

MAR 6, 2022

Attack on Ukraine Continues

This is The Weekly Letter for March 6, 2022: [About this newsletter](#)

News

Ukraine: The city of Mariupol is under siege, an [ominous development](#). (Washington Post, 3/4)

· The International Criminal Court is [investigating](#) alleged war crimes in Ukraine. (Al Jazeera, 3/2)

· In [a meeting](#) with members of the U.S. Congress, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky called for additional steps to counter Russia. Zelensky supports a no-fly zone over Ukraine, but "Western governments have rebuffed the idea as all but impossible, citing the risk of direct conflict between NATO and Russian forces." (NY Times, 3/5)

Climate: A new Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report states that currently at least 3.3 billion people "are [highly vulnerable to climate change](#)." (Al Jazeera, 2/28)

· The Supreme Court heard arguments in [a case](#) that challenges the power of the EPA. "A ruling that limits the EPA's authority may undercut the Biden administration's plans to cut the country's greenhouse emissions in half by 2030." (BBC)

SOTU: On March 1, President Biden delivered the [State of the Union address](#). (PBS NewsHour, 3/1)

· Rep. Rashida Tlaib delivered [a left-wing response](#) to the State of the Union on behalf of the Working Families Party. (Politico, 3/2)

Texas: [Primary elections](#) were held on March 1. Incumbent Greg Abbott won the Republican primary for Governor while Beto O'Rourke won on the Democratic side. Three progressive U.S. House candidates in Texas performed well, with Greg Cesar winning his primary in the 35th district, Jasmine Crockett advancing to a primary run-off in the 30th district, and Jessica Cisneros advancing to a primary run-off against incumbent Henry Cuellar in the 28th district. (Texas Tribune)

· A [legal battle](#) is under way over a Texas policy "to conduct child abuse investigations when medically accepted treatments — including hormones or puberty-suppressing drugs, which doctors describe as gender-affirming care — are prescribed to transgender adolescents." (NY Times, 3/2)

· The cost of Texas's [anti-abortion law](#). (NPR)

Opinion

Ezra Klein: "Ninety-five percent of Afghans don't have enough to eat. Nearly nine million are at risk of starvation." [The U.S. is largely responsible](#). (NY Times, 2/20)

George Monbiot: A segment of the left is [amplifying Russia's misinformation](#). (The Guardian, 3/2)

My View

On April 3, 2008, NATO released [a statement](#) that included a new stance toward Ukraine: "NATO welcomes Ukraine's and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO. We agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO." However, [NPR notes](#) that this promise did not include "any concrete timeline or pathway" toward NATO membership. The compromise was the result of a split within the bloc, with the U.S. supporting NATO membership for Ukraine and some countries opposing such an offer. With NATO formally committed to Ukrainian membership but not allowing the country to take the concrete steps necessary to join, Ukraine became more vulnerable to Russian aggression while still lacking NATO's protection.

It seems to me that after the end of the Cold War, the U.S. and Western European states had two options: to work toward disbanding/minimizing NATO and integrating the Russian Federation into a new informal alliance of democracies, or to view Russia as a potential future threat and expand NATO to include all European states that might be vulnerable. For the most part, the latter path was chosen. However, NATO's ambivalence toward Ukraine demonstrates that the alliance's commitment to security in Europe was not ironclad.

I don't know enough to speculate about whether the first option—shifting away from NATO in the 1990s—would have been a wise choice. A different US/Western European policy toward Russia might have resulted in the country strengthening its democracy instead of moving toward a new authoritarianism. But today's reality is that Russia under Vladimir Putin has become a threat once again, and not only to Eastern Europe.

In fact, Russia under Putin has already done enormous damage. To take the most egregious example, in 2015, Russia began an intervention in the Syrian war between rebels and the government of Bashar al-Assad on the side of Assad. Russia [attacked civilians in Syria](#) and it is now engaging in [indiscriminate attacks](#) in residential areas of Ukraine.

Given the [UN Charter's commitment](#) to responding to "Acts of Aggression," the invasion of Ukraine should be a situation perfectly suited to the United Nations. However, responding to aggression is the responsibility of the UN Security Council and, as a permanent member, Russia holds veto power in that council. Indeed, the veto power wielded by the five permanent Security Council countries (China, France, Russia, U.K., and U.S.) is a major reason why imperial aggression and crimes against humanity have continued despite the creation of the UN. The veto power of the U.S. and Russia alone has been sufficient to prevent the UN from acting to prevent numerous crimes committed by these two countries and their allies.

My understanding is that there is little the UN can do to end the Russian invasion of Ukraine so long as Russia has a veto on the Security Council. It is up to the U.S., Western European countries, and other willing countries to end the tragedy in Ukraine. I think there is still a diplomatic path forward—my hunch is that there are concessions that could be made to Russia which do not entail turning Ukraine into a puppet state.

However, I hope that Russia's blatant violation of the UN charter, and the UN's inability to prevent it, will encourage a movement toward reform of the UN. While [Russia vetoed](#) a Security Council resolution condemning the invasion of Ukraine, the UN General Assembly overwhelmingly [voted to condemn the invasion](#). If more power regarding matters of security is given to the representatives of the world as a whole, it is less likely that there will be inaction in the face of aggression and atrocities. Further, if the UN is able to keep the peace, it will be easier to create a world that is no longer divided into power blocs and military alliances.

People of conscience must stand with Ukraine as it is under attack. We should also work toward building a global system where such an attack could not happen in the first place.

Have some thoughts about a current event? Want to reply to an opinion article featured in the newsletter? To create a conversation about the news, all are encouraged to share their views. Send your letter along with your name and where you're writing from to theweeklyletternewsletter@gmail.com or reply to this email. Please be aware that the newsletter is published on the website theweeklyletter.ghost.io and sent by email to subscribers. Letters that are hateful or contain misinformation will not be published.



If you are not yet subscribed to automatically receive The Weekly Letter in your email, you can subscribe on the website: theweeklyletter.ghost.io

If you are already subscribed and like what you're reading, forward this newsletter to a friend!

< PREVIOUS ISSUE

BROWSE ALL ISSUES

NEXT ISSUE >

Subscribe to The Weekly Letter

Sign up now to get access to the library of members-only issues.

Jamie Larson

SUBSCRIBE >