

Would you sell them out?

A question for American lawmakers about Ukraine



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Imagine that freedom was [in decline](#) around the world. Imagine that things had gotten so bad that a dictatorship actually invaded a democracy with the express goal of destroying its freedoms and its people. And yet... imagine that this people fought back. Imagine that their leaders stayed in the country. Imagine that this people got themselves together, supported and joined their armed forces, held back an invasion of what seemed like overwhelming force. Imagine that their resistance is a bright moment in the history of democracy this whole century. We don't have to imagine: that attack came from Russia and those people are the Ukrainians. Would you sell them out?



“Nearest bomb shelter,” TS, Kyiv, 9/2023

Americans have an alliance in North America and Europe which has existed for more than seventy years, with the goal of preventing an attack from the Soviet Union and then from Russia. Imagine that, when the Russian attack came, the hammer fell on a country excluded from that alliance. Ukraine indeed took the entire brunt of the invasion, resisted, and turned the tide: a task assigned to countries whose economies, taken together, are two hundred fifty times larger than Ukraine's. In so doing, Ukraine destroyed so much Russian equipment that a Russian attack on NATO became highly improbable. With the blood of tens of thousands of its soldiers, Ukrainians defended every member of that alliance, making it far less likely that Americans would have to go to war in Europe. Would you sell them out?

(If there is anyone out there who still thinks that NATO had anything to do with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, consider this: invading Ukraine made Russia far more vulnerable. If Russia actually feared NATO, invading Ukraine would be the last thing it would do. Russian leaders are perfectly aware that NATO will not invade Russia, which is why they can pull troops away from the borders of NATO members [Norway](#) and [Finland](#) and send them to kill Ukrainians.) For this whole century, American politicians and strategists of all political orientations have agreed that the greatest threat for a global war comes from China. The scenario for this dreadful conflict, in which hundreds of thousands of American soldiers could fight and die, is a Chinese offensive against Taiwan. And now imagine that this can be defused at no cost and with no risk. The offensive operation the Chinese leadership is watching right now is that of Russia against Ukraine. Ukrainian resistance has demonstrated how difficult a Chinese offensive operation in the Pacific would be. The best China policy is a good Ukraine policy. Will we toss away the tremendous and unanticipated geopolitical gain that has been handed to us by Ukraine? There is nothing that we could have done on our own to so effectively deter China as what the Ukrainians are doing, and what the Ukrainians are doing is in no way hostile towards China. Ukrainians are keeping us safe in this as in other ways. Would you sell them out?

Imagine, because it's true, that the whole world is watching the war in Ukraine. From everyone else's point of view, whether they like us, hate us, or don't care about us, Ukraine seems like an obvious ally and an easy win for the United States. Anyone around the world, regardless of their own ideology, knows that Ukraine is a democracy and America is supposed to support democracies. Anyone around the world, regardless of the state of their own economy, knows that our economy is enormous, far larger than Russia's, and that economic strength wins wars. Anyone around the world can easily see that Americans are not at risk in Ukraine, and that Americans draw extraordinary moral and geopolitical gains from Ukrainian resistance. From the point of view of all observers, in other words, defunding Ukraine would demonstrate enormous American weakness. Is that the face we want to show the world? Do we want to tell everyone that we are unreliable and unaware of our own interests? Ukrainians, with American help, make Americans look sensible and strong. Would you sell them out?

Imagine that this is a winnable war, because it is. Russia's main strategic objective, the seizure of Kyiv, was not achieved. Ukraine won the Battle of Kyiv. Russia was forced to retreat from Kyiv and Chernihiv and Sumy oblasts. Imagine the Russia's campaign to take Kharkiv failed. Ukraine won the Battle of Kharkiv. Imagine that Kherson, the one regional capital Russia has taken in this war, was taken back by Ukraine. Ukraine won the Battle of Kherson. Snake Island, lost early in the war, has been taken back by Ukraine. Ukraine has taken back more than half of the territory seized by Russia in this invasion. Knowing that all this is true, imagine that Putin knows it too. Russia's main offensive instrument, the paramilitary Wagner Group, staged a [coup against Putin](#) and that Putin had to kill its leader. Imagine that

Putin knows he cannot really take much more Ukrainian land -- not without American help, anyway. Ukraine has a theory of victory that involves gains on the battlefield. Putin has a theory of victory that involves votes in the US Congress. Putin thinks that he has a better chance in the Capitol than he has in Kyiv. Should we prove him right?



Posad Pokrovs'ke, Kherson oblast, deoccupied by Ukrainian army, TS 9/23

Imagine a world food system with Ukraine as a major node. In normal times Ukraine can feed [four hundred million people](#), and usually the UN World Food Program depends upon Ukraine. Ukrainian exports feed some of the most sensitive parts of the Middle East and Africa. Much of the instability in those regions is related to shortages of food. Russia has destroyed a major dam to destroy Ukrainian farmland. And mined Ukrainian farms on a huge scale. Russia targets [ports](#) and grain storage facilities with its missiles, and claims the piratical right to stop all shipping on the Black Sea with its navy. And yet... Imagine that Ukrainians resist here as well. Ukrainians farmers are hard at work. Ukraine still supplies food to the World Food Program. Ukrainians, through their own innovative weapons and clever tactics, managed to intimidate the Black Sea Fleet and open a lane for commercial shipping. That they are feeding the people who needed to be fed. Would you sell them out?



Ukrainian self-made demining tractor. TS, 9/23

Imagine that we were a country that cared about war crimes. And imagine that there was a law, an international genocide convention, that defined five actions that constitute [genocide](#), and that Russians have committed every one of these crimes in Ukraine. I cannot keep on writing about "imagining" when I have seen some of the death pits myself. I cannot say "imagine" when writers I know have been murdered because they represent Ukrainian culture. I cannot stay with my device when I read that the Russian state [boasts](#) of having taken 700,000 Ukrainian [children](#) to be russified, when every day Russian [propagandists](#) make clear that Russian war aims are exterminationist. And yet Ukrainians resist and persist. This is a genocide that can be stopped, that is being stopped. We are living within the scenario, the one we say that we have been waiting for, when American actions can stop a genocide, simply by helping the people who have been targeted, simply by paying their taxes. Whenever the Ukrainians take back land, they rescue people. This is how they think of their liberated territories: as places where no more children will be kidnaped, no more civilians will be tortured, no more local leaders will be murdered. Would you sell out a people to a genocidal occupation? A people that has done nothing but good for you?

I have heard the excuse that Americans are "fatigued." I have been in Ukraine three times since the war began. I have been in the capital and in the provinces. I have seen almost no Americans, fatigued or otherwise, in the country. And that is for the simple reason that we are not in Ukraine. How can we be fatigued by a war we are not fighting? When we are not even present? This makes no sense. It causes no fatigue to give money to the right cause, which is all that we are doing. It feels good to help other people help themselves in a good cause.

If we stop supporting Ukraine, then everything gets worse, all of a sudden, and no one will be talking about "fatigue" because we will all be talking about disaster: across all of these dimensions: food supply, war crimes, international instability, expanding war, collapsing democracies. Everything that the Ukrainians are doing for us can be reversed if we give up. Why would lawmakers even contemplate doing so?

If you happened to know lots of Ukrainians, as I do, you would know people who have been wounded or who have been killed. You would know people who get through their days with dark circles around their eyes, because everyone has dark circles around their eyes. You would know people who have lost someone, because everyone has lost someone. You would know people who are grieving and yet who are nevertheless doing what they can do. You would not know anyone in Ukraine who believes that fatigue is a reason to give up. Would you sell such people out?

I have heard the other excuse: that we need to audit the weapons we send to Ukraine. The expenses are minimal and the gains are great: a nickel on our defense dollar, achieving what we cannot ourselves do with all the rest. And here's the thing: the weapons we send to Ukraine are the only ones in our stockpiles that are being audited. They are being audited not by accountants in suits and ties but by men and women in camouflage. They are being used and used well by people whose lives are at stake and whose country's future is at stake. Ukrainians have used American air defense more effectively than anyone knew that it could be used.

Ukrainians are using American missiles that we consider outdated to destroy the most advanced Russian assets. Ukrainians are taking American weapons built in the last century and using them to defend themselves and the rest of us in this one. In large measure they are literally using arms that we would otherwise be paying to disassemble because we regard them as obsolete.

If that battlefield audit done by the Ukrainian army is not good enough: well, then, by all means, American lawmakers, come and visit Ukraine and see for yourself. You and your staffers would be very welcome. Ukrainians want you to come. It would be a very good thing if more of us visited Ukraine.

I will tell you what I witnessed in Ukraine: when Ukrainians see American weapons systems, they applaud. Would you sell them out?