

How the Ukraine crisis could strengthen the West



by Conrad Black

Over the past week or so, earth-shaking events appeared to be occurring every day: the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the dramatic and almost instantaneous determination of Germany to rearm, the imposition of relatively serious sanctions upon Russia and the international condemnation of that country, and the extraordinary bravery of the Ukrainian people and the eloquence, and charismatic leadership qualities, of their president, the formerly somewhat whimsically regarded ex-comedian Volodymyr Zelenskyy. The world appears to be at a turning point between a decline in western, and particularly American, influence and a galvanizing resurgence of the importance and compelling motivating power of human liberty and national patriotism.

At a glance, this looks like routine Russian oppression of a neighbouring people. Central and eastern Europe have been familiar with this phenomenon for many centuries and many

people have some recollection of the Soviet-led repression of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and of the Soviet bloc suppression of Hungary in 1956. These episodes are very easily distinguishable from Ukraine today. The Soviet and neighbouring satellite armies had long occupied those countries and the dissenting leaders in both cases professed to be reliable Soviet allies, but more liberal executants of the pursuit of Marxist communism than were their Soviet masters. The U.S.S.R. had twice the population of Russia, an immense army and almost complete control of the borders of the countries over which it was reasserting itself.

The Hungarian and Czech armies were in no condition to challenge the invasions that they suffered. The Ukrainian army today consists of over 200,000 highly trained and very well-equipped soldiers, who know every square inch of their own country, are fanatically determined to defend it and have been armed to the teeth with the most sophisticated weaponry, along with a reserve force of 900,000.

There is much talk of an even more massive aerial bombardment of Ukrainian cities. Russia is technically capable of executing such missions, but their military value would be very limited, and while Russian President Vladimir Putin is conspicuously unconcerned with international opinion, such a barbarous assault on noncombatants would probably incite even stiffer resistance from the gallant Ukrainians and more intensive support for them from NATO. It would also embarrass China, into whose arms the American Democratic party has pushed the Russians, by its absurd obsession with that country, including the infamous and fantastic nonsense that former president Donald Trump was a Russian intelligence asset. And it would be met by stiff resistance, as Ukraine is being supplied with virtually inexhaustible stores of mobile and sophisticated ground-to-air and surface-to-surface missiles and receives constant, exhaustive intelligence from NATO satellite and aerial reconnaissance and other sources that detail all Russian movements in Ukraine. (This analysis

comes in part from distinguished journalist, military expert and old friend, Brian Stewart.)

Russia is, all in all, far from being in the overwhelming position of decisive strength that is generally assumed. Of course, it is a much more formidable country than Ukraine, but it has less than four times Ukraine's population, and is now facing open-ended costs and trying to finance this very disreputable invasion on a relatively primitive economy with a GDP smaller than Canada's and under heavy strain of sanctions. Most importantly, this week there have been intimations from Russia's new big brother, China, which is indirectly inconvenienced by western sanctions on Russia, that it desires a negotiated end to the conflict. This may explain why the very tentative peace talks, for which little was expected, are continuing to a third session.

There are essentially three possible outcomes to this war: the total subjugation of Ukraine, as Putin evidently desires; some sort of compromise, probably based on the Russian-speaking eastern provinces, which Russia has already declared to be autonomous, joining Russia and leaving Ukraine, which would then be entirely autonomous, but forced to commit to not joining the western alliance, though it could have a security guarantee from it; or an indefinite and horribly costly war – an urbanized and more intensely conducted version of the Russian experience in Afghanistan and the American experience in Vietnam, though with nothing like the domestic support that America received from the South Vietnamese army and population.

The first alternative, complete subjugation of Ukraine, would be impossible for Russia to sustain, even if it were tentatively able to achieve it, and it would degenerate into the third alternative of an indefinite, horrible and costly semi-guerrilla war. A negotiated end to this war, though perhaps not imminent, does seem the most likely outcome. This would avoid the disaster of another horrible defeat for the

West, following the excessive shutdown in response to COVID, the fiasco in Afghanistan, the astounding spectacle of national self-hate, rising urban crime and violence, and mass illegal immigration into the United States, and America's abandonment of energy self-sufficiency for spurious ecological reasons in order to treat Vladimir Putin with \$100-per-barrel oil with which he pays for his evil occupation of Ukraine.

It is now clear that the United States has botched and wasted its period as the world's only superpower and it is having an aberrant moment of political feebleness and absurdity. But there is no reason to believe that this is the beginning of a permanent decline. And as it goes through this torpor, which is unprecedented in its own history, NATO has shaped up with refreshing and unexpected vigour, Germany has announced its return to its rightful role as Europe's leading power but in a positive and collegial context, and the long-festering issue of what would happen to the former republics of the U.S.S.R. will be substantially answered satisfactorily. Ukraine may go through a period of Finlandization, but will join the West. The little Baltic countries (Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia) now seem likely to escape the control of Russia, as do the Caucasian republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. If Putin were to succeed in taking back Ukraine and turning it into another primitive subsidiary of Moscow like Belarus, it would be another severe defeat for the West and a substantial disgorgement of our great and bloodless victory in the Cold War, but this scenario seems extremely unlikely given the level of resistance we've witnessed from the Ukrainians.

Ultimately, the West will emerge stronger from Ukraine's ordeal, China will receive a substantial disincentive to any thoughts it might have entertained of a military occupation of Taiwan, which would be infinitely more difficult than the attack on Ukraine, and Russia will certainly tire before long of the overlordship of China, giving us another chance to attract it to the West, where it belongs. We should have paid

much greater attention to former Russian president Boris Yeltsin's, and even the early Putin's, suggestions that Russia join NATO, as we should have paid greater attention to the security guarantee that the five permanent United Nations Security Council members gave Ukraine when it (and Belarus and Kazakhstan) voluntarily abandoned the nuclear weapons that they inherited from the Soviet Union in 1994.

Canada has been very helpful in training and supplying Ukrainian forces and Chrystia Freeland in particular has forcefully supported the liberation and westernization of Ukraine. The huge numbers of tragic fugitives from the violence in that country should be encouraged to immigrate to Canada to join and expand one of the largest and most successful of all our ethnic communities. They would be an immense asset to this country.

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