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## *Why Does the US Have Better Intelligence on Russia's Military Situation Than Ukraine's?*



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A curious fact about the Russia-Ukraine war is that US intelligence agencies admit to knowing more about the military situation in Russia than they do about the military position of Ukraine. Media coverage of the war is voluminous, but is largely reliant on Ukrainian government claims which in a time of war are understandably partisan and dwell on successes rather than failures. The fault here is not on the part of the Ukrainian government, but on a media which almost invariably fails to admit the one-sided nature of its information.

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Sometimes this over-optimistic bias is punctured by the Ukrainian government itself, as it was last Sunday when President Volodymyr Zelensky, on a visit to the front in the Donbas, said that the fighting in Sievierodonetsk was “extremely difficult”, with as many as 100 Ukrainian soldiers dying every day, and Russia had captured a fifth of Ukraine. But even this unexpected bit of official pessimism is not necessarily the whole story, and may be geared to prodding the US and Nato into providing more heavy weapons.

It is striking therefore to see this well-sourced piece by Julian E. Barnes in the [\*New York Times\*](#) citing US intelligence officials as saying that they do not know much about what is going on militarily on the Ukrainian side. This ignorance rules out any realistic assessment of the balance of power between the combatants on the ground, something which is a necessity in determining future policy.

Here are some particularly telling quotes from the piece:

“How much do we really know about how Ukraine is doing?” said Beth Sanner, a former senior intelligence official. “Can you find a person who will tell you with confidence how many troops has Ukraine lost, how many pieces of equipment has Ukraine lost?”

US officials said the Ukrainian government gave them few classified briefings or details about their operational plans, and Ukrainian officials acknowledged that they did not tell the Americans everything.

### **Beneath the Radar**

It is easy to be depressed by the ongoing political crisis in America with its ever-widening and toxic divisions – and the likely success of a Trumpian Republican Party in the mid-term elections. As an antidote to gloom, I have been rereading Seymour Hersh’s riveting and meticulously documented book *The Dark Side of Camelot* on the career of President Kennedy and his family.

Published in 1997, this remains by far the best book on the Kennedys, revealing the extent to which their success relied on corrupt political deals to steal elections. I found it uplifting because the book shows that many of the worst aspects of American political life today are not unique to our era, but were flourishing back in the 1950s and 1960s.

### **Cockburn’s Picks**

On Boris Johnson’s survival, Andrew Marr’s verdict seemed to me to be pretty sensible. After declaring that troubled political waters were good for journalism, he added that “I’m also, I hope, a patriotic person, and this outcome is terrible for the country. Johnson’s still there but he’s very badly wounded.

“Who would have chosen to end of all this plotting with the same Prime Minister as before  
– only more damaged and less able to lead?”

Gloomier but perhaps more insightful is [this piece](#) in *Middle East Eye* by Peter Osborne.

*Patrick Cockburn is the author of [War in the Age of Trump](#) (Verso).*

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