**Putin’s invasion of Ukraine – Did Diplomacy Fail?**

**BACKGROUND**

* Sviatoslav Yurash going to meet him.
* Sviatoslav on Sky News getting his AK47 – also appeared on loads of other channels.
* Putin’s speech saying Ukraine has no right to exist etc.
* This proves Putin didn’t care about NATO – that was just an excuse.
* I heard this back in November 2021, listening to Monocle podcast, and experts said Putin doesn’t recognise Ukraine’s existence – how I thought this seemed ridiculous, but that obviously, war won’t happen.
* This also gelled with what Sviatoslav told me about Putin seeing only Russians, and not recognising the nationhood of Ukraine or its differences from Russia. This ridiculous belief may not have been believed by the West – certainly not as a premise for war – but after what Putin has done, it’s clear that this was his angle all along, and he has shared these insane views with the world.
* Used to imagine how war would look in modern world, with internet etc. and so many cameras watching – it’d be impossible, because of the bad press. That’s one of the main reasons I didn’t expect Putin to invade, especially when he was warned by Biden about what would happen if he did invade.
* But, he did invade after all, using as a pretext the two ‘republics’ in Donetsk and Luhansk, where Ukrainians have been fighting Russians and their proxies since 2014, when the Russians invaded Crimea and annexed it.
* Let’s talk about these ‘republics’ – which are ruled by FSB agents and military officers from Russia. Putin’s strategy in using these as his excuse for invasion – and using the ‘genocide’ of Russians by Ukrainians – exposes his entire strategy in the region. It was as Ukrainians had always insisted – pro-Russian sentiments in the region were never strong enough to actually lead to the situation on their own.
* Without direct Russian intervention there, these regions would have remained Ukrainian, as would the Crimea. If Putin wants a change, call for a plebiscite supervised by the international community – it’s not hard. Those that claim Crimea is X% Russian miss the point – a demographic imbalance is no excuse for war, which Russia launched in 2014.
* And that brings us to the cause of that war – the Euromaidan protests, which toppled the pro-Russian President Victor Yanukovych from power. Presiding over one of the most corrupt regimes in Europe, Y was deposed once before, but when protesters were shot at and killed, his regime was toppled and Y was forced into exile.
* This part of the story is ignored by those that prefer to claim the US was behind the revolution, as if Ukrainians didn’t want to remove themselves from Russia’s orbit on their own volition.
* Sources, normally on the right, have claimed that the revolution was all America’s doing, thereby delegitimising Zelensky’s current regime, and doing much of Putin’s work for him.
* Considering how awful Putin has been in the last fortnight particularly, should we be surprised that Ukrainians (with a better grasp of the realities of the situation than us in the West) should desire to distance themselves from him?
* Considering this bad blood which boiled as Ukrainians went to the polls in early 2019, we may wonder whether Ukrainians saw this war coming? In a sense, yes, but Ukrainians have been under Putin’s shadow since 2014. They’ve had to deal with threats of escalation regularly, and have had no choice but to carry on with their lives. Children born at the time of the invasion would be nearing their eighth birthday, to put it into context.
* I remember in Ukraine how collection tins for the Ukrainian army were everywhere, and I was told that Ukrainians want to be free of Russia – I was left under no impression that it would be otherwise. I was also left under the strict impression that Ukrainians would fight for this belief, and fight tenaciously.
* But even I was not confident in their prospects when the soldiers massing on their border passed 100k, and then 150k. Like many watching on, I assumed Putin would use this threat as leverage. Because to invade would be anathema to the current international order. Not unless Ukraine attacked him first, which they were obviously never going to do, notwithstanding the efforts to provoke them in the border areas.
* Remember when both Putin and Lavrov accused the West of fomenting hysteria regarding the Russian intentions towards Ukraine? Remember when we were told that the idea of Russia invading Ukraine was ‘insane’.
* Remember where Russians shelled Ukrainian positions for like a week, hoping for retaliation which they could use as a pretext? Ukraine didn’t take the bait. Putin should have known then that he was dealing with a wily foe, but this didn’t suit his narrative, so here we are.
* Putin’s belief system is central to what’s happening now; without him, none of this would be possible. His warped outlook has brought this war to being, not NATO, not the US, and certainly not Ukraine.
* We look at the numerous faux pas which have emerged since the conflict began; Twitter has proved a treasure trove, where we got to read about a particularly interesting leaked document commissioned by a Russian news agency in the event of a Russian victory. The leak, from 26 Feb, announces a new era in Ukrainian relations, bound unmistakably to Russia. As was customary, the document barely acknowledged the existence of Ukrainians as a people, and the proposed post-war arrangement determined that portions of Ukraine would be divvied up between Russia and Belarus.
* Among some of the more egregious extracts from this document were as follows: The main issue was “the complex of a divided nation and a complex of national humiliation, when the Russian House began to lose part of its foundation (the Kievan one) and then was forced to reconcile itself to the existence of two states of not one but two peoples.” The answer? Kill Ukraine's sovereignty. “Now this problem no longer exists: Ukraine has returned to Russia. This doesn’t mean that its statehood will be liquidated but it will be re-structured, re-established and returned to its natural condition as part of the Russian world… “…In which borders and in what form.. (through the CSTO, and the Eurasian Union or as part of the Union State between Russia and Belorussia)?—questions like this will be decided when we have placed a firm full stop to the history of a Ukraine as an anti-Russian entity.” The author moves to the West. “Did anyone in.. Paris and Berlin, seriously believe that Moscow would give up Kiev?… the West as a whole, and Europe in particular, lacked the strength to keep Ukraine within its sphere of influence, let alone to take Ukraine for itself." "the rest of the world sees and understands perfectly well: this is a conflict between Russia and the West, this is a response to the geopolitical expansion of the Atlanticists, this is Russia's recovering its historical space and place in the world." The author of this Twitter thread and the one who drew attention to the contents of this document, Thomas de Waal, concluded: “Let me add one caveat. We can’t know that the article reflects the Kremlin’s intentions, only that a big news agency commissioned it to celebrate victory—and it “rhymes” with Putin’s big speech last week. Let's hope other views prevail.”[[1]](#footnote-1)
* This was deleted soon afterwards, but it shows how Russia would annex and then justify this annexation to the world – incredibly, this document offers no new excuses, just the same old blatantly false version of history spewed by Putin. This is as far as Russia’s war plan goes – it’s one of the more pathetic efforts seen by aggressive states in the past. Louis XIV put more effort in than this.

**DIPLOMACY**

* Having built this context, we should address the question in this episode – did diplomacy fail in Ukraine. Many of you seem to think so. I’ve received countless messages over the last fortnight stating that diplomacy has in fact failed. Let’s clear something up very quickly – did diplomacy fail, leading us to where we are now?
* Diplomacy failed on 24 February 2022 in the same way that diplomacy failed on 1 September 1939. It failed not because it was inadequate, but because a dictator decided it should fail. Just like no alternatives save Polish supplication would have satisfied Hitler, no alternatives save the supplication and entire annexation of Ukraine into Russia would have satisfied Putin. That’s how messed up he is as an individual.
* Thanks to leaked documents, we know that the post-war plan envisioned Ukraine’s dissolution. What would happen to people like Sviatoslav, or Zelensky, or anyone else in this scenario? Exile, imprisonment, or worse. One thing I know for sure, neither of those men nor their colleagues would ever have been content to serve a puppet regime for Moscow.
* Does this war highlight the worthlessness of diplomacy? Actually, no, quite the opposite. While few real barriers can stand in the way of an aggressive dictator attacking a non-aligned state, what happens after the fact demonstrates that diplomacy is the most effective weapon in the west’s arsenal.
* Diplomacy is the reason why Zelensky has shot from half a million twitter followers, to nearly five million followers, to give one example. Diplomacy has enabled the world, with some gross exceptions, to rally against this despicable act of aggression on a scale and with a determination few could have thought possible. Diplomacy has cut Russia off from the world’s finance, from its sport, from its culture, from its information, from its trade.
* As a consequence, the rouble has fallen to a record low – a pattern which followed each successive act of aggression by Putin in 2008, 2014 and now 2022.
* Diplomacy has engendered a determination to chase down the oligarchs that grant Putin his power. Diplomacy has drawn the UN together; with 141 nations condemning Russia’s invasion, and 35 abstaining.
* Remarkably, it has shown clearly how much teeth the EU has; previously cast – mostly by Brexiteers – as a economic or political bloc, with fundamental military weaknesses, the Russian invasion has empowered the EU to tap into its military capabilities, proving what has sometimes been cautiously suggested – that the EU is a sleeping military giant, which has just been awoken from its slumber.
* Nor was the EU alone the only state to feel this reality; Germany increased its % of GDP spending on defence from 0.5% to 2%, a fourfold increase which had been requested for decades. Then there’s the non-aligned neighbours of Russia in the Baltic; neither Finland nor Sweden is under any illusions about what it means to be outside of NATO. Their concerns were immediately confirmed when Russia threatened each state with consequences if it joined NATO, and Russian planes violated Swedish airspace.
* Clearly, since the signal failure of diplomacy to stop Putin – not that it realistically could – diplomacy has become the sword wielded by all concerned states in the world. As I suspected, the aggressor was bound to suffer in the internet age, where people are more well-informed than ever before.
* Sanctions continue to bite on the average Russian citizen, and while debate rages over whether these sanctions will really hurt Putin or give him pause for thought, we can see he is furious by the language he uses to describe them, claiming the sanctions represented an act of war against Russia. I really wish a Western figure had responded – deadly serious – to claim that these weren’t sanctions, but were a ‘special economic operation’. Beat Russia over the head with its own BS propaganda, and see how they like it.
* Sanctions as they are will not end the war – only the Ukrainians can realistically do that, but they definitely make a difference. Economic life in Russia will become increasingly hard, and Russia’s options will dwindle dramatically. Something which will truly damage the Russian economy further would be the total ban of any imports of Russian oil or gas, which the Poles are now increasingly calling for. Painful as this may be, I agree with the sentiments. Energy prices are already high anyway, and we know for a fact that any money the Russians make will be spent on the war, so let’s cut them off from as many opportunities to make money as possible.
* It’s also true that moral sanctions have an effect. For the last several days, loud protests have been ongoing outside the Russian embassy in Ireland, demanding Ireland expel Russian ambassador Yuri Filatov. This ambassador earlier decried claims that Russia was about to invade, which makes him either a useful idiot for Putin or a liar, complicit in his crimes. As far as I’m concerned, there’s no space for him here.
* Other Irish folks agree – red paint was thrown on the outside of the Embassy by an Irish priest, and the other day a truck reversed through the embassy’s gates. The Russian Embassy in Ireland had the temerity to claim that the act violated the Vienna convention regarding the security of embassies, and says that the Gardai stood idly by. I really wish our political leadership had the balls to criticise the Russian Embassy for hysteria. It wasn’t a truck ramming your gates, Mr Ambassador, it was a special parking operation. Maybe if we fight ludicrous claim with ludicrous claim, Russia’s diplomatic personnel might come to terms with isolated they are. If even the Irish hate you, you must be doing something wrong.
* Earlier in the year, before the invasion was official, the Russians talked of their intentions to have naval manoeuvres off the Irish coast. It was far enough from our borders that it couldn’t be legally criticised, but nobody was under any real illusions as to why they chose the moment of heightened tensions to do something like this. Fortunately, after some intense pressure from Irish fishermen, yes really, the Russians decided they would cancel the manoeuvres.
* The last few months have made us Irish think sincerely about our proclaimed policy of neutrality, which was really a policy of convenience, since it meant we didn’t have to invest all that much in Ireland’s armed forces. I think there is space for debate on the future of this policy, but there’s obviously no point in a sudden shift in policy before we invest in our armed forces first. Fun fact, I actually joined the Army Reserve all the way back in 2009. Cuts to Ireland’s military were so bad back then that my friend Sean, of talk episode fame, couldn’t join up with me because his application was handed in a week after the cut off. That should go to show where our priorities lie in Irish defence. Though I think it goes without saying that if Russia did attack Ireland, whether we’re in NATO or not wouldn’t matter – Irish Americans, let alone Ireland’s EU membership, would insulate us from such threats. Still, the experience of the last few months has been eye opening. I’m sure Ukrainians believed Russia wouldn’t attack due to the outrage it would cause. Perhaps I’m being naïve, and a country is only as safe as its military makes it.
* Back to the diplomacy issue though. Discussions about removing ambassadors on an EU-wide level would go some way towards driving home the practical diplomatic isolation for Russia. It would be more effective to maintain the channel between Macron and Putin, and close the other channels.
* Increasing the economic, cultural, financial isolation of Russia is the best way to show our disapproval. All of this is possible through diplomacy, and I have to say, after watching Trump bumble through his hideous foreign policy of the last few years, my heart swells with pride to see Blinken and von der Leyen standing side by side, confirming the values which it was always obvious Europe and America hold in common. Bet the UK feels pretty silly now?

**CONSEQUENCES**

* Long term, how do I rate Ukraine’s prospects? To begin with, it’s plain that NATO is becoming more militarily involved. Thousands of volunteers have joined Ukraine’s foreign legion. Countless caches of military equipment and weaponry have been provided to Ukraine’s armed forces, and we’ve seen evidence that these supplies have made a real difference.
* In the last few hours, it was confirmed that the US would not block NATO efforts to supply the Ukrainians with planes, suggesting that a way around the riskier no-fly zone idea has been found. If, in the next few days and weeks, foreign fighter jets begin to arrive in Ukraine, thus tipping the balance of air superiority away from Russia, this would reduce even further the advantages Russia enjoys, and perhaps cause their advance to stall altogether.
* There is also something to be said for the Ukrainian determination – a statistic which rarely shows up when comparing the Russian and Ukrainian forces side by side, but which is obviously of great importance. Even with their military superiority, which was waved in our faces for so long, Ukrainians have doubled down.
* Looking at the situation objectively, I do not see how the Russians will take the country, let alone hold it. I’ve seen estimates of anywhere between half a million to 800k soldiers that would be needed to occupy Ukraine and combat the resistance which would be guaranteed. As Sviatoslav said, removing Zelensky would not remove Ukraine – in fact I believe if the President were assassinated, his loss would galvanise the Ukrainians even further, and would potentially remove some of the final barriers towards direct military intervention from the west.
* Of course there are concerns – what if that convoy stalled outside Kiev actually wakes up and moves into the capital. If they do so, they’ll be forced to confront a well-armed and well-prepared populace, fighting for their homes, and on their own land. Stinger missiles, Molotov cocktails, and AK47s in the hundreds of thousands, the Russians will be forced to take each city street by street, a difficult task for any professional army, but in a situation like this, conscripts will be effectively useless, and the more expensive mercenaries or veterans will have to be brought in by a regime which is in dire financial straits.
* What if Putin fulfils his threat to use nuclear weapons? Unlikely. Putin is clearly addled with a warped nationalist ideology, but I don’t believe he’s insane enough to begin a mutually destructive race to a nuclear winter. I would instead see his threats as a symptom of his weakness.
* The real fear is that the violence, the carnage, the losses, will all get worse. This isn’t helped by Russian efforts to maintain their ridiculous façade that all Ukrainians are really Russians – seen in their insistence that humanitarian corridors must lead back into R or Belarus. Imagine that – imagine demanding that yes, civilians can safely escape the conflict, but only if they seek refuge in the open arms of the country that is currently attacking them?
* It’s because of policies like these Russian efforts have been so heavily criticised. Perhaps Russians don’t care how vilified their country is. Perhaps the Russian government believes they’ve gone too far with this fantasy to back out now, but one thing is certain – the longer this goes on, and the more damage that is done to Ukraine on Putin’s authority, the more untenable the Russian position becomes. The more obvious it is – if it wasn’t blatantly obvious yet – that Ukrainians would rather die than become one big Russia, the more likely it is that these stark facts might filter back to the Russian people, now cut off from all sources of information save for the state propaganda organs.
* Nor should these organs be underestimated – they’ve been so effective that reports have emerged of Russian parents not believing their children living in Ukraine when they said bombs were falling outside. Perhaps because of the dominance of state propaganda, uncomfortable parallels with the Nazis and with Hitler are inevitable. The irony isn’t lost on us history fans, that the same nation of people that resisted Hitler’s forces so tenaciously and ferociously didn’t seem to anticipate a similar degree of passion for nationhood in their neighbours.
* Hopefully what this episode has done is clarify several facts, even those facts that might be painful. Sometimes in history, an event happens which is as plain a case for right versus wrong as can be.
* We must be on guard against those that would try to confuse the picture – this was never about NATO, just like it was never about false claims of genocide in the disputed territories, and it’s not about evidence of nuclear weaponry which Russians are desperately trying to manufacture. This is about a powerful, aggressive, dictatorial regime attacking a smaller neighbour, because it wanted an easy win and a chance for expansion.
* As violations of the post-1945 order go, there’s no doubt in my mind that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine will go down in history as one of the more repugnant, villainous acts of recent history, and certainly of the 21st century. It means the return of war to the European continent, and the betrayal of the lessons and principles learned after the worst war in human history.
* It’s been almost exactly two years since I enjoyed the sights and flavours of such a diverse, fascinating, welcoming culture. It breaks my heart to see the daily reports of refugees, war crimes and other atrocities visited upon an innocent nation by a raving lunatic and his sycophantic cabal.
* I can’t imagine what it means to face such terrible scenes, and I veer between utter despair, intense rage and a fierce sense of hope, hope not only that Ukraine will prevail, but that the criminals responsible for this evil act are brought to justice, and that the world finds a new appreciation for peace, and the importance of protecting it.
* Thanks for listening. If you want to help Ukraine deal with this evil, consider donating to the recommended charities, making space available to refugees if you can, or spreading the word on social media. You can follow Sviatoslav Yurash on Twitter; his Twitter is the main way I reassure myself that the guy is still alive.[[2]](#footnote-2) He also recently rescued a dog after its owner died, so there’s that. In fact, it’s a great symbol of hope to end this episode on, as well as a startling contrast. Where Ukrainians rescue dogs, Russia shells residential blocs. We know which is good, we know which is evil, and we know who is on the right side of history.

1. <https://twitter.com/Tom_deWaal/status/1498310064117059585?s=20&t=qcbe7Hg9U9119JRg6hGKPA> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://twitter.com/SviatoslavUA> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)