

## Connecticut Debate Association

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### **This House, as NATO, would admit Ukraine as a member.**

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#### **Bring Back the Free World**

The New York Times, By Bret Stephens, Jan. 25, 2022

At some point in the last 30 years, the concept of the “free world” fell out of favor.

Maybe it seemed dated once the Cold War ended. Or an afterthought in an era in which economic development, not political freedom, became the primary measure of human progress. Or too smug in an American culture increasingly obsessed with its own sins, current and original. Or no longer befitting countries where democratic norms and liberal principles were being eroded from within — from Hungary to India to the United States.

But we urgently need to restore the concept to its former place, both for its clarifying power and its moral force.

The prospect of a Russian invasion of Ukraine is being treated by Vladimir Putin’s many apologists as a case of reasserting Russia’s historic sphere of influence, or as predictable pushback against NATO’s eastward expansion — that is, as another episode in the game of great-power politics.

By this logic, the Kremlin’s aims are limited, its demands negotiable. It’s a tempting logic that implies diplomacy can work: Give Putin something he wants — say Ukraine won’t join NATO, or remove NATO forces from former Warsaw Pact states — and he’ll be satisfied.

But the logic ignores two factors: Putin’s personal political needs and his far-reaching ideological aims. Putin is neither a czar nor a real president, in the sense that he governs according to fixed rules that both legitimize and limit him. He’s a dictator, liable to charges of corrupt and criminal behavior, who has no guarantee of a safe exit from power and must contrive ways to extend his rule for life.

Whipping up periodic foreign crises to mobilize domestic support and capture global attention is a time-tested way in which dictators do this. So however the Ukrainian drama is resolved, there will be other Putin-generated crises. Appeasing him now emboldens him for later.

The second factor follows from the first. The ultimate way to consolidate dictatorship is to discredit democracy, to make it seem divided, tired and corrupt. There are many ways to do this and Putin practices plenty of them, from supporting extremist parties and politicians to sponsoring the Russian bots and trolls peddling conspiracy theories on social media.

The most effective method is a blunt power play that exposes the gap between the West’s high-flown rhetoric about democracy, human rights and international law, and its unheroic calculations about commercial advantage, military spending, energy dependence and strategic risks. Attacking Ukraine will have costs for Putin, but they’ll be more than compensated for if he can imbue the West with a profound sense of its own weakness. The bully’s success ultimately depends on his victim’s psychological surrender.

The best short-term response to Putin’s threats is the one the Biden administration is at last beginning to consider: The permanent deployment, in large numbers, of U.S. forces to frontline NATO states, from Estonia to Romania. Arms shipments to Kyiv, which so far are being measured in pounds, not tons, need to become a full-scale airlift. NATO troops need not, and should not, fight for Ukraine. But the least we owe Ukrainians is to give them a margin of deterrence that comes with being armed before they are invaded, along with a realistic chance to fight for themselves.

The longer-term response is to restore the concept of the free world.

What’s meant by that term? It isn’t just a list of states that happen to be liberal democracies, some bound together by treaty alliances like NATO or regional trading blocs like the European Union.

The free world is the larger idea that the world’s democracies are bound by shared and foundational commitments to human freedom and dignity; that those commitments transcend politics and national boundaries; and that no free people can be indifferent to the fate of any other free people, because the enemy of any one democracy is ultimately the enemy to all the others. That was the central lesson of the 1930s, when democracies thought they could win peace for themselves at the expense of the freedom of others, only to learn the hard way that no such bargain was ever possible.

The concept of the free world is not a perfect one — its constituent states are so often imperfect. It can be prone to overconfidence (as in Afghanistan) or strategic incoherence (as it was, for several years, in the Balkans) or bitter division (as it was over the war in Iraq).

But it would be foolish to think that the loss of Ukraine would mean nothing to the future of freedom elsewhere,

including in the United States. Success in risky ventures tends to beget admiration, and Putin has never lacked for Western admirers, including a certain former — and possibly future — American president.

Putin seems to think that dividing and humiliating the West over Ukraine would reduce NATO and its partners to a collection of states, each fearful and pliable. It's not a bad bet, and it won't be easy to stop him. But a free world that understands that the alternative to hanging together is hanging separately can at least begin to face up to the menace he represents.

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## **NATO Won't Let Ukraine Join Soon. Here's Why.**

The New York Times, By Edward Wong and Lara Jakes, Jan. 13, 2022

Ukraine, with Russian troops on its borders, is pressing for membership. But President Biden and European leaders are not ready for that step.

WASHINGTON — The tense talks this week among the United States, Russia and European members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization have made one thing clear: While the Biden administration insists it will not allow Moscow to quash Ukraine's ambitions to join NATO, it has no immediate plans to help bring the former Soviet republic into the alliance.

If Ukraine were a NATO member, the alliance would be obligated to defend it against Russia and other adversaries. U.S. officials say they will not appease President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia by undermining a policy enshrined in NATO's original 1949 treaty that grants any European nation the right to ask to join.

"Together, the United States and our NATO allies made clear we will not slam the door shut on NATO's open door policy — a policy that has always been central to the NATO alliance," Wendy R. Sherman, the deputy secretary of state, said on Wednesday.

But France and Germany have in the past opposed Ukraine's inclusion, and other European members are wary — a deal breaker for an alliance that grants membership only by unanimous consent. American and Russian leaders know this. With Russian troops amassed on Ukraine's eastern border, some current and former American and European officials say Mr. Putin might just be raising the NATO issue as a pretext for an invasion.

Michael McFaul, a former U.S. ambassador to Russia, has suggested that Mr. Putin is trying to distract from more urgent matters. "Everybody's talking about NATO expansion," Mr. McFaul said on a podcast by the Center for a New American Security that was released on Tuesday. "Suddenly, we're debating this issue that wasn't even an issue. That's a great advantage to him."

Like European leaders, President Biden remains uninterested in Ukrainian membership in NATO. Here are four reasons.

### **Biden has grown skeptical of expanding U.S. military commitments.**

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Mr. Biden successfully urged NATO to accept Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic as member states in the late 1990s. The top Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee at the time, Mr. Biden said that turning the former Cold War adversaries into allies would mark the "beginning of another 50 years of peace" for Europe. He added that the move would right a "historical injustice" perpetrated by Stalin.

But over the course of two decades of war in Iraq and Afghanistan, experts said, Mr. Biden's fervor for expanding NATO cooled considerably. In 2004, seven Eastern European countries joined the alliance, and in 2008, President George W. Bush pushed NATO to issue a declaration that Ukraine and Georgia would become members in the future despite reservations from U.S. intelligence agencies. However, the alliance has never offered either country a formal action plan to join, a necessary step for them to do so.

As recently as June, Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken told senators that "we support Ukraine membership in NATO." Mr. Biden, however, has been far more circumspect in his public comments and "has soft-pedaled talk of extending NATO membership to Ukraine," two foreign policy scholars, Joshua Shiffrin and Stephen Wertheim, wrote in September in Foreign Affairs.

In 2014, as vice president, Mr. Biden told officials in Ukraine during a visit there that any U.S. military support would be small, if given at all, according to a biography of Mr. Biden by Evan Osnos, a New Yorker writer who was on the trip. Russia had just invaded and annexed the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea, and Ukrainian officials were unhappy with Mr. Biden's message.

"We no longer think in Cold War terms," Mr. Biden told Mr. Osnos, adding that "there is nothing that Putin can do militarily to fundamentally alter American interests."

Last June, Mr. Biden told journalists at NATO headquarters in Brussels that “school is out on that question” when asked whether Ukraine could join the alliance.

### **Biden wants Ukraine to improve its political and legal systems.**

To meet one of the three main criteria for entry into NATO, a European nation must demonstrate a commitment to democracy, individual liberty and support for the rule of law. While Ukrainian leaders say they have met that threshold, some American and European officials argue otherwise.

In a 2020 analysis, Transparency International, an anticorruption watchdog, ranked Ukraine 117th out of 180 countries on its corruption index, lower than any NATO nation.

Officials in European nations with stronger liberal governance — notably in Sweden and Finland — have also floated the possibility of joining NATO, despite years of determined nonalignment. That is a discussion “we are ready to do,” Victoria J. Nuland, the State Department’s under secretary for political affairs, told journalists on Tuesday. “Obviously, they are longtime, established, stable democracies.”

She signaled that might not be the case with Ukraine. “That conversation would be slightly different than it is with countries that are making the transition to democratic systems and dealing with intensive problems of corruption and economic reform and democratic stability, etc.,” Ms. Nuland said.

Her comments echoed those of Mr. Biden on his 2014 visit to Ukraine. “To be very blunt about it, and this is a delicate thing to say to a group of leaders in their house of parliament, but you have to fight the cancer of corruption that is endemic in your system right now,” Mr. Biden told Ukrainian officials then.

Some Western officials also question whether Ukraine could meet a second set of criteria: contributing to the collective defense of NATO nations. But Ukraine sent troops to the U.S.-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“There are steps that Ukraine needs to take,” Jen Psaki, the White House press secretary, said in September after President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine met with Mr. Biden in the Oval Office. “They’re very familiar with these: efforts to advance rule of law reforms, modernize its defense sector and expand economic growth.”

A spike in hostilities. Russia has recently been building up forces near its border with Ukraine, and the Kremlin’s messaging toward its neighbor has hardened. Concern grew in late October, when Ukraine used an armed drone to attack a howitzer operated by Russian-backed separatists.

Ominous warnings. Russia called the strike a destabilizing act that violated the cease-fire agreement, raising fears of a new intervention in Ukraine that could draw the United States and Europe into a new phase of the conflict.

The Kremlin’s position. President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia, who has increasingly portrayed NATO’s eastward expansion as an existential threat to his country, said that Moscow’s military buildup was a response to Ukraine’s deepening partnership with the alliance.

Rising tension. Western countries have tried to maintain a dialogue with Moscow. But administration officials recently warned that the U.S. could throw its weight behind a Ukrainian insurgency should Russia invade.

### **NATO wants to avoid greater Russian hostility.**

After annexing Crimea, Mr. Putin invaded eastern Ukraine and gave military aid to a separatist insurgency there. He did something similar in Georgia in 2008. The message has been clear: If these two nations join NATO, the United States and European countries will have to grapple directly with ongoing Russian-fueled conflicts.

Russia could also impose other costs on Europe, such as withholding gas exports. And Germany and many other NATO nations prefer to choose their battles with Russia, given its proximity and Mr. Putin’s aggressive nature. They know he and other Russian officials are obsessed with Ukraine.

Given all that, Ukraine would almost certainly be unable to meet the third main criterion to join NATO: approval from all 30 members.

“The principal objection would be: Does such a move actually contribute to the stability in Europe, or would it contribute to destabilization?” said Douglas E. Lute, a former U.S. ambassador to NATO. “I think it’s indisputable there wouldn’t be consensus among the 30 members, even though all allies agree that Ukraine has the right to aspire to become a NATO member.”

Stephen M. Walt, a professor of international affairs at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, said that even in the 1990s, when NATO enlargement was first proposed, many prominent American strategists opposed it for this reason. “That was the concern all along — it wouldn’t be easy to do this in a way that wouldn’t threaten Russia,” he said.

Former President Viktor Yushchenko wanted entry into the alliance, but Ukrainians became more reluctant after Russia invaded Georgia. His successor, Viktor Yanukovich, dropped any drive for membership and promoted closer ties with

Russia, even agreeing to allow Moscow to continue leasing a Black Sea naval port in Crimea.

During the Obama administration, American officials encouraged Ukraine to sign a formal association agreement with the European Union rather than try to join NATO. Mr. Putin pressured Mr. Yanukovich to reject the agreement, which led to the Euromaidan protests in 2013 that eventually ousted Mr. Yanukovich.

“A lot of the U.S. policy has been quite reactive due to circumstances,” said Fiona Hill, a Russia expert at the Brookings Institution who was a senior director for Europe and Russia on the National Security Council under President Donald J. Trump. “It has also changed due to changes in Ukraine itself toward this.”

“By now, you’ve got much more sentiment in Ukraine for joining NATO,” she added.

Mr. Zelensky has pressed Mr. Biden repeatedly on membership, including during his visit to the White House in September. “I would like to discuss with President Biden here his vision, his government’s vision of Ukraine’s chances to join NATO and the time frame for this accession, if it is possible,” he said as he sat next to Mr. Biden.

Mr. Biden blew past those comments without responding.

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## **How the United States Can Break Putin’s Hold on Ukraine**

The New York Times, By Alexander Vindman, Oct. 10, 2021

It feels ominously like 2014 again.

Back then, Russian troops and tanks rolled into eastern Ukraine while the West, in shock, looked on. This year, Russia has once again raised the tenor of anti-Ukraine propaganda and assembled nearly 100,000 military personnel along Ukraine’s border, plus tanks, artillery and equipment. All of this has raised alarms that Russia is preparing to launch the largest military offensive in Europe since World War II.

In an attempt to ease the tension, President Biden spoke with Russia’s president, Vladimir Putin, on Tuesday. Mr. Biden made progress in signaling the significant cost of an invasion of Ukraine: He explained the United States is prepared to impose punishing economic measures to protect Ukraine’s sovereignty.

But that may not be sufficient to deter Mr. Putin. Russia has amassed a \$620 billion war chest to weather the most crippling of sanctions — and Mr. Putin understands such penalties are unlikely to be enforced in the first place, since American allies in Europe would also be hurt.

Providing Ukraine with larger weapons such as anti-air and anti-ship missiles would be useful, but history suggests that the U.S. government is too risk-averse to take this step. To shift Mr. Putin’s calculus, it is imperative that the Biden administration’s policy toward Ukraine change both tactically and strategically to demonstrate a more active level of U.S. engagement but one that avoids crossing into military adventurism.

There’s a bigger issue at stake here: the vital role a free and sovereign Ukraine plays in advancing U.S. interests against those of Russia and China. The United States must support Ukraine by providing more extensive military assistance, deep and sustained diplomatic engagement and, most crucially, economic cooperation.

To date, U.S. foreign policy toward Ukraine has failed to keep the Kremlin in check. When it comes to Russia’s neighbors, Washington has settled for a passive role and has been, at best, fickle in its friendship with Ukraine.

Russia, on the other hand, has been committed to retaining and regaining a sphere of influence over its most important imperial holdings, Ukraine and Belarus. Mr. Putin — no doubt picking up on the decreased American appetite for foreign entanglements over the last few years — has seized his chances with encroachments on Ukrainian sovereignty including the annexation of Crimea and the invasion of the Donbas region. Even interference in Western elections is just another tactic to weaken the West and create a privileged sphere of Russian influence.

Today’s looming crisis in Ukraine is simply the continuation of Mr. Putin’s ambitions. Statements like the one by Mr. Biden on Wednesday — that U.S. interests end at NATO’s borders — have only emboldened Mr. Putin to ignore international norms.

This American neglect must end. After all, the United States and Ukraine share both ideology and long-term geopolitical interests.

Over the past 30 years, Ukraine has made major strides in its experiment with democracy. Despite worrying instances of

government-backed corruption — undeniably, there is still more work to be done — Ukraine has made hard-fought progress on reform in the midst of war. Six presidents, two revolutions and many violent protests later, the people of Ukraine have sent a clear message that reflects the most fundamental of American values: They will fight for basic rights, and against authoritarian repression.

A prosperous Ukraine buttressed by American support makes an authoritarian Russia unviable in the long term. Ukraine's success would upend Russia's irredentist aspirations for empire and highlight the Kremlin's failures, just as West Germany's achievements once did in comparison to the totalitarian East German state during the Cold War. It may even convince the Russian people — who share a culture, history and religion with Ukrainians — to eventually demand their own framework for democratic transition.

To be sure, this doesn't happen overnight. A generational investment is necessary to realize such a vision. Nevertheless, the outlines of the stark contrast between a prosperous democratic Ukraine and a repressive and economically stagnant Russia are already evident. This is, in large part, why Mr. Putin needs Ukraine to be a failed state.

U.S. support for Ukraine could also help drive a wedge between China and Russia. Preventing Mr. Putin from invading Ukraine demonstrates the strength of the West's commitment to opposing autocracy and makes Russia a less potent partner to China in their mutual efforts to undermine the Western rules-based international order.

To that end, the United States should consider an out-of-cycle, division-level military deployment to Eastern Europe to reassure allies and bolster the defenses of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. This kind of deployment would signal that Russia's aggression will result in the sort of NATO security posture Russia most wishes to avoid.

And the United States cannot adequately support Ukraine without significant European involvement. The Kremlin wishes to make NATO membership for Ukraine a central issue of any discussions. That's a distraction right now because an assurance that Ukraine won't be a part of NATO is unlikely on its own to stop Russia from still trying to bring Ukraine to heel.

The more important issue to consider is that negotiations with Russia should be dealt with at the level of European security. These talks should devise off ramps that alleviate both European and Russian security concerns: for Russia, NATO encroachment and ballistic missile defense, and for NATO, Russia's over-militarized western border.

The Biden-Putin call on Tuesday opened the door to exactly this kind of discussion. The question that remains is whether Russia is prepared to walk through that door and reconsider its position on conventional arms control agreements such as the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty.

The United States should also engage Ukraine in more long-term bilateral initiatives on security, reform and economic cooperation. This year, Washington has delivered approximately \$450 million in security assistance to Ukraine. While this is important, economic cooperation should go further to include backing American commercial investment through the Development Finance Corporation. Washington should also consider maintaining a more sustained high-level relationship with Ukraine that isn't defined by whether Kyiv is in crisis or not.

There are irrefutable benefits to the existence of a strong, democratic and independent Ukraine as a powerhouse at the crossroads of Russia, Central Asia, the Middle East and Southern Europe. For that to happen, the United States has to be more assertive in the region. Our traditional halfhearted approach has already proven to be a dead end.

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## **Acting too aggressively on Ukraine may endanger it — and Taiwan**

The Washington Post, By Joshua Shiffrin and Stephen Wertheim, December 23, 2021

Get Ukraine horribly wrong, and a true strategic nightmare could result.

As Russian troops mass on Ukraine's eastern border, prominent politicians and policymakers are urging the White House to defend Ukraine more assertively. Some claim the stakes justify escalation with a nuclear peer. But others argue that America's broader "credibility" is on the line: If the United States fails to check Russian aggression against Ukraine, the argument goes, it may embolden China to invade Taiwan.

Retired Adm. James Stavridis, the former military leader of NATO, asserts that "China will be watching U.S. support to Ukraine, and it will inform their calculus regarding Taiwan." Making concessions to Russia would deal a "blow" to "U.S. credibility from Kyiv to Taipei," warns Rep. Michael McCaul (Tex.), the top Republican on the House Foreign Affairs Committee. Sen. Tim Kaine (D-Va.) likewise worries that if the United States acts too passively toward Russia, "China would conclude, 'Boy, the West sure isn't going to come to the aid of Taiwan if we were to do something on Taiwan.'"

Such arguments are doubly mistaken, at once misdiagnosing the Ukraine crisis and getting the Taiwan connection backward. What has brought about a crisis for the United States over Ukraine is not so much passivity as a legacy of overexertion, more of which would pose acute dangers. A better path lies in the live-and-let-live approach through which the United States has managed the potentially explosive issue of Taiwan. Right now, though, the United States is degrading that policy just when it needs it most, increasing the risk of a showdown over Taiwan akin to the one in Ukraine.

The present crisis has its roots in a long-brewing contest over Ukraine's geopolitical alignment. After the Soviet Union collapsed, Ukraine became independent but for decades joined neither with Russia nor with the West. The United States, for its part, expanded its NATO alliance but initially sidestepped Ukraine. It recognized that Russia, sharing deep ties and a 1,426-mile land border with Ukraine, might oppose such a move by force. "Ukrainian entry into NATO is the brightest of all redlines for the Russian elite (not just Putin)," William J. Burns, then U.S. ambassador to Russia and current CIA director, cabled from Moscow in 2008. "I have yet to find anyone who views Ukraine in NATO as anything other than a direct challenge to Russian interests."

Later that year, however, President George W. Bush pressured NATO to pledge that Ukraine and Georgia "will become members of NATO." Although momentum toward membership stalled for multiple reasons, Ukraine pursued an association agreement with the European Union that moved more quickly. When, in 2014, Ukraine's Revolution of Dignity replaced a Russian-oriented government with a pro-Western one, Russia swiftly annexed Crimea, home to its Black Sea naval base, and backed separatists in eastern Ukraine.

Russia's moves were aggressive, unjustified and destabilizing. They were also responses to Ukraine's efforts to join the West. In parallel with an expanding E.U., NATO had already undergone three rounds of enlargement, extending across Eastern Europe and ballooning its ranks from 16 members in 1991 to 28 by 2014.

U.S. policy since then has reinforced the problem. Although Ukraine's candidacy to join NATO is lagging, Secretary of State Tony Blinken affirmed in June that the United States continues to "support Ukraine's membership in NATO." The United States also has provided the country \$2.5 billion of security assistance and helped to train the Ukrainian army. By sustaining the possibility of Ukraine's close alignment with the West, U.S. actions exacerbate the concerns that triggered Russia's condemnable, but predictable, incursions.

To be sure, Russian President Vladimir Putin's intentions in the current crisis are difficult to discern. He may turn out to be bent on war, whether for strategic purposes or to regain the prize that Ukraine represents in Russia's national narrative. But the United States must also understand that flirting with a security commitment for Ukraine helped to bring that country under threat.

What should the United States do now? For inspiration, it can look to another geopolitical problem: Taiwan. In the 1970s, the United States changed its approach toward Taiwan to one it and China could both tolerate. To do so, Washington acknowledged Beijing's position that only "one China" exists (while papering over which government should rule Taiwan). The United States then imposed limits on its alignment with Taipei, terminating a treaty obligating it to defend the island and declining to integrate it into the formal U.S. alliance system. This did not mean giving Beijing a blank check: The United States opposed any effort by China (or Taiwan) to alter the status quo by force and sold weapons to Taiwan for self-defense. Together, these measures have helped to preserve peace for decades.

As the United States respected China's red lines over Taiwan, so should it respect Russia's long-standing red lines on Ukraine by keeping the country from entering too closely into the Western orbit. First, the Biden administration should openly state that Ukraine will not join NATO. Such opposition by the United States would obviously foreclose the possibility of Ukrainian membership, even if NATO does not accept Russia's demands to formally bar other countries from ever joining. Other NATO allies long opposed to Ukrainian membership, including Germany and France, could amplify the pledge.

Meanwhile, the United States could agree not to place troops in Ukraine. It could also maintain its present policy of limiting arms sales to Kyiv and refocus its military assistance on professionalizing Ukrainian forces. Depriving Ukraine of armaments would weaken its defenses against Russia, but these are unlikely ever to be sufficient in the face of a committed Russian invasion. An international agreement to respect Ukraine's independence would be a sounder defense. It would also make sense for Washington to try to rekindle negotiations to resolve the conflict in eastern Ukraine.

These measures, paired with the threat of further economic sanctions, stand a chance of defusing the present crisis. Even were this course of action to fail, it would nevertheless disentangle the United States from the conflict and help to avoid the outcome truly unacceptable for U.S. interests — a war with Russia. Such a war would cause untold casualties. And Russia, with greater interests in Ukraine, and thus a higher tolerance for risk, might well win.

American involvement in a war for Ukraine might also have broader consequences: It could damage peace in Asia.

Many factors inform Beijing's calculations toward Taiwan; events in Ukraine are unlikely to be decisive. But if it were to fight for Ukraine, or even just threaten to do so, the United States could give China more incentive to be belligerent rather than restrained. Although Beijing would see that the United States is willing to fight, it would also see Washington pushing to revise existing geopolitical arrangements without regard for the vital interests of other powers. China might then fear that Taiwan would be next. Left with less reassurance, Beijing also could face reduced deterrents, if conflict with Russia absorbed American resources and attention.

In recent years, moreover, the United States has been degrading its own effective policy toward Taiwan. By increasing contacts with Taiwanese officials and inviting Taiwan to the Summit for Democracy, the United States has chipped away at the "one China" policy. This month, a U.S. assistant secretary of defense for Indo-Pacific security affairs called Taiwan "critical to the defense of vital U.S. interests," suggesting that Taiwan lies within America's defense perimeter and must not ever reunify with China. Members of Congress are pushing for a greater U.S. commitment and have even proposed to pre-authorize the president to use force to defend the island.

Get Ukraine horribly wrong, and a true strategic nightmare could result: two crises, and perhaps two wars, against two great powers at once. Ironically, the United States would have gotten there for fear of facing exactly the dual catastrophes it brought about.

A better alternative is available: Support Ukraine's independence through diplomatic and economic statecraft, but neither intervene nor attempt to anchor Ukraine to the West. President Biden has taken a positive step by stating that the use of force by the United States "is not in the cards." Yet, publicly accepting limits, and sticking to them, runs counter to much recent U.S. foreign policy, as demonstrated by U.S. actions toward Ukraine and Taiwan alike.

Even if the latest confrontation is defused, the United States is setting itself up for grave crises in the future. Do Americans really wish to risk war with other great powers, near those countries' borders and over issues of questionable importance to America's security and prosperity? If the answer is no, the United States should halt the expansionist drift of its post-Cold War policies. The only frontiers left to cross are wrapped in bright red lines. Behind them lies ruin.

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## **U.S. Rebuilt NATO to Face Down Russia. Putin Scrambled Those Plans.**

The Wall Street Journal, By James Marson and Daniel Michaels, Jan. 11, 2022

Kremlin tests the alliance by undermining former Soviet republics, sowing disinformation and exploiting divisions  
BRUSSELS—The U.S. and other NATO members have deployed thousands of troops and invested heavily in weaponry to rebuild the alliance's front line facing Russia. Moscow has parried that strategy by opening up new fronts just beyond NATO's reach.

Now, as Russian officials visit North Atlantic Treaty Organization headquarters in Brussels on Wednesday to address grievances raised by the Kremlin, the 30-country alliance is grappling with how to counter Russia's increasing assertiveness.

Rather than confront NATO head-on, Russian President Vladimir Putin is exerting pressure in other countries including Ukraine, Syria and Libya. He is testing alliance unity with natural-gas deals while probing its democratic defenses with cyberattacks and disinformation, Western officials say. The approach is testing both the alliance's military might and Western political will.

NATO is divided over how to respond. Allies such as Germany and France have long urged caution and negotiations with Moscow.

Germany blocked the sale of sniper rifles to Ukraine via NATO last year, saying only defensive systems should be provided to help Kyiv, an alliance partner that has faced a simmering war against Russian-led separatists in its east since 2014. Hungary, led by a pro-Russian authoritarian, is preventing high-level NATO meetings with Ukraine.

Eastern members such as Poland and the Baltic states worry the Biden administration is leaning toward concessions to Mr. Putin in the hope of focusing instead on China. U.S. officials have said they won't accede to Moscow's demand that NATO commit to never accepting Ukraine and Georgia as members, but could consider other measures, such as mutual reductions to military exercises.

"If we give Putin concessions now, he'll come back for more," said a European diplomat at NATO. "Russia is a long-term threat with the political intent to weaken us."

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said in December that NATO had become “a purely geopolitical project aimed at absorbing territories left ownerless after the disappearance of the Warsaw Pact and the collapse of the Soviet Union.”

A decade ago, NATO was a solution looking for a problem. The West had won the Cold War and belatedly subdued fighting in former Yugoslavia. For ex-Soviet bloc countries such as Poland and Hungary, NATO membership came to be seen as a steppingstone to European Union membership because investors felt comfortable diving into frontier economies under Washington’s security umbrella. Prospects of serious warfare appeared remote. Two rounds of enlargement in 1999 and 2004 brought in former Soviet bloc countries from Bulgaria to the Baltic states.

Russia, consumed by domestic economic and political strife, grumbled but could do little. NATO sought to placate Moscow by agreeing a cooperation pact that committed to not permanently base forces in former Soviet domains, allowing Moscow to open a diplomatic mission at NATO headquarters and establishing a council to address concerns.

NATO cut military budgets and shrank forces in Europe. It invoked its mutual-defense pact for the first time—not against Russia, but following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks—and it launched a mission in Afghanistan.

The dynamics began to shift in 2004, when Mr. Putin blamed the West for sponsoring a popular uprising in Ukraine that overturned the disputed election of his protégé. He began bolstering the Russian military, which had atrophied from its Soviet-era might.

In 2008, Germany and France blocked a U.S.-led effort to offer the former Soviet republics of Ukraine and Georgia a path toward NATO membership. The alliance came up with a workaround: Ukraine and Georgia could eventually become members, but no timeline was offered.

“That was a big mistake,” said Anders Fogh Rasmussen, NATO secretary-general at the time. “We sent the wrong signal, a signal of disunity, weakness.”

Russia was somewhat mollified, but in August 2008 crushed Georgia in a short war that placed two breakaway Georgian regions firmly under Russian control. Russia already had troops in a breakaway territory in Moldova, Ukraine’s neighbor, after a war that ended in 1992.

Mr. Rasmussen said he believes Mr. Putin wanted to install himself as NATO’s doorkeeper by deploying troops to freeze conflicts in countries that the alliance and the EU would then not want to join their blocs.

A military buildup along the Ukrainian border is further straining ties between Russia and the U.S., after clashes over cybercrime, expulsions of diplomats and a migrant crisis in Belarus. WSJ explains what is deepening the rift between Washington and Moscow. Photo Composite/Video: Michelle Inez Simon

In 2014, Mr. Putin upended NATO’s balancing act by grabbing the Crimean peninsula from Ukraine and fomenting an armed rebellion in its east. It then launched a covert invasion to carve out two separatist territories. Caught off guard by the brashness and violence on its doorstep, NATO begrudgingly began rebuilding forces in Europe.

To deter a possible Russian invasion, members have stationed some 5,000 troops in the Baltic states and Poland. The U.S. rushed troops across the Atlantic to reinforce European allies and established a new Atlantic Command in Norfolk, Va., to protect sea lanes.

Partly under pressure from former President Donald Trump, many European NATO members agreed to buy new weapons systems and meet previous spending commitments, adding billions of dollars to defense budgets. Belgium and Poland struck deals to buy the Pentagon’s newest warplane, the F-35, with Greece and other members also considering the sophisticated aircraft.

The alliance’s planning and weaponry doesn’t appear to have deterred Mr. Putin in Ukraine or other countries outside NATO. And it doesn’t completely reassure current members. Some are arguing over how much economic pressure to put on Moscow, with Germany equivocating over whether it would cancel the nearly completed Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline from Russia if Moscow invades Ukraine again.

NATO’s beefed-up European forces might not scare Mr. Putin, who has much more significant troops stationed in the region, but they do allow him to claim that the alliance threatens Russia, one of the issues Russia wants to address at the NATO meeting Wednesday.

Few military analysts foresee Mr. Putin attacking NATO directly. The stakes for him are much lower in weaker countries such as Ukraine, which he sees as critical to Russia’s security and part of its sphere of influence.

NATO members have provided Ukraine with weapons and equipment, trained its soldiers and offered political support, but the alliance has said it won’t send military forces as there is no mutual defense pact.

Meanwhile, the Russian military buildup continues, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said on Friday, although diplomats say not at a pace that would suggest an imminent invasion.

“The challenge,” he said, “is that when you see this gradual military buildup combined with the threatening rhetoric—



capabilities, the rhetoric and the track record—of course that sends a message that there is a real risk for a new armed conflict in Europe.”

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## **Threatening to invade Ukraine will help Putin at home. Actually invading won't.**

The Washington Post, By Samuel A. Greene and Graeme B. Robertson, December 8, 2021

When he intervenes abroad, the Russian president tends to use proxies or mercenaries, to minimize the impact on public opinion

The two-hour virtual summit between President Biden and Vladimir Putin, held Tuesday in the midst of very real worries about full-scale war, ended as expected: without a breakthrough.

Nothing Putin said — not his concerns about NATO expansion or his claims about Russia's historical ties to its southwestern neighbor — was enough to push the American president off his public commitment to Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity, or off his refusal to let Russia decide whether Ukraine may join NATO. And it remains to be seen whether Biden's threats of sweeping sanctions “and other measures in the event of military escalation,” as the White House readout put it, will be enough to reverse the march of some 175,000 Russian troops to the Ukrainian border — or whether they will spur those forces on still further.

More than at any other time since modern Russia emerged from the debris of the Soviet Union 30 years ago this month, Western policymakers need a clear-eyed view of how and why the Kremlin makes political decisions — which makes it all the more troubling that so much of the debate about the summit and the troops ignores the things we do know, focusing instead on things we cannot know.

There are those, for example, who suggest that the Kremlin's aim is conquest pure and simple, driven by Putin's alleged desire to reconstitute the Soviet Union and his belief — expressed in an essay published under his name in July — that Russia and Ukraine are destined for unity. Others peg Putin's dreams a notch lower, pointing to his assertion that any Western deployment of weapons or soldiers to Ukraine would cross a “red line” and lead to a forceful Russian response. Still others note his speech to the senior Russian diplomatic corps last month, in which Putin spoke approvingly of the “anxiety” that Russian saber-rattling had caused in Western capitals and called for more of the same — seemingly suggesting that all of those other things he said were just for show.

The problem with taking Putin's words seriously is figuring out which of his words were seriously meant. And to do that, it makes sense to look at his political interests. During his 22 years in power, it's become clear that Putin's actions map pretty well onto what will benefit him politically.

Why is Russia acting like it will invade Ukraine?

We know what Putin's domestic political motivations might be. His overriding interest is in maintaining and cultivating his power; that focus often crowds out concerns about the future and his legacy. The archives of Putin's speeches are littered with grand promises and even good ideas, many of which — such as shifting the economy away from natural resources, making the police more accountable to citizens or breaking up powerful monopolies — were abandoned because they threatened his power base. It turns out that, like most politicians, Putin is willing to sacrifice long-term goals for short-term survival.

For all of Putin's vaunted authoritarianism, we know that he relies on popular support to make his power effective and durable. Being popular — or popular enough — means he can spend less money on the police and worry less about challenges from within his own elite. As a result, he doesn't generally do things that he knows the Russian public will disapprove of.

We know that there are limits to Putin's ability to manipulate public opinion. While the Kremlin's TV and online propaganda machines are formidable, they can't change the way people think and feel about the things that matter to them most — especially the economy.

And we know that when Putin does decide to go on an adventure abroad, he tries very hard to minimize the costs to him at home. When possible, this means making his wars short and sweet: Think Russia's five-day invasion of Georgia in 2008, or the virtually bloodless annexation of Crimea in 2014. When protracted war is unavoidable, Putin's Kremlin gets others to fight for him, whether proxies (as in the Donbas, which is part of Ukraine) or mercenaries (in Syria, Libya and the Central African Republic).

Put these things together, and we have a much clearer view from Putin's vantage of what might happen in the current showdown. Whatever ambitions Putin may harbor for restoring Russian greatness or reconquering Ukraine, he is not likely to pursue those goals at the expense of his own power.

Putin's power depends on his popularity. That makes him vulnerable.

But would Russian public opinion reward him for such an adventure?

It is true that the annexation of Crimea gave Putin four years of stratospheric approval ratings of over 80 percent, even as the Russian economy tanked. A large-scale invasion of Ukraine, however, would be very different. It would involve massive numbers of regular Russian troops, not a few thousand “little green men,” proxies or mercenaries, and many of those troops would die. It would bring immediate and sweeping sanctions onto an economy that is already struggling to cope with the pandemic and inflation — at a time when 44 percent of Russians already say the country is headed in the wrong direction. And however much Putin might believe that Russians and Ukrainians should share a government (presumably his), and no matter how much he talks about it on TV, only 17 percent of his compatriots share that opinion. (Even fewer Ukrainians do.)

Does that mean war is impossible? No. But if Putin does invade Ukraine, he will do it without broad public support at home, and in a manner that will almost certainly weaken that support still further. It would break just about every rule in a playbook that has ensured his political longevity.

Clearly, though, detente between the United States and Russia is also not in the cards. As focused as Russians are on the economy, most also see the United States as a geopolitical threat, and Putin has successfully used that threat to marginalize the domestic opposition and independent media, branding them as traitors. Short of disbanding NATO, nothing Biden could say or do would change that state of affairs.

So where does that leave the United States and its allies? What we know about how Putin uses and maintains power suggests that radical shifts — whether toward war or toward reconciliation — are unlikely, which means a long period of confrontation is all but inevitable. Western governments can’t change that reality, but they can learn to live with it. They can insulate themselves and Ukraine from the worst of its effects, and relearn the kind of strategic patience that a protracted conflict requires.

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