

Boots on the Ground

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‘Boots on the ground’ a bulwark against aggressors

There are no U.S. or NATO boots on the ground in Ukraine. Yet for many months, Russia built up its military forces that surrounded three sides of Ukraine’s borders.

NATO, with the U.S. being its key member, did not respond to these hostile deployments with

their own armed forces. Time and again, U.S. intelligence informed the world Russia was going to invade Ukraine. The NATO response? In view of the massive Russian military deployment, very little.

When Putin deployed 3,000 troops to the borders of southeast Ukraine last year, the United States, in conjunction with NATO, should have moved 3,000 troops out of western Europe into Ukraine. When Russia moved additional forces to gradually surround Ukraine from those three sides, NATO

should have also deployed more troops, such as the 60,000 troops the United States has stationed in Europe; supplemented by troops from other NATO countries.

The U.S. presence in the NATO forces would have presented Putin with a far different situation than the free pass he received to invade Ukraine. Assaulting Ukrainian soldiers is one thing. Assaulting American soldiers, who would have been invited guests of Ukraine, is quite another.

What is the purpose of having 60,000 American soldiers in western Europe if they are not used to meet the objective of their presence there: The countering of an aggressor’s actions against western Europe and western Europe’s allies? Ukraine has showed itself to be an ally of the West.

A critic of my suggestion informed me: U.S. boots on the ground in Korea, Vietnam, the second war in Iraq and Afghanistan were the reasons the U.S. became mired in these unwinnable or stalemated wars.

But in those encounters, the U.S. went in shooting.

My suggestion is for the U.S. to have deployed troops into Ukraine without any shooting; not abutting the Russian forces but peacefully armed, stationed in Ukraine’s major cities and military sites.

Instead, President Biden — well before the hostilities from Russia began — announced to the world that no U.S. military forces would be deployed. A folding of a poker hand before the betting had even begun. Putin surely slept easy the night after Biden essentially gave Russia a free pass — an uncontested, lay-down poker hand — to take over a greatly overmatched Ukraine.

The West’s weapon, NATO’s firearm against the anticipated enemy, the reason for NATO’s very existence, was not a military response. The West is imposing sanctions. Granted, they keep the West out of a possible war with Russia, but the Russians are now claiming authority over a sovereign nation and a

close friend of the West.

In relation to what Russia gains from having Ukraine in its fold — Ukraine’s reserves of minerals and a highly productive society — thus far, the sanctions do not go far enough. Last week, the U.S. and several other countries have stated they will terminate exchanging SWIFT transactions with selected Russian banks. This sanction will handicap Russia in moving its money around to fulfill commercial obligations and personal interests.

However, even this sanction is limited because a total ban of Russia from SWIFT would likely weaken the dollar, as SWIFT uses the U.S. dollar as reserve currency. Moreover, the targeted Russian banks can use correspondent banks and other funds-transfer systems to partially skirt SWIFT. Nonetheless, this EU action is an excellent maneuver.

As of this writing, sanctions have not been imposed on Russia’s sizable oil and natural gas industries, which account for a huge part of

Russia’s GNP. The West is afraid such sanctions would boomerang back to the West in higher energy prices and more inflation.

Yet this crisis provides the West (notably western Europe) with an opportunity to reduce its dependence on Russia. It would entail belt-tightening in the West. However, no sanctions at all on Russia’s oil and natural gas make no sense if the West is determined to use sanctions as its primary weapon against Russia’s invasion.

Modest sanctions will be little more than noise to Russia.

It is unfair to criticize only Biden for taking to heart a campaign pledge he made. The American voter has grown war weary. Bellicosity is out. Nonintervention is in. This is an admirable shift away from hostile behavior, except when our country encounters hostile behavior from a powerful nation, such as Russia.

Meanwhile, China is licking its Taiwan chops. In the mind of China’s leader, Xi Jinping: If America cannot muster the

will to confront a country — essentially a third-world nation armored with tanks and nukes — on European soil, how can it muster the will to protect an island far away from the U.S. ... but only 100 miles from China ... that belongs to China in the first place?

This writer disagrees with Xi’s assertion about Taiwan belonging to China. But my views do nothing to dispel concerns over, not only the loss of a democratic Ukraine to a militaristic autocrat, but what the implications of this easy take-over might have for the possibility of a much more disruptive conflict a few miles off the coast of China.

Boots on the ground need not translate into instant shooting. Boots on the ground, properly and timely placed, can translate into a hesitancy to begin shooting in the first place. But for the Ukraine situation, we will never know.

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OPINION



Uyless Black

My Turn