

AS WE SEE IT

Moving the lines in Ukraine

The level and quality of military support for Ukraine from NATO countries is increasing, just as Russia prepares a new offensive.

In recent weeks, the United States and its NATO allies have committed to providing new weapons systems, consisting of tanks, armored fighting vehicles, armored personnel carriers and the Patriot missile system.



DAVID BERNELL



THOMAS GRAHAM JR.

This will include the training — in NATO countries, including the United States — to effectively use these weapons.

Perhaps most significant is Germany's contribution. It's not simply that Germany will send its own tanks and fighting vehicles, it's because this decision is a historic change. Germany is moving away from its post-

World War II position of avoiding military conflict and is now on board more than ever as a full partner in NATO.

These weapons systems are not simply oriented toward defending Ukraine, but to helping Ukraine go on the offensive and entirely ousting the Russian military from the country. They offer new capabilities, such as mobility, enhanced firepower and combined arms operations to execute maneuver-style warfare that can overwhelm the Russians and force them to retreat.

The new weapons deliveries can be attributed to the strong performance of Ukraine's military in defending the country and retaking territory, along with

the poor performance of Russia's military. This has provided a degree of optimism in further supporting Ukraine.

At the same time, Russia's increased targeting of civilians, with waves of missiles and drone attacks against Ukrainian cities and infrastructure, has prompted calls for greater assistance to Ukraine.

But there is another dynamic at work here. Things have changed with respect to what constitutes an action that is considered too provocative toward Russia. The U.S. and NATO have been careful not to push Putin too far at any one time, seeking to avoid his red lines (whatever they may be) and incite a larger war.

Still, the Americans and their NATO allies have learned something over the past year: Support to Ukraine and pushback against Russia through military aid can be ratcheted up. The line not to be crossed has continually moved without threatening direct retaliation by Russia against NATO countries.

At the start of the war, it was unthinkable for the U.S. and NATO to send Ukraine tanks, armored personnel carriers and Patriot missiles, but today this is considered appropriate and not overly provocative. Moreover, this is not covert aid. It is all done in public, openly acknowledged.

This demonstrates two things. First is that the United States and its allies have greatly expanded their own view of what is considered acceptable weaponry to provide, and what is an acceptable risk to NATO.

And second, they are sending a message to Russia, signaling (once again) that NATO has not yet reached any line it considers to be going too far. Instead, the

U.S. and NATO have moved that line, and they will continue to expand military aid and push the line further.

It is unclear where this ends. However, it will not be surprising to see more of the careful incrementalism that defines the increasingly robust commitment by NATO to arm Ukraine. After all, Ukraine has become the place that NATO sees as critical to defend Europe and protect liberal democracy worldwide.

Considering President Zelenskyy's skill at channeling Winston Churchill in his speeches to both the U.S. Congress and the British Parliament, it seems that he sees Ukraine as facing the same type of challenge that Britain did, for the same reasons, and needing the same support to ensure Ukraine's defense, as well as the defense of NATO and the liberal democratic project. We shall see.

Ambassador Thomas Graham Jr. is former acting director of the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency under President Clinton, and the special representative of President Clinton for Arms Control, Nonproliferation and Disarmament. He served as General Counsel of ACDA during the presidencies of Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush. He is author of several books on nuclear arms control, U.S. foreign policy and American politics.

David Bernell is an associate professor in the School of Public Policy at Oregon State University. His research and teaching focus on international relations, U.S. foreign policy and U.S. energy policy. He is author of "The Energy Security Dilemma: U.S. Policy and Practice" and "Constructing U.S. Foreign Policy: The Curious Case of Cuba."