

About the war in Ukraine

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In recent days, we read that the morale of Russian soldiers is challenged, that 300 of them sat down on the job, and perhaps some of them ran over their own commander. Perhaps in the coming days, as more people are killed and more Ukrainians leave their homes and their country, we will also see more Russian soldiers refusing to kill, or laying down their arms, or turning against their military superiors. I want the Ukrainians to win this war, as most people do, but I ultimately want war to be eliminated. Can I have it both ways?

I am interested in defecting Russian cabinet members, and Russian soldiers who refuse to do their job because they represent a moral alternative to war. As much as I want the Ukrainians to win, to turn back Putin's brutal capture of their lands and killing of civilians, I don't want to become so partisan that I become an enthusiast for war. I don't want to get excited about special drones that can take out tanks and achieve military advantage. If I am concerned only with who has the advantage on the battlefield, and why, then I do become an enthusiast for war, watching the strategies unfold, hoping that one strategy prevails against another. If the horizon of my thought becomes focused on military vanquishing, then I have let my mind be overtaken by strategic concerns. Of course, the reason why I want Ukraine to win is a just one: their political rights of self-determination are under attack; their people have been brutally and extensively murdered in their homes or huddled in theatres, and Ukrainian refugees have been shot while they flee.

If NATO assists Ukraine, then they are doing the right thing this time. But that is no reason to become a fan of NATO. Some of thought we had to be given Trump's nationalist opposition to its treaties and economic demands. But NATO is also expansionist, breaking agreements, and arguably stoking tensions within the region. One is not for NATO, but for Ukrainian rights of self-determination. One can want this war to end with Ukrainian popular sovereignty restored, but that is no reason to allow one's desires and thoughts to be constrained by a war logic, or to think that only the two sides are the only actors in the scene. In other words, one can maintain a well-grounded skepticism of NATO and a general anti-war position and still maintain a profound wish to see the Ukrainian resistance prevail. There is no contradiction here as long as the opposition to war is strengthened by the demonstration of atrocities and war crimes, as long as a necessary and justified resistance does not lead to an acceptance of war as the model for understanding international politics. Of course, the Ukrainians must fight for their country, their rights of self-determination, and if and when this war ends, they will have to demand return and reparation, like the Palestinians have been doing for over 70 years. As much as one rightly wishes for the Ukrainian triumph in resisting Russia's war, one wishes more for a velvet revolution to sweep across the Russian army in powerful waves, producing a new generation of refuseniks. Such a refusal to fight on the part of Russian soldiers would not just be a win for Ukraine, but for the global community, for justice, and for a future we want to live to see.

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