Preface

The Crisis in Ukraine: A Test for Global Democracy

In February of 2022, the authoritarian military dictatorship known as the Russian Federation launched a military invasion of the democratic nation of Ukraine. While Ukraine was not a member of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) at the time of the attack and had no mutual defense treaties with the United States or the other dominant Western democracies, the invasion of a democratic nation became a global controversy and evolved into one of the most serious human rights crises since the COVID-19 pandemic. Lead by the United States, many Western European nations have contributed both material and economic aid to Ukraine, with the United States leading this effort.

A History of Oppression

Despite Vladimir Putin's propagandistic claim that Russians and Ukrainians are "one people," the Ukrainian national identity has been evolving for many centuries. While many Americans have at least some level of superficial knowledge about Russia, at least how the nation is portrayed and often critiqued in American pop culture, but fewer Americans have any knowledge of the history and cultural legacy of Ukraine. This is important because Americans influenced by the recent conservative softening of attitudes towards Russia might be tempted to believe Putin's claims that Ukraine has always been a part of Russia or that the nation has never truly been an independent state.

The cultural evolution of Ukraine can be traced back before the Greek and Roman Empires, having been originally settled, it is believed, by migrants from the Iranian region. Over the many centuries that followed, many different cultural groups either occupied or integrated with populations in the region, creating a rich and ancient cultural tableau. The historical basis for Russia's claims on Ukraine can be traced back to the period of the Kievian Rus, when Ukraine was part of a massive state that is claimed as the shared cultural ancestor of the Russian, Belarusian, and Ukrainian people. With Kiev as the center of the society, the Kievian Rus lasted from the nineteenth to the thirteenth century before the monarchic dynasty in the region was destroyed in a Mongolian invasion.[1]

Later Ukraine was within the territories claimed by Lithuania, Poland, and the Ottoman Empire, among others, until a war between Russia and Poland brought the Russian Empire into the picture. Russian took formal control of much of what is now Ukraine in the 1700s, with the remaining territories controlled by the empire of Austria. Ultimately, this made Ukraine a part of the Soviet Union, but a movement for Ukrainian national identity developed over the course of the 1800s and throughout the 1900s, with independence activists repeatedly clashing with dictatorial Russian forces. Over the years, the Russian regime tried to erase

Ukraine's unique cultural identity, banning the use of the Ukrainian language, changing the national curriculum to remove independent Ukrainian heritage and heroes, and prohibiting the use of unique cultural symbols, traditions, and expressions. This oppression did not work, and Ukrainians defiantly retained aspects of their culture and identity while under Russian control.[2]

In 1991, as the Soviet regime crashed, the citizens of Ukraine voted as to whether or not to become independent or to remain with Russia and more than 90 percent voted for independence. Since that time, the vast majority of Ukrainians have seen themselves as Ukrainian and not as "Russian," and have voted in elections to move their country closer to the European Union (EU) and away from the Russian model of governance.

Prior to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Ukraine had been one of the most economically important parts of the Russian federation and this helps to explain the regime's desire to regain access to Ukrainian resources, but there is no historical or political justification for reintroducing Russian dominance over Ukrainian society. The Russian government's propagandistic efforts to portray Ukraine as a part of Russia or as a version of Russian culture is part of a very old technique of cultural erasure. It is telling that as Russia captured Ukrainian territory, soldiers were ordered to burn books about the history of Ukraine. They purposefully targeted cultural centers, museums, libraries, and other centers of Ukrainian identity. Marjana Varchuck, director of the Kyiv Museum that was damaged in a Russian bombing campaign in October said of the military campaign, "Destroying our culture is the purpose of everything that the Russians are doing. Culture and language strengthen our nation, they remind us of our history. That's why the Russians are shelling our monuments, our museums, and our history. That's what they're fighting with."[3]

Russia has also attempted to justify their invasion by claiming that they are in the process of "denazifying" Ukraine, a baseless claim that does not meet with scrutiny. Though portraying themselves as "liberators" of Russian citizens from an oppressive Ukrainian government—a demonstrably false claim—the Russian military has engaged in tactics that have been called war crimes by international observers. These include kidnapping tens of thousands of Ukrainian children, who have been forcibly taken to Russia. This is actually a common tactic in warfare, utilizing kidnapped children as leverage to spread terror and to put pressure on defending governments, but it is considered a crime against humanity in violations of the ethics of warfare. Russian soldiers have also been connected to instances of torture, rape, and other abuses considered violations of military ethics. Beyond these extraordinary abuses and war crimes, the war on Ukraine has killed and injured tens of thousands, with at least 10,000 civilians, including children, killed in Russian bombing raids and attacks on residential towns and cities. Millions have been displaced or lost property, leading to one of the most severe humanitarian crises of the twenty-first century.

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Russia and Ukraine
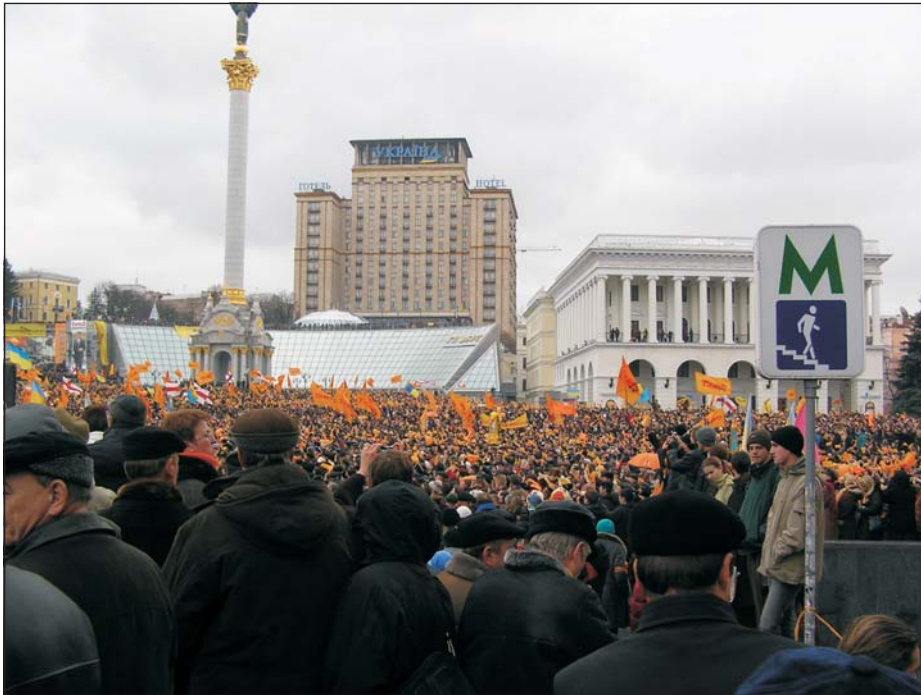
The Ukrainian constitution was changed to shift power from the presidency to the parliament as part of the 2004-2005 Orange Revolution. Above, Independence Square in Kyiv with protesters, November 2004. Photo by Serhiy, via Wikipedia.

The Russian Empire Rears Its Head

Citizens within dictatorial societies are not substantively different from citizens in more democratic societies. They seek to live their lives, to provide for children, and to have access to resources for sustenance and enjoyment. In democratic societies, changes in leadership brings new ideas and new policies to the forefront and this provides members of the populace with a sense of advancement, even if this is only illusory. Dictatorial regimes lack innovation and new ideas, because information and knowledge threaten the control of the ruling class. However, leaders in dictatorships still need to provide citizens with the illusion of advancement towards solving their society's hardships and problems. Typically, this involves blaming social/societal problems on enemy states or target groups and then engaging in military/police efforts to allegedly address those threats.

Vladimir Putin, a man in his early seventies who has been in power since the beginning of the twenty-first century, was raised in a Russian society shaped by Russian imperialism. Putin and his allies have sought to maintain the power and privilege of the Russian oligarchic class by utilizing the same basic strategies and techniques that were used in the former Russian Empire.[1] On the domestic front, this includes placing tight controls on all communication and media and shaping the education system to promote imperial era about Russia's cultural legacy and role in global culture. On the foreign policy front, the imperialist approach is to use military power to claim territories with desired resources or to protect and achieve strategic advantages.

The Russian Empire once ranged from Poland into Asia and this included the now independent, democratic nation of Ukraine. During the Russian imperial era, Ukraine was known as "Malorossiya," or "little Russia," and was considered one of the most important parts of the empire.[2] The Ukraine region had been a center of Slavic culture in the Middle Ages, after which it passed through several eras of imperial domination, under the Austrian Empire, the Ottomans, and others. Despite long periods of external control, the Ukrainian people have a unique language and unique traditions. Russia took control of Ukraine following the World War I era and for most of the nineteenth century, Russian leaders actively suppressed Ukrainian cultural identity by prohibiting the Ukrainian language and other cultural expressions. For more than a century, the Russian dictators attempted, essentially, to forcibly assimilate Ukrainians into the Russian Empire.

Over the course of the twentieth century, the era of imperialism ended and the culturally and economically stagnant Russian Empire fell apart. In Ukraine, the independence movement began to gain traction in the mid-1800s, but it wasn't until 1991, when the union was in disarray, that the Ukrainian people voted,

Russia's at War with Ukraine: Here's How We Got Here

By Becky Sullivan
NPR, February 24, 2022

As Russian forces begin an all-out assault on Ukraine after months of troop buildup and failed diplomatic efforts by the U.S. and its European allies to head off conflict, the situation for Kyiv is the most high-stakes in the country's 30-year history.

Since breaking from the Soviet Union, Ukraine has wavered between the influences of Moscow and the West, surviving scandal and conflict with its democracy intact.

Now it faces its biggest test as Russia threatens its very existence as an independent country.

Since the illegal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, many Ukrainians have turned away from Moscow and toward the West, with popular support on the rise for joining Western alliances such as NATO and the European Union.

But along the country's eastern border with Russia, separatists backed by Moscow took control of two regions in 2014. Violence in eastern Ukraine has killed more than 14,000 people in the years since, according to International Crisis Group research. Russia's recognition of the two regions' independence set the stage for moving its troops into Ukraine.

The 1990s: Independence from the Soviet Union

1989 and 1990
Anti-communist protests sweep central and Eastern Europe, starting in Poland and spreading throughout the Soviet bloc. In Ukraine, January 1990 sees more than 400,000 people joining hands in a human chain stretching some 400 miles from the western city of Ivano-Frankivsk to Kyiv, the capital, in the north-central part of Ukraine. Many wave the blue and yellow Ukrainian flag that had been banned under Soviet rule.

July 16, 1990
The Rada, the new Ukrainian parliament formed out of the previous Soviet legislature, votes to declare independence from the Soviet Union. Authorities recall Ukrainian soldiers from other parts of the USSR and vote to shut down the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in northern Ukraine.

Russian War in Ukraine Timeline

US Department of Defense, December 12, 2023

Since Feb. 24, 2022, the United States and its allies and partners have provided equipment and training to Ukraine, capabilities necessary for Ukraine's defense of its sovereign territory. This international security assistance has had a significant impact in defending against Russian aggression within Ukraine and preparing the Ukrainian armed forces for the fight ahead.

Ukraine Events Timeline

In total, the United States has committed more than $30.4 billion in security assistance to Ukraine since the beginning of the Biden Administration. Since 2014, the United States has committed more than $32.4 billion and more than $29.8 billion since the beginning of Russia's unprovoked and brutal invasion on Feb. 24, 2022.

December 12, 2023

The Defense Department announced additional security assistance to meet Ukraine's critical security and defense needs. This announcement is the Biden administration's 53rd tranche of equipment to be provided from DOD inventories for Ukraine since August 2021. This package includes additional air defense capabilities, artillery ammunition, antitank weapons and other equipment to help Ukraine counter Russia's ongoing war of aggression.

December 11, 2023

Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III delivered introductory remarks prior to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's address at the National Defense University in Washington, D.C.

December 6, 2023

Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III today hosted bilateral discussions at the Pentagon with Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov.

The Defense Department announced new security assistance to meet Ukraine's critical security and defense needs that uses the limited resources that remain available to help Ukraine. This announcement is the Biden administration's 52nd tranche of equipment to be provided from DOD inventories for Ukraine since August 2021.

The Political Debate Over US Aid to Ukraine

The Russian invasion of Ukraine began on February 24, 2022, with a near immediate response from the US government and the Biden administration. The very same day that the Russian invasion began, 7,000 additional US military personnel were deployed to key locations in Europe, with at least 500 more deployed just days later. The Biden administration authorized a near immediate $350 million in military assistance from the Defense Departments existing resources. Additional aid was secured through bipartisan support and funding initiatives and, ultimately, the United States provided $30.4 billion in aid and equipment over the course of the first two years of the war. For some, this funding and support was essential, not only protecting the people of Ukraine from an unjust assault on their sovereignty, but also protecting American interests abroad. Others feel that the US support for Ukraine is an inappropriate use of US resources, may contribute to inflation, and may lead to a dangerous escalation in hostilities in the region.[1]

The Complexity of Countering Russian Aggression

If the Russian Federation was (a) not a nuclear power, and (b) did not control a sizeable practical military force, it is possible that the European Union (EU) and the United States would have directly intervened in the Ukraine conflict, sending in peacekeeping troops to rebel the invasion or would, at least, have committed to more aggressive measures to contain or limit the violence in the conflict. In practice, the threat of Russian nuclear escalation and/or courting a more direct conflict between global powers limited the response of the United States and allied nations.

One of the major questions, in the first several months of the war, was whether the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) would attempt to establish a "no-fly zone," which is a protected area of airspace within a certain region. no-fly zones have been used in other global conflicts as an indirect measure to contain or limit a military conflict by preventing individuals on either side of the conflict to use air strikes. The Ukrainian government called on NATO to establish a no-fly zone but leading NATO members, including the United States, felt that the action would be too provocative. As a result, allied nations instead provided Ukraine with aerial defense equipment.[2]

Initially, the United States and allied nations hoped that establishing deep economic sanctions would indirectly hinder the Russian military effort. Ultimately, the primary strategy utilized by allied nations was to impose significant economic sanctions and restrictions on Russia in an effort to damage the Russian
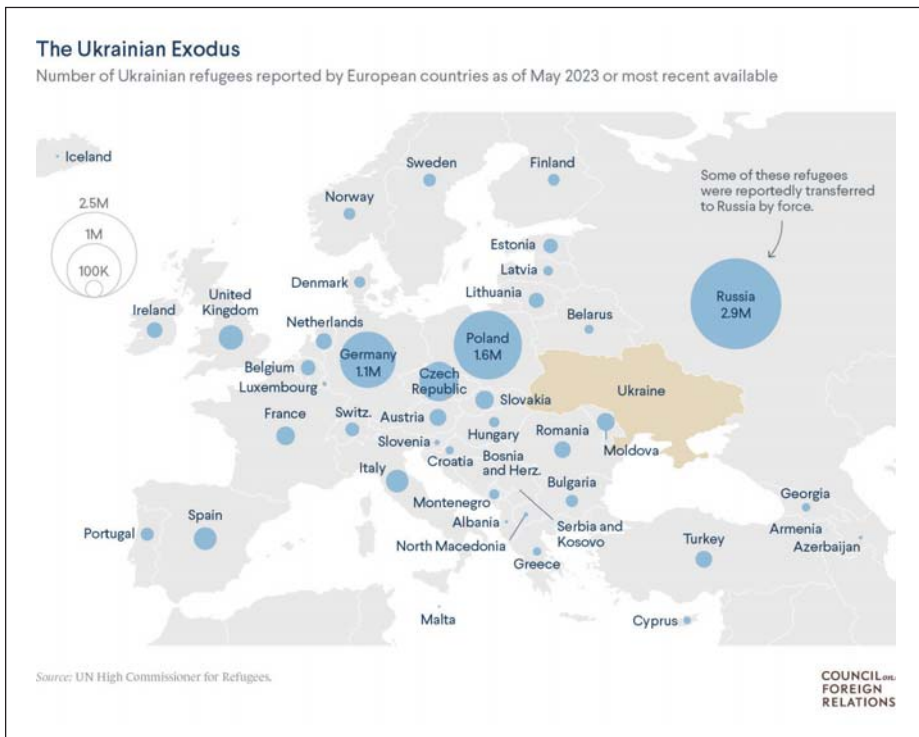
December 2022 World Bank estimate puts the likely cost of reconstruction at up to $641 billion.

Health officials also remain concerned about the spread of infectious diseases given the deterioration in health-care infrastructure. They warn that COVID-19 transmission remains high, with only 38 percent of Ukrainians fully vaccinated against the disease. In the Russia-occupied city of Mariupol, officials imposed a quarantine over fears of cholera and dysentery, while the UN human rights mission in Ukraine expressed concern regarding reports that Ukrainian prisoners of war have contracted diseases including hepatitis A and tuberculosis.

Where Are Refugees Going?

About 2.9 million people, or 35 percent of Ukrainian refugees in Europe, have headed east to Russia. Poland, already home to an estimated 1.3 million Ukrainians (both naturalized citizens and temporary migrant workers), has welcomed the second-largest amount, at more than 1.6 million. Most of the remaining refugees have fled to the Czech Republic, Moldova, Romania, Slovakia, and other European countries, many of which already had sizable populations of Ukrainian nationals prior to the war.

The number of refugees leaving Ukraine has slowed somewhat after peaking in March 2022; since then, nearly six million have returned home. Even so, migrant experts warn that Russia's planned spring offensives could generate up to four million additional refugees in 2023.

The Ukrainian Exodus. Number of Ukrainian refugees reported by European countries as of May 2023 or most recent available. Source: UN High Commissioner for Refugees. COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

welcomed Finland as a member, is consistently viewed in a favorable light by Americans. In 2022, shortly after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, 67% held a favorable view of NATO, the highest percentage measured since Pew Research Center transitioned to online surveys in the U.S. Since last year, positive opinions of NATO have faded slightly, with favorable views dropping 5 percentage points.

U.S. adults with a bachelor's or postgraduate degree are more likely than those with some college or less education to have positive views of NATO. For example, three-quarters of Americans with a postgraduate degree express a favorable view of NATO, compared with 56% of those with a high school education or less.

Willingness to work with other countries is also associated with assessments of the alliance. Those who say the U.S. should take other countries' interests into account are more likely to express favorability in NATO (73%) than those who believe the U.S. should follow its own interests (47%).

Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents are consistently more likely than Republicans and GOP leaners to hold a positive opinion of NATO. About three-quarters of Democrats (76%) have a favorable view of NATO, in contrast to 49% of Republicans. Among Republicans, moderates and liberals are more likely to have a favorable opinion of the alliance than conservatives. And liberal Democrats are more positive toward NATO than conservative and moderate supporters of the party.

The partisan divide on the issue of NATO is well established in past research. In 2022, Republicans grew more favorable toward NATO in the wake of Russia's invasion. However, since then, Republicans have become less positive, with favorable ratings of the alliance declining 6 points. Democratic views of NATO have remained relatively steady since 2021.

Democrats and adults with more education more favorable toward NATO

% who say they have a(n) ___ opinion of NATO

	Unfavorable	Favorable
Total	35%	62%
HS or less	39	56
Some college	39	59
College grad	28	70
Postgrad	24	75
Rep/Lean Rep	49	49
Conserv	51	46
Mod/Lib	45	54
Dem/Lean Dem	22	76
Cons/Mod	26	73
Liberal	17	81

Among those who say when dealing with major int'l issues, the U.S. should ...

	Unfavorable	Favorable
Take into account the interests of other countries	25	73
Follow its own interests	49	47

Note: Those who did not answer not shown. For full question wording, see topline.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted March 20-26, 2023. Q3e.
"Americans Hold Positive Feelings Toward NATO and Ukraine, See Russia as an Enemy"

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