing defeat in the Donbas. This will push Putin into a panic mode and he will retaliate severely — even resorting to the usage of battlefield-size nuclear weapons. This has the potential to metastasize the war to other parts of the Europe, which is until now confined to a well-demarcated area.

Three: he is advocating for “status quo ante,” which refers to the restoration of the situation in which Russia maintains its formal control of Crimea and informal control of Luhansk and Donetsk, where Russia has already established a loose statehood structure in place since 2014 through Russian proxies.

At the Madrid summit, not surprisingly, defeating Russia was a visible theme, but still this hawkish group could not win enough support from other colleagues for a direct intervention plan to push back the Russian forces to the preinvasion positions.

Only three main items on Ukraine were approved: the generous military hardware and financial support package to Ukraine; tightening the economic sanctions on Russia by hampering its undocumented oil trading; and boosting the number of high-readiness NATO forces to over 300,000 in the biggest overhaul of the alliance since the Cold War era.

Kissinger, perhaps no one can claim that he or she knows about Russia better than him, is not advocating that Ukrainian

territory should be relinquished to appease Moscow. He is simply saying that none of the sides can win this war in the near future. Neither the Ukrainian forces, despite the full throttle support of NATO, can push back the Russian forces beyond certain “soft points” in the area, nor has the Kremlin the intention and logistical capability at the moment to move further inside Ukraine.

Kissinger’s argument is that war has to eventually end at the negotiating table. Then why not now? His appeal is that negotiations should be resumed as quickly as possible to avert further damage to Euro-Atlantic stability and the global economy, which is already reeling under the fuel and food crisis due to this smouldering conflict on the Eastern fringe of Europe.

He is pleading that protracted war in Ukraine will drastically complicate global power structures. Washington and European capitals must pay heed to what Kissinger is saying. He is not “old school,” he is a pragmatic practitioner of *realpolitik*.

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