

# DESANTIS IS FLAT-OUT WRONG ON UKRAINE

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DON'T LOOK AWAY, GOV. DESANTIS! NY Post today  
(3/15)

Last month (2/23), the Wall Street Journal's Kimberly Strassel told us that Ukraine War Is Ron DeSantis's Security Test.

Now, after months of near-silence and innuendo, Florida Gov. and GOP presidential hopeful Ron DeSantis decided to speak about Ukraine, removing all doubt about his position. He flunked the test, and badly – joining what Strassel calls “the GOP surrender caucus.”

While his statement on Tucker Carlson's Fox News show on Monday (3/13) makes a handful of valid points, it is ridden with a fundamental misunderstanding of the war and US geopolitical interests.

First, the good. DeSantis is correct to criticize the Biden administration's lack of clear objectives in its support for “as long as it takes,” which is a recipe for a long and intractable conflict — which Americans would be right to reject.

He is also right to point out President Biden's energy policies have been disastrous — and much of the blame is to be placed at the door of the left's climate fixation.

The rest, alas, is a hot mess, starting with a series of straw-man arguments warning against “deployment of

American troops,” which nobody is advocating, and a “policy of ‘regime change’ in Russia,” which “would greatly increase the stakes of the conflict.”

The latter policy, “no doubt popular among the DC foreign policy interventionists,” according to DeSantis, is in fact nonexistent, either as an official position or even as a topic among actual “foreign-policy interventionists,” among whom I may be counted.

It is well worth thinking about the stability of Russian President Vladimir Putin’s regime, his likely successors (the man is 70 years old and does not project the image of perfect health) and our support for the opposition, but there is no single voice of any significance, in Washington or elsewhere, advocating for a military or other intervention aimed at removing Putin from power.

It is equally unclear what piece of Russia’s historical record DeSantis refers to when he says “Putin’s successor .??. would likely be even more ruthless.”

If anything, the crude pattern seems to suggest that aggressive, “hardline” leaders are followed by more cautious ones — Stalin was succeeded by Khrushchev, Brezhnev by Gorbachev, and Ivan the Terrible by Boris Godunov.

DeSantis is correct to be concerned about Russia’s “de facto alliance with China,” which, however, predates the war’s outbreak (remember the “no limits” partnership from early February 2022?) and certainly wasn’t helped by Russia’s disastrous performance on the battlefield.

Most fundamentally, he fails to understand the stakes of the conflict, calling it a “territorial dispute” in his words. In this, DeSantis could not possibly be more flat-out wrong – as Senator Marco Rubio explained to Hugh Hewitt yesterday (3/14):

*“Well, it [Russia’s war on Ukraine] is not a territorial dispute in the sense that any more than it would be a territorial dispute if the United States decided that it wanted to invade Canada or take over the Bahamas. Just because someone claims something doesn’t mean it belongs to them. This is an invasion.”*

Furthr, in the context of our long-term competition with China, DeSantis presents a false dichotomy between helping Ukraine and pursuing our “vital interests.”

In reality, our military assistance to Ukraine puts the United States in a far better position to confront China.

For one, a chastened and degraded Russian military will be much less of a threat to NATO’s eastern-flank countries, enabling us to focus more of our resources at the Indo-Pacific.

A prosperous Europe at peace would be a far stronger partner in holding Beijing accountable than a Europe preoccupied with its own security.

Second, contrary to the disingenuous rhetoric about “blank checks,” much of the money appropriated to military assistance to Ukraine is being spent here in the United States to modernize our own military capacities as we transfer older equipment to the Ukrainians.

It represents, in fact, an overdue investment into our own capabilities, which would have been postponed even further had Russian aggression not created a real sense of urgency.

Has our assistance to Ukraine exposed gaps in US stocks of weapons and munition and in our defense industrial base?

Of course. But the adult response does not consist of a can't-do attitude.

Instead, we need to address those shortcomings, including by an increase in military spending commensurate with the role the United States is playing in the world.

Global leadership was always going to cost money — it's preferable, however, to creating vacuums that are filled by our enemies.

Finally, for a presidential candidate who will want to associate with a "Peace through strength" approach to our adversaries, it is odd to argue, as DeSantis does, against providing Ukrainewith our (aging) F-16 fighter jets and long-range missiles, deeming the risks "unacceptable."

It is in America's interest that this war is over quickly.

What Biden does not understand in his effort to prevent escalation is that the only way to durable peace is through a Ukrainian victory and, yes, Russian humiliation.

A GOP challenger who falls for the same bag of Russian tricks will be poorly positioned to call out Biden's weakness in the general election.

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