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U.S. involvement in Ukraine and Russia Conflict

Russia's unjustified invasion of Ukraine has shocked the entire world. The sheer severity and cruelty of Putin's actions have put Ukraine into a state of destruction and chaos, known as "the most terrible European war since WWII" (Zelensky). So how does the U.S. come into this? As of now, Ukraine is not part of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization). However, Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky pleads for help from European allies and the U.S. Can we stand idly by as injustices are carried out in Eastern Europe?

While the invasion of Ukraine just commenced recently, the tension between Ukraine and Russia has been stretched over a long period of time. In 1922, Ukraine became part of the Soviet Union by way of force. The nation did not regain its Independence until 1991 after the U.S.S.R. died out. During an important election between a pro-Western candidate and a pro-Russian candidate in 2004, the pro-Western one, Viktor Yushchenko wins. He expressed interest in making Ukraine a member of NATO and established a plan to do so. Russia was in full opposition to this. The plan was short-lived, as Yushchenko's rival pro-Russian candidate Viktor Yanukovich won the presidential election in 2010. This does not end well, as he reinforced his anti-NATO stances.

Things in Ukraine remain the same until 2014's Maidan Revolution in which the common people revolted against Yanukovich. It culminates in him leaving the presidency and

fleeing to Russia. Putin did not take kindly to this and annexed the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea. In doing this, he cut Ukraine off from its major natural gas resources. It has been Russia's aim to keep Ukraine under its control and prevent it from joining NATO. This leads to the present-day invasion. Putin put forth outlandish demands on NATO in order for the conflict to de-escalate. These included the removal of NATO forces from Eastern Europe and a full stop to all further expansion of the organization (which of course includes Ukraine). The U.S and allied European countries promptly rejected these demands and instead began putting economic sanctions on Russia.

Given the history of the conflict, how should the U.S. and NATO respond to the recent developments? The assistance that we are already giving Ukraine is sizeable. Military and security assistance since January 2021 amounts to around 19 billion dollars. Both the U.S. and NATO as a whole do not condone Russia's craving for power, but there are certain considerations that hold us back from doing more than we are now. For one, Ukraine is simply not a member of NATO. If it was, this conflict would fall under an Article 5 situation. Article 5 states that if any NATO ally is attacked, it is considered an attack on all allies. This would mean a full-scale war with Russia at this point, which is something no one wants to happen. If Ukraine was a member of NATO, Putin might have never touched Ukraine in the first place.

Another consideration to take into account is Putin's threats. He understands that allied countries will provide aid to Ukraine, but he uses threats to deter escalating support. Addressing NATO, Putin said: "Whoever tries to stop us should know that Russia's response will be immediate, and will lead to such consequences that you have never faced in your history." This brings up the discussion of nuclear threats. Russia and the United States have the largest nuclear arsenals in the world. If Putin decided to drop nuclear bombs on Ukraine or any NATO country,

it could bring forth catastrophic consequences. Going into a nuclear war with Putin could potentially wipe out entire cities and regions to the point of mutually-assured destruction. In any conflict with Russia, the topic of nuclear arsenals is present. Allies of Ukraine must act wisely in the face of this looming threat.

Taking all of this into consideration, how should the U.S. respond? The obvious answer is to tread lightly. We should continue supporting Ukraine with military and security equipment. Without joining the war ourselves, we can give Ukraine the tools to fight off Russia for the time being. However, things will eventually come to a head. There will come a time when two things can happen. One is that Russia concedes and pulls all offensive forces out of Ukraine. Two is that Russia pushes Ukraine to a point of desperation so great that NATO will have no choice but to let Putin and Russia enact their terror on the entire country. This point in the war is crucial to the future of all countries involved. I firmly believe that the only possible option we can work towards is Russia conceding.

It is irrational to believe this is a possibility under the present circumstances. Putin will not agree to any ceasefire or compromise as of now. The most allied countries can do is what we are already doing, providing funds and equipment to aid the war efforts in Ukraine. The bottom line is that no NATO country wants war with Russia. Putin's military and nuclear power are something no one wants to confront head-on. The U.S. will not enter a war with Russia under any circumstances. We cannot justify drafting civilians to go fight in someone else's war on the other side of the world. Yes, the atrocities being carried out in Ukraine are terrible and cannot be condoned, but at the end of the day, this isn't our fight. The American people would never stand for sending us out to fight in Eastern Europe.

We must continue supporting from an uninvolved position. If we start to ship soldiers to Ukraine or start sending missiles, there's no telling what would come back to bite us. Putin's unreasonable and unpredictable behavior is not something to be joked about. From a moral standpoint, we are doing everything in our power to assist Ukraine in its efforts despite how separated the U.S. is from this conflict.

While the U.S. has been providing billions of dollars in military and security equipment, this is still not enough for Ukraine to win the war against Russia. More concrete measures must be taken in order for the tides to turn. Putin's retaliatory threats should absolutely be taken seriously. Putin cannot win a head-on war against the U.S. without dire results on both sides. If we so choose, we could possibly stop the invasion and fight Russia back over the border. However, with Russia, it is not simple. Any action taken will be met with consequences. Any action must be navigated carefully, and the risks and rewards weighed meticulously. I believe that the U.S. is doing all that it can do at this point. Our mission is to back Ukraine as much as possible with finances and resources, destabilizing Russia's hold on Ukraine and making things more and more difficult for them. Russia cannot be allowed to stretch its power and influence, and bully innocent people into repression and subservience. However, it is not the U.S.'s place to join this war and become entangled with Putin's atrocities.

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