**[Whose hubris?](https://www.dawn.com/news/1683381/whose-hubris)**

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PUTIN’S ‘hubris’ is a popular theme for trenchant commentaries on Ukraine. One can see why. For truckloads of conventional Western pundits, the Ukraine tragedy began on the day of the invasion when there seemed to be more time for Putin’s regime to await the same unsatisfactory answers it had been getting since 1991 regarding Nato’s expansion eastward. In times of war, it’s also considered treasonous in the free speech-loving West to examine subtleties, such as the notion that there may be another side to the narrative.

The notion of ‘Putin’s hubris’ is actually contradictory, given that critics begin with an assumption of overweening Russian might, despite an easily demonstrable military spending gap of 20:1 between the US and Nato together versus Russia. If Russia is so comparatively weak how can it be hubristic?

Hubris, or overreach, is a trend one can only confirm in retrospect (after a failure). The signature loss of contact with reality inherent in hubris leads to a dreadful downfall. The US and Nato, who are interchangeable in the Ukraine case, therefore logically cannot commit hubris there because they have the power to accomplish what they set out to do even if at great cost to Ukrainians.

The appraisal one makes about the conflict — and the degree of Nato and US culpability — is determined by where one begins. If it is March 2022 then Vladimir Putin is the sociopathic monster that Western media and politicians unadvisedly are making him out to be. Monsters, by definition, cannot be negotiated with, yet the only way this volatile war ends is through negotiated solution, which Putin has been clear about regarding the terms.

Appraisal of the Russo-Ukraine war is determined by where one begins.

If the starting point is 2014 with the controversial Maidan coup, into which the US poured billions to dislodge an elected leader, then there is plenty of blame to go around.

If the starting point is 1991, with the dissolution of the USSR and broken promises about no eastward advance, then it looks like the current crisis is down to Nato’s smug recklessness.

The generous shipments of Nato-compatible arms to Ukraine long before the invasion, Western military advisers’ training of Ukrainian, including some neo-Nazi, troops, the location of Nato offices in Ukraine, the provocative Ukrainian constitutional enshrinement of aspirations to join Nato/EU, and the brushing aside of the Minsk agreements all underlined the bleak conclusion that Nato would not halt until it parked itself inside the Kremlin, although Nato could have done so earlier if Russia’s efforts to join it had been entertained.

In any case, nothing in Russian conduct so far indicates they want to occupy a resistant Ukraine, which the US and Nato would like them to try. The claim that neo-Nazis in Ukraine are insignificant is ridiculous. How many Nazi regiments, such as the Azov Regiment in Ukraine, are integrated into the armed forces of Western European states? Is it even conceivable elsewhere? That Ukraine, where 25 per cent of the Holocaust murders were carried out, is now supposedly free of anti-Semitism because Zelensky was elected is akin to claiming the US was cleansed of racism after Obama became president.

When Madeline Albright blurted that the deaths of 500,000 Iraqi children were worth it, or Henry Kissinger judged the Chilean people had no right to elect a left-wing government, those were the true faces of power speaking. Demonising Putin masks the wider power dynamics at play, which need to be understood in order to resolve a terrible situation. The WikiLeaks cables — over 250,000 of them — released in 2010-2011 via the courageous Chelsea Manning disclosed that American diplomats plotted all along to enlarge Nato in full recognition that it risked war with Russia. In 2008, the Bucharest summit agreed that Nato membership for Ukrai­­ne and Georgia was a matter of ‘when, not if’. A US State De­­p­a­rtment official explained: “Every­thing is Nato’s area, potentially.” Leaked documents also attest that the State Department knew that Russia considered incorporating Ukraine or Georgia in Nato as a red line, but Nato proceeded regardless, and to the severe cost of impetuous Georgia in 2008.

For all the media blather of being bogged down, the Russian strategy is consistent with a scheme to raise pressure on Ukraine and hammer out an acceptable deal, which there, at last, are serious indications of happening. Zelensky must be applauded for manoeuvring, however unwillingly, towards a neutrality settlement that neither Nato nor fierce right-wing forces inside Ukraine can stomach.

When you understand that for Nato functionaries, and likewise for powerful internal ultra-rightist forces, Ukraine essentially is fighting and suffering for the right not to be neutral, the craziness of it all begins to dawn on you. The sanctions only assure that we are all paying the price for the hubris of our leaders.

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