

# What the West Owes to Ukraine

And what it doesn't.



by Conrad Black

**The Biden administration** has one last bit of prestidigitation it can pull to salvage something from the midterm elections for the balance of its term. It is obvious that, despite the biases of most of the polls attached to pro-Democratic newspapers and left-leaning universities, the Biden administration is regarded by the majority of Americans as a failure and that the governing Democratic Party has misused its mandate and in four weeks is going to be rejected, probably decisively, at the polls.

The Democrats have played the only card they've had for the

last six years: the confected and magnified hatred of the former president, Donald Trump, capped by the Keystone Kops invasion of Mar-a-Lago. The ensuing controversy reminded the country of Trump chaos, (even when it is caused by spurious attacks on Mr. Trump that he has to rebut), and President Biden's disapproval gap narrowed by half to ten percent. Yet Mr. Trump managed to shunt it off to a special master, and the nonsense has died down.

It must be said that, contrary to those who imputed to the United States a predestination to decline and a governing class that is decadent and ineffectual, the bipartisan political class that rules Washington absolutely, though taken by surprise by Mr. Trump in 2016, has fought back with fierce and desperate vigor to regain their monopoly on the federal government.

It is the nature of this monopoly that while both sides come to bat in the White House and at the Capitol with reasonable regularity, between Presidents Reagan and Trump, most of the Republicans were look-alike Democrats and the unelected Democratic apparatus in Washington is well reflected by the presidential vote in that city which always favors the Democrats with over 90 percent of the votes in the District of Columbia, and heavy majorities in the adjoining districts of Virginia and Maryland.

The last hope for the Biden Democrats is Ukraine. President Putin obviously wants out and has staked out the four southeastern provinces and added them to Crimea as his takeaway – he has effectively thrown in the towel on completely crushing and reabsorbing Ukraine. Mr. Putin needs to add some territory to prevent an ultimately dangerous humiliation of Holy Mother Russia.

Meaning one that would leave it seeking revenge for the next 50 years, like France after the Franco-Prussian War, not to mention a possibly inadequate level of enthusiasm in the

corridors of the Kremlin for Mr. Putin's continuity in office. The territory that he claimed to annex last week can be reduced in size and all those people in all parts of Ukraine who would rather live in Russia can be assisted in moving there, and residents of "annexed" territory who would rather be Ukrainians can be assisted in moving to Ukraine.

And with that, Mr. Putin can be told that the Western Alliance will see to it that he gets no more, regardless of what levels President Zelensky, who has won the world's admiration, can be told that the national homeland of all who wish to be Ukrainian is secure and that the West will do what is necessary to assure the survival and reinforcement of Ukraine as an independent country.

We cannot, though, give him a blank check to keep the specter of nuclear war over the whole world in order to keep the Russian-speaking Ukrainians of the Donbas and Crimea in a country where they may not all belong. (Mr. Zelensky did not really call for a nuclear [preemptive strike](#) last week, just for some element of pre-emption; he was traduced by hostile, mischievous, or just incompetent media.)

The West had to defeat the Russian attempt to absorb Ukraine, in order to preserve its victory in the Cold War, to shatter the idea that the West was in inexorable decline, and to continue the eastward advance of the Western world. It also had to send the world the message, as it did in expelling Saddam Hussein from Kuwait in the Gulf War thirty years ago, that the West will not stand for the aggressive extermination of neighboring states.

Yet we have no obligation to take any risks to provide for more than an ample Ukraine, capable of joining the European Union if it meets its criteria for competent self-government, (which Ukraine has yet to do), and capable of peacefully building itself into a functioning integral state, something Ukraine has never been. Bismarck famously warned that "The

great powers must not become involved in the quarrels of these sheep-stealers,” referring to the Balkans.

The same can be said of Central Europe. Mr. Putin made a serious mistake and he has been made to pay for it, and should be allowed to withdraw without Russia, one of the world’s great powers for 300 years, if probably (with China), the most poorly governed great power, being durably enflamed with an insatiable thirst for revenge. The West owes this much to Ukraine but not more.

This peace must be guaranteed by Russia and its remaining satellites and all of NATO, and this time, we must all keep our word. President Biden could achieve this quite quickly, or at least Secretaries Blinken and Austin could achieve it for him. This is the last train leaving the station. If they can’t catch this they are going to be an even more pitiful punching bag, at home and abroad, in the next two years than they have been in the last two years.

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