

Ukraine

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Ukraine has been in the news for the past century, and now. Many Americans couldn't identify it on a map, yet we need to have a brief tutorial on why it is important to know. War is involved.

Our current issue with Ukraine is Putin's gambit to keep the world on edge on his intentions: are the tanks lined up on Ukraine's borders a prelude to another invasion, or is it a bargaining chip to throw a spanner into NATO and create division between Europe and the US?

Our last engagement with Ukraine was during the Trump period when he phoned Ukraine's new young president and tried to bully him into "finding dirt" on Joe Biden that he could use in the 2020 election. Trump was impeached for this.

The Obama Administration had its go when Secretary of State Hillary Clinton supported Ukraine's attempts to get rid of Putin's corrupt puppet president and have a free election. Putin's hatred of Clinton was one factor in his grooming of the totally inappropriate Donald Trump, who repaid Putin by supporting Putin over our own Intelligence Community. For the first time in American history, we had a president who preferred Russia to his own country.

History. Ukraine is a land blessed by nature and cursed by its neighborhood. It has spent much of its thousands of years in conflict with its neighbors and with invaders. Being in conflict for so long, the people who suffered were the peasants, blessed with black and fertile soil, but with neighbors that coveted it.

The merchants in its cities thrived in good times and then suffered during conflict. Many of these merchants were Jews, whose fate gave the world the word "pogrom," government-ordered slaughters that gave the unhappy Ukrainians scapegoat to distract them from their real enemies, their rulers.

In the 19th century alone, 1821, 1859, 1871, 1881, and 1905, there were 660 pogroms in Odessa, a major city. The foot soldiers in these pogroms were Cossacks, railway workers, and industrial laborers.

Ukraine was for centuries part of the Russian Empire, essential to Russia's need for grain. Much of Russia is too cold to grow much of anything, so Ukraine was their bread basket. Later, when the Russian Empire became the Soviet Union, Ukraine also provided oil and gas, essential to modern economy.

When the Russian Empire collapsed, Ukraine enjoyed a brief two years of independence, after which it was imprisoned again by Joseph Stalin, who punished them with two forced famines (1921-22 and 1932-33) that starved 8 million people to death. The Soviets took their harvests and left formerly prosperous farmers to starve and then freeze to death. There was no press coverage. Then during World War II, between the Nazis and Russians, 8 million more Ukrainians died.

Current Issue. Ukraine is the largest country in Europe, except for Russia. It is in a life-and-death struggle for its independence from Russian control, with efforts to rid itself of corruption and promote democratic institutions. They want to belong to the EU and NATO, which Putin absolutely opposes.

It is US foreign policy to promote democracy, which is what we are doing. However, we need to understand what drives Putin's actions. Russia is a paranoid enormous state with enemies on its borders. Having a buffer region between the Russian borders and the ever-increasing NATO democracies is his foreign policy.

His other policy is to demonstrate the ineffectiveness of democracies and the need for muscle, which dictators have. If democracies energize Russia's own internal dissidents, Putin and his oligarchs will lose everything and might end up in prison. Putin will not let that happen.

President Biden is not willing to go to war with Russia, but is playing a game of chicken with Putin right now. Fortunately, they are still negotiating and using diplomacy. Russian soldiers are dispirited by the threat to fight Ukrainians. Ukrainians are motivated to protect their country. Russia would pay a price for this.

Biden has restored our relationship with our European allies. They all have skin in

this conflict and would suffer if Russia wins.

681 words

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