

What is Starmer doing in Ukraine?

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There are quite a lot of things that I only know a little about. That is, of course, true of everybody. Life is too short, and the world is too complex, for us to know a great deal about more than a relatively limited range of subjects. However, that has never stopped politicians from claiming to be the master of any brief that they are given, and for that reason alone, I feel able to ask a question about defence this morning.

It has been widely reported that UK-built Storm Shadow missiles were used by Ukraine to attack targets within Russia yesterday. Very little has been officially said about this, so the consequences of these attacks are not yet known, and as far as I am aware, neither are the targets. But that really does not matter as far as I am concerned.

What does matter to me is what, precisely, the UK thought it was doing by permitting this use and what it hopes might happen as a consequence. I can ask that question because whilst I am not an expert on defence, I have in my time prepared a great many plans for businesses of varying sizes, and what I know as a consequence is that no plan is of any merit or has any chance of success unless the reason for its creation is known. In turn, the reason for its creation must involve the imagining of a desired outcome from whatever activity is to be undertaken. I think it quite reasonable to suggest that if that is true of business, life in general, and politics, then it is also true when it comes to firing missiles into Russia.

So what is the UK's goal in permitting this action, which was a necessary precondition for these missiles to be fired?

Is it, as seems most likely, that the UK was playing its usual support act role to the USA, where Biden is desperate to take some final military steps before Trump arrives on the scene and supposedly ends the war in Ukraine in a day? Of all the possible explanations for this action, this seems by far the most likely when no other has been stated.

Alternatively, does the UK believe that firing missiles into Russia is an act without consequence, which it can, therefore, permit Ukraine to do without anyone paying any attention because Russia will not notice what has happened?

Or is it that there is some grand master plan that now exists that demonstrates that after 1,000 days of the war in Ukraine, an end is in sight with Russia being expelled from that country, the likelihood of which appears almost impossible to imagine?

Let me be clear. I do not know which of these motivated this action. But let me be equally clear. I very much doubt that Keir Starmer does either. As far as I can see, the UK, the US, NATO and even the government in Kyiv have no clear idea between them as to what they are now trying to achieve in pursuing the conflict in Ukraine, where something close to stalemate now seems to exist, but with Russia may be winning a slow war of attrition, which is what might have also motivated this action.

It is this lack of any explanation for the continuing waste of war in Ukraine that worries me. I am not keen to reward Putin for his actions. I am not in any way suggesting that we should be relaxed about Russia claiming territory by force. I would not be relaxed about any country doing that. But, what is apparent is that there is no obvious way in which this war will end, and that is a situation of benefit to no one, including Ukraine, its people, and those who have yet to die there if this war is perpetuated.

What we do know is that this war must eventually end because all others in history have done so. That is the inevitable consequence of those who are involved reaching the conclusion that they are either no longer worth pursuing and, therefore, either surrendering or negotiating a peace. In this case, the stalemate suggests that a negotiated peace must now become the inevitable trajectory for a solution to this conflict. It is hard to see any other that is now available.

But, in that case, why did Keir Starmer permit the use of British-made missiles against Russia? Who was he trying to impress? What was the strategic goal? And what was the risk analysis? I sincerely hope there was one. These are all fair questions to ask.

I am not sure that there are any known answers. It is that which worries me. When Starmer appears to have so little idea about so much that he is doing, by noting this, I am adding it to my list of concerns.

Starmer sold himself to the country on the basis of managerial competence, as a result of which millions of people were persuaded that he might be able to think. Evidence to support that claim has not been readily available since July 5. This action can only add to the doubt about his ability.