

America's Next Proxy War: "Freedom for Ukraine?"

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Abstract

When Russia instituted a full invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, many analysts jumped to find answers on why Putin had invaded Ukraine, and why the United States was so insistent on its moral and economic support towards Ukraine. For many analysts, the immense economic support that the United States gave Ukraine was too good to be true. Just a few decades after the Cold War, it seemed as if another Cold War was among us. Not only had the tensions between Ukraine and Russia reached new highs, but so did relations between the United States and Russia. The realist theory of international relations seems to be the best theory to explain the renewed hostilities between the United States and Russia. First, it appears clear that Russia is attempting to expand its influence through this invasion. Furthermore, many analysts have compared the war in Ukraine to several proxy wars that the United States had been involved in. Although there are a few differences between the current war in Ukraine and other Cold War proxy conflicts like the Vietnam War, Korean War, Chinese Civil War, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the Soviet-Afghan War, there seemed to many analysts that there was a correlation: that the United States was supporting certain sides in these conflicts in order to try and undermine the power of the Soviet Union and current Russia.

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In the book *On War*, the famed military theorist Carl von Clausewitz claimed that defense "is not a simple shield, but a shield made up of well-directed blows" (Clausewitz, 1832, p. 357). Even though he was referring to using this strategy in battle, one can apply the same quotation to broadly explain the Cold War and the renewed tensions between Russia and the United States. When asking random people on the street about how to defend national security, they may simply suggest strengthening a country's borders or increasing homeland security in order to achieve this task. In the world of technology, they may even suggest improving the coding of certain programs to prevent private information from being hacked. Whatever the solution one may offer, they all have one correlation: that to defend the country you must protect itself first, or as Clausewitz describes, create a stiff "shield". Yet, this is not exactly what happened during the Cold War. Indeed, both the United States and the USSR improved their defense spending and military technologies, yet they realized that to defend their own interests and security, they needed to counterattack. Simply put, during the Cold War, the "shield made up of well-directed blows" equated to military funding and aid by the US and the USSR to their respective allies and waging proxy wars between the two rival blocs. Obviously, this is similar to what the US is doing now in regards to Ukraine.

Furthermore, the reason why these two rival blocs were so insistent on defense spending, and insistent on involving itself in "wars that were not theirs" was, and is still because of their desire to be dominant powers. It remains a continuous struggle to be number one on the world stage. This is why the realist theory best explains the current situation between Russia and the United States regarding the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Though it may seem cynical, it seems that the realist argument seems to ring true today. Not only has Vladimir Putin shown

that he is not afraid to squelch dissidents in his own state who protest his ruthless crave for control (Kimmage, 2023), but it is obvious that he is attempting to annex former Russian territories in order to obtain prestige and pride. Why else would a state send so many of their own soldiers to die, while killing thousands of innocent civilians? As the realist would explain it, war is rational if the state is willing to bear the human costs and consequences of what they want to achieve. Certainly, Russia seems willing to bear the cost of its invasion, as it continues to send more Russian males to the front lines. Yet, contrary to what is seen on American mainstream news as a “humanitarian effort to protect democracy,” America and their NATO allies are really supporting Ukraine’s defense efforts in order to increase their power. It seems that America seems intent on funding Ukraine in order to eliminate Russia as a powerful rival. Overall, it is clear that both Russia and the United States are acting on their own self-interests, just as they have always done. It is no surprise that some analysts call this the second Cold War. As a realist theorist would argue, there’s only one cake in the world, and every state is trying to get every slice of it.

What is the Realist Theory of International Relations?

Realism has been an instrumental theory in describing international relations, as it has existed for more than 2,500 years. The Greek historian Thucydides was one of the first realist scholars, as he described the underlying cause of war between Athens and Sparta as a disruption of the balance of power and of the Thucydides trap. According to Thucydides, the rise of Athens and the decline of Sparta created the conflict. Furthermore, the Italian realist thinker Niccolò Machiavelli also became notorious for his pessimistic view of human nature. In his works, most notably *The Prince*, Machiavelli emphasized the importance of a harsh ruler that was feared by the masses, and emphasized a leader’s cunning and a state’s military power to the survival of the

state. Hans Morgenthau was another famed realist scholar, in which he assumed that all states had tendencies to behave as rational unitary actors and believed in the balance of power strategy to prevent future conflicts. Ultimately, this balance of power strategy had a big influence on American foreign policy in the Cold War, which was reflected in George Kennan's suggestions of "containment". Realism is an international relations theory that aligns itself with conservative political ideology. Realists have a cynical view of human nature, and in turn, believe that states that are led by selfish people must be selfish itself. Furthermore, the realist theory of international relations focuses on power politics and how the struggle for power among states influences their behaviors (Genest, 2004).

Realists believe that states should prioritize themselves and their self-interests. Realists believe in mercantilism. Today, realist politicians, like Donald Trump, vow to stop trading with free trade zones because it fails to benefit their countries. They argue that governments have a clear national interest in protecting their domestic industries from foreign competition (Ethridge & Mandelman, 2014). It is important for a state to be economically self-sustaining, because according to realists, they do not have any friends, and every state is trying to pounce on the opportunity to exploit them. Additionally, according to realists, violence should be used if it is in the state's best interest. Since countries are selfish and the international system is a zero-sum game, nations must attempt to be a hegemon in order to promote their own interests, and if they are not powerful, they must align themselves with other hegemons (Genest, 2004).

Another variant of realism is neo-realism. Instead of focusing on the brutality of human nature, neo-realists focus on the anarchic structure of the international system. According to neo-realists, because the international system is self-help, states must ensure their own survival. Furthermore, neo-realists believe that because of this self-help international system, states often

improve their military technology and training in order to preserve national security. However, this in turn creates a security dilemma, where other countries will also increase their defense budgets in order to keep up, creating arms races (Genest, 2004).

History of US-Russian Foreign Relations

The bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II forever changed the outlook of warfare. Even though the Americans kept their atomic bomb projects secret from the Soviet Union during WWII, they were completely unaware of the Soviet infiltration in the Manhattan Project. Even as allies during WWII, both the USSR and the United States were increasingly suspicious of each other. It seemed like the cooperation between the two delayed the inevitable clashing of their two political ideologies. As WWII ended, this tension put on hold was immediately renewed. With each trying to be the world's global power, In 1949, President Harry Truman announced that the Soviets had indeed launched their first ever nuclear weapons test, marking the beginning of the nuclear arms race (Glass, 2017). Not only did both sides create hydrogen bomb projects in the early 1950s, but it is estimated that the United States had built a nuclear arsenal of upwards of 10,000 warheads during the peak of the Cold War (Congressional Research Service, 2008) while the USSR had 40,000 warheads (Faulconbridge, 2023). These numbers clearly show that while each attempted to best the other for nuclear superiority, it created a security dilemma.

Moreover, the hostility displayed by the United States and the Soviet Union were increased by their disagreement over the makeup of post-WWII Europe. While the Communists hoped to establish friendly governments, the United States tried to eliminate Soviet influences from Eastern Europe. However, because of Stalin's aggressiveness, many European states, like Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and more, became under Soviet control by the late 1940s to

the dismay of the Americans and their western allies (Hook & Spanier, 2010, p. 31). More importantly, the division of Nazi Germany into occupation zones, with the western countries gaining control of West Germany, and the Soviets gaining East Germany, was the start of the new era dictated with the nickname, the “Iron Curtain”.

Frustrated with Stalin’s fierce intentions of creating a world regime under Soviet influence, President Truman attempted to increase his “sphere of influence” while limiting the Soviets, with a strategy known as “containment”. George Kennan, a State Department officer, suggested that because the USSR wanted to “destroy the capitalist system,” the US needed to act and try and get countries into their side. In order to achieve this, the United States needed to help rebuild war-ravaged countries with economic aid through the Bretton Woods accords and the Marshall Plan, and political aid in order to establish capitalist and democratic governments that would be favorable to the United States (Hook & Spanier, 2010, p. 46). Furthermore, the establishment of NATO achieved the “united front against communism” that America had hoped for. Both the rush for nuclear dominance, and the struggles of trying to establish different types of political governments display the wants of both trying to create their own ideal versions of the world and the international structure. In short, both the United States and the Soviet Union were acting in their own self interests for unipolarity.

Fast forward to the 1980s, during the Ronald Reagan administration. Although the previous presidential administrations had started to inch towards a policy of detente, Reagan was a staunch anti-communist. Under his administration, he re-established the policy of containment by funding regimes, many of them fascist, in countries like Guatemala to try and deter these states from turning into communist governments. Reagan even increased defense spending to more than \$1 trillion in order to rearm America. Even though Reagan is often heralded in

retrospect of being the savior to officially end the Cold War through his friendly relationship with Mikhail Gorbachev and the INF Treaty, some analysts believe that he could have done more. Reagan was so insistent on his SDI strategy, mocked by many as “Star Wars”, that the talks during the Reykjavik Summit fell through. During those talks, it seemed as if Gorbachev and Reagan were inching close to eliminating all nuclear weapons, but because of Reagan’s insistence on SDI and his delusion that it would work, not much was achieved (Hook & Spanier, 2010, p. 134). Although the INF Treaty was indeed successful, it failed to ban all nuclear weapons, only certain categories, and some analysts claim that it was Reagan’s refusal to compromise that the buildup of arms started again in the 21st century. Yet, on the verge of the 21st century, the USSR collapsed. The Berlin Wall was torn down and it seemed as if Russia was transitioning to a democratic state. However, as recent events have shown, Russia is indeed more of a soft-authoritarian state, and the struggles of power between the US and Russia have renewed hostilities once again.

Even though the Cold War never turned into a direct conflict between the USSR and the United States, the Cold War was really highlighted by a series of proxy wars, where these rival blocs would support their respective allies through military funding and resources with the goal of undermining each other’s factions.

History of Proxy Wars During the Cold War

The first major proxy war during this period was the Chinese Civil War. Even though Western Europe had always been the priority, America realized that it had to try and contain communism in Asia in order to continue its dominant influence in the region. In order to fulfill this self-interest, America sent upwards of \$2 billion to the KMT led by Chiang-Kai Shek after WWII and even sent some Marines during the occupation period, a good amount of whom

became under combat against the Chinese Red Army (Hook & Spanier, 2010, p. 62).

Furthermore, realizing the importance of the region, the Soviets decided to fund the Red Army with military technology and improved training. In fact, one could argue that the Soviets merely involved itself in the Chinese Civil War for its own gain. While Stalin was certainly hoping to avoid a democratic government in China and to gain control in the region, he also helped the Chinese Communist Party in order to use some of the natural resources and technologies that China had for the USSR's own industrial use.

One can look at the Chinese Civil War as a practice round for the first real test: the Korean War. While America tried to establish a unified, democratic Korea, the Soviets actually refused free elections to North Korea in 1947. After the first shots were fired, America grew increasingly paranoid of the domino effect happening with the loss of South Korea. President Truman realized that he needed to stop a unified communist Korea, because if it happened due to American inaction, that communist factions in other states would soon follow. Furthermore, Truman and his staff believed that if America stood idle, their allies would no longer trust in them to negotiate world peace, and in turn, would hurt their globalization efforts and influence. While America first attempted to support the region with aerial and naval reinforcements, General Douglas MacArthur urged President Truman to press on with infantry. The US then converted its military into being part of the UN peacekeeping forces in Korea, with General MacArthur being UN supreme commander. This would fit perfectly within a realist perspective, as the United States attempted to wipe itself clean by using the excuse of being the righteous bringer of peace in order to hide its lust for power and influence (Hook & Spanier, 2010, p. 64). Nevertheless, with direct US intervention, the Soviet Union was forced to not be directly

involved and tried to give the North Koreans aid through giving better aircraft, weapons, and tanks.

Even as the so-called ideal model of democracy of the world, America certainly falls short of upholding its beliefs when they become in conflict with its self-interests. The initial American backed Cuban leader, Fulgencio Batista was extremely corrupt and had extremely fascist tendencies. When he was overthrown by Fidel Castro, a leader who vowed to reform land and improve living conditions for all, America immediately tried to overthrow him. Again, it was America's self interest that pushed them to overthrow Castro, as the majority of the good Cuban land and oil were in the hands of American corporations. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union successfully encouraged Castro to turn from a socialist democracy into dictatorship, Again, following realist theory, the Soviets acted on their own self-interest in regards to Cuba. Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev realized the importance of having an ally in the Americas and in the Western Hemisphere, because he understood that it would disrupt American hegemony and dominance in the region (Hook & Spanier, 2010, p. 89). Even by daring gambles by both sides, which included the Bay of Pigs and the construction of Cuban missile launch sites with the help of the Soviets, a direct conflict was narrowly avoided.

The Vietnam War is a more complex conflict to analyze, because the one Americans refer to was really the second installment of conflicts between North Vietnam and South Vietnamese. During the First Indochina War, Hồ Chí Minh's communists successfully fought for independence from the French, where an agreement was signed on July 21, 1954, dividing Vietnam into the North and the South. Again, with the failure of the Chinese Civil War looming over the heads of American policymakers, they believed that they needed to intervene during the Vietnam War in order to evade a domino effect which would almost completely erase their

influence in the Eastern Hemisphere. By considering Vietnam as an issue regarding national security, America sent more than 500,000 soldiers to fight along with the Southern Vietnamese. The USSR, slowly gauging what seemed to be an American failure in Vietnam, signed pacts with North Vietnam to provide crucial logistics support and to act as a main supplier for their war effort (Hook & Spanier, 2010, p. 94). This Soviet support, along with disastrous problems on the battlefield and the home-front, led to an American embarrassment in Vietnam and a hasty military withdrawal. The intense commitment by America to fight a “war that was not theirs” was caused in order to contain Soviet influence. Obviously, the realist theory heavily applies to explaining American involvement in Vietnam, as America believed that violence and casualty were a necessary means to an end.

Finally, when studying proxy conflicts during the Cold War, one must also consider the aggressive actions by the Soviets in Afghanistan. The Soviets invaded Afghanistan in 1979 because of its fear that the state would turn to the support of America and its western allies. Furthermore, the geography of Afghanistan made it extremely strategic. President Carter’s “national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, suggested it stemmed from ‘the age-long dream of Moscow to have direct access to the Indian Ocean’” (Baker, 2019, para. 13). Again, the Soviets support the realist theory of war as a rational act, and prove that Ukraine is not the first time it had invaded a country out of strategic and political interest. Therefore, it should not be surprising that President Carter was an extremely vocal dissident of the invasion, calling it “the greatest threat to world peace since World War II” (Hook & Spanier, 2010, p. 129). In retaliation, President Carter boycotted the 1980 Moscow Olympics and encouraged the Senate to block the ratification of the SALT II treaty.

All of these conflicts discussed above, and the American policy of “containment” further amplify the accuracy of the realist theories when describing the tensions and decisions made during the Cold War. However, realism and the concept of proxy wars can also be applied to the current war in Ukraine, based on Ukraine’s history and its past conflicts with Russia and the Soviet Union.

History of Ukraine Far-Right Nationalism, NATO, and the Build-up of the War

The hostilities between Russia and Ukraine could arguably be pinpointed on a single event: the Holodomor. According to the University of Minnesota (n.d.), Stalin’s intentionally plotted famine towards Ukraine killed more than 3.9 million Ukrainians. Stalin did this, to no one’s surprise, in order to gain control over the state. Before he had taken power, Ukraine had initially fought, unsuccessfully, against the USSR Red Army to maintain their independence. After being incorporated into the USSR, it stayed a culturally vibrant state, with its own language and traditions being promoted. Stalin felt endangered by this cultural sovereignty and grew increasingly paranoid of a possible revolution against him in Ukraine. To do this, Stalin used force, with secret police and the military, to undermine dissidents, torture and kill them and their families, and to strip Ukraine of its food and arable land. It is because of Stalin’s hunger and lust for control in Ukraine that caused trauma and future animosity towards Russia and the USSR for generations to come.

To further advance the realist argument that the United States got involved in Ukraine because of their self-interest for power, one must briefly understand the history of Ukrainian far-right nationalistic movements and their connection with the US. First, in the mid 1900s all the way to near the start of the 21st century, “the CIA brought Ukrainian fascists to the US and worked with them to undermine the Soviet Union in Ukraine, running sabotage and propaganda

operations” (Lauria, 2023, para. 2). Moreover, during the 2004 Ukrainian presidential election, the US sponsored an overturning of the election, known as the Orange Revolution, for the outcome to favor their ally Viktor Yuschenko, a known far-right extremist, over the Russian backed candidate Viktor Yanukovich (Lauria, 2023). These two actions alone show that America does not care about promoting freedom and democracy like its politicians often claim, but rather will support causes that undermine their enemies who threaten their rank in the world leaderboard. Furthermore, the influential Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists was led by Stepan Bandera, a leader who although was the face of the anti-Semitic massacres that included Babi Yar, was, and still is considered a hero to many Ukrainians (Lopatonok, 2016). In fact, the flag of the UON-B, which was Bandera’s faction of the group, was held by many protesters during the Euromaidan protests.

NATO was initially created by the United States in cooperation with its western allies to create a bloc that would defend each other against the USSR and its communist bloc. NATO expansion began after the fall of the USSR in two parts: in 1999 with the incorporation of Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic and in 2004 with the addition of Baltic states (The University of Chicago, 2015). Thus, NATO was evidently expanding near Russia, practically creeping on its border. These actions can be seen as selfish by realist theorists as it was clear that even with Russia’s clear opposition, the United States and its allies seemed focused on trying to threaten Russia and embarrass it. In fact, promises were made by US policymakers to Gorbachev that NATO would not expand eastward in return for a unified Germany and the US was blatantly breaking its promise. The final straw for Russia came when NATO announced in 2008 that both Ukraine and Georgia would become future members. By forcing its way into NATO, Ukraine’s actions support the realist theory that states that non-hegemonic states should ally itself with

other powerful nations. Additionally, Russia immediately invaded Georgia and fought a victorious five-day war, proving the realist notion that states use violence rationally (Hoh, 2023).

In November 2013, Ukrainian President Yanukovich seemed increasingly close to forming an association agreement with the EU. However, Putin was opposed to this idea and fumed over the fact that he was not involved in the deal. He counter-offered a package that was favorable to Ukraine to Yanukovich, which he accepted, and in turn, chose to suddenly turn down the association agreement with the EU (Lauria, 2023). Instantly, Ukrainian nationalists flamed Yanukovich, claiming that he was a “puppet” of Putin, and started the protests that would later be coined as “Euromaidan”. Over a period of three months, resulting in hundreds of casualties, Euromaidan turned into a success story for protestors as Yanukovich fled Ukraine (The University of Chicago, 2015).

In retaliation, Russia slowly moved and took over their military checkpoints in Crimea, incorporating it into their state. To a realist, this would seem like a rational act. According to Mearsheimer, because Russia is a global superpower, it obviously would feel threatened if the United States attempted to reel in one of their strategically important lands, and further makes the connection to America’s Monroe Doctrine, stating Putin’s actions matched with America’s actions regarding balance of power (The University of Chicago, 2015). Sure, Putin could have ignored everything that had happened and could have decided to let Ukraine and Crimea go, but because it is of strategic importance and would weaken Russia’s power, he chose the opposite. The United States on the other hand, along with its NATO allies, incited this conflict because of its urge to gain power. In fact, as Mearsheimer argued, Ukraine is not of vital strategic interest to America, and it seems puzzling, other than its lust for control, on why America would even care

or attempt to intervene in this crisis. Therefore, the theory of realism explains the build-up to the war in Ukraine today.

Trump and Biden's Foreign Policy Towards Russia

Trump's relationship, and as a result, his attitudes toward Russia and Putin, are extremely controversial. There were rumors which became confirmed allegations, that Russians had hacked into election systems in order to help Donald Trump win his presidential election in 2016. In fact, during the Helsinki Summit, Trump was quoted as stating that he was certain that Putin did not meddle in the election because Putin had assured him so. In addition, Trump has been criticized for speaking highly of Putin. He had been seemingly neutral on the Crimea crisis, even suggesting that it should probably be in Russia's hands. Even so, to the abhorrence of his supporters, he seemingly praised the Russian invasion in Ukraine, by calling it a "smart" move by Putin (Kirkpatrick et al., 2022). However, an impactful decision Trump had made when he backed out of the INF and Open Skies treaties (Hoh, 2023). Trump accused the Russians of failing to hold their end of the bargain, and in doing so, started a policy of nuclear mutually assured destruction all over again. In a closer look of these policies, Trump seems to contradict himself. He seemed content with trying to at least ally himself with Putin or be on cooperating terms. On the other hand, he seemingly rejected Putin outright, accusing him and Russia of non-compliance. Realists argue that Trump backed out of these nuclear treaties in order to show the Russians that he too, was not afraid of using force and destruction in order to strengthen his power.

Biden, as mounting video evidence displays, is not the same sharp senator he was years ago. Certainly, his gaffes during speeches that address the Ukraine crisis show this, as in a speech referring to Putin, he is quoted to have said, "for God's sake, this man cannot remain in

power” and saying that he was a “butcher” (Zurcher, 2022). As Zurcher stated, it was an extremely dangerous line that Biden was walking on, and that by explicitly supporting the removal of an adversary was completely undiplomatic and dangerous. Obviously, this is contrary to Trump’s reluctance of actively denouncing Putin, but concluding from previous actions, Biden has also seemed to be willing to cooperate with Putin on certain issues. Not only has he tried to reach out to Putin regarding cooperative solutions to climate change, and Russia and America worked together to extend the New START Treaty until 2026, until Putin suspended his cooperation in 2023 (Steinhauer & Crowley, 2020). Maybe ironically, the icy relationship between Biden and Putin can be best described by a face to face meeting the two had in 2011, where Biden claimed himself to have jokingly said, “Mr. Prime Minister, I’m looking into your eyes. I don’t think you have a soul,” with Putin said to have teased back by stating, “We understand each other” (Steinhauer & Crowley, 2020). Even though the two were playfully poking each other, they both allude to the main point that the two of them are dictating their foreign policies toward whatever would benefit the interests of their respective states.

Trump and Biden’s Foreign Policy Towards Ukraine

Trump’s attitudes on Ukraine, similar to Russia, has been clouded by scandal. Phone calls between him and Ukrainian president Zelensky that were released revealed that he had pleaded with Zelensky to investigate Hunter Biden’s business dealings. Also, by sending Ukraine hundreds of millions of dollars in weapons and training support, many realists claim that he was at fault for tightening tensions at the border (Hoh, 2023). He continues to make absurd claims about Ukraine, seemingly praising Putin for the invasion and claiming that he could broker peace between Russia and Ukraine in 24 hours if he was given the chance. In a recent interview, when asked if he would continue to help support Ukraine if elected in 2024, Trump stated, “Really, I

don't know... I think it depends on the opinion of Americans, of your society... It's their support. It's their money. It depends on them" (Bronston & Welker, 2023). It just seems as if Trump is content with switching policies on Ukraine if it means that in his own opinion, America's, and his interests would always be considered first.

President Biden has shown an increasingly determined stance to back Ukraine from "Russian aggression". Not only does Biden's visit to Kyiv to meet with Zelensky show this, but the numbers back it up too. Since his administration, the US has given \$76.8 billion dollars of bilateral aid to Ukraine, \$46.6 billion of which are targeted towards supporting Ukraine's military. In addition to pressing NATO European allies to giving more financial and military support to Ukraine, the United States have provided Ukraine with advanced body armor, missile launchers, hundreds of field artillery, a few thousand tanks, thousands of ground support vehicles, anti-air guns, drones and helicopters, and even advanced radars and satellites. The evidence should show that it is not a surprise that many Americans, including Republican voters and politicians, believe that the United States and the Biden Administration is spending too much of its resources into Ukraine. Biden seems so committed to Ukraine that the \$76.8 billion of aid he has given them is triple that of NASA's allotted budget in 2022, and is just \$4 billion less than Virginia's state budget in 2023. Furthermore, the US is spending nearly as much money on Ukraine as the total of the top 20 donor EU countries combined (Masters & Merrow, 2023). With all these American funds in Ukraine, it is clear that Biden is committing fully to trying to undermine Russian success. Even though he is not using violence to gain what he wants, he is still using strategies similar to American proxy wars in the past to try and undermine Russian power. However fuzzy President Biden's decision making is at his old age, it is clear that he still understands the importance of power politics.

Conclusion

As shown in the study of the American involvement in proxy wars during the Cold War, there are many connections to those and the current war in Ukraine. Both the US and Russia realize that a “shooting war” between the two would not serve their best interests and would be an extremely devastating loss of life for both sides. In doing so, they have decided to settle their conflicts through circuitous confrontations, by fighting proxy wars and funding and supporting coups and wars to allies around the world to undermine the other’s influence. Through the realist lens of international relations, every indirect confrontation between the United States and the former USSR and current Russia can be summed up with two words: power politics.

Only time will tell whether the US legislature would continue to fund Ukraine’s efforts, or whether a peace negotiation between Putin and Zelensky would be reached. In the renewed age of nuclear mutually assured destruction and of proxy warfare, maybe coining the current situation as “A New Cold War” is a reasonable statement after all. Perhaps this whole conflict can be summed up by Sun Tzu, who seemingly predicted America’s current policy more than 2,000 years ago when he wrote in *The Art of War*, that “the greatest victory is that which requires no battle.”

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