

Time for NATO to get more directly involved in Ukraine

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The war in Ukraine has been raging for nearly six weeks, and shows no signs of letting up any time soon. Russia's invasion of its neighbour began on Feb. 24, and has been notable not only for the Ukrainian military's impressive pushback on Russia's military forces, but the underperformance of Russia's military machine and a total humanitarian catastrophe, with Russia's brutal targeting of civilian targets, including apartment buildings, hospitals and child daycare centres, leaving thousands of civilian casualties. The latest Russian atrocity has been the hundreds of dead Ukrainians found in towns on the outskirts of Kyiv, like Bucha and Motyzhyn, as the Russian forces retreated. Some of these poor souls had been shot in the back, some even had their hands tied behind their backs. While Russian leader Vladimir Putin has threatened nuclear retaliation for any direct involvement of NATO forces in the conflict, the time has long passed for NATO to take a more proactive role to stop Russia's appalling targeting of civilians in Ukraine. Appeasing a bully is never the answer, and history is filled with instances where bullies were appeased and the tragic consequences. Perhaps the most well-known example of course, is Adolf Hitler and the Nazis being appeased by the West as the former invaded Austria and Czechoslovakia in 1938 and 1939, and then British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, having met with Hitler and come to a 'peace agreement' with the Munich Pact, waved said document, declaring 'peace in our time.' Not so much, as later that year, after the Nazis invaded Poland, the world was at war. While the world was terrified at prospect of another devastating war in the late 1930s, especially after the enormous loss of life suffered in the First World War, they did eventually stand up and directly confront Hitler when the Nazis invaded Poland in 1939. While NATO has been very helpful in sanctioning Russia and in supplying Ukraine with humanitarian aid and weaponry up to this point, we must do more to end the atrocities that are being committed by Russia there on a daily basis. That means a no-fly zone, more weapons of all types to the Ukrainian military and even NATO boots on the ground to help the Ukrainians learn how to use any weaponry they may be unfamiliar with and even to directly assist them in halting the Russian advance and driving them back to their own territory, not Ukrainian territory they claim is theirs (like Luhansk and Donetsk in the Donbas region and the Crimean Peninsula). As Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the war that has been raging for over a month now, it has become clear that Russia's military is disorganized and not performing as well as many thought they would. Ukraine has been able to keep them at bay and even give them the odd bloody nose, so to speak, with their own grit, military prowess and the military aid that NATO has provided. However, due to this tepid Russian military performance, they have taken to indiscriminately targeting civilians with short-and long-range missile strikes to overrun and occupy Ukraine; the bombing of a maternity hospital in Mariupol and a theatre clearly marked as housing children are but two examples. As of April 3, The Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights has documented over 3,000 civilian casualties, with 1,417 deaths, although they say that the numbers are likely higher because they can't fully verify each individual casualty. So, it is time to call Putin's bluff and present a more forceful NATO response to Russia's brutality to the civilian population in Ukraine. Not only will letting Putin keep up his attacks on civilians end up destroying much of Ukraine, bringing untold suffering to its people, but it will also embolden the Russian leader to expand his military ambitions as he realizes his nuclear threats have worked and NATO will not take any decisive military actions to stop him. Over time, he will likely invade other former Soviet nation states, and attack other countries that he feels are against him, including Canada. As the Arctic region melts more and more, we now have a vast, largely undefended (compared to Russia's Arctic defences) border with Russia to our north. It's not exactly a comforting thought. Today, Ukraine in mortal danger, but who's next and when will NATO finally say, enough is enough, and give this bully a well-deserved black eye?