

The Delray Democrat

We Must Do More For Ukraine – But What?¹

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I watched Putin's build-up for weeks knowing it was inevitable that he would direct the invasion of Ukraine. There was simply no alternative based on Putin's world view. He has consistently, openly stated that the dissolution of the Soviet Union was the biggest calamity in Russian history and his policy was to restore a Russian empire. That empire would stand opposed to democracy and freedom, opposed to a unified Europe and NATO, and opposed to the self determination of satellite nations he believes fall within the Russian sphere. Ukraine, historically viewed as a "breadbasket" by the Soviets, with its Slavic history, was always in Putin's crosshairs. Putin has not gone insane, as some suggest. This has long been his plan. His messianic complex strongly influences his decisions and his brutality guides his actions.

The empire began with Putin's invasion of neighboring Georgia in 2008, an illegal war of aggression intended by Putin to stop Georgia's outreach to Europe and move towards democracy. Likewise, his initial invasion of Ukraine in 2014, also wholly illegal, lacking any legitimate basis, was designed to prevent Ukraine's moves towards democracy, growing separation from Russia, and desire to be part of Europe. In that case, Putin failed, as the result was a stronger commitment by the Ukrainian people towards self-determination, freedom, and partnership with the EU and NATO. Therefore, it was inevitable that Putin's next move would be another illegal invasion of Ukraine and establishment of an illegitimate puppet government beholden to Russia, opposed to freedom.

Putin's invasion was never about NATO expansion, but rather his compulsion to establish his new Russian empire, and for that he needed Ukraine. NATO understood this and reluctantly could not establish stronger military ties to Ukraine, even with the understanding that Putin would inevitably invade and establish a puppet regime. NATO leaders believed that if they had expanded into Ukraine or fought on Ukraine's behalf, it would likely provoke a new world war and they determined they could not risk this, especially with Russia's nuclear weapons policy. While it is highly unlikely Putin would not use nuclear weapons generally, there is an argument he would do so when he believed he was protecting what he believes is Russia's natural sphere of control around its borders and that, unfortunately, clearly involves Ukraine. There are certainly strong arguments supporting NATO's position, with or without the risk of nuclear weapons.

The more important issue for NATO concerns the newer NATO members that were formerly in the Soviet Bloc and exist along or near Russia's borders. They lie within Putin's believed Russia sphere of control and are clearly in his crosshairs. Will NATO's collective self-defense alliance deter Putin and protect countries such as the Baltic States, Poland, Romania, et al, if he invades or commits other aggression to destabilize them? The answer is that NATO must do so no matter the cost. I believe after witnessing Ukraine that the alliance will invoke Article 5 and come to the defense of any NATO member Putin attacks. Consequently, we can expect Russia to significantly increase its non-military attacks on those countries. This involves Russia's extensive

¹ *The Delray Democrat*, March 2022, page 7.

destabilization campaigns using disinformation, social media, elections, etc. For the record, many of these actions may rightfully be considered as acts of war, and thus an unjust attack on a sovereign nation that would trigger NATO action of some kind.

Understanding the geopolitical realities, the pressing matter remains as to how to respond to Russia's illegal war and brutality in Ukraine. The key to success is determining an alternative to NATO military involvement that otherwise prevents Putin from establishing a Russian puppet regime to subjugate the Ukrainian people, subvert their will and right to self-determination, oppose NATO and European integration, and support Putin's Russian empire. It is hard to believe Putin would accept success in Ukraine and then abruptly end or drastically reduce his plans for the empire. NATO must find a way to do more to stop Putin's empire, reduce the threat to Europe, and protect the Ukrainian people.

Thus far NATO has pulled together in great form, united against a common, dangerous enemy who threatens the very existence of many members if not the world. Putin's ultimate goal is to eliminate the post-World War II era and liberal democracy, replacing it with overlapping totalitarian regimes that will erode all freedom and self-determination. For many years he has waged this campaign against NATO and the world's democracies through destabilization campaigns. In recent years we have seen levels of success and populist, anti-democratic parties have gained strength, even winning elections. Plainly said, we are already at war, just without military combat. We never choose war; war is forced upon us. Do we defend freedom and democracy or do we ignore decades of ever increasing, more effective attacks by Putin? Shame on us if we lose the war to Putin without ever defending ourselves.

Ukraine is on the verge of falling to Russia. Despite setbacks, Russia has the power to defeat Ukraine. While it is true that the Ukrainian military and brave citizens have launched a viable resistance, Putin has responded with a wave of brutality and additional war crimes, including the killing of civilians. There is no limit to what Putin would do to Ukraine or even his own people to avoid a [humiliating](#) loss. The world must hold him accountable and isolate Russia until the aggression ends and Ukraine is reestablished and rebuilt.

The West's unprecedented sanctions regimen has held and been effective, at least for now, inflicting severe damage on Russia's economy. There is no sign, however, that Putin cares how many people get hurt, including Russians.

The West needs to ratchet up the pressure on the oligarchs who enable him. NATO must seize all Russian assets worldwide, especially Putin's and the oligarchs. Every last penny, including property, business, investments, all of it.

Moreover, sanctions must go beyond mere seizure if they are to work. Oligarchs can wait that out. The seized resources must be consolidated by NATO and given to the Ukrainian people to defend their country (or held in trust until Ukrainian freedom is restored). NATO must inform Putin and the oligarchs that for every day Russia continues to attack Ukraine, a percentage of these assets will be given to the Ukrainian people for reparations, in support of the exiled government, and any continuing resistance. That percentage thus cannot ever be returned to Putin and the oligarchs because it will have been spent, gone forever. Only then will the pain be significant enough for the oligarchs to force Putin's hand. We also need to bring pressure on nations that have not joined the sanctions but where the oligarchs have assets.