

The Kievan Dialogue:

Thucydides in Eastern Europe.

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In the aftermath of the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, the world witnessed how nuclear superpowers ought to diffuse crises. A mutual compromise that would ensure the interests of both parties, as well as, maintain their prestige and respect among the global order must be found (Beebe, 2022). Unfortunately, the world is currently witnessing what happens when such a compromise is nowhere to be found. The Russian invasion of Ukraine continues to rage on, and as each day passes by, the intensity and brutality escalate. Therefore, one must analyze why the Russian Federation and Ukraine, backed by NATO/Western powers, failed to reach a compromise and how can that situation change? With hopes that once the compromise is found, de-escalation can commence.

Russia's geopolitical interests seek to maintain Ukraine's neutrality regarding membership into NATO and the European Union. If Ukraine were to join NATO, it would cause Belarus's position to be indefensible as it would be surrounded on three sides by NATO states. Additionally, the topography of the Great European Plain places the security of the Russian state at risk. The defense of the Russian-Ukrainian border, which is nearly 2300 kilometers of open plains, would be highly problematic for Russia (Piaget, 2022). As well as the military considerations, the Russian state seeks to maintain Ukraine's reserves and strategic commodities outside of the influence-sphere of the EU and the west at large (Shehadi, 2022). However, neutrality by Ukraine would be and has been perceived as a pro-Russian stance by NATO/the West. Western states view Russian pushback against NATO enlargement as an attempt by the Russian Federation to reclaim former USSR and Russian Empire territories.



Both sides view each other's actions as hostile while viewing their own actions as simply shoring up defenses. That being said, the reason a compromise could not be reached until this moment is due to the weakness of Russia's position. The Russian state seeks to dictate a sovereign nation's policies, and are neither able to garner major support from the international community to do so nor are they given free rein to do as they please. The Russian Federation was denied the state of exception reserved to superpowers. This is indicative of Russia's increased isolationism on the global stage. Furthermore, the fact that a threat of violence was not enough to find a suitable compromise signals a decline in their global standing. Currently, the Russian state is seeking to maintain Ukraine's neutrality, but have nothing to bargain with other than their military might and the leveraging European dependence on Russian gas. The Russian state is currently demanding the payment for the gas to be in the Russian Ruble and threatening to halt exports if payment is not in Rubles.

Russian concerns regarding the enlargement of NATO are well-founded; however, they have no means to stop that from happening except through a show of aggression, which in turn emboldens the calls for a greater NATO presence in Eastern Europe (Carpenter, 2022). It is worth noting that after more than a month of conflict, NATO is unwilling to directly enter the war in Ukraine. This lack of action by NATO places question marks regarding Russian concerns that NATO would accept Ukrainian membership anytime in the near future. President Zelensky repeatedly signaled his frustration with NATO's outright refusal of implementing a no-fly zone over Ukraine. After all, such a move would place NATO in a direct confrontation with Russian forces. However, NATO is still supplying backing to Ukraine through providing weapons and



intelligence (Stigler and Faulkner, 2022). In addition to NATO's support, other forms of support towards the Ukrainian position have taken place. Economic sanctions from across the globe that have been levied upon the Russian economy. These sanctions have almost entirely isolated Russia from the world economy, and the Ukrainian government maintains that further sanctions would be required.

It would seem that Ukraine was promised the backing of NATO if an invasion were to occur, but it did not know the extent of that support. The presence of NATO's backing may have emboldened Ukraine in the prelude to the invasion. However, as the likelihood of NATO-led actions diminishes and sanctions on the Russian economy take their toll, negotiations between the two nations could be more fruitful. Russian demands have revolved around three main issues: 1) the recognition of Crimea as Russian territory, 2) the recognition of the Republics of Donetsk and Lugansk as independent states, and 3) the guarantees that Ukraine will not enter any bloc. Russia has exerted ever-increasing pressure in an attempt to secure these demands from the Ukrainian government. What Russia can offer Ukraine in return for these demands other than a ceasefire, military withdrawal, and future security guarantees that would be ensured by a third-party remains to be seen. Interestingly, Ukrainian forces' staunch defense may encourage them to launch a counteroffensive or change their dispositions towards negotiations. They might believe that there is no need to give any significant concessions to the Russians. Such a development may result in further escalation by the Russian army and would result in them using more drastic measures as a last-ditch effort to secure some concessions. If Russia fails to receive any serious gains from this invasion their position as a regional player would be dealt a major blow.



A concession could be reached if the Russian forces take-over Mariupol, the port city in which the Neo-Nazi Azov Battalion is stationed. If they do so, the rhetoric about de-Nazification could be used to save face within Russia. After which, a referendum can be put in motion so that the citizens of Crimea and the Donbas region can decide their future. In most recent developments, Zelensky has pointed out that any concession that would take place would be made after a nationwide referendum (Wood, 2022). From the Russian side, a ceasefire, troop withdrawal, security guarantees, and reparations for the war could be offered in return.

The sanctions that have been unleashed upon Russia serve as a warning to any potential power that might seek to contend against Western hegemony. After more than a century, it would seem that Woodrow Wilson's claim of sanctions as tools "that brings a nation to its senses just as suffocation removes from the individual all inclinations to fight." (Mulder, 2022) seem to be more apt than ever. The sanctions have shown the need for alternatives to the western digital infrastructure that allows our current societies to function as they do. It would seem that China's choice of developing its own alternatives to SWIFT, Visa, and Mastercard places it as one of the, if not the only, pole for possible opposition to Western hegemony. In response to the sanctions, the Russian state has issued a decree allowing Russian companies to no longer compensate owners of patents, utility models, and industrial designs from unfriendly countries i.e., the west (Bonadio and Trapova, 2022), effectively legalizing piracy. This attack on intellectual property rights on the heels of a global pandemic in which vaccine intellectual property rights have been a highly contested topic (Furlong, 2022) could alter how states view and interact with intellectual property rights.



“Those in positions of power do what their power permits, while the weak have no choice but to accept it.” (Thucydides, 2019) Two-thousand and five-hundred years ago, the famed Athenian general and historian Thucydides’ analysis of the siege of Melos remains as valuable as ever. The Russian state assumed its power would permit it to invade Ukraine and secure its interests. While that has been the case so far, this might be the last time that the Russian state’s power would permit it to do so. However, there is nothing more dangerous than a once powerful entity realizing that the last embers of its powers are slowly fading away.



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