

Ukraine Heading to Another Showdown

by George Friedman - February 7, 2023

I should say up front that I am not writing about Chinese balloons. Instead, I am writing about the situation in Ukraine, which is getting increasingly dangerous.

Until relatively recently, Russian assaults on Ukraine tended to be contained by the Ukrainian armed force – not universally but frequently enough to prevent Russia from keeping territory or achieving victory. But in the past month or so, Russia has begun to hold its ground. If that becomes the norm, then Ukraine is in serious trouble.

The United States has kept the front intact by introducing new weapons. The current weakness of the Ukrainian army is due to a lack of longer-range rockets that could strike the Russian rear, hitting reinforcements and supplies moving to the front. Without these elements, Russia can't maintain its position.

The problem is that the range of the new munitions is so great that they can reach Russian territory. The U.S. has made it clear it has no intention of striking Russian soil. In fact, Washington has ordered Ukraine not to use the munitions at their fullest range, and there are rumors that the Americans modified the missiles to ensure they don't. But Ukraine is fighting an existential war, and its willingness to use anything less than full power is inevitably questionable.

So far, Russia has not been struck, nor has Poland, where supplies and U.S. troops are based. The tacit agreement not to hit either has prevented the war from becoming a direct conflict between the U.S. and Russia. If either side deliberately attacked Russia or Poland, all bets would be off.

With the delivery of new missiles, a new danger thus emerges, not least of which is that Russia could choose to bring the war to even greater heights by forcing escalation. In which case nothing can be ruled out – not even Russian false flag operations. This isn't merely an analysis of paranoia. Moscow has characterized the conflict as a long war against the West, and if that is indeed how it sees things, then forcing escalation at a time and place of its choosing might be rational. Doing so would demonize the U.S. military and give Russia a freer hand in attacking, say, U.S. positions in Poland. The U.S. has been waging a proxy war without experiencing losses. The fact that body bags are not arriving at Dover Air Force Base has given Washington a great deal of room for maneuver. If the U.S. started taking casualties, and the Russians could demonstrate that the war was based on a first

strike by the Americans, the ability of the U.S. to wage war might be limited.

Far-fetched as that may seem, the central issue right now is stabilizing Ukraine's position by attacking Russian assets in theater without spilling over into Russian territory. If that can be done in absolute terms, it would be hard for Russia to overcome, and it would keep the U.S. out of direct combat by avoiding U.S. domestic political considerations, which have destabilized the U.S. military in a number of wars. But the execution must be flawless, and Russia would have to decline to essentially attack itself.

All wars are complex, and all wars have political dimensions. The U.S. is going to supply long-range rockets, which makes perfect sense in the cold logic of war. But in the event of some failures in controlling the weapons, it could create the unexpected, which is never welcomed in war.

Author: George Friedman

[Read more from this author on geopoliticalfutures.com](https://geopoliticalfutures.com)