

# UKRAINE: THE PAWN IN THE POWER GAME

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

A woman and her child from Mariupol say goodbye to their friend before their train departs to Lviv from the train station of Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine. | Photo Credit: AP

It is a tragedy that Ukraine has become the victim of a contest between great powers. The U.S. assiduously created conditions for Russia to be drawn into a quagmire, and Moscow obliged. Washington would now like the world to believe that this is entirely a fight to protect democracy and defeat a dictatorship. That is not exactly true. [The war](#) is the result of a cold, hard-nosed calculation of the U.S. to prevent the rise of a large power in the east with huge natural resources, including those critical for promoting green technologies. It clashed with the dreams of [President Vladimir Putin](#) for making Russia great again and for whom the break-up of the Soviet Union “was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century”. Yet, the U.S.-led West has succeeded in creating a public opinion that it is fighting for protecting freedom. But its record of fighting for, and on the side of, democracy is at best patchy.

History is stacked against the U.S. In 1953, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) toppled the democratically elected government of Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh and installed Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the last Shah of Iran, to ensure the uninterrupted flow of oil from the Gulf. It followed up with its ‘twin pillar’ policy of supporting and arming Iran and Saudi Arabia (both dictatorships), making them U.S. gendarmes to safeguard its oil supplies.

When a resolution was tabled in the United Nations in 1963 to cut off oil to the apartheid government of South Africa in the aftermath of the Sharpeville massacre by the police that left 250 black dead or wounded, the U.S. voted against it. As the second-largest investor in the country, Washington gave priority to its economic interests. It is no different today. A Harvard University study concluded that the U.S. military operations in 2011 in “Libya demonstrate how corporate interest and U.S. foreign policy are intertwined”.

When Salvador Allende came to power in Chile and headed the first democratically elected Marxist government in the Americas, a CIA-sponsored movement killed him in 1973.

The U.S. arming of Pakistan against democratic India is the best example that challenges Washington's claim that it is the champion of democracy. Virtually every soldier of democratic India who died in the wars with autocratic Pakistan was killed by arms and ammunition supplied by the U.S.

Today's war in Ukraine has been largely brought about by the U.S. bid to perpetuate a unipolar world, though other adjunct factors work as influencers. A critical one is the immensely powerful U.S. defence lobby. Washington's sales of billions of dollars of weapons to Saudi Arabia (whose military budget increased more than six and half times in eight years in the 1970s) were steered by its defence industry. It even led Washington to sell countries weapons that they had little use for.

Today, after the sudden withdrawal of the U.S. from Afghanistan, many defence contractors saddled with stocks of weapons have found a new destination for them in Europe. It gives credence to what Peter Kuznick, a history professor at the American University, said, “War is big business for the U.S.”

And when the dust settles, a new Europe primed to beef up its security will be the new and lucrative market for U.S. weapons. Germany's announcement of increasing its defence budget from €53 billion to €100 billion next year cannot but please U.S. defence contractors (in the last 10 years, nearly 50% of all Germany's military imports were from the U.S.).

The sad fact is that if the U.S. had not pursued its relentless goal of expanding the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), it is unlikely that the present crisis would have taken place. Many defence strategic thinkers of the U.S., including the most celebrated — George Kennan and Henry Kissinger — opposed it. The latter categorically stated that "Ukraine should not join NATO" and had warned that if this "principle" is not adopted, the "drift toward confrontation will accelerate" and "that it will come soon enough".

Even Mikhail Gorbachev, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1990 for the reforms he introduced in the former Soviet Union that led to the dismemberment of his motherland, bemoaned that the West had assured him that the alliance will not "move 1 centimetre further east".

And the expansion had no logic whatsoever. The *raison d'être* for NATO's existence had ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Russia was no threat to the West. It was economically ravaged, and its once-powerful military was in complete disarray. Its famed military hardware, some of which were more advanced than the U.S.'s in many areas, was unworthy of military deployment.

It was then commonplace to see the military machine of the Soviet Union dotting defence facilities like boats in the skeletal cost of Africa (for instance, the rusting gargantuan Typhoon submarines — more than double the size of the biggest submarines of the U.S. — that floated lifeless in the Sevmash shipyard on the White Sea). I had also observed the desperate efforts of some of the most famous military design centres of the erstwhile Soviet Union to make soaps and detergents to survive. Many did not.

Ironically, in 1999, when NATO expanded, bringing within its fold Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, Russia was at its weakest. The defence budget of Russia that year was a measly 4.26% of the U.S. and a pitiable 2.5% of the combined NATO budget. And its president was the fun-loving Boris Yeltsin, whose weakness for drinks often saw him dance happily on stages inebriated. The now-vilified President Putin was more than 10 months away from being appointed as the acting president.

History will not absolve Washington of a part of the blame for the human tragedy that has engulfed Ukraine while life goes on as usual in the U.S. Even if the West's narrative that President Putin has attacked Ukraine as a part of his grandiose dream of rebuilding the Russian empire is to be believed, what begs an answer is why the West did not accept the wise counsel of Mr. Kissinger. If it had, or at least waited for a while, the U.S. would have denied Moscow a reason to invade its neighbour, and the 69-year-old old Cold War-era warrior would have had no option but to take his alleged dream to his grave.

To end the war, Washington should accept the neutrality of Ukraine. It should broker peace now. Supplying increasingly sophisticated arms to Ukraine will only serve America's great power goals.

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