

VITAL SIGNS

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Putin vs. The World: the War in Ukraine, Russian Disinformation, Non-State Actors, the Maidan Revolution, International Response



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WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

By Alex Wong

War has descended on the European continent once again. Many fight bravely for the sovereignty of their country, while millions more flee for safety. Every day, new reports of the horrors of the War in Ukraine strike terror and fear into the hearts of everyday people around the world. Needless fighting and suffering have been caused in Ukraine, Russia, and across the world. However, this is not the first time that Ukraine has had to fight for its independence...

Ukraine has had a long and proud history, from the days of the Kyivan Rus and Prince Volodymyr of Kyiv to the present-day democratic Ukrainian nation. However, since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russian authorities, especially Russian President Vladimir Putin, have attempted to undermine the Ukrainian state. This attempt to rot the Ukrainian government internally was

This attempt to rot the Ukrainian government internally was made most evident by the actions of President Viktor Yanukovich. Yanukovich won the 2010 Ukrainian Presidential election and immediately began to express his true colours as a quisling in every sense of the word. From the onset, it was clear that Yanukovich was more interested in protecting Russian interests rather than Ukrainian interests. President Yanukovich agreed to extend the lease on the Russian Naval base in Sevastopol and refused to acknowledge the Holodomor of 1932-1933 as a genocide by the Soviet government, in line with the narrative from the Kremlin (Ray). Yanukovich also imprisoned political opponents, most notably former Prime Minister Yuliya Tymoshenko, a pro-Western politician. The efforts by the Ukrainian government to sign a free trade agreement with the European Union were also stifled by Yanukovich in 2013, with many suspecting that it was at the direction of Russian President Vladimir Putin that Yanukovich diverted course at the last minute (Ray). The seditious and treasonous actions of President Yanukovich would eventually come to pass with the anger of the Ukrainian people.

Even before President Yanukovich shot down the European Union Free Trade agreement, tensions had already begun simmering in Ukraine, especially in the capital, Kyiv. On the 21st of November, 2013, a crowd of 300 youth gathered in Maidan Square, in the centre of Kyiv. The crowd soon swelled to a size of thousands, and many of all ages came from all

VITAL SIGNS

Pingry's Journal of Issues & Opinion

Vol. 28, NO. 2 • The Pingry School, Basking
Ridge, NJ 07920 • MAY 2022

Editors-in-Chief

Sarina Lalin
Alex Wong

Associate Editor:

Spencer McLaughlin

Copy Editors

Sasha Bauhs
Olivia Buvanova
Jeremy Betz
Aanya Shah

Faculty Advisor:

Ms. Kathryn Smoot

over the capital and surrounding areas to show their support for the free trade agreement with the EU (Afineevsky). The atmosphere was largely peaceful, and shows of Ukrainian culture and patriotism were on full display, as the young protestors started building a community amongst themselves. The feeling of camaraderie among the protestors was not centred around race or religion, but rather around a uniquely Ukrainian identity and a desire to join the larger European community, away from the tight grasp of Putin and the pro-Russian Yanukovich. As protestors marched through the streets of Kyiv peacefully, the police largely left them alone, as political opposition leaders made rousing speeches to the large crowds. Political heavyweights such as Petro Poroshenko (future President of Ukraine) and Vitali Klitschko (future mayor of Kyiv) came out in support of the protestors in Maidan (Afineevsky). The patriotic and peaceful protestors, fed up with the corruption of the Yanukovich regime and simply wanting to become more involved with the larger European community, would have to come face to face with the full brunt of the rotten regime they sought to change.

On the 29th of November, 2013, President Yanukovich ordered the Berkut Special Forces, an arm of the Ukrainian armed forces, to storm and take back Maidan Square (Afineevsky), coinciding with his decision to reject the free trade agreement with the European Union. Instead of using traditional plastic batons, Berkut Special Forces used iron batons to beat and bloody the peaceful protestors in Maidan (Afineevsky). Although the special

forces were able to retake Maidan Square temporarily, protestors came back en masse into the square once again, protesting peacefully, and pushing out the Berkut (Afineevsky). When the special forces attempted to retake Maidan two weeks later, all of the bells in the Mykhailiv's'kyi Monastery, an iconic Christian monastery in the centre of Kyiv, rang out, an event that had not happened since the Mongol invasion of Kyiv in 1240 (Afineevsky). Whether through the resounding sound of the bells, or an act of God, more people began pouring into Maidan, peacefully but firmly beating back the Berkut Special Forces. From that day on, protestors continued to occupy Maidan Square, establishing a thriving protestor community in the square, complete with a defence force and medical corps.

The authorities under President Yanukovich continued to try to dislodge the protestors from Maidan. On top of deploying Berkut special forces, President Yanukovich hired Titushky to harass the protestors (Afineevsky). The Titushky were thugs who were independent of any military or police association and thus could do things that the police could not do (Afineevsky). As such, the Titushky perpetrated horrific attacks against peaceful protestors, attacking injured protestors and temporary hospitals treating injured people, often backed up by their Berkut comrades in arms. Furthermore, the tactics of the Berkut special forces became more and more brutal as time wore on. Initially, the Berkut were limited to using iron batons, pepper spray, and tear gas. Eventually, they were given rubber bullets,

which were later changed to live ammunition. The use of deadly force by the Berkut resulted in deaths and severe injuries on the protestors' side. President Yanukovich forced a series of ridiculous laws down the throat of the Ukrainian parliament, outlawing actions such as wearing a helmet or speaking out against the government (Afineevsky). Furthermore, President Yanukovich frequently hosted meetings with his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, throughout the entire movement (New York Times). Putin pledged almost a billion dollars in aid to help President Yanukovich put down the protestors. As the tactics of the Berkut and government forces became more intense, so did the resolve and determination of the protestors. Newly formed bands of the Maidan Defence Corps did regular patrols around the square, ensuring no harm would come to the protestors inside the square (Afineevsky). Furthermore, the members of the defence corps would often clash with the Berkut and Titushky, armed with iron shields, slingshots, makeshift barricades, stones, burning tyres, and Molotov cocktails (Afineevsky). As the death toll began to climb, and Maidan's makeshift hospitals began to become overwhelmed with many terribly injured patients from the front line (BBC), many felt frustrated with the lack of progress that had occurred. Little did the protestors know that a change would come rapidly and soon.

Throughout the entire protest movement, negotiations had taken place between moderates in the Ukrainian parliament and self-proclaimed protest leaders. The negotiations had resulted in an agreement to hold elections in



Orthodox priests between *Berkut* Special Forces and Protestors during the Maidan Revolution

ASSOCIATED PRESS



Protestors during the peak of the Maidan Revolution

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December of 2014 (Afineevsky). Even so, many saw this as not enough. On the 21st of February, 2014, a commander of the Maidan Defence Corps addressed the crowd in Maidan, giving an ultimatum to the Yanukovych regime; either Yanukovych resign immediately, or they would storm his government and force him to resign (Afineevsky). Furthermore, protestors began spilling out of Maidan and occupying government buildings, grinding the Yanukovych regime to a halt. The events appeared to scare President Yanukovych, as in the early hours of the 22nd of February, Yanukovych fled from his mansion on the outskirts of Kyiv into exile, taken in by his puppet master, Vladimir Putin, and never to step into Ukraine ever again.

With the departure of President Yanukovych, change came swiftly. The Parliament officially impeached President Yanukovych and removed all laws imposed by his regime (Afineevsky). Furthermore, elections were called for May 2014, and Maidan leader Petro Poroshenko was elected President of Ukraine. Under his leadership, President Poroshenko signed the free trade agreement with the European Union and set Ukraine on a path toward joining the larger European community. Furthermore, the Berkut Special Forces were disbanded, and there was a renewed commitment by the Ukrainian military and police to serve the people rather than the regime. Many rejoiced in the fact that the Yanukovych regime was over and a new era had begun in Ukrainian history (Afineevsky). The Ukrainian people also had to come to terms with the high price that came with the newfound freedom they gained, many from shootings by the Berkut Special Forces (Afineevsky) during the Maidan Revolution, of about 125 fatalities and 1,800 injuries.

The revolution in Maidan had implications that stretched far beyond the borders of Ukraine, influencing various protest movements around the world. The revolution in Maidan also prompted Vladimir Putin, angered with the increasing Westernisation of Ukraine, to illegally invade and annex Crimea, as well as sponsor an insurgency in Eastern Ukraine (Vox). The insurgency in Eastern Ukraine has been raging for the past eight years and has been a deep source of tension between the Russian and Ukrainian governments. Since Maidan, Putin has become more forthright in his attempts to destroy the Ukrainian state and identity, using direct military force to undermine the state instead of subtle political manoeuvres through pro-Russian politicians in Ukraine. Putin's efforts have culminated in his full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, where he has put everything on the line in order to fulfil his sick ideal of destroying Ukraine, both as a state and a culture.

At the time of the Maidan Revolution, it was hard for many around the world to grasp how a military and police force meant to defend its people could so barbarically and brutally subdue peaceful protestors, wishing only for an end to a tyrannical regime. Fast forward eight years and the world must come to grips with an even larger crisis, an invasion of a sovereign nation by its much larger neighbour. Putin once again seeks to install a puppet regime in Ukraine, and it is suspected that if successful, he will reinstall Yanukovych to the position of President of Ukraine (Kahn). Nevertheless, the tenacity and courage of the Ukrainian people will continue to stand the test of time, and face any threat that attempts to destroy it. Vladimir Putin, hellbent on the destruction of the Ukrainian culture and identity, failed in 2014, and he definitely will not succeed this time. The world will not stand idly by and will rally the aid of the Ukrainian people. And when all is said and done, Putin will be defeated, and Ukraine will continue to stand proudly among the sovereign nations of the world.

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Ukraine's Humanitarian Crisis

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By Sarina Lalin

Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, has prompted one of the greatest humanitarian crises since the end of World War II. With millions of people seeking asylum in neighboring countries and thousands already dead, this ever-growing conflict has quickly become one of international concern. As the threat of another world war looms, organizations across the globe are mobilizing to condemn Russia's actions and put an end to the strife, but the damage that has already been done is irreparable.

In addition to the war's 5.1 million refugees fleeing Ukraine for other countries, 7.1 million people, almost a quarter of Ukraine's total population, have been internally displaced within the besieged country, making this the largest war-related mass migration since the 1990s. An overwhelming majority of those 7.1 million individuals are women and children and, according to the UN, more than one of every two children are currently displaced (IOM Survey). As of April 21st, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) reported a total of 5,264 civilian casualties- with 2,345 people killed, including 208 children. It is speculated that the actual number is likely to be much higher than this estimation.

As the conflict escalates, civilian casualties and infrastructural damage within the country will only intensify. Some sources predict that up to 50,000 people will be killed as a consequence of the conflict in Ukraine.

Many Russian attacks have targeted highly populated areas, such as locations near schools and hospitals, making the effects of the war exceedingly detrimental to Ukrainian civilians. Within only fifteen days of the war, 47 civilians were killed by Russian airstrikes that took place at two different schools in Chernihiv, leaving hundreds of additional innocent people injured. Russia's utilization of harmful weaponry, including artillery, missiles, and explosives, has given them the ability to completely alter normal circumstances in Ukraine, obliterating civilians' homes and decimating entire villages (UN News). The immense destruction caused by the Russians has forced Ukrainians to seek refuge in the most unfavorable of conditions, finding shelter in dilapidated buildings and abandoned metro stations.

Attacks on healthcare facilities in Ukraine have continued to endanger patients and staff in Ukraine. According to a WHO spokesperson, there have been 137 verified attacks since February 24; 132 of them have directly damaged health institutions, 16 of them have impacted transportation such as ambulances, 24 have impacted workers and patients,

27 have impacted supplies, and two have damaged warehouses (UN News). Ukraine, like the rest of the world, has already had to deal with the COVID-19 Pandemic. Less than 40% of the Ukrainian population is vaccinated against COVID-19, and the Russian Invasion is further exacerbating the strain on the Ukrainian health system.

Experts claim that Europe's effort to help the Ukrainian people is the largest display of European mobilization in recent years. Poland has taken in more than half of all new migrants, setting up temporary houses, hospitals, and reception centers that provide food, information, and medical supplies to those who need them. Moldova, Hungary, Slovakia, and other European countries have taken in the remaining refugees. Around 271,000 people, or around 7.5 percent of all refugees, have made their way to Russia. Ireland has declared that all visa requirements for Ukrainians seeking asylum will be waived, while the Czech Republic has withdrawn its entry ban and COVID-19 limitations on entering migrants. Officials from the European Union (EU) unanimously endorsed a plan to activate the bloc's Temporary Protection Directive, a seldom-used provision that would allow refugees leaving Ukraine to enter EU countries for up to three years without having to seek refuge.

The Ukrainian relief efforts do not stop there. The UN has recently declared \$20 million in aid from their Central Emergency Response Fund and \$2.25 billion for humanitarian assistance (Operational Data Portal). Additionally, to deal with the rapidly changing situation, the U.S.'s International Committee of the Red Cross, or ICRC, is expanding to ten various places across Ukraine, including Kyiv, Poltava, Dnipro, and Odesa. Trucks are moving across the country to provide medical supplies and other relief, and additional convoys with critical supplies are expected to arrive in the coming days. The World Health Organization has delivered 218 metric tonnes of medical supplies to Ukraine and numerous diesel generators to areas where the power supply is limited or near non-existent. Once the generators are delivered, they will help with surgery, trauma and emergency care, internal medicine, and pediatrics, as well as with treating infectious infections. Even a brief power outage could have severe ramifications for patients, such as those who require medical oxygen, making the generators all the more necessary. A WHO official stated that they "will only transfer the generators to their final locations when we can secure the safety of our staff and the valuable cargo they are hauling" (UN News), stressing that hospitals and health facilities now only had 10 oxygen plants across the country. Organizations have deployed more than 60,000 metric tons of food across the country, enough to feed two million people for two months. Since February 24, 1.7 million individuals in Ukraine have been reached through in-kind food aid to families in surrounding and conflict-affected areas, as well as \$3.6 million in cash-based transfers in areas where markets are operating. Through four UN interagency humanitarian convoys, the UN agency has supplied 113 tonnes of food to vulnerable families in the surrounded cities of Kharkiv, Sumy, and Severodonetsk, enough for 20,000 people for ten days.

Despite the massive aid operation around the world, humanitarian needs in Ukraine are still increasing exponentially. According to UN refugee spokesperson, Matthew Saltmarsh, "Food, water, medicines, and medical care, shelter, basic household items, blankets, mattresses, cash, building materials, generators, and fuel are urgently needed" (Saltmarsh). An estimated six million people need food and money as the attacks on Ukrainian cities across the country unfold.

One of the most pressing issues is the situation in Mariupol, where civilians are in dire need of assistance. On April 21, Putin claimed victory over Ukrainian troops, declaring the city of Mariupol liberated. In what is considered the biggest battle of the Ukraine War, Putin ordered his troops to blockade the area, telling citizens to either surrender or die.

The Russian military cut off all food, electricity, medical supplies, and communication networks as it bombed the city indiscriminately, destroying houses and schools, and forcing inhabitants to spend entire days in bomb shelters. A hospital and its maternity department were among the targets, as were a theater and an art school where several hundred people allegedly sought refuge (Polityuk and Person). Organizations have consistently requested the safe transit of civilians out of these areas and the entry of impartial humanitarian aid, urging that the principle of humanity and international humanitarian law be respected. However, Russia has already denied these requests twice. Since then, corridors have opened, allowing residents to take dangerous paths out of the city, but the need for medical assistance remains (Oliveira).

It is prohibited under international law to target civilians and besiege them indiscriminately during a war. It is also illegal to target certain locations, such as hospitals, and to forcibly relocate people. Consequently, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) issued a fact-finding report on April 13 concluding that Russia violated international humanitarian law in invading Ukraine and that the targeting of a maternity hospital and a theater sheltering civilians in Mariupol constituted war crimes. The OSCE discovered "strong patterns of international humanitarian law violations by Russian forces in their conduct of hostilities," according to the report. The International Criminal Court, the United Nations, and other governments "should investigate alleged war crimes in Mariupol," according to a study released on March 21 by Human Rights Watch of New York. Those who have been lucky enough to escape report dead bodies and ruins filling the streets of Mariupol,

and one can only imagine the conditions of those who are trapped in the besieged city, cut off from the rest of the world.

The Ukrainian population, particularly the children and elderly people, has suffered immensely throughout this war. Nevertheless, their resilience and strength in the face of conflict are inspiring. Despite the continued attacks against their homes and communities, the Ukrainians have resisted every effort of the Russian forces to take their land. Their fight may be admirable, but a lack of food and necessary medical assistance has put a vast majority of civilians in perilous danger. In the name of humanity, it is imperative that we finally put an end to this strife, and bring the Ukrainian people to safety.

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Ukrainian refugees fleeing into Poland

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Dezinformatsiya: Past and Present

By Will Young

The Russian invasion of Ukraine is, at the time of writing, rapidly approaching its second month. Despite the slowing Russian advance and its subsequent regrouping, the conflict shows no sign of ceasing. The conflict has also garnered significant international attention, for better or for worse. For Ukrainians, attention has been overwhelmingly positive. Ukraine received immediate Western support, and most nations have denounced Russia's actions. The Ukrainians also have had successes in combat, and despite being outnumbered in manpower and equipment, they have been noted to have shown remarkable resilience against the Russians. This includes both the stalling of Russian advances on the Southern and Northeastern offensives, as well as a successful counterattack in the Kyiv Oblast, a province in Ukraine. In the process of thwarting Russian advances and executing effective counterattacks, the Ukrainians have engendered widespread support from NATO and Western allies, including aid and direct shipments of military hardware which have helped Ukraine inflict significant damage on advancing Russian forces.

On the other hand, the Russian Armed Forces have become known for constant failure, despite supposedly being a top-tier fighting force. Logistical issues have plagued

the Russians' advances, grinding many Russian units to a halt. These logistical failures have ensured that Russian troops often don't have consistent access to vital supplies such as food or fuel. Russia has also suffered massive equipment losses, most notably the recent sinking of the cruiser Moskva, the flagship of Russia's Black Sea Fleet. These equipment losses have accumulated, and when combined with the fact that Russia has been crippled by sanctions, have proved costly. This, in conjunction with logistical failures, has had a massive impact on the morale of Russian troops, most of whom are conscripts, or those called up from reserve forces. While the damage that the invasion has inflicted on Ukrainian cities and infrastructure has been profound, it does not compare to the scale of loss of human life and the atrocities that have been committed against the Ukrainian people in the process of the invasion. Russia has demonstrated time and time again that it is willing to go to any length to degrade the Ukrainian military and population, most commonly targeting civilian areas, particularly with artillery or airstrikes. As bad as it may seem, the brutality does not end there. Mariupol, after being under siege for over a month, has been almost completely leveled. Russian troops have even gone so far as to execute civilians, as demonstrated in the Bucha massacre. In spite of this, an often overlooked aspect of the conflict is the role of information, partic-

ularly how it is used by Moscow. This topic unfortunately receives little coverage in comparison to Russia's losses or war crimes. This is rather surprising, especially given the prevalence of Russian disinformation in the Invasion of Ukraine. It must be asked: what does Russian disinformation look like in the first place? Generally, Russian disinformation has several key identifying factors. These factors are:

1. Repetitiveness.
2. A high volume of output that comes from various sources.
3. No commitment to reality.
4. A lack of consistency.

In other words, Russian disinformation, or *dezinformatsiya*, relies on overwhelming a target with a torrent of falsehood, with little regard for whether or not the information is coherent (Matthews & Paul). Russia primarily utilizes two different methods for spreading disinformation: social media and conventional media. Russian usage of social media as a weapon is fairly well known; Russia will either pay accounts or create bot accounts to spread propaganda, which is aimed at more politically fringe groups. These fringe groups, on both the left and right, are susceptible to messages that democracy is both inefficient and corrupt. Arguably more dangerous, however, is the usage of conventional media. Sites like RT and Sputnik have the appearance of conventional media and hire those who have

the appearance of credible journalists to spread disinformation. Additionally, both are offered in multiple languages, and the former was once offered through several U.S. cable providers. Ultimately, the goal of the Russian government is not to get a potential target to believe the torrent of nonsense that Russian bots, trolls and media pump out, but to instead question what they already know or believe to be true. There isn't an attempt to hide this either, as RT's editor-in-chief Margarita Simonyan states its purpose is to provide "a perspective otherwise missing from the mainstream media echo chamber" (MacFarquhar).

Now that it's been established what Russian disinformation looks like, its historical use should be described. The Russian usage of disinformation is nothing new. Russia has an extensive and storied history of using disinformation, dating back to Soviet times when theories like "CIA-made AIDS" ran amok in the West. While the export of disinformation was widespread under the USSR, it eventually died down with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Disinformation remained relatively minimal throughout the 1990s, as the fledgling Russian Federation was a relatively weak state with significant internal problems, ranging from internal rebellions to a failing economy. Yet once Russia began to get back on its feet, it once again started to exert its influence globally, and with it, the amount of disinformation coming out of Russia rose. By the time Russian troops would cross the Russo-Georgian border in 2008, the Russian disinformation operation was in full swing.

The Russian invasion of Georgia, and the subsequent occupation of the territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, would in many ways serve as practice for the later invasion of Ukraine, being that the invasion of Georgia was based on entirely manufactured pretenses. First, in order to justify the initial building up of troops, the Kremlin announced it was simply conducting regular military exercises, a tactic

that would be repeated in the 2022 conflict. To follow up on this, Moscow would claim that Tbilisi was committing genocide against its ethnic minorities, and any subsequent military action against Georgia would be in the name of protecting Georgia's ethnic minorities. Again, this would be a move repeated in later hostilities conducted against Ukraine. Russia, to further its claims of genocide and help legitimize the invasion, illegally distributed Russian passports to South Ossetians and Abkhazians. Even after hostilities ceased, Russia still made an attempt to spread disinformation; the Kremlin spent millions on an intensive media campaign attempting to blame Georgia for the war. Despite Russia's best efforts, however, there weren't very many who believed Russia's lies. The West was well aware that Russian claims of genocide were just a facade for toppling the pro-NATO, pro-EU President Saakashvili, and undermining Western interests in the Caucasus. However, despite ultimately failing in gaining support, the Russian disinformation experiment in Georgia would prove itself to be a useful framework for future conflicts.

Russia would continue to hone its skills again in the 2014 Annexation of Crimea and the subsequent conflict in the Donbas region. Russia, as in Georgia, would use misinformation as a way to conceal wrongdoings, like the downing of Malaysia Airline Flight 17, or to justify military action. Yet this time around, Russian disinformation would be used as more than just a cover; it would be a weapon, targeted toward foreign populations. After the Annexation of Crimea, countries not previously part of NATO, particularly Sweden, started to debate entering the alliance. Immediately, there was a torrent of disinformation in Sweden regarding NATO. Theories started floating around, including, but not limited to, theories that NATO would undermine Sweden's sovereignty by invading Russia from Sweden, or by secretly stockpiling nuclear weapons in Sweden. Theories would go so far as to say NATO troops

could rape Swedish women immune from prosecution. These theories would cause such a panic that they began to spill into conventional media. The problem was so out of control that Sweden's now-former defense minister, Peter Hultqvist, would be asked repeatedly about these theories at press conferences. Disinformation regarding NATO and the West started to spread into NATO member states as well. During NATO exercises in June 2016, a theory claiming NATO made Europe a puppet of the US and Germany became particularly common, echoing theories that rose in Sweden. Forged articles and documents started floating around, including one that claimed Sweden greenlit the illegal sale of artillery pieces to Ukraine. It is fair to say that disinformation had a pronounced effect on the beliefs of Westerners this time around as well; one poll conducted in the Czech Republic found that up to 51% of Czechs had a negative opinion of the United States' role in Europe (MacFarquhar). In response, European nations finally realized the threat and started to set up dedicated anti-disinformation agencies. However, the Russians would realize the remarkable importance of disinformation as well. Between now and 2014, disinformation campaigns have played an increasingly central role in Russian military strategy, and as a Russian political scientist explained, "Moscow views world affairs as a system of special operations, and very sincerely believes that it itself is an object of Western special operations" (MacFarquhar).

Almost an entire decade of experience in the sphere of misinformation brings us to the 2022 Invasion of Ukraine. Again, the Russian military uses similar tactics as previously seen in history. Russia first tries to legitimize troop buildup, such as by claiming buildups are merely regular exercises, and that troop presence will go down to regular levels shortly. This time around, many in the West bought it, saying that Russia would not be brazen enough to actually follow through with an invasion. Troops would instead continue to be built up. With the invasion nearing the same time, the Kremlin began claiming that the Ukrainian government was committing ethnic cleansing against East Ukraine's ethnic Russians. These claims would coincide with claims that Ukraine, despite having a popularly elected Jewish president, is actually run by Neo-Nazis. Disinformation about Ukraine would come from even the highest echelons of the Russian government, with President Vladimir Putin personally releasing an essay only a few months before the invasion, discussing the similarities between the Ukrainian and Russian peoples, ultimately claiming they are essentially the same. While this claim is false, it still garnered a fair amount of legitimacy in American media, particularly in more fringe circles.

Overall, the Russian disinformation



Georgian MRLs firing on separatist positions

RFERL



REUTERS

A Russian State News employee protesting the war in Ukraine

war has largely been a success. The same, however, cannot be said for the United States. Given the closed-off nature of Russian social media and the restricted state of Russian conventional media, attempting to counter disinformation within Russia would be nearly impossible, and that does not even take into account the poor state on the homefront. The United States, while it has made efforts to slow and minimize the spread of disinformation, has been relatively ineffective. Responses have been slow, giving ample time for theories to spread. Even when a response occurs, Russian disinformation has already entrenched itself in far too many Americans. Ultimately, Russia's successes and the West's consistent failures paint a grim picture for the future of the war on information.

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Police arresting a Putin critic during an anti-war protest

NBC NEWS



State-Parallel Militias

ATLANTIC COUNCIL

By Alexander Henry

The current situation in Ukraine is multifaceted, going well beyond just a conflict between two nations. The conflict is riddled with the influence of foreign regimes and numerous non-state actors protecting their interests. One notable category of such influencers on the conflict is that of state-parallel militias. State-parallel militias fall into the category of pro-government paramilitaries; they exist to protect the ruling government and execute its will. State-parallel militias differ from the more common state manipulated militias in that their finances are independent of their host, and their existence is indispensable to the survival of their host nation. This higher degree of influence makes state-parallel militias essential to state power, rather than a mere supplement to state power.

It is estimated that a total of 30 Ukrainian state-parallel militias exist, the most significant of these being the Azov Battalion, Dnipro Battalion, and the Donbas Battalion. Although the aforementioned groups have been officially integrated into the Ukrainian Ministry of Internal Affairs, they are still *de facto*; almost completely independent, maintaining separate recruitment, training, and most importantly, finances. Though initially funded by wealthy Ukrainians, these groups now draw financial

support from around the world. As Donbas Battalion Commander Semen Semenchenko put it, “We aren’t anybody’s army, and we don’t have a single sponsor. We have many sponsors, including just ordinary people who give us as little as food and water supplies” (Mulford).

To the Ukrainians, the fighters in these militias are heroes. Ukraine’s militias have been shockingly more successful than their official counterparts despite being comparatively underfunded. According to a 2014 poll by the weekly Zerkalo Nedeli, Ukraine’s militias were more popular than the church and the army, and their popularity has only risen since Putin’s 2022 invasion as they have become increasingly more relied upon. When war broke out with Russian separatists in the Donbas region in 2014, Ukraine’s militias represented the nation’s only capacity to resist. In the absence of any government armed forces, the militias managed to hold the separatists off until the government could organize a proper defense. Additionally, the Azov Battalion in particular has achieved shocking military successes. For instance, after Kyiv’s forces were unable to defend the strategic port city of Mariupol, allowing it to fall into the hands of pro-Russian separatists, the Azov Battalion became instrumental in leading its recapture. The Azov Battalion has continued to defend Mariupol even throughout Putin’s full-scale 2022 invasion. Although the exact

makeup of Mariupol’s defenders is not entirely clear, it is generally understood that the Azov Battalion has been the prime factor in its successful defense so far.

Ukraine’s militias owe their superior rate of success to their fighters’ higher morale. Militia fighters join their respective militias out of a patriotic desire to defend their country’s independence, but there is a reason why militia fighters choose to join volunteer organizations instead of the country’s official army. While the higher pay offered by militias certainly plays a small role in attracting more enthusiastic soldiers, it is dubious that its role is a very big factor. Obviously, no soldiers go to war to get rich, and they definitely will not, since both the Ukrainian militias and military offer extremely low wages, even by Ukrainian standards. That being said, the higher morale of Ukrainian militia fighters can be attributed to the fact that many are motivated by more than an altruistic desire to defend their motherland. Many of Ukraine’s militias, most notably the Azov Battalion, have been long known for harboring far-right and even Neo-Nazi ideologies. The Azov Battalion itself has no official neo-Nazi allegiances, but the organization has openly allowed neo-Nazis to join its ranks. It is important to note that the Azov Battalion has maintained no more than 20 percent of its members who self identify as neo-Nazis,

but even this obviously downplayed statistic seems much higher than should be acceptable. Addressing a particular Nazi, Alex, involved in Azov leadership, Andriy Diachenko, a spokesperson for the Azov Battalion said, "I know Alex is a Nazi, but it's his personal ideology. It has nothing to do with the official ideology of the Azov", maintaining that Azov was merely employing Alex out of a pragmatic need for skilled leadership (Dorell). In response to the infiltration of the Azov Battalion by neo-Nazis, Congress banned US arms from going to Azov Battalion. Expressing his support for this move, Representative Ro Khanna (D-CA) stated, "I am very pleased that the recently passed omnibus prevents the U.S. from providing arms and training assistance to the neo-Nazi Azov Battalion fighting in Ukraine" (Kheel). Khanna also articulated a desire to see Ukraine disassociate itself from the Azov Battalion and other similar militias. With the role of Nazism in mind, it can be concluded that perhaps the Azov Battalion (and other militia fighters) feel that they are fighting for the role of Nazism in post-war Ukraine, in addition to their country's independence.

Although state-parallel militias have been the white knights of Ukraine, they could simultaneously become the downfall of the current government. The fact that Ukraine's militias are independent, state-parallel organizations, could definitely serve to entice Ukrainian patriots with subversive aspirations. As a state-parallel organization, with separate troops and independent finances, militias like the Azov Battalion could be a potent king-maker for post-war Ukraine. Much like how defeated Vichy France fell to Pétain's authoritarian fascism during World War II, a defeated Ukraine could fall to fascist, Nazi influences. Though the Azov Battalion has denied that it has any plans to overthrow the Ukrainian government after the war, the official position has been contradicted by Azov fighters, who seem to believe that they will march on Kyiv after the war is over.

Ukrainians are acutely aware of their own country's corruption, and many are openly hostile to democracy, distrusting what they see as a broken process that has been undermined before. In 2014, Ukraine's democratically elected president, Viktor Yanukovich, was overthrown by an (allegedly) US-backed revolution, colloquially referred to as the Maidan Revolution. The US (allegedly) chose to foment insurrection in Ukraine after the then president Viktor Yanukovich upset the West by rejecting the Ukrainian-European Association Agreement, which would have brought Ukraine into the West's sphere of influence. As a result of Ukraine's rocky relationship with democracy and the West, many weary Ukrainians have flocked to the Azov Battalion, likely feeling that a more authoritarian form of rule would be

less susceptible to foreign influence and more in line with Ukrainian interests. As Charles Colborne, who "monitors and researches the far-right", stated when describing the Azov Battalion to *The Washington Post*, "At its core, it's hostile to liberal democracy. It's hostile to everything that comes with liberal democracy, minority rights, voting rights, things like that" (Raghavan). The hostile attitude toward the democracy of Azov and other similar militias further supports the possibility of a state-parallel militia led coup following the war in Ukraine.

By giving support to and collaborating with such openly hostile groups, the Ukrainian government is putting itself at far more risk than is justified by the advantage they gain from collaboration with their parallel militias. Militias like the Azov Battalion both threaten the position of the Ukrainian government, with the possibility of an anti-democracy coup always looming, and undermine Ukraine's moral high ground with their neo-Nazi sympathies serving as fodder for Russian propaganda. With this in mind, Ukraine should follow the advice of the United States government, and distance itself from its state-parallel militias, on both pragmatic, and ethical grounds.

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Maidan Square, Kyiv, Ukraine c. 2017

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



GETTY IMAGES

By Spencer McLaughlin

Shortly after Russia launched a military invasion of Ukraine in February, many countries around the globe immediately responded with sanctions and Russia quickly fired back with sanctions of its own. One particular industry that saw a nearly immediate impact from these sanctions was the aviation industry. In response to various sanctions imposed by Western nations, Russia banned airlines from over 30 nations from flying in Russian airspace. While this was a shock to the aviation industry and is one of the biggest impacts on international trade in recent years, it is not unprecedented.

Prior to the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, Soviet airspace was open only to Russian airlines (with a few exceptions), resulting in flights often needing to take lengthy detours around the USSR, either far to the south or over the north pole. During this time, Anchorage, Alaska, experienced an influx of passenger traffic from Europe, Asia and North America, as the airport is geographically situated as an ideal gateway between Asia and the West when overflying Russia is not an option. By the 1960s, seven international carriers used Anchorage as a layover airport between Europe and Asia and it was referred to by some as the “crossroads of the world”. In 1982, a large new international terminal was constructed to handle the increased demand. However, quicker than Anchorage had risen to prominence, the international terminal was effectively abandoned as the range of airplanes was improved

to no longer necessitate a stop, with the fall of the Soviet Union and the opening of Russian airspace in the 1990s. As of 2020, the international terminal saw little passenger traffic.

Despite the lack of international passenger traffic via Anchorage, the Alaskan airport was the busiest airport in the world for several days early in the Coronavirus pandemic. Although passenger numbers remain modest, Anchorage is a logistically ideal stopover for cargo flights between North America and Asia. Aircraft are most fuel-efficient flying medium-length distances, as takeoff and landing both consume large amounts of fuel, but carrying additional fuel is inefficient. As a result, one study found that the Airbus A330-300 is most efficient when flying routes of about 4,350 miles, or about 8 hours. Cargo airlines have determined that a stopover in Anchorage is economically efficient, as it helps prevent excess fuel consumption on extremely long flights that traverse continents. Anchorage has established itself as the 5th busiest cargo airport in the world, and the lack of passenger air travel during the pandemic allowed it to briefly become the busiest airport in the world. As trade is expected to only increase between Asia and North America, cargo traffic through Anchorage is similarly expected to continue increasing rapidly.

With the closure of Russian airspace, could Anchorage expand to include large scale service from Europe? The closure of Russian airspace has effectively created a barrier which European and Asian airlines now must bypass to exchange cargo and passengers between

continents. Although the blockage of Russian airspace is not as encompassing as that of Soviet airspace, the northern route over the north pole and over Alaska is often comparable or a shorter distance than flying to the south of Russia, over the Middle East. Anchorage is ideally in the path between Europe and Asia on the northern route. In addition, the distance between Anchorage and Western Europe is approximately 4,500-5,000 miles, and the distance between Anchorage and East Asia is 3,500-5,000 miles, matching the most fuel-efficient flight distance for large planes such as the Airbus A330. As Anchorage is the only major airport located about halfway between Europe and Asia on this northern route, it is the only option on this route for cargo flights which wish to make a stop. Cargo flights which stop between Europe and Asia will have the advantage of being able to hold more weight on takeoff as cargo and less as fuel which will be burned later in the flight. Anchorage’s biggest competitors in this space will be the large Middle Eastern hubs of Dubai, UAE and Doha, Qatar, which as of 2018 are the 6th and 11th busiest cargo airports in the world. These airports anchor the route between Europe and Asia that stays south of Russia, and they are typically a shorter detour than connections in Anchorage. Despite this, the enormous power of the already prominent North American-Asian link in Anchorage propels it to be the 5th largest cargo airport in the world, above both of its large Middle Eastern competitors. The addition of a significant link to Europe could allow Anchorage to become the “crossroads of the world” for trade.



Anchorage's strategic location, as seen on a globe

GETTY IMAGES

International passenger travel through Anchorage has been very limited since the 1990s, however new airline business models and the closure of Russian airspace have created an opportunity for Anchorage to once again become a major hub for travel between North America, Europe and East Asia. Even since Anchorage's decline, many airlines have created major hub airports with the main purpose of connecting passengers to other international destinations. These include, but are not limited to Emirates of the UAE, Qatar Airways of Qatar, Icelandair of Iceland and Copa Airlines of Panama. These airlines all almost exclusively operate long haul routes bridging continents and take advantage of the most fuel-efficient flight distance of most jets being significantly shorter than range. By refuelling around halfway through their journey, these flights can save a significant amount of fuel and as a result often offer far cheaper fares, drawing in customers. These connecting itineraries also allow small cities to be efficiently connected to various cities on other continents, as a "hub and spoke" approach easily connects small cities over a large distance. Economically, Anchorage appears to be a prime candidate for an airline to operate as a major international hub. Due to its remote location near the North Pole, Anchorage has the unique distinction of being able to bridge three continents, and the airport itself advertises that it is within 9.5 hours (5,000 miles) of 90% of the developed world. When once again considering the most effective flight distance of large jets, any airline operating through Anchorage should be able to offer

lower fares than the nonstop competition. With a large international terminal already in existence, little new infrastructure would be needed for an international hub to be established in Anchorage, all that is needed is an airline to commit to a plan.

The potential for the re-emergence of supersonic airplanes in the future is another interesting prospect for Anchorage. Several supersonic jet proposals have been designed in recent years, but if these come to fruition, they likely will be unable to fly above populated areas of land, similarly to the Concorde, due to the sonic boom caused by supersonic flight. If these jets rise in prominence, Anchorage offers an incredible location as it is surrounded by unpopulated wilderness and ocean, where supersonic jets would likely be permitted to fly. On the Europe to Asia route, the northern route through the Arctic Ocean would benefit significantly from its remoteness in comparison to the southern route through the Middle East.

In recent years, political leaders in Alaska have begun to attempt to restore Anchorage's international hub status. As of late 2019, Government agencies such as the Alaska Department of Transportation (DOT) are looking for a private company to renovate the international terminal, and political leaders from Alaska and China have begun to work toward creating a nonstop flight between the two areas. Alaska Governor Mike Dunleavy believes that Anchorage becoming an international hub would lead to an influx of tourism, stimulating the local economy. Officials also have planned \$1 billion worth of improvements

for cargo planes, which would facilitate the exchange of goods between aircraft. With the closure of Russian airspace, it seems inevitable that air travel in Anchorage will increase in some way as a result, however, we have yet to see if Anchorage will return to the status it once held from passengers as the international travel hub at the top of the world.

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By Sasha Bauhs

Switzerland, as seen above, is notorious for its neutrality and its fondue. On February 28, 2022, Switzerland joined the European Union's efforts against Russia in its war against Ukraine, breaching its neutrality for the first time in centuries. For a country to be deemed neutral, such as Switzerland has been for centuries, the government has declared to avoid interfering in situations of international armed conflict. This was breached when Switzerland joined many other European countries to aid Ukraine, supplying humanitarian aid and levying sanctions against Russia. Switzerland's sanctions and generous humanitarian aid demonstrate their desire to support Ukraine in the Russia-Ukraine war. Although the reason for their non-neutral stance in this war remains undisclosed, if it is for virtuous and humanitarian reasons, this is a step in the direction of improved international relations in Europe.

Switzerland's neutrality dates back to the 16th century when the Swiss Confederacy suffered a loss to the French at the Battle of Marignano on September 13–14, 1515. The Battle of Marignano was the first Italian campaign of King Francis I of France, and it was fought near the village of Marignano, now known as Melegnano, Italy. After this devastating loss, the Swiss Confederacy proclaimed its neutrality, declaring that it would put an end

to their desires for expansion and look to avoid future conflicts. This was briefly put on hold during the Napoleonic Wars with the French in the late 1700s but quickly reinstated following the wars in 1803. These proclamations of neutrality were put into writing during 1815's Congress of Vienna when the Confederacy signed a declaration affirming their "perpetual neutrality." From then on, they were committed by their declaration to be politically neutral towards all future international conflicts. They maintained this stance throughout both World War I and World War II, accepting all refugees but not taking a side militarily or politically. Since then, Switzerland has played an active role in international affairs through humanitarian initiatives but remains a politically neutral country with a neutral military. It is not a part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) nor the European Union but has instead engaged in NATO's Partnership for Peace program. To summarize, Switzerland proclaimed itself as a neutral country years ago and has upheld that since the Napoleonic wars, despite being centrally located for a number of conflicts. And although it is politically neutral, Switzerland still engages in humanitarian aid programs.

Throughout history, Switzerland and Russia have been rather compatible. The Napoleonic wars, which spanned from 1800 to 1815, following the French Revolution, were initiated

and led by Napoleon Bonaparte, emperor of France. At the beginning of the Napoleonic wars, the French armies attacked Switzerland whilst battling Austria, and Switzerland was forced to break its neutrality in order to protect itself. By 1798, Switzerland was overrun by the French and was even temporarily renamed the Helvetic Republic on April 12, 1798, although that was reversed by the Swiss Confederation in the 1803 Napoleon's Act of Mediation. During the Battles for Zürich, the French and Austrians clashed, with Russian forces under Alexander Suvorov's, a Russian general, command joining with Austria and Switzerland on August 14, 1799. This led to the first large-scale appearance of Russians in Switzerland, as Suvorov's army was fighting back and forth across Switzerland and northern Italy.

Art has also depicted the Russo-Swiss historical relations. Suvorov's army proceeding through Switzerland became a popular subject for Russian painters, as seen to the left. This painting, "Suvorov Crossing the Alps in 1799," was created by Vasily Surikov, a Russian realist historical painter. It was painted to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of Suvorov's campaign, demonstrating the support that the people of Russia had for Suvorov joining Switzerland and Austria during the Battle of Zürich. Surikov traveled to Switzerland to paint landscapes at historical attractions and sled down mountains to properly capture the movement

in his paintings. He explained his method of painting, "The most important thing in the picture is the movement. The selfless courage. The men proceed, subordinating to their commander." Paintings such as these strengthen the Russia-Switzerland historical relations. Halting its neutrality, Switzerland has put many measures in place to aid Ukraine, including sanctions and humanitarian aid. Switzerland joined the European Union's efforts against Russia by imposing sanctions. The purpose of sanctions is to economically impair a country and to pressure the country's government to stop its behavior. Switzerland has joined the United Kingdom, European Union, United States of America, and other countries in banning flights from Russia, the export of luxury goods, and dual-use goods, which are items that can serve both a civilian and military purpose, to Russia. Switzerland also provided humanitarian aid, in addition to these sanctions. Their humanitarian support package is contrived of three main elements. These elements include sending supplies to Ukraine, sending Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit specialists to Ukraine, and providing financial support. Switzerland has generously increased its humanitarian aid to a total of 80 million Swiss francs (CHF), which is equivalent to about 85 million United States dollars (USD). Switzerland's support will hopefully be helpful to Ukraine in its war with Russia.

The reasons behind Switzerland's break-in neutrality are not certain, but many believe it to be for either virtuous reasons or an attempt to avoid controversy. President Ignazio Cassis spoke about the break of neutrality for the Russia-Ukraine war, "The attack of Russia against an independent European country — Ukraine — is an attack on sovereignty, freedom, democracy, the civil population and the institutions of a free country," (Noack). This illustrates the necessity seen by the Swiss government to put their support in place. Another possible intention for their break in neutrality is the attempt to avoid controversy. During World War II, Switzerland found itself in a geographically challenging location, as it was surrounded by countries at war with each other and was in a hazardous position. It avoided invasion by stating its promise of retaliation in the event of an attack on Switzerland. During that time, Switzerland claimed neutrality and indifference, yet continuously traded with Nazi Germany, a decision that became controversial and upset many after the war was over. There are many possible reasons for their discontinuation of neutrality.

Switzerland's effort against Russia indicates the possibility of a new era of European international relations, in which Europe defends itself as a united force. Neal G. Jesse, a political scientist at Bowling Green State University with experience in small, neutral



"Suvorov Crossing the Alps" by Vasily Surikov countries, explained the possibility of better prospects in regard to international affairs in Europe, "If Switzerland believes that defense of Europe is something they want to be a part of, we are really seeing a new era of international relations in Europe that we haven't seen since 1815.(Noack)" This demonstrates the optimism toward a brighter, more united future in Europe.

At the end of the day, Switzerland's break from neutrality was a monumental event, with its last occurrence being over 200 years ago. Switzerland does not have a vast extent of historical relations with Russia, but the exchanges that exist are strengthened through paintings and other forms of art. The sanctions that Switzerland imposed against Russia with the European Union will expectedly help support Ukraine in its current war. Although the intentions remain unreleased, in the case that the support is for virtuous and sympathetic reasons, Europe may be developing towards an era of improved international affairs.

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When Russia Fights

By Olivia Buvanova

Among Russia's historical rulers, Ivan the Terrible, Stalin, and Putin stand out as possessing three similar qualities: belief that they were destined to rule by a higher power, using aggression and violence as the answers to everything, and their extreme paranoia concerning surrounding enemies. In the past, these Russian leaders have always been in the mindset, "the best defense is a constant offense," constantly using war to advance their goals, even when fighting could be avoided.

Russia, as a state, was founded by Ivan the Terrible in the middle of the 16th century. Ivan was estimated to kill over 60,000 people during his rule. Just a few days after his father's death, Ivan declared himself czar of the entire country, previously having been the czar of Moscow. He modeled his government after the Golden Horde of the Mongolian era. In fact, he argued that he was a "messi", sent by God to rule Russia. The entire government was built around his fear and terror— the people around him were loyal to the czar and were ready to do anything he commanded them to do. The czar was uninterested in the well-being of his people; his main concern was conquering new territories and bringing them all under his rule. The first victim of his ambitions was Kazan, a major trading city built along the Volga river.

The residents of this town were Tatars— Ivan viewed them as potential enemies. In 1552, Ivan was able to overthrow the Kazan government. Shortly after, Ivan ordered the city to be destroyed altogether, killing off most of its population. Overall, Ivan, the Terrible was successful in expanding his empire and bringing Kazan under his rule, which became regarded as his first major achievement. In 1556, Ivan extended his territory along the southern Volga down to the Caspian Sea through the overthrowing of the Astrachan city. The majority of Astrachan's population were non-Russians.

Ivan the Terrible's next goal was Novgorod. Novgorod was one of the most ancient Russian cities, was very prosperous, and a major trading center. Residents of Novgorod lived more luxurious lives than any other Russian city. In addition, the city held elections to choose politicians to govern— they resembled a European city more so than a Russian city. Novgorod wanted to be independent of the Russian czar. Ivan thought of them not only as enemies, but as traitors; they were Russian, but didn't want to be part of his empire! Most residents of Novgorod were tortured and killed, including wives, children, and priests. It was after these gruesome events which Ivan earned his title, Ivan the Terrible.

Stalin came to rule 400 years later, yet

his mentality was nearly identical to that of Ivan the Terrible. His crimes, however, were much more powerful, intense, and aggressive— instead of 60,000 dead, over 20 million Russian citizens died under his rule (not even taking into account those from World War II). Stalin rose to power in 1924, after the death of Lenin. His rule was built entirely on fear, terror, and lies much like Ivan the Terrible. Within four years, Stalin managed to consolidate the country under his rule. Similar to Ivan the Terrible, Stalin aspired to create a new Russian empire through war and conquering new territories.

Stalin was very well-read, covering a wide range of historical books, especially biographies about Ivan the Terrible. Half of Stalin's books usually marked up in the margins remain in Putin's office. Interestingly enough, the comments Stalin left on Ivan the Terrible were condensed to one word: Teacher.

By 1927, Stalin decided to spread his rule to other countries in Europe. What Stalin needed was money, to create an industry for manufacturing weapons. 80% of the population were farmers, who sold land, crops, and goods, making them the wealthiest of its nation. Stalin developed laws that gave farmers no choice but to give away all of their resources. Either that or they were sent to jail. Liquidating individual businesses and farms gave Stalin the necessary funds to make a heavy industry, capable of

producing massive amounts of trains, tanks, airplanes, and weapons.

From 1929 to 1939, Russia became a powerful military state, and over 500 factories were built. Factories were so powerful, in fact, that 3 factories could produce 20 tanks a day.

After World War II ended in 1945, the Soviet Union, still under Stalin, continued to control certain territories in Europe: Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and part of Germany. Russia and America became rivals but never engaged in battles face-to-face. This period of tension earned its title, the Cold War for neither the Soviet Union nor the United States officially declared war on each other.

47 years later, in 1999, Putin came to power. Before becoming president of Russia, Putin was trained in the KGB academy, a “secret police”, per se. Originally, Putin was seen as a modern, liberal politician, who would listen to the people’s requests, and improve the quality of life for society. As time went by, Putin transformed into a dictator— within one year of his rule, he eliminated independent television channels and radio stations. Soon enough, magazines, newspapers, and journals were controlled by the government as well. Under Putin’s reign, the government spent millions of dollars each year on propaganda and misinforming the public about Putin’s policies and plans for the future.

In 2008, Putin began a war in Georgia, revealing Putin’s true colors. With every year of his presidency, it became more and more evident that Putin wanted to restore the Soviet Union.

In 2014, Putin began an aggressive

war against Ukraine, conquering Crimea. On March 6, 2014, President Obama signed an executive document that imposed sanctions on Russian individuals and entities responsible for violating the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, or for stealing the assets of the Ukrainian people. (U.S. Department of State, 2014).

Meanwhile, Putin sent troops to Syria in order to cause disturbance and more problems in the region, and all of Europe as a whole. Thanks to Putin, Syria is effectively destroyed, and over 6 million Syrian residents seek refuge in neighboring countries to this day (Mercy Corps 2022).

For Putin, Ukraine remains his number one priority in his plan to reinstate the Soviet Union. His ideas, aspirations, and obsessions are just like Stalin’s and Ivan the Terrible. The timeline of civilization over the course of 500 years illustrates that the rule of dictators like Ivan the Terrible, Stalin, and Putin ends in total collapse, and much suffering for its citizens: after the death of Ivan the Terrible, Russia entered the Time of Troubles, a period of political crisis, civil wars, and suffering for its citizens. During Stalin’s rule, more people died than in any other country in the world. Stalin died in 1953, but his empire lasted all the way until 1991. When the Soviet Union came to an end, it was ranked as one of the poorest countries in the world. Timothy Snyder, an American author, and historian specializing in the history of Central and Eastern Europe believes that Putin declaring war against Ukraine will effectively be the last Russian war (as a country). No matter who wins the war, Snyder, amongst other historians and politicians, be-

lieves that Russia will cease to exist in the near future (Snyder, 2022).

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“Ivan the Terrible and His Son Ivan” by Ilya Repin

GETTY IMAGES



COVID-19 in Russia

By Brian Chin

COVID-19 has changed the lives of every single person in the world, mostly for the worse. Businesses have had to shut down, the economy has stagnated, and many are unable to see loved ones. However, the country which arguably took the pandemic the worst was Russia. While headlines about Russia nowadays concern its “special military operation” in Ukraine, one of the most important questions that few ask is “What were COVID-19’s effects on Russia and does it have a correlation with Putin’s seemingly rash decisions?” While this question may be hard to answer fully, the bottom line is that Russia terribly mishandled and underestimated the effect of COVID-19 on the public perception of President Vladimir Putin and the Russian government as a whole.

An early example of the Russian government’s mishandling of the pandemic is Russia’s rushed Sputnik V vaccine. It was the first COVID-19 vaccine in the world to be approved by a government. However, even with the head start “only about one-[half] of Russians are fully vaccinated against the coronavirus” (Stronski). This number fails to even compete with the United States’ 66% vaccination rate. In addition to the low vaccination rates, President Vladimir Putin hesitated on getting the vaccine himself for over half a year, only getting vaccinated in March of 2021. In comparison, Former President Donald Trump was vaccinated just a month after the vaccine became available and similarly, current President Joe Biden got his on live television just a week after the FDA allowed

Pfizer to start rolling out vaccines. Both the low vaccination rates of the Russian public and the hesitancy of its own leader to get the vaccine has led to some of his lowest approval ratings of all time and at times dropping down to a mere fifty-nine percent approval rating.

Another sign of Russia mishandling the COVID-19 pandemic is that the country has the fourth-highest number of COVID deaths in the world, the highest death rate in Europe and the second highest in Asia. However, while countries like India, the United States, and Brazil have higher death counts, the populations of these countries are much larger, with the smallest of the three, Brazil, having nearly seventy million more people and the largest country, India, having a population 10 times larger than Russia. To add to this, Russian statistics have a history of being erroneous and COVID-19 death statistics are no exception to this. This is evident as only cases where COVID-19 is the sole contributor to that person’s death are counted as COVID-19 deaths, while other countries also take into account cases where COVID-19 is a contributing factor. This is deeply troubling since in 2020, around ten percent of COVID-19 deaths were cases where COVID-19 was not the main cause, but instead just a contributing cause. To add to this “roughly 700 Russian doctors reportedly died of COVID-19 in the first six months of 2021” and Mikhail Murashko, the Russian minister of health, has resorted to calling retired doctors to “help alleviate staff shortages” (Stronski). The COVID-19 pandemic has not only affected the Russian homefront but has also affected

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the battlefield in Ukraine as well. Arguably the most visible sign of this is the Russian troops’ clear lack of training for large-scale military campaigns. This lack of training can be directly attributed to the pandemic. Many of the soldiers have never trained for a military operation of this scale since for training exercises to occur, large amounts of troops from all over Russia must come together and train in very close proximity, which could lead to the rapid spread of COVID-19. Furthermore, with the low vaccination rates in Russia, the high infection rate of COVID-19 coupled with the questionable efficacy of the Sputnik V vaccine, more serious cases of COVID-19 could be more likely to occur. In addition, not only has the Russian military not been trained for large-scale military operations but during the pandemic, some parts of the military even shifted from combat operations to more civilian tasks, like distributing vaccines. As a result, even fewer troops are ready for combat, showing Russia’s lack of foresight on this issue. Moreover, many pictures depict Russian military equipment in terrible shape which can also be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic, as due to the lack of training exercises most of the equipment has been in storage for the duration of the pandemic.

Making matters even worse for the Russian army, most of the heavy combat in Ukraine is in an urban or metropolitan setting. Without proper training in this setting, the Russian Army will be destroyed even if they have more advanced technology and more firepower. Comparisons can be made with the

Vietnam War, in which the United States Army had to fight in unknown terrain, or the urban Battle of Fallujah in the Iraq War, in which even a heavily trained and well-equipped US force took heavy casualties. Russian forces seem both heavily under-equipped and heavily under-trained. Many lives will be lost if the Russians attempt a full-scale invasion of Kyiv. This thought is not only a worrying prospect but it also casts doubt over how much longer can Putin really stay in power

Despite this, the frontline is far from the only sector of Russia's military that has been affected by the pandemic, as the industrial front was also heavily impacted. This is due to global supply chain issues, which have caused materials like steel and similar metals to double in price. These increased prices do "not allow the Russian defense industry's ability to surge their production to meet wartime needs" (Mittal). However, supply chain issues are just part of the problem as due to labor shortages caused by COVID-19, it is impossible to run a factory at full capacity for extended periods of time. This is of course necessary if Russia hopes to keep up with the demands of a full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

If all of these faults and missed calculations can be blamed on one person in the Russian Government, it is President Vladimir Putin. From not taking his own country's vaccine to taking extreme and bizarre measures against COVID-19, his questionable actions have distanced and arguably completely detached him from the Russian people. As an example, many people have seen Putin talk with fellow high-ranking officials at a 20 feet long table. While some think this is some strange assertion of power by Putin, the Kremlin told reporters that it is to keep Putin in a "COVID safe bubble". Furthermore, Putin mostly meets online with government officials, and on the rare occasions in which he does meet with



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The Sputnik V Vaccine

someone in-person, the other person must go through a two week quarantine period. All of these extreme measures completely contrast with the lives of the Russian people, which he has allowed to return to normal life with little to no restriction. All of these factors have contributed to a perfect storm of mistrust between the government and President Vladimir Putin. In essence, the COVID-19 pandemic has deeply affected Russians' trust in their leader, their invasion of Ukraine, and President Vladimir Putin himself. With all of these factors converging it is evident why the Russian invasion of Ukraine has thus far failed and why Russia has suffered some of the highest COVID-19 death rates in the world. Despite Russia's failings, however, the United States and its allies must take advantage of the fragile situation in Russia to help Ukraine win this horrible war and hopefully deal a crushing blow to Vladimir Putin and other high ranking Russian officials who are responsible for it.

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Putin abiding by social distancing norms during the pandemic

NBC NEWS



BBC NEWS

Molotovs vs. Marching

By Jeremy Betz

Russia is 28 times the size of Ukraine with a similarly large military advantage. According to the recent GFP review, the Russian Armed Forces has over a million military personnel and ranks second overall out of 142 countries worldwide (GFP). However, Russian forces have reportedly suffered heavy casualties during the Russo-Ukrainian War and have failed to make much progress in their endeavor to overrun Ukraine. So, with so many clear advantages, why is Russia struggling against a country with widespread poverty and corruption?

According to General Mark A. Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Ukrainian military is conducting a very efficient and mobile defense on the battlefield, leveraging their knowledge of their home ground to block Russian forces on numerous fronts.

General Milley noted that one of the tactics used by Ukrainian troops was to use mobile weapons systems to disrupt Russian troops wherever they could. Ukraine's military is "fighting with remarkable competence and courage against Russian forces," he told reporters traveling with him in Europe. According to many war analysts, Ukrainian resistance puts up a much greater fight than expected, surprising both general war experts and Russian personnel.

In order to take advantage of Russian weaknesses, Ukraine has implemented several clever

and well-planned war strategies against the Russian forces. Destroying bridges, preventing Russian air dominance, and remaining mobile are all examples of the tactics contributing to Ukraine's success in doing so.

Ukraine's war strategies are based on a handful of key elements that have a devastating effect on Russia's war efforts. The first element, denying Russia air superiority, has been intrinsic to Ukrainian success, ensuring free movement of Ukrainian forces while bringing about fears among Russian forces as the threat of an aerial assault looms. While the Ukrainian force is too small to be completely air dominant, their combined assortment of anti-aircraft missiles, MiG fixed aircraft, and anti-air systems have been sufficient to disrupt the Russian's aerial tactics.

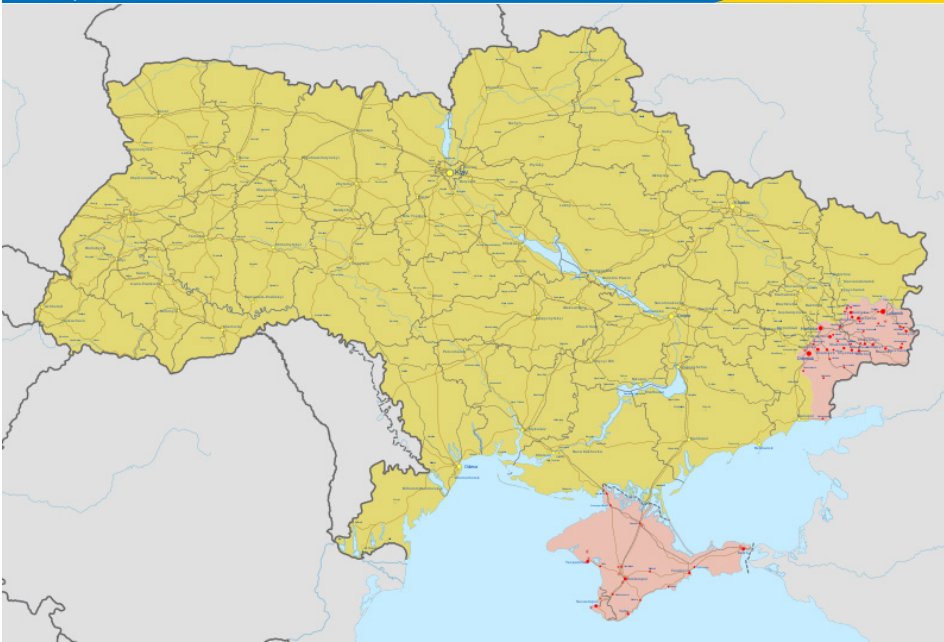
With the freer mobility of troops, Ukraine can transform their cities into fortresses and roadblocks, bastions of defense that disrupt Russian communications and logistics to destructive effect - What army can plan an attack if they don't have the information with which to make that plan? In the Battle of Kyiv, the nearby cities Chernihiv and Sumy forced Russian troops into a battle of attrition, bogging them down in slow street-by-street skirmishes that made any advance difficult, giving Ukrainian troops the ability to launch counter-attacks against the immobilized forces.

Street-by-street combat is another crucial aspect of Ukrainian war strategy; Long columns are hard to defend, and streets all but force advancing armies into those exposed columns. From there, Ukrainian forces can

attack from all sides in the form of heavy artillery, tactical drone strikes, special forces, and even conventional formations (Schmitt). With personnel stretched thin along these lines, Ukrainian attacks are largely successful at inflicting casualties.

Additionally, Russia's mistakes early in the war exposed a vulnerability that has allowed Ukraine to cripple its advances: Supply lines. Pre-existing fuel and food shortages, coupled with attacks from shoulder-launched anti-tank missiles stall the miles-long convoy, turning a march that should have been only a few days long into one that is taking weeks, possibly impacting Russians for months. Forced into static positions and suffering high losses, Russia has lost control of the political situation, as Ukrainian forces push them back from a 'take all' approach into a much more restrained effort.

Suffering both political and military defeats, Russia has made numerous claims about changing its strategy. While the veracity of these statements has been in doubt, a withdrawal from northern Ukraine into the eastern Donbas region has been observed. Following this action, a reorganization of command accompanies attacks at Izium and Dnipro. Seeking to shore up control in the Donbas region before continuing the westward campaign. Learning from the mistakes made in the early assault, Russian officials are changing strategies to recoup what they lost, after underestimating Ukrainians and spreading their forces too thinly.



The extent of Russian military operations in Ukraine after 2014

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But what is the value of Eastern Ukraine, and why is Russia so intent on keeping its hold there?

There are a couple of reasons, involving both military and political aspects of the war. For starters, the Donbas region, comprising the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, has been home to ethnic Russians for a long time, and in the past 8 years, the Kremlin has backed a separatist movement that has continually resisted Ukrainian forces. If there is anywhere that Russia has a chance of taking without requiring a continually oppressive force (at least no more than already exists in the Russian heartland). Also, should Russia be unable to advance the expansion, it could result in another annexation like the 2014 Crimean crisis, in which Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula following a military invasion (Ellyat). While Moscow may have tried for an encompassing takeover in this attempt, a piece-by-piece approach may be appealing to them, given their recent losses. However, support and endurance are not the only things of value Eastern Ukraine supplies. The Donbas region refers to Ukraine's old steel and coal production area, as well as the port city of Mariupol. If Russia succeeds in taking the region, it would cripple the industrial ability of Ukraine - a conventional move for slowing down military resources - as well as further hinder the abilities of other nations to help, both by importing needed supplies and helping civilians evacuate. Also, this would get Russia closer to having a land bridge with the aforementioned Crimean Peninsula, further cementing control along the southern border.

Finally, there's the classic favorite - personal motivation. A victorious conquest in the full Donbas region would be a major success for Putin, an achievement that he could display to the Russian people to engender pride. What's more, if he was successful before May

9th, Victory Day, national pride over historic greatness may be used to sway more support to the war effort (Kirby). With Moscow pumping propaganda that there are Nazis in Ukraine, the fervor may increase morale to frenzied heights, with Russians wanting to regain the respect they feel they once had and are still owed. With that in mind, the next question is strategy. The US-based Institute for the Study of War identifies the city of Slovyansk as the next crucial target for Russian forces. Slovyansk, located in the central-northern area of the Donetsk region, is concentrated right in the middle of Russia's encircling technique. The cities of Izyum, Kremiinna, and Avdiivka, respectively located northeast, northwest, and south of Slovyansk, are all potential launching points for Russian forces to march from. The ISW believes that should Ukrainians be able to

hold Slovyansk and prevent the Russian army from continuing its drive westward and linking up with the forces and Izyum, the campaigns to capture Donetsk and Luhansk are unlikely to succeed.

While it is unknown what the future of this war will be, national security coverage states they do not think anybody can know right now. Ukraine's successful resistance was unexpected, by both enemies and allies. While the continued success may be in doubt, as Russia adapts to the fighting and works to wear down Ukrainian forces through attrition, many are cautiously optimistic about the prospects for Ukrainian victory against the Russian invaders. The conflict will rage on, and Ukraine will do all it can. Moscow may be predictably stronger and more powerful, but even the largest forces have their weaknesses. In this case, unrelenting persistence on Ukraine's behalf seems to be the perfect way to breach the chink in Russia's armor. Because while Russia may try its hardest, one thing is for certain: Ukraine's people will never stop fighting until they overcome this attack on their freedom.

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A Ukrainian fighter in front of a burnt Russian Tank

FLICKR



THE WASHINGTON POST

By Joaquin Stevenson

Over the past several years, the United States has been mostly focused more on domestic issues, the pandemic, China, and the Middle East, while Russia has been actively looking to expand its influence in South America*. Admiral Craig Haller, commander of the Pentagon's U.S. Southern Command, commented in 2019 on Russia's ambitions and actions in the western hemisphere, stating that "They're there. They're present, and they're working for their national interests in ways that are 100 percent counter to the long-term stability in the region."

Much has changed since 2019 and Russia holds even greater influence in the region. When Russia decided to invade Ukraine, at the United Nations, both Bolivia and Venezuela abstained from condemning the invasion. Russia provided Argentina with Sputnik COVID-19 vaccines before any US-made vaccines were available to export. Venezuela has been a historical ally of Russia. Peru and Chile, long-time allies with the United States, now have staunch left-wing** governments that are looking toward Russia for support which they are lacking from the United States. Ecuador's most recent election was nearly won by a far-left candidate. Brazil is Russia's largest trading partner. During the invasion of Crimea, both Uruguay and Paraguay (along with Argentina, Brazil, and Ecuador) abstained from condemn-

ing the invasion.

Russia has been looking to increase its sphere of influence and has found success in South America. Many South Americans are tired of economic policies that don't seem to benefit the majority of the population. Such free-market policies seem to only benefit a select few, while the majority sees their economic situation as stagnant. It is within this context that leaders are looking beyond the United States and now toward Russia for economic improvement.

Venezuela:

On March 10, 2022, Venezuelan and Russian representatives met and Venezuelan representatives reaffirmed their friendly ties with Russia and desire for more strategic cooperation between the two nations. In addition, Venezuela has signed many treaties with Russia in recent years. In 2019, as a response to sanctions placed by the United States on Venezuelan oil, Russian oil company Rosneft helped to channel Venezuelan exports of oil to Asia. Rosneft has secured a preferential access status to Venezuelan oil and gas. A treaty of special concern to the United States allows Russian warships to navigate Venezuelan waters with short notice. Finally, Venezuela recently received 2.5 million much-needed hepatitis, yellow fever, and measles vaccines from Russia.

Bolivia:

Former Bolivian President, Evo Morales, was no stranger to criticizing the leadership of the United States. Despite his presidency ending in 2019 after 14 years in power, his influence is still very present in Bolivian politics. Bolivia has been supporting Russia in the United Nations, such as when they chose not to condemn Russia for its actions against Crimea. Additionally, Bolivia has significant natural gas reserves and Russian gas company Gazprom and nuclear conglomerate Rosatom have been working on projects in Bolivia. Rosatom is building a nuclear research reactor at 13,123 feet above sea level. There is also a defense co-operation agreement between the two nations.

Argentina:

In a recent meeting at the Kremlin, Argentinian President Alberto Fernandez spoke with Vladimir Putin about the need to be less dependent on the United States and his hope for greater collaboration with Russia. Mr. Fernandez thanked Mr. Putin for his support during the COVID-19 pandemic by supplying the Sputnik vaccine to Argentina and he highlighted that Russia supported Argentina while the rest of the world stood by. Mr. Fernandez wishes Argentina to be the gateway for a greater Russian influence in the region. Russia also supports Argentina's sovereign claim to the Falkland Islands***.

Brazil:

Brazilian President Bolsonaro stated in a meeting in Moscow in February of 2022 he stands in solidarity with Russia and that he wants to collaborate with them in many areas. Russia has stated that they want to expand its influence in South America mainly within Brazil. There has been a recent increase in technological trade between Russia and Brazil, specifically in military and space technology and telecommunications. Brazil is also looking to form closer cooperation with Russia in energy and agriculture. Additionally, Brazil also signed an agreement to exchange classified geopolitical and military technology information with Russia. Russia supports Brazil's efforts to become a permanent member of the UN security council.

Peru and Chile:

Peru's Pedro Castillo and Chile's Gabriel Boric are newly minted far-left presidents. Unlike Venezuela's Maduro, their ties with Russia are not very strong. However, the ideologies behind both Castillo and Boric's respective parties have very close ties to Soviet-era communism.

Despite a clamor for change by both the Peruvian and Chilean populations respectively, these leftist governments have shown incapacity to govern their nations. Mr. Castillo, in less than 9 months has barely survived 2 impeachments, 4 cabinet changes and he has virtually no ability to lead in a country where his approval rating is at 19%. The conflict in Ukraine has dealt the country a bigger blow as gas prices and inflation have caused massive protests across Peru. Boric, in just a few weeks as president of Chile, only had a 45% approval rating and has already switched out cabinet members. Like Castillo, Boric and his team are inexperienced in running a country.

Russia likely is carefully watching the situation unfolding in Chile and Peru, ready to intervene if it suits their interests. Castillo already has announced the building of a Sputnik V vaccine manufacturing plant in partnership with the Russian government. Meanwhile, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov expressed his satisfaction with the election of Boric as President of Chile.

With the heavy Russian and left-wing influence present in South America, where is the continent headed?

Colombia will have presidential elections in May of this year, and the left-wing candidate is currently favored, however, the US has expressed concerns that Russia may interfere with the Colombian elections. Ecuador's right-wing party also seems vulnerable and may be the next one to fall from power after Colombia's. Left-wing political parties are gaining strength in the region and Russia is ready to capitalize on this.

Lavrov has suggested that Russia has a very close relationship with Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, and Venezuela. He also reiterated that the new Chilean government "is interested in ensuring that relations with Russia are not victims of the so-called Monroe Doctrine, to which Washington remains committed."

Moscow believes that the United States underestimates the threat of outside influence in South America. There is a rapid rise of left-wing economic policies in South America and the United States is losing ground in these countries, all while Russia continues to expand its influence in the region.

*South America as used here is Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay.

**"Left", as defined here, the governments seek a more fair, egalitarian world order that will not necessarily respect private property or current social security systems in place (i.e. retirement funds).

***Falkland Islands (Islas Malvinas) are an archipelago in the South Atlantic Ocean, off the coast of Argentina. They are a British Overseas Territory claimed by Argentina.

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Putin with Former Bolivian President Evo Morales

KREMLIN



FLICKR

By Aanya Shah

When thinking about the United States of America, oil and gas come to mind. Though cars are an effective transportation system, when gas gets expensive, it hits many Americans very hard in the wallet. With the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and domestic policies limiting oil production at home, Americans are seeing gas prices surge to levels not seen since the 1970s. Coupled with a stagnant economy and runaway inflation, many Americans, and people all over the world, are seeing their dollars being stretched thinner and thinner by the day. As gas prices continue to rise and the invasion of Ukraine continues, the world must come to terms with the merits of cutting Russian oil, and its disastrous effect in the long term.

In 1973, Saudi Arabia and other Arab nations levied an oil embargo on America and other Western countries, in retaliation for the West's support for Israel in the Yom Kippur War. Oil prices in the United States immediately shot up, as nearly 83% of all oil imports came from the Middle East. Long queues for petrol became commonplace as many petrol stations ran out of petrol. The oil crisis was detrimental to society, that the government allowed cars to turn right on red lights, a statute that stands to

this day. After the 1970's oil crisis, American Presidential administrations started to do more to prevent such a situation from occurring again. In 2000, Bill Clinton offered hundreds of millions of dollars in aid to families hit by high gas prices and tapped federal oil reserves to reduce costs. Similarly, President Bush proposed a plethora of measures when oil prices soared back in 2008, saying, "If there was a magic wand to wave, I'd be waving it" (Ivanova, U.S. Ban).

However, the results of cutting off Russia, which contributes to around 10% of the oil exported globally, could be catastrophic. If Russian oil is cut off from the rest of the world, investment banks estimate that the global oil price could surge up to \$185 per barrel by the end of the year as opposed to the \$120 mark today and \$70 in December. As Time Magazine states, "The economic consequences could be severe" (World, Russia). The average gas price for pumps in the U.S. is already more than \$4 per gallon, according to the American Automobile Association, and it could go much higher. Beyond the cost of driving, there are other consequences to this issue. The global economy has already been suffering for the last two years as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, fiscal mismanagement, and high government (deficit) spending. As such, the severing of oil imports from Russia by the West would only serve to

exacerbate the already worse effects and have a great potential for sending the global economy into a recession (Ivanova).

According to the International Energy Agency, income from oil and gas taxes/fees made up 45% of the government's budget in January. Russia's export revenue from oil and gas-related products totals over \$1 billion a day (World, Russia). In an effort to convince the U.S. to prohibit Russian oil, the former CEO of Ukraine's gas company, Andriy Kobolyev, declared, "You will not win against Putin by directly attacking them but you can make his rule and his strategy to be considered as nonsense with the relevant Russian people who understand that their whole business is collapsing" (World, Russia). In other words, Kobolyev saw the United States' efforts to cut out Russia from the oil trade as a strategy to weaken their industry, and effectively weaken its state.

The United States government had two options— not buying any Russian oil and not engaging with any countries that did, or simply prohibiting Russian oils for the United States (Ivanova, U.S. Ban). On March 8, 2022, President Biden announced that the United States would be banning Russian gas and oil imports: "Today, I am announcing the United States is targeting the main artery of Russia's economy, we're banning all imports of Russian oil and gas energy. That means Russian oil will



High gas prices have become commonplace across the United States

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no longer be accepted in U.S. ports, and the American people will deal another powerful blow to Putin's war machine' " (Eaton, Oil). Before the conflict with Russia, the United States expected inflation to slow down to about 2.7 percent by the end of the year, but as the conflict in Russia threw everyone off the wrong course, the country now expects a rate closer to 4.5 percent (World, Russia).

In immediate terms, this ban on Russian oil will affect gas prices and cause them to surge even higher. The ban will also embargo new U.S. investments in Russia's energy sector, blocking Americans from financing foreign companies that are making investments to produce oil in Russia (Rappeport, Russian Oil). If the ban continues to spread, it "would severely reduce and disrupt energy supply on a global scale and already high commodity prices would rise," says Caroline Bain, an economist at Capital Economics (Rappeport, Russian Oil). However, it is still unclear whether other countries will pass a similar law. The United States was able to pass such a ban because they are not fully dependent on Russia's energy unlike other European countries, which heavily depend on Russia's exports of oil and gas. President Emmanuel Macron of France said, "We have a long-term policy of getting rid of the dependence on Russian oil and gas, but in the immediate future we need to discuss this with our European partners" (Rappeport, Russian Oil). Despite their will to cut off Russian oil, European countries are facing a bigger risk of doing so due to their well-established trade relations.

For years, the cost of energy has been an obstruction to climate policy. This is largely due to the intense political influence of fossil fuels in the industry, as well as an overall fear of rising energy prices. Despite the rising inflation and gas prices, the Biden Administration is working hard to replace Russian fuel and stabil-

ize global markets. The United States seeks a replacement for oil supplies, looking to countries such as Saudi Arabia and Iran, where oil production rates are close to that of Russia. Even so, the situation in Ukraine has turned a global economic crisis from bad to worse, and the oil crisis remains a polarizing issue in the United States. Some have advocated for drilling in more places across the country to supply America's domestic production. Others have seen this as an opportunity to push for a green energy policy, as the oil crisis reveals just how dependent the world is on oil. As the world's thirst for oil remains high, and the amount of oil that the world can use gets smaller and smaller by the day, the future of oil and the energy industry remains shrouded in mystery.

The only thing that is certain in this situation is that the oil crisis is not good news for anyone, and the responsibility for the crisis lies on all of our shoulders.

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A Russian Oil Plant

THE NEW YORK TIMES



FLICKR

By Sophia Deeney

On February 24th, 2022, Russian armed forces invaded Ukraine with the goal of overthrowing Ukraine's democratically elected government. The Russian government has used the excuse of Ukraine wishing to join NATO, the West's defense alliance, in order to justify its invasion, among other falsehoods. Since then, more than 2,700 Ukrainians have been killed by the Russian military. Over 10 million civilians native to Ukraine have fled to Poland where officials have accepted them with open arms. Furthermore, the Ukrainian economy has entered into a freefall, as it experiences economic struggles just like the rest of the world; inflation, high gas prices, and an increase in poverty. It seems increasingly unlikely that the Ukraine's situation will improve, as the Ukrainian economy is "expected to shrink by an estimated 45.1% this year" (World Bank). Despite knowing the untold human suffering he is causing, President Putin continues his egregious campaign across Ukraine, on a mission to completely occupy it and erase any trace of a sovereign Ukrainian nation.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has called an emergency summit in response to Russia's attack on Ukraine. NATO members have criticized Russia's actions

in Ukraine and have taken efforts to discourage future Russian aggression, as well as reassure NATO members in Central and Eastern Europe that they would not fall victim to said Russian aggression. NATO and its largest member, the United States of America, have announced that they will not deploy troops to Ukraine, which is not a NATO member. Instead, NATO has dramatically strengthened its defensive posture in the alliance's eastern regions. NATO has also offered military assistance to the Ukrainian armed forces. According to multiple accounts, NATO partners had transferred around 17,000 anti-tank missiles and 2,000 Stinger anti-aircraft missiles to Ukraine as of early March. Moreover, Nato Secretary-General, Jens Stoltenberg, declared that the allies pledged to do more in support of the crisis in Ukraine, notably cybersecurity assistance and "equipment to help Ukraine protect against biological, chemical, radiological and nuclear threats" (Garamone). On top of military assistance, NATO is providing humanitarian assistance to those fleeing the war in Ukraine into NATO member states.

Furthermore, NATO will not allow the conflict in Ukraine to escalate. Secretary-General Stoltenberg has stated, "we have a responsibility to ensure the conflict does not escalate further, because this would be even more dangerous and more devastating... allies

agreed that we must also increase our support for other partners at risk from Russian threats and interference including Georgia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina" (Garamone). The leaders of NATO have repeatedly reiterated their commitment to the alliance's open-door policy throughout the conflict, touting the historic success of former Soviet Bloc nations in NATO, such as Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia (Garamone). While war rages in Ukraine, NATO remains calm and collected, extending a hand to help Ukraine while attempting to mitigate the situation on their eastern border.

Another Western organization paying particularly close attention to the situation in Ukraine is the European Union (commonly referred to as the EU). France, especially, has paid close attention to the conflict, as French President Emmanuel Macron presently holds the rotating presidency of the European Council of the European Union. President Emmanuel Macron has attempted to resolve the situation between Russia and Ukraine with repeated attempts to dissuade President Vladimir Putin through meetings and phone calls—all to no avail. President Putin pays scant attention to the EU, preferring instead to deal with the United States directly, while ensuring China-Russia relations are strong. President Macron wants to establish a united European foreign and security strategy, but it appears that this will be

more difficult than ever. As Europe falls back into a new cold war, France and Europe are once again stuck between two nuclear-armed superpowers. Putin's decision to recognize the contested regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, as well as Russia's unwarranted military attack against Ukraine, is fiercely condemned by the EU. On multiple occasions, EU leaders have requested that Russia cease its military actions immediately, and unconditionally remove all forces and military equipment from Ukraine to preserve Ukraine's territorial integrity, sovereignty, and independence. In response to Russia's military aggression, the EU has dramatically increased sanctions against the country, including the addition of a large number of people and businesses to the sanctions list. The five current sanctions are aimed at weakening Russia's economic foundation, denying it access to crucial technologies and markets, and limiting its ability to wage war. The first package of sanctions was announced on February 23rd, demanding "individual sanctions against members of the Russian State Duma who voted in favor of the recognition of the non-government controlled areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts... restrictions on economic relations with the non-government controlled areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts... [and finally, curtailment] on Russia's access to the EU's capital and financial markets and services" (Union). The second package of sanctions was delivered on February 25th to declare "individual sanctions against Vladimir Putin, Sergey Lavrov and members of the Russian State Duma and National Security Council, among others... economic sanctions covering the finance, energy, transport and technology sectors... [and] suspension of visa facilitation provisions for Russian diplomats and other Russian officials and businesspeople" (Union). The third package of sanctions involved the "closure of EU airspace to all Russian aircraft... prohibition on transactions with the Russian Central Bank... [and most dramatically, a] SWIFT ban for seven Russian banks" (Union) among other sanctions. Furthermore, the fourth and fifth sets of sanctions were also sent out, targeting individuals (specifically oligarchs) tied with the Russian government.

On Thursday, March 24th, The United Nations (UN) General Assembly demanded civilian security and humanitarian access in Ukraine, while also chastising Russia for creating a "dire humanitarian situation" (Nations). The General Assembly also adopted a resolution on March 2nd "deploring the 'aggression' committed by Russia against Ukraine" (Nations). The Prosecutor within the International Criminal Court of the UN has launched an open investigation into war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by Russian forces. On March 16th, the International Court of Justice "ordered Russia to immediately suspend its military operations in Ukraine" (Nations). Moreover, the UN Secretary-General has appealed for a humanitarian ceasefire, although the UN has not received any response from the Russian government (Nations). The UN General Assembly passed a resolution on April 7 asking for Russia's suspension from the Human Rights Council. In the 193-member Assembly, the resolution achieved a two-thirds majority of those voting, minus abstentions, with 93 nations voting in favor and 24 voting against.



Putin in talks with French President Macron

REUTERS

The United Nations is prioritizing civilian safety and will expand its humanitarian activities in and around Ukraine. The UN requires unrestricted access to all areas impacted by the Russian military offensive. The establishment of a safe passage for life-saving medical supplies and health workers is critical. In addition, the UN and its humanitarian partners announced coordinated emergency appeals totalling \$1.7 billion on March 1st to give emergency humanitarian aid to Ukrainians and refugees in neighboring countries. The World Bank authorized \$700 million in emergency finance for Ukraine on March 7th. This funding will assure the population's access to basic services. On March 14th, the UN Secretary-General announced that the UN will contribute an additional \$40 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to Ukraine to bolster humanitarian assistance.

President Joe Biden has condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine and has imposed an array of economic sanctions and restrictions on key environmental resources. The Biden administration has enforced sanctions on Russia's central bank and blocked the country's oil, gas, and coal imports. The organization has already approved \$1.2 billion in financial aid for Ukraine with another \$800 million in military assistance forthcoming. Moreover, President Biden sent 3,000 more American troops to Germany, Poland, and Romania, fortifying the security of NATO member states surrounding Ukraine. The U.S. cannot directly deploy soldiers into Ukraine because Ukraine is not a member of NATO, and America, as well as NATO, only protect countries within the organization. With the combination of rigid sanctions, economic restrictions, and military support, President Biden believes the U.S. has done all in its power to defend Ukraine against Russian invasion while simultaneously reinforcing the potency of NATO members.

Economic, financial, and military responses from NATO, the EU, the UN, and the U.S. have substantially supported Ukraine in their efforts to eliminate the devastating humanitarian crisis and defend against Russia's egregious invasion. These organizations have offered unconditional aid to the country of Ukraine to ensure a positive and hopeful future with the goal of reunifying the Ukrainian people. The sanctions in particular have weakened Putin's ability to wage war on Eastern Ukraine, thus dampening the effects of the invasion. Without strong financial capabilities, Russia struggles to continue the severity of its war on the country of Ukraine. Increased sanctions and more support in favor of NATO, the UN, the EU, and the U.S. will hopefully force Russia to terminate its attacks on Ukraine and negotiate a reasonable solution, although this seems unlikely in the near future.

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