

# Reflections on the War in Ukraine

By

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## The War still Ongoing

In *Polemics*, I made the prediction that Ukraine would fall within days of March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022. Against my expectations—and the expectations of the world, I think—the Ukrainians are still holding on and are fighting valiantly for the independence of their country.

I have no desire to alter or to retract what I wrote in the concluding section of *Polemics*. I am not afraid of having an inaccurate political prediction in my work, as I am still confident in the real substance of my writing, which has to do with cultural forms, principles and conventions rather than day-to-day political occurrences. I am not a political writer in the strictest sense, nor am I a journalist.

The conclusion I wrote for the first part of *Polemics* is a testament to my frame of mind as I was writing. The buildup of Russian troops along the Ukrainian border was what pushed me to begin writing that piece. My good friend who is currently living in Russia broke the news of the invasion to me. We had a two-hour conversation in hushed, solemn tones with the unspoken understanding that the world had very suddenly changed. On the night of the invasion, something changed inside of me—a sense of overriding urgency took hold of me, and I spent the rest of the night writing. I thought that I had detected the first winds of war—the initial stages of a Great Crisis of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I felt that I needed to exert myself to the absolute maximum of my abilities, perhaps even before they had fully ripened.

But now the Russian invasion has stalled. The Ukrainians are even beginning to reclaim territory. As I am writing this, the Russians have withdrawn from Kiev, and they have begun to shift their attention to the Donbas region in eastern Ukraine. The Ukrainian capital is safe, and the world is breathing easier now.

The war is still ongoing, however, and it is far too early to say definitively that the established order is itself safe. I have read that Russian opinion is rallying around the government, and Putin is far too invested—and isolated—to back down now. Although in America we have still held onto our sense of normalcy in day-to-day life, I suspect that the consequences of this war will be far-reaching.

We must acknowledge that the war in Ukraine is hugely significant from a historical perspective. Watching the news or reading the headlines, you would get the sense that we are still living in the mid-2010s—albeit with a harsher, more vitriolic ideological undertone, and a greater willingness to attack and accuse public figures. But our world is constantly changing, and we can never go back to the times that are already behind us. Just today, I was remembering 2019 with nostalgia. I was relatively carefree then, and although I was discontented with

American politics, I felt no serious sense of uncertainty. Those days may as well have been a lifetime ago. While the issue of the Ukrainian War has by no means been determined, it is worthwhile to reflect on this monumental event which is poised to change the world we live in entirely.

## President Zelensky

It would be out of place to discuss the war in Ukraine without also discussing President Zelensky. I don't think it would be wrong to say that he is the man of the hour. If the Ukrainians do succeed in fending off the Russian invasion, it will be in no small part because of his leadership. In fact, I would go so far as to say that Ukrainian independence—if it is maintained—will be Zelensky's accomplishment.

In my view, Zelensky's achievements as a leader have to do with the psychological impact he has had upon the Ukrainian defenders. This aspect of psychology is something that is often overlooked when we discuss political leaders and the things they do. When I was studying in England, I was once asked to write an essay comparing the achievements of Winston Churchill to those of Clement Attlee, and to argue which prime minister was more accomplished. My instructor favored Attlee, pointing out that he had more legislative and institutional achievements that were *empirically verifiable* and that could be counted in the historical record. He did grant that Churchill had a positive psychological effect upon the British populace during the Second World War: his unyielding resolve to fight Hitler even in the face of complete isolation served to encourage the war effort. However, my instructor wrote this as a phenomenon that is not the appropriate subject of scholarly attention; it cannot be *empirically verified*.

But to look at things this way is to do a gross injustice to the importance of a leader. The psychological impact a leader has on his people is the very essence of leadership. (Scholars and the public alike are perfectly willing to lay the blame for the entire Second World War at the feet of Hitler—which is by no means unjust—but what was all of his speech giving and party organizing if not a *profound psychological influence* on the German people? We can quantify things such as arms production, labor hours or the number of soldiers and tanks used by the *Wehrmacht*, but the motivation to put an entire country on war footing has its root in public psychology.)

A political collective is always facing new and changing circumstances from within and from without. A leader's role is indeed to make decisions about what is to be done in a given situation, but a good deal of policy making goes on among a leader's subordinates. *A leader also sets an example of the attitude his people may take towards a given situation.* This is especially true in times of crisis, when people naturally fall back on the social hierarchies that are already in place. When a political society is under threat, it contracts and becomes more like a unified body. The leader is the head of that body, and his thought and emotion in response to political circumstances influence the thoughts and emotions of the threatened, unified political body. Individual citizens are usually too occupied to think very much for themselves. For example, a soldier relies on his commander, a commander relies on his superior officer, and so on eventually

to the general staff. A top general may be in charge of strategic planning, but he relies on the direction of the political leadership.

In recent times, we have the example of the president of the democratic regime in Afghanistan. When the US withdrew and the Taliban began to retake the country, he quickly fled to save his own life. If the leader of the regime had no faith in it, why should its soldiers? They began to surrender en masse, many of them without firing a single shot.

It is not difficult to imagine Ukraine suffering a similar fate in the early days of the invasion. Indeed, there were initial rumors that Zelensky had fled to Poland with his family.

Consider Zelensky's position in the first week of the invasion. It was a dramatic situation worthy of Aeschylus or Shakespeare. He was faced with the army of a former superpower which was generally acknowledged to be overwhelmingly superior to Ukrainian forces. The West condemned Russia and imposed sanctions. They promised military aid, but they gave no indication that they would intervene on the behalf of Ukraine. By all appearances, the most that they had to offer was moral posturing: humanitarian rhetoric and holier-than-thou pomposity. In a word, the situation seemed hopeless.

However, Zelensky resolved to remain in Kiev. He stayed knowing full well that he would probably be killed if he were captured. One can only guess at the terrible inner deliberation Zelensky faced in solitude—such decisions are invariably made alone, even in the presence of others. Since the opening days of the invasion, the Ukrainians have fought with almost superhuman tenacity, and have inflicted massively disproportionate casualties on the advancing Russian troops. The Ukrainians are evidently tough fighters and proud of their national identity, but I would attribute a good amount of their fighting resolve to Zelensky's leadership.

There seems to be a historical pattern of leaders *staying in their capital* which proves to be the decisive point in a conflict. Just off hand, I think of Justinian, who was prepared to flee Constantinople in the face of a rebellion, but who was convinced to stay and ended up holding onto power. I also recall the Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand II, who refused to leave Vienna during a crisis, even as a nobleman took him by his lapels and shook him, insisting that he evacuate—he also held onto power. There is the memorable example of Stalin, who refused to leave Moscow even as the *Wehrmacht* was advancing nearer and nearer. The outcome of Russia's heroic defense is well known. For a leader to stay in the capital even in the face of imminent danger sends a potent message. It means *I am willing to risk my life for the sake of my country and my office*. Zelensky's refusal to leave Kiev may well have been the decisive point in the Ukrainian war.

The question of Ukrainian national identity has long been a matter of debate. Proponents of an independent Ukrainian identity have pointed to its history, language and culture which differ from Russia's, but these debates are purely academic. This question is now being tried in war. If Ukraine holds onto its independence, its nationhood will have been won not by debate, but by the blood and resolve of the Ukrainian people. An American observer cannot help but be stirred when our own bitter struggle for independence is recalled.

I don't think anyone expected this much from Zelensky. He was written off for his past career as a comedian and an actor. But war brings out the true character of a person, and he has shown that he is a better leader and a better man than others in positions of power today. If the Ukrainians persist as they have in the past weeks, and if they succeed in forcing Russia to make a peace deal that leaves their independence intact, then Zelensky should rightly be considered a savior and "second founder" of his nation.

## Strategic Dimensions of the War

I am no expert on strategy, but I did study this subject in school. These are my comments on the strategic dimensions of the war in Ukraine.

The media tends to fixate on buzzwords. We hear, for instance, about *cyber warfare*. Putin is accused of *war crimes*, and we are told about the various *weapon technologies* used by the Russians that are unusual or inhumane.

What is interesting to me, however, is just how conventional Russia's invasion of Ukraine was. In fact, it was a textbook example of basic strategic principles. New technologies aside, it just as well could have taken place in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Just as in the Gulf War, there was first a phase of troop buildup along the Ukrainian border in Russia and in neighboring Belarus. Taking advantage of its geographic situation, Russia was able to position troops at every point around Ukraine, including in Crimea. Russia was also able to leverage its control of the Black Sea to launch maritime operations against Ukraine. When the invasion began, Russian ground forces advanced towards key strategic points in Ukraine—major cities and defensive positions. The Russian air force, meanwhile, fought in an attempt to gain air superiority in Ukraine. The Russians advanced from every direction, but the main thrust of the attack was directed towards Kiev, which lies conveniently close to the Russian border. This was the "Center of Gravity" of the Russian attack, and its capture would have resulted in the political and military decapitation of the Ukrainian state. At the very least, it would have been a major moral victory, and it would have thrown the Ukrainian defense effort into disarray and confusion.

Again, Russian military planning was generally in keeping with the principles laid out by Clausewitz, and the basic nature of strategic reality does not seem to have changed much from his time, or from the time of the Ancient Greeks for that matter. The one major difference is the threat of nuclear war, and while Putin did threaten the use of nuclear weapons, the Ukrainian War does at least prove that a major conventional military operation involving the interests of major nuclear powers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century can be carried out under a "nuclear canopy," so to speak. The threat of mutually assured destruction seems to restrain Russia from using the full extent of its military capabilities to achieve its strategic aims.

Just as the invasion of Ukraine was carried out according to fairly orthodox strategic principles, Russian military failure in Ukraine thus far may be attributed to very conventional reasons. *The Russian offensive has stalled owing to the failure of Russian ground forces to capture and secure key strategic positions, principally Kiev.* The failure of Russian ground

forces was due in no small part to the failure of the Russian air force to achieve air superiority over Ukraine in the early stages of the invasion. Air power on its own is not sufficient to achieve a country's strategic goals, but it does play a crucial supporting role for its ground forces. In the Gulf War, for example, the American air force achieved complete air superiority in the first three days of the invasion, which greatly facilitated the success of allied ground operations. The Obama administration's decision to use air power in Libya proved decisive in the ouster of Gaddafi—though Libyan rebel forces on the ground carried out the most crucial work.

Outside of the obvious threat of nuclear weaponry, which has been a factor since the close of the Second World War, the two new military technologies or “fronts” that have been attracting critical attention are space warfare and cyberspace warfare. It will be the work of historians to determine the role cyber attacks played in the Ukrainian war, but from all appearances, the real effectiveness of cyber warfare seems to be negligible. Russia may boast some of the best and most dedicated IT personnel in the world—they may *be* the best for all the difference it makes—but their efforts seem not to have had any appreciable influence on the Russian war effort. At any rate, cyber warfare was not sufficient to prevent the dramatic failure of the Russian invasion.

Space warfare, on the other hand, has real potential to change the face of warfare in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The extensive array of man-made satellites orbiting the earth plays a crucial role in intelligence gathering and in every aspect of military planning and practical operations. The ability to disrupt or destroy information-gathering satellites would throw an enemy's operations into confusion, and it would provide a serious advantage to the military with this capability. To this end, Russia has already developed anti-satellite missiles—their effectiveness remains to be seen, but it is at least an early attempt to fill this role.

There are other possibilities in the area of space warfare. For instance, man or unmanned space craft could be designed that could destroy enemy satellites, which might prove to be more cost-effective than using missiles for that purpose. These same craft could also have orbital strike capabilities, which would provide militaries with more options either for deterrence or practical military application. As yet, however, military space technologies are still underdeveloped, and the role space warfare will play—or will not play—in the 21<sup>st</sup> century remains to be seen. We can only speculate about what may or may not happen, but space warfare may prove to be to the 21<sup>st</sup> century what the development of air power was to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The country that develops effective military space technologies will be able to reap the benefits of being more or less unchallenged in a new dimension of warfare.

For the time being, however, the war in Ukraine seems to prove that the essential nature of warfare and strategic principle has not dramatically changed since the last century.

## Parallels Between the War in Ukraine and the Finnish Winter War

What I find interesting are the parallels that may be drawn between the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine today and the Soviet campaign against Finland in 1939-1940.

In 1939, Mannerheim was the marshal of Finnish forces. In the years leading up to the Winter War, Finnish leadership fully anticipated an attack from the Soviet Union. Understanding that the Red Army was vastly superior to Finnish forces, and that Finland could not hope to hold its own with a conventional defensive effort, Mannerheim planned Finnish defense according to the principle of *delay*, or the understanding that territory would have to be lost to the enemy, but that this should happen gradually while the defenders inflict a maximum of casualties on the attackers. The idea was that this would either buy time so that the Western powers could successfully intervene, or so that, failing Western intervention, the defensive effort would impose such a severe cost on the Soviets that they would be forced to stop short of attaining their strategic goals, and to sign a favorable peace deal with the Finns.

As things fell out, the Western powers did not intervene, but the Finnish defense proved so effective that the Soviets were forced to call off the invasion without achieving all of their aims. The Finns inflicted terrible casualties on the advancing Soviet forces which had numerical superiority in terms of men and materiel, but which had not developed any effective doctrine of combined arms warfare, leaving tanks and infantry alike exposed in the difficult winter terrain of Finland. The Finns were ultimately forced to sign away part of their territory in the peace deal of 1940, but they succeeded in maintaining their independence.

This course of events should immediately seem familiar to anyone who has been following the war in Ukraine consistently—there is an uncanny similarity between the events of the war in Finland in the last century and the events of the war in Ukraine today.

Like in the Winter War, the Ukrainians faced an overwhelmingly superior force from Russia. They had to give way and retreat from their territory in the face of the advancing Russian army, but they did this slowly and in good order while bitterly contesting the land they lost (we might compare the Ukrainian defensive effort favorably to the recent performance of the Afghan army, which began to dissolve as soon as it came into contact with the advancing Taliban). Now, the Ukrainians are beginning to see success because of the massive casualties that they have managed to inflict on Russian ground forces. The Russians have been forced to shift their efforts away from Kiev to eastern Ukraine, as Putin is facing increasing international and domestic pressure owing to the military failures of the Russian army. The Ukrainians have succeeded in making any renewed effort to take Kiev completely untenable for Putin.

Like the Finns, Zelensky's initial hope was to hold out for the possibility of Western intervention. While no Western power intervened on behalf of Ukraine, he certainly did succeed in winning Western sympathy (not that the West needed any additional reason to condemn Putin). Western opinion has turned against Putin entirely, leaving Russia largely isolated. Sanctions against Russia have impacted its economy. Western military aid has undoubtedly helped the Ukrainian war effort. (Although in *Polemics* I stated that military aid is as good as doing nothing, in the last estimate I suspect it will be found that this military aid did help the Ukrainians substantially. However, the success of the Ukrainians thus far is necessarily the result of the fighting resolve of Ukrainian troops. To use the recent example of Afghanistan once again, no amount of Western military technology can be of any use to an army if its soldiers lack the will to use it against the enemy.)

In short, while Zelensky was not able to secure overt military assistance, he has certainly won Western support for the Ukrainian cause. (But as I have already indicated, we cannot attribute the almost-universal condemnation of Putin's actions to Zelensky's personal charisma. It is not as if the war in Ukraine were an isolated event disconnected from the political circumstances that led to it. There is an ideological divide between Russia and the West, a fundamental conflict of political interests, and so Western interests necessarily align with Ukrainian interests against Russia.)

As things currently stand, just like Finland, Ukraine may be forced to give away some of its territory, but it seems to have succeeded in holding onto its capital and its independence.

We can take away certain lessons from the parallels between these two wars. The similarity between the Winter War and the Ukrainian war is most keenly felt in Finland—and understandably so—where concern over Russian aggression will likely make Finland seek membership with NATO.

Like in the Winter War, Russia has demonstrated its incapability to realize its ambitions of territorial expansion despite having superior military resources. This is doubtless in large part due to the resolve of the Ukrainian defenders, which has been beyond what anyone could have anticipated. We might compare Russian military failure in Ukraine to American military failures in Vietnam and Afghanistan, or even to Soviet military failure in Afghanistan. However, in all three of these cases, the militaries of the stronger powers were swiftly able to overwhelm the conventional military forces of the weaker states. The stronger powers failed in subduing the militant elements of the populace in all three cases, which waged successful guerilla campaigns against the costly and unwieldy military forces of the stronger powers in a context of asymmetrical warfare. What is particularly shocking about Ukrainian success is that the Russian military is failing in a *conventional fight* against Ukraine.

In a discussion with a friend, I attributed Russian failure in Ukraine to three possible causes:

1. The unexpected resolve of the Ukrainian defenders
2. Possible morale issues in the Russian army
3. The contributions of foreign military aid

I have already discussed the first and the third reasons, but we should not overlook the possibility of the second.

Perhaps Russian failure in this campaign and in the Winter War may be attributed to a peculiarity of the Russian national character—the Russian *Soul*. I mean the Russian tendency to slide into disadvantage and self-destruction even when a clear advantage is possessed. It is like the card player who plays his winning hand once too often and destroys himself; or the gambler who wins a fortune, spends it all, and returns to the roulette table only to sink deeper and deeper into debt and destitution. Just so, the Russian state seems not to know how to capitalize on a clear and overwhelming military advantage in an offensive war. In Finland, the Soviets had massive reserves of manpower and materiel, only to send wave after wave of soldiers and tanks

to their destruction without thinking to adjust their strategy or their tactics. In Ukraine, we might find parallels in the inefficiency of Russian logistics—the famous miles-long truck convoy, for instance.

The Russians are not like the Americans. They do not have the same optimism and outspokenness, the same psychological confidence and predisposition for success. Also unlike the Americans, the Russians do not have the same aversion to setbacks and misfortune. On the contrary, the Russians seem to show their true worth and character in the face of suffering and hardship. Americans are somewhat “shallow” in the sense that they tend only to aim for extraordinary material success, wealth and fame. By contrast, the Russians are “deep” in the sense that they calmly and impassively accept conditions of hardship and suffering, and their spirit has endured even under the most terrible conditions of human misery. A Russian wears his or her capacity to endure like a badge of honor. The greater the suffering that is endured, the prouder he or she becomes.

In short, it would not be wise to dismiss the Russian people because of this military failure. Although the Soviets suffered major setbacks in the Winter War, in the time immediately following this disaster, they were able to win the greatest and most terrible defensive war in history. The Russians have a deep, spiritual connection to their land and to their way of life, and history has proven that it is a mistake to attempt to conquer the Russian people or to attempt to impose Western ideology upon them. A figure no less than Napoleon tried this and failed. His conclusion: “These men are Scythians”—they are resolved to do any unconventional thing to defend themselves.

It is similarly unwise to condemn Putin and the Russians on moral grounds. They have their own cultural motivations for behaving the way that they do. Putin’s regime poses a *political* threat to American *political* interests, but culturally and ideologically speaking, the Russians should be left to themselves.

## American Response to the Russian Invasion of Ukraine

In *Polemics*, I wrote that Western passivity in response to the Russian invasion was shocking. I stand by this statement. During the Russian troop buildup and in the early days of the invasion, Biden effectively sat on his hands and did next to nothing. He did worse than nothing—he threatened sanctions, which for Putin served as a guarantee that America would not intervene militarily. I am still convinced that this emboldened Putin to launch his invasion.

It is entirely a matter of luck that things turned out as they did. The situation has become a serious embarrassment for Putin and an effective psychological victory for the West, but things could have gone very differently. Biden opted to leave matters to chance rather than employ the considerable resources and military capabilities at America’s disposal. We cannot call this anything other than bad statesmanship and political policy—had it not been for Ukraine’s remarkable response to the crisis, the situation could have turned out like the disastrous American withdrawal from Afghanistan.



In my view, Biden missed out on two crucial opportunities in response to the crisis.

The first was during the troop buildup. I believe that the invasion could have been prevented altogether. If Biden had signaled that America would respond to Russian aggression with military force, it is likely that Putin would have backed down. Biden could have done this by sending troops to Eastern Europe and ships to the proximity of Russia, and by making clear threats to Russia and promises to assist Ukraine. Even if Russia had not backed down, it would be far better and safer to fight a limited war with Russia alone than to face the possibility of a total war against the combined forces of Russia, China and other rivals. American success against Russia alone would leave China almost totally isolated, and it would nullify our rivals' nuclear arsenal.

The second opportunity was to launch a surprise attack against Russia during the early stages of the invasion. In the early days of the invasion, Putin held some of his forces in reserve, and there was a point when he committed all of them. I believe he held some of his troops in reserve to guard against a potential Western attack in support of Ukraine. If America had launched an attack when Russia committed its reserve, we likely could have captured Moscow, deposed Putin and rendered Russia's nuclear arsenal impotent. It would have been a complete strategic victory for the West. At the very least, a surprise attack would have thrown the Russian invasion into complete disarray, alleviating the struggle of the Ukrainian defenders and the suffering of the Ukrainian people.

In launching his invasion of Ukraine, Putin took a major gamble. He likely calculated that he would be able to subdue Ukraine on its own, but that intervention from the West would spell disaster for Russia. He was betting on Biden's passivity and ineptitude in response to crisis—likely emboldened by the poorly-handled American withdrawal from Afghanistan—and he likely suspected that America would not intervene in response to an invasion. In this calculation, he was absolutely correct. The only thing he did not anticipate was the stiff resistance the Russian army has encountered in Ukraine.

In short, there is a clear lack of political initiative among Western leadership. While Russian military failure has been fortunate for the West, this lack of initiative and proactive leadership could lead to trouble for the West in the near future. This is a possibility that we all should be aware of.

While the current state of affairs does seem to be a political victory for the West in the short term, Western response to this issue is already having unintended consequences. Sanctions and the economic isolation of Russia is sending Europe into an energy crisis, and this will have severe economic repercussions. Western condemnation of Putin's regime has left him increasingly isolated and desperate, and this may also have unforeseen consequences.

In the end, I think that political affairs are not entirely within anyone's control, no matter how we speculate what might or might not have happened. At any rate, these events are setting the stage for further political developments in the coming months and years, for good or for ill.

## Moral Condemnation of Russia

From the beginning of the war, Western politicians, public figures and media outlets have been searching for a way to condemn Putin's regime on moral grounds. Media sources have been searching for ways to brand Putin a war criminal. Early on, there was an attempt to interpret Russia's use of certain weapons as a war crime, but I don't think this was entirely convincing. Now the media has incidents such as the Bucha shooting to point to, and the accusations are beginning to stick; at any rate, the media now has something concrete on which to found their moral accusations. This is the Western agenda—to reiterate a point I made elsewhere, it is essentially moralistic in nature.

Needless to say, I find it somewhat cynical for the West to exploit *moral sentiment* as a *political tool*, and for *moral accusation* to be used as a *premeditated political strategy*. In my view, this only contributes to the atmosphere and culture of *vitriolic moral hysteria*, which is anathema to a normal, natural way of life free of moral prejudice. This is doubly true when the United States can just as easily be accused of behaving “immorally”—that is, acting in line with its political interests at the expense of other countries and other peoples. The play of political interests and the competition among nations is essentially amoral. The historical record is proof of this. What's more, the foundations of our moralistic attitude have become somewhat tenuous vis-à-vis the “Death of God.” But enough on this; it is perhaps better to treat this matter at length elsewhere.

What I find most unusual about the insistence upon finding moral grounds for the condemnation of Russia is that *Putin has already provided us with ample grounds for condemning his political actions*. The Russian invasion of Ukraine is a clear-cut violation of the principle of national sovereignty. This is a principle enshrined both in international convention since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and in modern international law. The fact that Putin's actions are both contrary to Western interests and in violation of international law would be more than sufficient grounds to attempt to bring about his deposition through military force or by other means. At first glance, adding a moral dimension to this affair seems unnecessary. (Though the jaded observer might comment that America is perfectly willing to violate the sovereignty of other countries so long as it has an ostensible moral reason for doing so; hence its need for some moral grounds on which to condemn Putin.)

In fact, this affair points to certain principles surrounding the foundation and exercise of American power on the global stage. In brief, *American hegemony is founded upon the notion that we are the upholders of a higher moral standard*. This is the “horizon” within which we have enclosed ourselves—we feel the need to cloak the exercise of political power with the semblance of moral authority.

Perhaps I can illustrate this point with the use of a historical example. In *Polemics*, I compared American hegemony in the present day to Spartan hegemony following the Peloponnesian War. I should here elaborate upon this point.

Following the Second Persian War with Xerxes I, Athens had achieved more or less undisputed naval superiority in the Mediterranean. The Athenians used their naval might to bring

many of the other Greek city-states under their influence. They formed the Delian League; junior members of the League would pay tribute to Athens in exchange for military protection. Athens enforced their influence by imposing democratic regimes upon the other Greek cities. While the League was democratic in name, Athens effectively presided over an empire of democratic clients. Over time, Athens became extraordinarily wealthy, and its culture flourished in what is called the Periclean Age. (I realize that the situation of Athens bears a great deal of resemblance to the modern situation of the United States following the Second World War, but this is not the point I wish to make.)

Now, Sparta had traditionally been acknowledged as the leader of the Greek states owing to its aristocratic prestige and its reputation for military excellence. On the ground, Sparta was traditionally appointed leader whenever the Greek states formed a coalition, which gave Sparta considerable political influence in Greece. Athens' growing influence owing to its naval supremacy represented a direct challenge to Sparta's traditional position of political hegemony. As Thucydides writes in his History, Sparta's true motivation for going to war with Athens was its fear of Athens' political influence.

In the course of the war, however, the Spartans articulated a different ideological reason for fighting the Athenians: *they claimed that they fought to restore the independence of the other Greek cities.*

Following Sparta's victory in the Peloponnesian War, they remained bound to this principle. Sparta had indeed restored its position of traditional hegemony, but it had done so by setting itself up as the *guarantor and protector of Greek independence*. Whereas later states such as Macedon and Rome were able to benefit materially from their expansion and "refresh" themselves after their costly campaigns, Sparta was trapped fighting to maintain a static state of affairs among cities in constant conflict with one another. Sparta could not benefit from its position of political hegemony as the Athenians or the Romans did. This was owing to Sparta's ideological stance, the moral grounds on which they justified their political power. Their resources and their manpower were gradually whittled away fighting challengers until the disaster at Leuctra, when they lost most of their aristocratic fighting force.

In a similar way, America has set itself up as the *guarantor and protector of Western moral standards*. Following the Second World War, America was in a position of political leadership among the war exhausted Western powers. As I see it, the *Nuremburg Trials* were the decisive point at which America put a moral seal upon its political victory.

*In the Nuremburg Trials, the enemies of the Western powers were condemned along moral lines.* The charges brought against the Nazi leadership went over and above condemnation for violating sovereignty (which, indeed, was one of the charges brought against them). The concepts of *Genocide* and *Humanitarian war crimes* were created and brought to bear against the Germans (and these charges were in many ways justified; I do not dispute that). *However, in so doing, America set itself up as the protector of a morality founded upon human rights.* It is for this reason that we are now seeking ways to condemn Putin on moral grounds. Putin is our

*political enemy*, but, according to the dictates of our ideological standpoint, *we must make him our moral enemy as well.*

I am an advocate for Western values and Western power. I love my country, and I hope that one day we can learn to love each other once again. What's more, I am a Western person, and my wellbeing depends upon the wellbeing of Western political bodies. Our collective wellbeing depends upon this. However, we must recognize the constraints of our moralistic stance. *As we continue to exercise our political authority, the contradictions between the use of political power and our moral convictions will become increasingly apparent.* It is hardly necessary for me to herald these moral contradictions. These contradictions are already *felt*, which, in my view, is one of the several reasons for the growing culture of moral panic and hysteria.

Our values and our society are worth preserving. In order to do this, we should try to be more flexible and understanding in the way that we approach politics and in the way that we see ourselves in the world.

Utilizing *morality* as a *political tool* will only expose the flimsiness and hypocrisy of our moral position and galvanize our rivals against us.