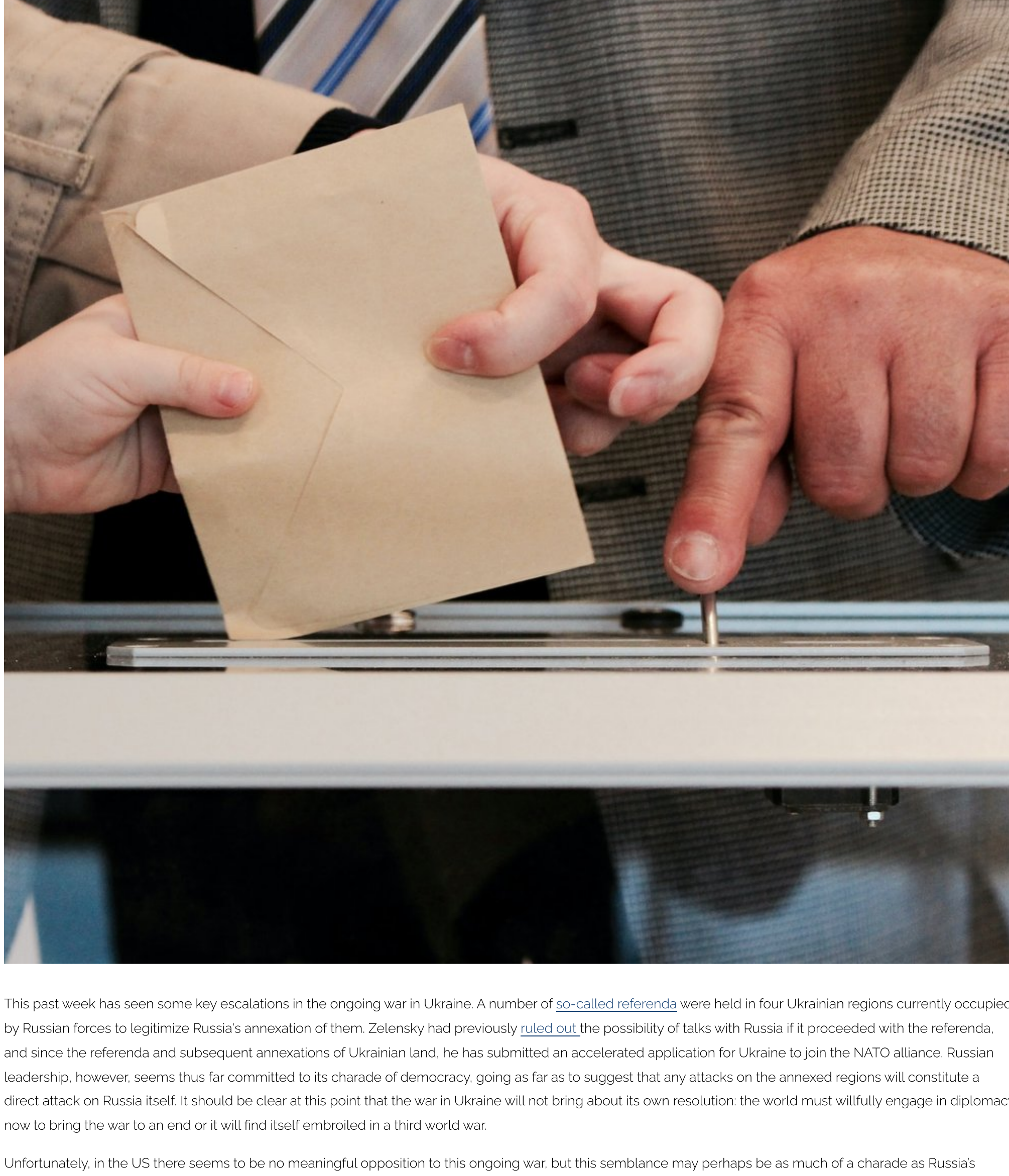


Oct 1

Survey Says: Militarism!



This past week has seen some key escalations in the ongoing war in Ukraine. A number of [so-called referenda](#) were held in four Ukrainian regions currently occupied by Russian forces to legitimize Russia's annexation of them. Zelensky had previously [ruled out](#) the possibility of talks with Russia if it proceeded with the referenda, and since the referenda and subsequent annexations of Ukrainian land, he has submitted an accelerated application for Ukraine to join the NATO alliance. Russian leadership, however, seems thus far committed to its charade of democracy, going as far as to suggest that any attacks on the annexed regions will constitute a direct attack on Russia itself. It should be clear at this point that the war in Ukraine will not bring about its own resolution; the world must willfully engage in diplomacy now to bring the war to an end or it will find itself embroiled in a third world war.

Unfortunately, in the US there seems to be no meaningful opposition to this ongoing war, but this semblance may perhaps be as much of a charade as Russia's recent referenda. Back in March 2022, in the early days of Russia's invasion into Ukraine, a then-recent poll had been making its rounds in the American presses, which found among other things that a majority of Americans attributed Putin's decision to invade Ukraine to Biden's putative weakness as president. As it happens, I had drafted up an article about the poll, which I argued was no representation of public opinion at all but an instrument of American militarism that worked to fabricate a public opinion in favor of war. Because recent events may have given the arguments of the drafted article some renewed relevance, I wish to publish that draft now on this blog.

I should note that I am not morally equating the survey poll in question with Russia's referenda, whatever such an equivalency would even mean. Compared to the referenda (a clear and indisputable escalation by Russia in the war in Ukraine), a single survey poll may seem like small potatoes even if it had made waves in the American media. Yet it is in good part because of the apparent smallness of the poll in the grand scheme of things that it merits our attention and scrutiny, for in being small, it has passed by us largely unnoticed and unquestioned, and for that very reason the poll may in fact have been that much more effective as propaganda for the American war machine.

Without further ado, then, I introduce my heretofore unpublished article, "Survey Says: Militarism"

Survey Says: Militarism! (written March 2022)

In recent days, Volodymyr Zelensky has excoriated the West for its measured reactions to the Russian invasion of Ukraine to date, arguing that the West's raft of half measures has failed to force Russia to end its unjust war against Ukraine. Speaking about the deaths of Ukrainian civilians attempting to flee the violence in Ukraine, Zelensky has [pointedly observed](#), "The audacity of the aggressor is a clear signal for the West that the imposed sanctions aren't enough."

Zelensky's righteous indignation toward the West, and his agitations to embroil the West in Ukraine's fight against Russia, read at the heart: he appeals to compelling principles of justice that the West nonetheless cannot honor lest it openly court a nuclear World War III. Yet Zelensky's siren songs to the West demanding a no-fly zone and other kinds of military engagement against Russia, calamitous though these escalations would be for the prospects of global peace, have found a sympathetic audience in the American media, which has been quick as ever to sound the war trumpets to herald American intervention.

The presses wasted little time trumpeting the findings of a [recent survey](#), conducted in the very early days of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as the voice of an American people ready for war and confrontation, nukes be damned. According to this survey of registered American voters, the latest [Harvard Center for American Political Studies \(CAPS\)-Harris Poll](#), 59% of the respondents believe Vladimir Putin ordered the invasion of Ukraine because Joe Biden as president showed weakness, with a majority of respondents also believing that, were Donald Trump president today instead of Biden, Putin would not have ordered the invasion. What is more, the survey also found that a majority of respondents believe that the United States and NATO should send their own troops into Ukraine if the conflict escalates.

Now, only about 2000 voters participated in the survey, so one might reasonably wonder if that sample size is large enough to allow pollsters to extrapolate such extraordinary findings to the whole American body politic. However, the sampling methodology is a detail that need not detain us here, for there are far more pressing issues at play. Indeed, the survey does nothing less than fabricate a reality fit for media consumption.

Just what kind of reality does this survey construct? A cursory glance at the general thrust behind the survey questions is suggestive. Consider just a few of the questions:

- "Do you think that the United States is a reliable global partner that lives up to treaty obligations and protects allies whose security is under threat, or is the United States not a reliable partner that does that?"
- "Did the Biden administration signal weakness in how it pulled out from Afghanistan and therefore invited Russia's attack on Ukraine and Europe's post-Cold War security or is that not a factor?"
- "If the conflict escalates, should the US and NATO send troops to defend the [sic] Ukraine or only send weapons to the Ukrainians to defend themselves?"
- "Do you think that if Russia gains the [sic] Ukraine that China will follow Russia's playbook and attack Taiwan or are these conflicts unrelated?"
- "Do you think we can give in to some of Putin's demands to prevent war or that once you concede anything to him he will keep marching on other countries like the Baltic States?"

To say these are loaded questions would be an understatement, but that aside, these questions together create a rather remarkable picture of the world. They depict for us a world in which the United States must either abide by its word (always and forever, come whatever may) or disgracefully renege on it. A world in which, nevertheless, Biden abiding by his word to end the forever war in Afghanistan was an instance not of resoluteness but of weakness, a singular instance of weakness, moreover, that in turn enabled military predations the world over. A world, ultimately, in which American might is the only guarantor of the standing world order, the only force capable of keeping barbarism at bay, such that Biden's weakness imperils the whole world.

This is a striking image of (affaire Ukraine and specifically Biden's role in it, at least at first glance, but this image turns out not to make much sense upon reflection. If Biden was weak, if by extension the United States were weak (or at least perceived to be weak by the likes of Putin), then the Russian invasion of Ukraine presents itself as a giggling explanandum. For if Putin felt unthreatened by Biden and the United States, he would have had little reason to order an invasion in the first place. Moreover, he would have had no need to feign being haunted by the specter of NATO, not even as a pretext for an invasion (be it a land grab or whatever), if in fact he regarded that specter as a non-reference in the world. If Putin acted because of Biden's alleged weakness, then Putin's actions defy all rational explanation, and even if one can entertain the possibility that Putin has completely forsaken reason in his dealings with Ukraine, one cannot seriously maintain both that Putin acted irrationally (that is to say, without sense or reason) and that he acted for the reason that Biden showed weakness.

Be all that as it may, the Harvard CAPS-Harris Poll purports only to represent public opinion. The reality of public opinion (if one can speak of such a thing) does not depend on the internal coherence or intelligibility of the opinions held by a people perfectly capable of believing any number of impossible things before breakfast. However, a closer examination of the survey questions, even the seemingly innocuous ones, brings to light the ideological workings of this survey in fabricating a reality, indeed a public opinion, in favor of American militarism and intervention.

The survey opened its segment on the war in Ukraine by posing the question, "Do you consider each of the following to be an ally, adversary or neutral toward the United States?" The way this question conceptualizes the range of possibilities in foreign relations is militaristic to its core: it does not allow for the possibility of friendship outside of allyship. Either Ukraine must be a full-fledged ally of the United States or Ukraine might as well be nothing at all to it. This framing of the question is no accident, either. It reflects, it embodies the American attitude toward Ukraine, and although most of us have been too numbed (by the continuing onslaught of recent events, to be sure, and much else besides) to pay it notice, it is a most palpable hostility. By insisting on allyship as the consummation of friendship between sovereign countries, the United States denigrates Ukraine; it dismisses, it denies Ukraine the possibility of friendship outside of a military alliance, and it belittles as nothing worth Ukraine's sovereignty, insinuating as it does that a truly sovereign Ukraine would have allied with it long ago.

The audacity of the American approach to Ukraine finds further expression in another seemingly innocent survey question: "What should the United States now do to protect Ukraine's independence, if anything?" As if the United States has ever sought to protect Ukraine's independence as such! The United States sees in Ukraine little more than a potential ally, a junior partner, one which moreover it can freely sacrifice to Russia like a disposable pawn in a war Ukraine cannot hope to win by itself. That is why Biden and his ilk, who had spent weeks crowing about an impending Russian invasion, did not one thing to mitigate the risk. On the contrary, they acted to intensify the risk, or even to realize it, by tantalizing Ukraine with so much talk of allyship, all to Russia's consternation, thereby endangering Ukraine and its independence in a game of brinkmanship. The cruel, unacknowledged irony of the question—its pretense that the United States cares one iota about the Ukrainian independence it had only just gambled away so freely—speaks volumes about the full extent to which the United States denigrates Ukraine even as it glorifies itself as Ukraine's noble protector.

At any rate, the survey quickly abandoned this pretense of concern for Ukraine's independence as it proceeded to ask, "Should we give Russia the Russian speaking parts of Ukraine and defend only the rest or not give them any territory?" This question is breathtaking in its imperial megalomania. By what authority, by what power do we as Americans have the right to determine ourselves the destiny of Ukraine and its several oblasts one way or the other? The matter of Ukraine's fate is properly one for Ukrainians to determine for their own sake. As a supposed friend of Ukraine and its people, the United States should not work to abrogate Ukraine's sovereignty or its ability to secure a workable peace for itself, least of all in the name of Ukrainian sovereignty.

This Harvard CAPS-Harris Poll, as it concerns us here, is no reflection of public opinion but an instrument of American militarism, one that works to construct out of survey responses to wildly distortive questions an ideological arsenal with which to weaponize the public sphere. Our media organs, so often doubling as the clarions of American might, have now dutifully lauded this arsenal of ideological weaponry into circulation and proffered it to us as the vox populi, thus completing the impression that the American people want war and impressing that impression upon the public so that it may learn its own thoughts and wishes.

If any truth can be gleaned from this survey, it is that American militarism (through its operations, its logics, and its fabrications of reality) militates against the very possibility of peace, in Ukraine as elsewhere, by working to make a peaceful, demilitarized world unimaginable. Zelensky, too, now also seeks to make such a world unimaginable, demanding allyship from the United States and the West as proof of their friendship for Ukraine. His appeals underscore the cruelty of the American approach to Ukraine: having once denied Ukraine the possibility of friendship outside of a military alliance, the United States now denies Ukraine, precisely in its time of need, even the possibility of allyship the United States had promised it for so long. Indeed, it is a cruel way for Ukraine to learn the United States was never its friend or its ally, one made no less cruel by the geopolitical realities that all but necessitate the United States to forsake (in deed if not in word) any possible alliance with Ukraine. Nevertheless, for the sake of Ukraine and the prospects of global peace, we as Americans cannot heed the calls of Zelensky and the roaring American war machine for military intervention. We must instead reclaim our voices from those who would manufacture our consent to American militarism and clamor for a peaceful resolution to the war in Ukraine. To that end, we must also imagine—and make real—the possibility of friendship with Ukraine outside of the framework and logic of allyship that would condemn us all to another world war.

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