

WHAT THE HELL IS THE WEST WAITING FOR?

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[Note by Jack Wheeler: Early yesterday morning

(1/24), the London Daily Mail ran this cover story by British former (and quite possibly the future) Prime Minister Boris Johnson. By early this morning (1/25), Germany got the message, Der Spiegel announcing: Ukraine Will Receive 80 Leopard Tanks from Germany and Other European Countries, and the Wall Street Journal reporting: White House Approves Sending Abrams Tanks to Ukraine. Thanks, Boris!]

Come with me into the ochre mud of the churchyard in Bucha, past the bullet-riddled church of St Andrew. Stand over the graves of some of the 416 inhabitants of this town – 9 of them children – who were shot by the Russians in an attempt to terrify the rest.

Look at the photos of their corpses, their hands tied behind their backs, left in the street to rot or to be eaten by dogs.

Stand with me by the blackened remains of an apartment block in Borodyanka, the twisted plumbing and smashed children's toys. Look at what just one of Putin's 500kg airborne bombs can do to an eight-story building.

Try to meet the pleading eyes of the people who pulled 162 corpses from the rubble, and who searched for the 28 whose remains were never found.

Look at those brave Ukrainians and answer me this question: *just what the hell are we waiting for?*

What happened here in the suburbs of Kyiv was sickening. But it is happening in every part of Ukraine that Putin continues to occupy: torture, rape, mass murder.

Though the physical destruction here is awful, it pales beside the crimes that Putin is committing in other parts of the country – flattening entire townships in a typhoon of bombs and missiles.

He has no restraint. He has no scruple. He has long since abandoned the slightest respect for the laws of war – and with every day that goes by, more innocents are sacrificed, more brave Ukrainian soldiers are killed and more young Russians are fed into the maw of his meat-grinder.

So let me pose the question again. What conceivable grounds can there be for delay? Why are we not giving the Ukrainians all the help that they need, now, when they need it?

Let us be in no doubt. Ukraine is winning and will win this war. Ukrainian hearts are high and their determination is hardening every day. Drive around the outskirts of Kyiv, and you will see how ferociously they fought to protect their hearths and homes, and how ludicrously Putin misunderstood his enemy.

You see innumerable buildings, crumpled and scarred by Russian tank fire. You see how the tracks of those tanks have ribbed the tarmac of the roads.

You also see the bivouacs and foxholes in the woods, camouflaged with rags, from which the Ukrainians fearlessly ambushed those Russian tanks – blowing them up with shoulder-launched missiles, many of them made in Belfast. You see where they routed what was supposed to be the most formidable army in the world.

The Ukrainian expulsion of Russian troops from Kyiv will go down as one of the great feats of arms of modern times. They did it again in Kharkiv, and again in Kherson.

They can, and will, drive Putin out of the whole of Ukraine. This is now *a war of independence*, and history teaches us that wars of independence only end one way. The question is when.

The sooner we can help the Ukrainians to their inevitable victory, the sooner their suffering will be over, and the sooner the whole world, including Russia, can begin to recover from Putin's catastrophe. That requires all of us in the West, all the friends of Ukraine, to double and treble our support.

Putin's troops are demoralized. They are short of good ammunition. His army consists of freshly sprung convicts, or scared members of ethnic minorities dragooned to fight from anonymous cities in the furthest reaches of Russia.

But wasteful though he is, Putin still has the reserves of population; he has the power to conscript; and he has shown his total contempt for the value of human life.

He is now preparing a counter-punch. And even if the Ukrainians can see it coming, and will easily absorb that punch, they will need our help for that next and decisive phase – taking back the land bridge.

This is that continuous strip of conquered land that runs along the coast from the Donbas to Crimea, and which currently blocks Ukrainian access to the Sea of Azov.

Blue: retaken by Ukraine; Pink: Russian Occupied

If they can take back that land bridge, or drive their way through it and cut it in two, the Ukrainians have won. It is game over for Putin.

[Note by Jack: This is a critical point. Here is the map:]

There is only one road and railway now connecting Russia and Crimea with the Kerch Strait bridge inoperative: that from Rostov in Russia to Mariupol and along the north shore of the Sea of Azov. The red dot is where Boris says this land bridge can be cut in two, the hub of Melitopol. Destroy transport control at Melitopol and game over.]

All they need to do it is the kind of kit the West has in abundance, and which right now could have no higher moral or strategic purpose than to help Ukraine.

They need ‘deep fires’ – longer-range artillery that can take out Putin’s positions from afar. At present, they can see what he is doing on Ukrainian soil. They can discern his command centers and ammo dumps.

To their immense frustration, they cannot hit those targets with the systems they have. They need planes to strike those positions from the air, and they need armored cars and tanks to recapture and hold the ground that Putin has stolen.

I am proud that it is the UK that is once again making the running. By sending 14 Challenger 2 tanks, our Defense Secretary Ben Wallace has set an example for other countries to emulate. Now is the time for others to follow our lead.



Britain is sending hundreds of armored vehicles to help President Zelensky's forces

The Ukrainians need hundreds of tanks, and they should be getting them from the Americans, the Germans, the Poles, and many others. Where does the Western world need to station those tanks at the moment?

Guarding North Rhine-Westphalia? Protecting Tennessee? Prowling the villages of Wiltshire?

The same point can be made about every item of conventional weaponry that could help Ukraine bring this agony to an end.

Don't talk to me about 'escalation', or the risk that we will somehow 'provoke' Putin, by increasing our support, to some fresh horror. Why should we fear to provoke him, when he has already shown what he will do without the slightest provocation?

How can he 'escalate', when he has already reached such a pitch of barbarism that he is systematically pulverizing the homes of civilians?

Will he escalate with a battlefield nuclear weapon? Really? I don't believe it for a second. If Putin were so insane as to go nuclear, he would in a trice lose all the world's swing voters – from Africa, the Middle East, Asia – who are currently willing to cut him so much slack.

Worse, from his point of view, he would lose the Chinese. He would become a global pariah, and plunge Russia into such a state of cryogenic economic exclusion as to make the current sanctions look moderate.

Above all, he would lose the Russian people, who would be utterly terrified about the consequences of such a move, and where it might lead. And it wouldn't even work. It wouldn't stop the Ukrainians fighting.

He won't do it. He wants to make us talk about nuclear weapons, because he wants to portray his war of choice as a stand-off between NATO and Russia. It is no such thing. It is a brutal and unprovoked attack on a blameless European country, and all Ukraine's friends are doing is to help that country defend itself.

We cannot be blamed for the geo-strategic disaster that Putin has brought upon himself. He has managed by his violence and aggression not only to cause Finland and Sweden to join NATO; he has eloquently destroyed any case against the NATO membership of the Ukrainians themselves.

What is the result of our decades-long failure to live up to our promise, and admit the Ukrainians to the shelter of the NATO defensive umbrella?

The result is the bloodiest war in Europe for 80 years. For the sake of clarity and stability and long-term peace, it is now clear – which it wasn't before Putin's invasion – that *Ukraine must join NATO now*.

And yes, I accept that when Putin eventually and inevitably loses, it will be difficult to explain it all to the Russian public. But he will find a way. He controls the organs of opinion. He still has very substantial support.

It is not our job to worry about Putin, or where his career might go next, or to engage in pointless Kremlinology. Our job is to help Ukraine win – as fast as possible.

Those heroic people are fighting for all of us. The Ukrainians are fighting for the Georgians, for the Moldovans, for the Baltic states, for the Poles – for anyone who might in due time be threatened by Putin's crazed revanchism and neo-imperialism. They are fighting for the principle that nations should not have their borders

changed by force.

When Ukraine wins, that is a message that will be heard around the world. So let us help them win, not next year or the year after, but *this year, 2023; and don't talk to me, finally, about expense.*

If you want to minimize the world's economic pain, if you want to avoid the enormous cost – in blood and treasure – of letting this tragedy stretch on, then let's together do the obvious thing.

Let's give the Ukrainians all they need to win now.

Boris Johnson

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