

Why Ukraine Must Win

May 26, 2023

This book had two ratings and no reviews until this one. It will not be widely read.

If you are conservative but nonetheless believe that Ukraine is worth supporting, this one is for you. Please find this review helpful (when it appears on Amazon) and buy the book.

Graham

Excellent but hopelessly unfashionable. Insightful history, thorough understanding

Throughout the Cold War period liberals tended to be soft on Soviet Russia whereas conservatives took a hard line. Today many American conservatives ask why it is in America's interest to confront Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Thomas Cromwell provides a thorough, well researched, well footnoted answer to that question.

You have to overcome some skepticism. Cromwell's first three chapters identify him as a Christian and the battle as Good versus Evil. He invokes Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. Only starting at page 30, 10% of the way through the book, does he get down to making his point. He does it well, but with such a late start he has lost half his readership.

The most prominent figures that Cromwell rebuts are Tucker Carlson and Glenn Greenwald. He does a good job – at the end here is an excerpt from Chapter 7 on the bogus arguments against the war. Greenwald and Carlson propose that the United States dragged Russia into a war in order to degrade their military. No. Putin had planned since the beginning to reintegrate Ukraine into Russia and had taken the first major steps, Crimea and then the People's Republics, in 2014.

Carlson and Greenwald propose that pushing NATO up to Russia's borders provoked the fight. No, Russia's persistent aggression – Chechnya, Transnistria, Georgia, Crimea and the People's republics – solidified Russia's neighbors' long-standing suspicions of its good intentions. Poland, Hungary and the Baltics wanted NATO. NATO did not have to pursue them.

The history that Americans read is often written from a liberal perspective. Americans revere Franklin Delano Roosevelt. We learn in school that George Kennan was the sage in Washington whose wise policy of containment maintained the peace for so many years. Cromwell argues that Soviet Russia always had the ambition of expanding worldwide, and the West's reluctance to engage them encouraged tightening their grip on the Eastern European satellites and adventures in the postcolonial space and, Latin America.

Cromwell's handling of Russian diplomacy, propaganda, and aggressions provides a well-informed and quite different perspective.

In keeping with his title, he concludes that Ukraine must win. Unless Russia suffers a significant setback they will simply keep on pushing. Cromwell contends that the West could have and should have administered such a setback in Georgia in 2008 or Crimea and the Donbass in 2014, but lacked the will. They lacked the will again in 2022, until faced with the remarkable strength of Ukraine's resistance, and the barbarity of Russia's attacks. Whereas the West, especially Germany, would very much have liked to do nothing, they were forced to act.

This book deserves a much wider reading than it will get. Its assessment of the corruption and fecklessness of the neocon establishment and Joe Biden means that it will certainly not be pushed by the United States

government or media. It will not be embraced by conservatives, who somehow assume that corruption in the United States deep state, and the history of corruption in Ukraine inherited from Soviet times invalidate Ukraine's right to exist.

A five-star effort. The text that follows is from Chapter seven. Following that is Cromwell's Table of Contents.

Ukraine Baited Russia into Invading Ukraine

This twisted and far-too-clever idea is not as isolated a view as you may think. For example, in a primetime December 7, 2022 discussion with Glenn Greenwald on his Tucker Carlson Tonight program, America's number one news anchor on cable news, Tucker Carlson, referred to this theory as a likely explanation for the war in Ukraine.

Like other theories that blame the US for provoking Russia, this one appears to be sympathetic to Russia's cause. It is certainly a popular theme used in Russian propa-ganda. Carlson and Greenwald see no American interest to be upheld in this war. However, they do see America using the proffer of NATO membership to Ukraine as Washington's strategy to lure Putin into this invasion.

Here is their conversation:

Carlson: What bothers me is not so much what Zelensky is doing, there is a lot of tyranny around the world. I don't brood on it. But the fact that, A, we are paying for it and, B, our leaders are defending it... I think every American should be upset about that.

Greenwald: I think in general Americans should be very skeptical when the US government says, "We are going to fight in wars on the other side of the world, we're sending tens of billions of dollars in military aid in order to spread democracy." The US government doesn't actually care about spreading democracy. Many of its closest allies in the world have been and still are some of the world's most despotic regimes, like Saudi Arabia, Egypt. All the US cares about is that governments serve American interests, not whether they are democratic or not.

If you want to believe the fairy tale that the US govern-ment goes to war to spread democracy, Ukraine is not the place for you. You mentioned this argument: "Well, Zelensky's at war. He has to curb liberty." Go back to 2021, a year before Russia invaded and you can find articles (just Google it) where he shut down opposition, television stations. He has now shut down opposition parties. Every hallmark of what a despot and tyrant—not a democrat—does, is shaping the Zelensky government, and that was true well before Russia invaded.

Carlson: I wonder two things. One, how can Republicans on the Hill continue to defend this, and, B, what's it really about. I think you are right. Our foreign policy is almost always about defending our interests. I think it should be, actually. But I don't see a critical interest at stake here, so what is this about?

Greenwald: Right. I think the first point is: If the US government was honest, it would get rid of this whole script about, "Oh we have to go and defend democracy." That's a fairy tale that's trying to get Americans to feel better about the fact that we are involved in many, many countries all over the world. That's not the real reason. The only reason is to do it for vital US interests. The line in Washington for decades was the US has no vital in-terests in Ukraine. That was Obama's view, that was the bipartisan view. Why did that change? The only reason is because we saw an opportunity to trap Russia inside Ukraine all based on the view that Russia is our enemy, something only Democrats could believe, because they think Russia is to blame for the 2016 election and Hillary's win [he meant loss]. But why would Republicans want confrontation with Russia? What Americans does that benefit besides arms manufacturers?

Carlson: Well, that's a really good question. I haven't quite unraveled it. It seems pretty clear that the Biden administration baited Russia into this invasion. You have the vice president of the United States in Western

Europe days before telling Zelensky to join NATO, which of course they knew it was a red line. They wanted this invasion. That's my view. It's very obvious. You think this was all about preparing for a war with Russia?

Greenwald: If you think that Russia is a grave enemy of the United States, then it makes sense to try and lure them into a war that they can't win. Like we got lured into one with Afghanistan for 20 years, and we lured the Soviet Union into a war in Afghanistan back in the 70s because it does deplete your enemies. The question is: Why should Russia be seen as our enemy? Both Obama and Trump said there is no reason to see Russia that way. It has 1/15th the size of our military budget, its not threatening American borders. Why are we so obsessed with spending tens of millions of dollars to weaken Russia which we could be using here at home to benefit the lives of American citizens, when Russia is not doing anything against the United States unless you are a crazy resistance person who believes there is a reason Donald Trump won. But if you don't believe that, what is the rationale for this? There is none.

Carlson: I know. And as usual they have hijacked the best instincts of Americans, their compassion, and turned that against them.

This is Nuts!

Carlson usually has a good nose for US government policies and programs that are harmful to America. In this case, he appears to largely miss the broader strategic issues in Ukraine, and to be cynically uninterested in Ukraine's suffering at the hand of Putin's army.

If—as the Carlson-Greenwald theory holds—Washington really believed the offer of NATO membership to Ukraine would lure Russia into a conflict that would significantly reduce the potency of Moscow's military, how come most of the wise men of the US administration—as well as most other Western military and strategic experts—believed that Ukraine could not resist a Russian invasion for more than a few days or weeks?

If these Western calculations were right, surely such a swift Russian victory would have meant that instead of Ukraine joining NATO and strengthening the alliance against Russia and other potential enemies, it would have been absorbed into Russia, making Russia a greater threat to NATO than it already was. In other words, it is the fact of sustained and effective Ukrainian resistance to the invasion that has resulted in Russia's military strength being degraded. This is NOT what Washington expected.

To remind our readers of the conventional wisdom in Western capitals on the eve of the invasion: According to Fox News, a few weeks prior to the invasion, US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley testified to Congress that Kyiv would likely fall to Russia in just three days:

Milley told lawmakers during closed-door briefings on Feb. 2 and 3 that a full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine could result in the fall of Kyiv within 72-hours, and could come at a cost of 15,000 Ukrainian troop deaths and 4,000 Russian troop deaths.¹²

Again, if America's top military commander believed Ukraine would collapse under the weight of a full-scale Russian invasion in a matter of days, how could it have been a US strategy to bait Russia into invading Ukraine in order for Ukraine to deplete the Russian military since Russia was expected to lose only 4,000 soldiers? Only if Ukraine put up a fierce and prolonged resistance could its army make a dent in Russia's military capabilities, and this is precisely what Milley did not anticipate.

As evidence for his theory, Greenwald suggests that the US lured the Soviet Union into invading Afghanistan in December, 1979. If that is true, President Jimmy Carter must not have been aware of American strategy, since he was exceptionally surprised and angry at Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev for breaking his promise not to invade.

Furthermore, it should be remembered that Moscow launched its invasion of Afghanistan with a purge of that country's Communist rulers (the president was a blood-drenched Communist called Hafizullah Amin, whom the Russians killed on the first day of the invasion), followed immediately by the installation of their own pro-Moscow Communist, Babrak Kamal. This clearly was an attempt by Moscow to gain more control over Afghanistan through a more pliant communist regime in Kabul. Washington had nothing to do with it.

The several Communist governments in Afghanistan had been fighting Mujahedeen for years as they tried to impose a Marxist-Leninist regime on an understandably resistant conservative Muslim population. But Washington under Carter did not begin providing assistance to these Muslim groups until July, 1979, just a few months before the Russian invasion—and then only \$500,000.

What exactly was the tempting American bait that induced the Soviet Union to engage in a decade-long occupation of Afghanistan at a cost it could not afford?

At the time of the Soviet invasion, Leonid Brezhnev was the paramount leader in Moscow. His "Brezhnev Doctrine" called for members of the Soviet Bloc to defend one another. What this really meant was that the Soviet Union should have the permanent right to use military force to intervene in fellow Communist countries to impose its will, as it had done in the Hungarian uprising of 1956 and the Prague Spring of 1968. In this way it could prevent Communist countries breaking away from Moscow's control.

Brezhnev at the time was declining in health, and his decision to commit dwindling Soviet resources to what would become an eight-year conflict proved to be a catastrophic mistake that triggered the collapse of Russia's Communist empire. This was not because the Soviet military was degraded, but because the Soviet Union was no longer economically viable.

And who was the cunning party that engineered the US invasion of Afghanistan after 9/11? According to Greenwald's theory, it must have been a pretty devious bad actor bent on bringing America to its knees through a long war of attrition. Is there evidence it was Russia or China manipulating the Taliban into helping Al Qaeda launch an attack on 9/11? Or was it the Taliban itself that wanted to take on and degrade the US army? Neither is likely. The more plausible explanation is the obvious one —America wanted to punish the Taliban for its role in the terror attacks.

To call Zelensky a tyrant and despot is pretty strong stuff, given the supposed evidence referenced for this accusation. Greenwald seems to forget that Russia first invaded Crimea and the Donbas in 2014, not 2022. Thus Ukraine had been fighting the Russians and their proxies to regain its territory for six years, not one.

To save Ukraine, Zelensky has had to purge it of Russia's fifth column actors while revamping Ukraine's outdated military to make it capable of meeting the Russian military threat. Taking such measures is not tyranny, as Carlson implies, but what any sane leader must do to protect his country in times of war. Would Greenwald and Carlson have Zelensky leave Russian agents and provocateurs in place? If so, Ukraine is lucky these pundits are not its leaders.

The fifth column problem is particularly dangerous in Ukraine because so much of the population is ethnically and linguistically tied to Russia. Furthermore, it was some of these pro-Moscow Ukrainian citizens and military commanders who practically handed Crimea to Putin in 2014, thanks to Russian active measures that prepared the groundwork for the annexation.

Zelensky has had to take action against pro-Russian media companies and political organizations, as well as the Ukrainian branch of the Russian Orthodox Church, which was found to be working for Moscow.

Again, any country at war would take such precautions, especially with evidence of subversion by fifth columnists, as in Ukraine's case. Ukraine is fighting for its life, and simply cannot afford to give its arch-enemy any more advantages than it has already exploited through turning Russian-speakers in Ukraine into traitors.

And, yes, America does have an interest in Ukraine prevailing in this war, just as much as it had an interest in supporting the Allies in WWI and WWII. Russia may seem far from US borders, but Putin's aggressive behavior—which has been on display since at least 2008—is the most serious threat to European and global peace and security since WWII, with the possible exception of Communist China's global subversion.

And, yes, there is an implicit warning for a dangerous Communist China in the increasingly robust Allied support for Ukraine, which sends a long-overdue message to Beijing: the West will no longer turn a blind eye to Communist China's subversion, intimidation and threats of invasion against other states.

Finally, there is something cynical about this discussion. To conclude that Russia's brutal invasion is nothing more than the result of ill-advised US foreign policy decisions, is to ignore the great suffering of the Ukrainian people and their remarkable cohesion and courage in the face of Russian aggression. Beginning with Zelensky, they have proved their valor and righteousness.

What About Our Own Border?

This argument is used to criticize the Biden administration for its failure to secure America's border with Mexico. This is a perfectly valid criticism of that failure, but what does it have to do with Ukraine? Shouldn't we both secure our own border and help Ukraine resist Russia's invasion? Aren't those logically consistent purposes?

A slightly different version of the border argument is the infrastructure argument: Why should America send billions of dollars to help Ukraine defend itself when our roads and bridges are in such need of repair? Again, need it be either/or? Shouldn't we work to fix our infrastructure and help Ukraine?

The War in Ukraine Does Not Serve America's National Interests

As the Carlson-Greenwald discussion quoted above shows, the essence of this argument is that there is no obvious American national interest at stake in Ukraine. This is a truly myopic and hence dangerous view. It echoes the position of the very active peace movement in America that tried hard to keep the United States out of WWII at a time when England was hanging on for dear life against an onslaught of Hitler's Luftwaffe. In that case, this argument was only set aside in December 1941 once Hitler's ally Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, drawing America into the war to defend itself against the aggression of the Axis Powers.

Do we really have to see massive destruction of our friends and allies before we feel justified to help them? And are we not able to recognize international threats to ourselves and our friends before they materialize in wars? Finally, is not a key purpose of NATO to deter countries like Russia from even contemplating aggression?

Consider this: If NATO and other countries did not support Ukraine, the chances of a Russian victory would loom large. Would it really be of no national interest to us if some of our NATO allies had Moscow's victorious army poised to invade on their border? Could we trust that Putin's adventurism would not entice him to go after other former Soviet states and satellites that are now our NATO allies?

The spirit that inspired America's founding continues to compel Americans to fight for liberty and against injustice at home and abroad. Like a good person, America cannot ignore the suffering of others inflicted by tyrants, and it must live up to its treaty commitments.

Our experience with the growth of Nazism and Communism in the last century proved that we stood by for too long while totalitarian states prepared for war. This encouraged their aggression, again and again. In WWII, the consequences of America trying to remain neutral would catch up with us when imperial Japanese Zeros appeared in the morning skies of a peaceful Hawaii and started bombing the US Navy.

Ukraine is the country standing between Russian aggression and the West right now. As such, it is serving the interests of all Western nations, including the United States. It is imperative to recognize this, and to avoid the moral equivalency arguments that proved so wrong-headed during the Cold War.

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