

The US revises its past miscalculations

Recent news reports informed about a classified letter of the Senate Intelligence Committee addressed to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, the Defense Department, and the CIA. The discussions concerning this issue highlighted the **miscalculations committed by the US intelligence community regarding evaluating the Afghan and Ukrainian capacity to counter the aggression from the Taliban and Russia**, respectively. The reflection on these issues and thorough analysis of methodology and conclusions made in these cases provide an opportunity to revise the past mistakes, minimize their consequences, and avoid them in the future.

What started as an operation to curb terrorist hubs in Afghanistan soon turned into the longest war the United States had participated in throughout its history. According to some of the more modest estimates, over the two decades of engagement in the local affairs, Americans disbursed as much as two trillion dollars, including at least 800 billion in direct war-fighting costs and 85 billion for training the Afghan army. The initial plan was to provide sufficient assistance to the Afghan government and armed forces until they were able to stand their ground on their own. The American establishment was certain that this goal was set to be achieved. When it came to withdrawing from the country, the intelligence institutions were convinced that after years of intense training and funding, the Afghan army would be able to defeat the Taliban forces, which are incapable of carrying out large-scale operations and lack high-quality equipment. However, they turned out to be mistaken. **Afghanistan fell to the power of the Taliban** despite all previous struggles in a matter of weeks of renewed active hostilities while American soldiers were still leaving their Afghan bases.



The consequences of the **misjudgment that entailed a hasty withdrawal from Afghanistan have been a heavy blow for the US**. It was perceived by many as a demonstration of weakness and inability to obtain the desired results, which could incite doubts about the American capability to maintain its grip on the world politics and impaired the image and credibility of the US among its allies and partners who used to count on American support and protection in case of various crises.

Quite the **opposite miscalculation occurred with respect to the situation in Ukraine**. The evaluations of Ukrainian potential in a direct confrontation with the Russian Federation by the American intelligence agencies and think tanks were rather modest. These evaluations focused primarily on comparing the Ukrainian and Russian military potentials **in quantitative terms** while underestimating the experience and skills of the Ukrainian military command as well as **not giving due regard to the ideological dimension** of the conflict and the will of the Ukrainian people to fight for their homes with weapons in hands even in the face of an overnumbering opponent which was considered to represent one of the world's strongest military powers.



Based on these intelligence reports, the American establishment held back its assistance to Ukraine. Procurements of massive amounts of weaponry and other military and financial aid were deemed unnecessary and irrelevant due to the notion that with or without them, the Ukrainian army would fall under Russian attacks. Therefore, American supplies of weapons and other military equipment remained rather moderate even as the Kremlin's plans to reignite the eight-year-long conflict by carrying out an unprovoked and blatant invasion of the Ukrainian territories became more and more evident.

Nevertheless, Ukrainians **proved the American analysts wrong** by providing a surprisingly strong and effective response to the aggressor. The Ukrainian military command managed to maintain the coherence and operability of the armed forces and not only last longer than the 48 to 72 hours, which were considered enough for Russians to seize Kyiv by many military experts, but also to hold back and counter the advancing Russian troops, **providing an outstanding demonstration of efficient application of all available resources.**



Timely and sufficient assistance for the Ukrainian Armed Forces could have prevented the appalling atrocities carried out by the Russian military in Ukrainian cities and substantially reduced the enormous losses of lives among both the Ukrainian army and the civil population.

It is important to understand that even though the past miscalculations cannot be unmade, **the US is still able to minimize their severe consequences and even draw benefit from the further developments.** The remarkable results accomplished by the Ukrainian military and society demonstrate that with a sufficient degree of assistance, Ukraine is able to become a **'success story'** that will facilitate restoring the American reputation and credibility compromised after the last-year events in Afghanistan. By fostering Ukraine in its struggle against Russian aggression, the US **can reaffirm its role as a global leader** capable of maintaining peace, security, and democracy in different regions worldwide, as well as demonstrate the unity within the North Atlantic Alliance and decisiveness in opposing a perpetrator of regional and global order.

Against this backdrop, it is important to understand that **Russia has to be defeated rather than just deterred.** The Ukrainian Armed Forces need to have the means to conduct largescale counterattacks with a view to de-occupying the Ukrainian territories and ensuring that the Russian Federation no longer presents a threat both to Ukraine and the regional security and stability. With that in mind, the US should provide the Ukrainian Armed Forces with advanced heavy weaponry, including long-range multiple launch rocket systems, artillery mounts, aircraft, and air defense systems.