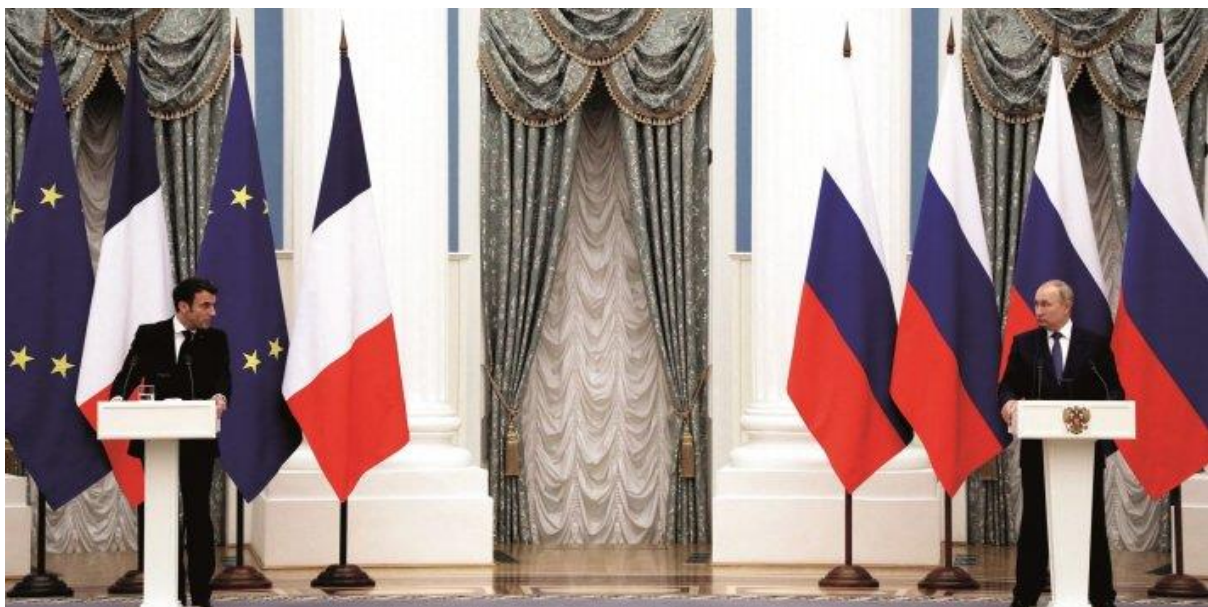




Putin's brutal war has left almost no nation or corner of humanity untouched

By David Howell – 22.06.22



To negotiate or to defeat? To concede territory or to win by driving every Russian off Ukrainian soil, Crimea included? The argument runs uneasily between the two poles and is, of course, unanswerable. No one knows how the Ukrainian war will unfold.

But there is perhaps one obvious negotiating rule worth observing in all predictions – namely, that you don't talk about negotiations and possible outcomes until you sit at the table, even initially. Until that point, the only wise stance is to stick to the hardest line, backed by the iron intent to win.

And that is rightly the position of President Volodymyr Zelensky – as it should be of all his allies. Unfortunately, it is a truth not quite grasped by leaders in either Paris or Berlin, where all sorts of noises about a deal, about not humiliating Vladimir Putin, about concessions of territory and so on, have been filtering out. A journalist or analyst can make these noises; a player in the action cannot.

There can be no talk of concessions until both sides are in the mood. And so far they are definitely not, nor will they be until both realise that absolute stalemate is the alternative.

Putin is not mad, he is calculating, and he wants to command the chess board

Putin is far from that point. Not only did he begin by setting totally unobtainable objectives in any circumstances – the elimination of Ukraine itself – but he is still determined to press on, pouring the lifeblood of Russian youth into the maelstrom in the belief that conquest of some kind – be it complete national subjugation or just occupation of the whole of Donbas – can be accomplished. That is where the weapons-supplying allies come in – to make this “solution” impossible. A carefully calibrated push against Russia must continue all the time and be bolstered with a continuous flow of new weaponry and training, not just speeches and promises.
