

## **Al Jazeera quotes Stephen Zunes in these three pieces March 2022:**

### **[Analysis: Can the UAE be a safe haven for Russian oligarchs?](#) March 14, 2022**

“The Emirati government has gotten away with quite a few things, such as serious human rights abuses, atrocities in Yemen, and dubious financial activities, which have apparently not phased successive US administrations,” **Stephen Zunes, a professor of politics and international studies at the University of San Francisco, told Al Jazeera.**

“However, UAE relations with the [US amid Biden’s presidency] are not as cozy as they were during the Trump years,” said Zunes. “Countering Russian aggression has become the top foreign policy issue for the US government, so it could indeed lead to some unprecedented tensions.”

“In addition to the close relationship between the US and Emirati armed forces, the UAE has played an important role in helping the United States trade balance, providing lucrative contracts with American arms manufacturers and other investors,” added Zunes.

“As a result, if Biden was inclined to put pressure on the UAE, he could be faced with strong resistance from both the Pentagon and powerful corporate interests [in the US].”

### **[Can Russia return to the world stage, as other aggressor nations?](#) March 29, 2022**

***Analysts say while Putin may be viewed as reprehensible now amid Ukraine’s war, casting him aside looks unlikely because of Russia’s strategic power.***

“There have certainly been leaders who have launched illegal aggressive wars with high civilian casualties but have nevertheless been accepted in some circles internationally, such as [US] President George W Bush and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon,” **Stephen Zunes, professor of politics and international studies at University of San Francisco, told Al Jazeera.**

“However, with no major country supporting Russia’s aggression, it is hard to imagine that Putin will not continue to be isolated in the international community.”

Explaining why Russia was at particular risk of longer-term isolation, he said: “The level of physical devastation and casualties thus far over a relatively short period is perhaps the worse in recent decades which, combined with the irredentist aims of the conquest, makes Russia’s war on Ukraine particularly reprehensible in the eyes of the international community.

“In addition, since Ukraine is a developed country with advanced communication capabilities, images of the destruction are being broadcast internationally to an unprecedented degree.”

But above all, the main reason Russia has drawn such sharp condemnation is because Ukrainians are predominantly white Christians living in an advanced democratic society, said **Zunes**, adding that Western empathy is higher now than it has been for Palestinians and Iraqis, and other recent victims of conflict.

### **[The limits of Iran’s influence on Yemen’s Houthi rebels.](#) March 8, 2022**

***While Iran engages in dialogue with regional rivals Saudi Arabia and the UAE, its ally in Yemen has increased attacks on them.***

## **‘Axis of resistance’**

*Iran has said it supports the Houthis politically, but denies sending the group weapons.*

*The Houthis rose up against the Yemeni government in 2014 and triggered the ongoing civil war on the southern tip of the Gulf Peninsula. The Saudi Arabia-led military alliance joined the fight a year later.*

Iran, which considers the Houthis part of an “[axis of resistance](#)” against Israel and the United States, holds sway over Lebanon’s Hezbollah, militias in Iraq, and the Syrian armed forces of President Bashar al-Assad.

However, the Houthis differ from Iran’s other partners, Stephen Zunes, professor of politics and international studies at the University of San Francisco, told Al Jazeera.

“Unlike some allied militia in Iraq and Syria, the Houthis have never been an Iranian proxy. They have their own unique history, grievances and agenda,” said Zunes.

While the US and others have accused Iran of supplying the Houthis with rocket and drone technology that has allowed them to attack far beyond Yemen’s borders, it is unclear whether that is 100 percent accurate, analysts say.

“The vast majority of their weapons have been captured or purchased on the black market and are not of Iranian origin,” Zunes said.

Moreover, the Houthis are less tied to Tehran than Hezbollah members, and they are not under the Iranian command and control system and act largely autonomously, said Trita Parsi, executive vice president of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft.

“Over the years, Tehran has been able to deepen its relations with the Houthis. However, its influence over the group has always been limited. The Houthis welcome Iranian support, but they do not take orders from Tehran,” Parsi told Al Jazeera.

The war was the only reason Iran was able to gain influence in the first place, he added.

“Had the Saudis not invaded, Tehran would not even have been able to deepen its relations with the Yemeni group,” Parsi said.

“Contrary to the Saudi narrative, Iran’s relations with the Houthis are a very recent phenomenon and a direct consequence of the Saudi invasion of the country. Moreover, prior to 2010, the Saudis – who used to work closely with the Houthis – did not even refer to the group as Shia,” said Parsi.

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*Also by Stephen Zunes, Published Mar 01, 2022 in [The Progressive](#) and [Common Dreams](#)*

## **[There's No Justification for Russia's Aggression, But U.S. Double Standards on Illegal War Are Hard to Stomach](#)**

***Nothing can excuse Putin's invasion, but the hypocrisy coming out of Washington, D.C. could hardly be more striking.***

Though U.S. and NATO policy in recent years has contributed to the current tragedy unfolding in Ukraine,

responsibility rests unequivocally with the Kremlin. It is an illegal war of aggression which has quite deservedly resulted in worldwide condemnation.

Media coverage has been sympathetic to the civilian victims of the invasion and the Ukrainian resistance. Again, while it raises questions about why there hasn't been a comparable response when the victims weren't white, Christian Europeans, or when the aggressor was the United States or a U.S. ally, it is refreshing to see this acknowledgement of the horrors of war.

There's no excusing the invasion, but the double standards and hypocrisy coming out of Washington, D.C., are quite striking.

For example, President Joe Biden has correctly asserted that "nations have a right to sovereignty and territorial integrity." The United States, however, has been the only government in the world to formally recognize Israel's illegal annexation of Syria's Golan Heights and Morocco's annexation of the entire nation of Western Sahara, both seized by force in defiance of the United Nations.

If Biden really believed that countries have a right self-determination he would not refuse to recognize this right for Western Sahara, as the International Court of Justice and virtually every country on Earth has called for, nor would he refuse to support Palestinian self-determination outside of the parameters agreed to by their Israeli occupiers, the current prime minister of which has categorically ruled out Palestinian statehood.

In addition, Biden's claim that the United States "always stands up to bullies" would be news to the Yemenis, Lebanese, Palestinians, and others who have been subjected to massive military attacks by U.S.-armed allies. His insistence that "we stand for freedom" is contradicted by his administration's support for brutal dictatorships in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, and elsewhere. Criticism of Russia's veto of the U.N. Security Council resolution condemning the invasion rings hollow in light of successive U.S. vetoes of resolutions challenging the U.S. invasions of Grenada and Panama, U.S. attacks on Nicaragua, and Israel's invasions of Lebanon.

And, of course, Biden's insistence that countries must not invade other nations on false pretenses is incredibly hypocritical considering his strident support as a Senator for the U.S. invasion of Iraq on the deceptive grounds that Saddam Hussein had somehow amassed vast arsenal of chemical and biological weapons, a nuclear program, and sophisticated delivery systems.

Although Biden is certainly correct to challenge Russian president Vladimir Putin's claims that Ukraine constituted enough of a threat to Russian national security that his government had to invade, Biden's past puts him in a poor position to lead the international response to Russian aggression.

The history of U.S. militarism, imperialism, and false narratives has led some on the antiwar left to rationalize Russian aggression and exaggerate Western responsibility. A number of forums and rallies in the weeks preceding the invasion calling for an end to war in Ukraine were focused on the nonexistent threat of U.S. military intervention while ignoring the very real and growing threat of a Russian invasion. Subsequently, some have tried to blame Washington for Moscow's actions.

It is certainly true that the decision by the United States to break what appears to have been a promise to the Kremlin that NATO would not expand eastward contributed to Putin's paranoid nationalism. Incorporating former Warsaw Pact countries and three former Soviet republics into the Western alliance could be seen as unnecessarily provocative, particularly in light of repeated invasions of Russia from Western Europe through Ukraine in 1812, 1914, 1919, and 1941.

A strong argument could also be made that the crisis could have been avoided if NATO had been willing to rule out membership for Ukraine, granting the nation a neutral status similar to Finland and Austria during the Cold War. At the same time, Putin's rewriting of history and his insistence that Ukraine is inherently part of Russia, along with his decision to launch a full-scale invasion, is indicative that he would have done so regardless.

Putin appears to have at least some U.S. supporters. Not only are many in the Trump wing of the Republican Party embracing his autocratic reactionary nationalism, but there are also people on the left who have embraced him simply because he opposes the United States.

Despite claims to the contrary, the United States was not responsible for the popular 2014 uprising that ousted the Ukraine's democratically elected but increasingly autocratic and notoriously corrupt President Viktor Yanukovich. The limited funding of some opposition groups was no more responsible for the pro-Russian leader's ouster than Soviet support for armed leftist groups was responsible for socialist revolutions during the Cold War. It's as wrong to deny agency to Ukrainians as it was to deny it to Salvadorans.

And despite overreach by some U.S. officials in trying to influence the makeup of the provisional government, subsequent elections have brought to power popular representative governments. The current president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who won by a landslide, is Jewish and an ethnic Russian, making claims that the Ukrainian government is controlled by Nazis committing genocide against Russian-speakers particularly absurd.

As with the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a major setback to nonproliferation efforts. In the 1994 Budapest agreement, Ukraine agreed to give up its vast nuclear arsenal inherited from the Soviet Union in return for guarantees by Russia and others of its territorial integrity. So how should the United States respond? Even many critics of the United States' massive arms transfers to countries around the world argue that a democratic nation faced with a full-scale invasion justifies military aid. At this time, however, it is unclear whether it would be enough to defeat the Russian invasion or just cause more bloodshed. Perhaps more effective would be massive nonviolent civil resistance, which would make an occupied Ukraine ungovernable like the kind that freed the Baltic Republics from Russian occupation in the early 1990s.

Meanwhile, in Russia, antiwar protests have broken out and leading scientists, writers, intellectuals, sports figures, and others are openly challenging the Kremlin. More than 1,700 protesters were arrested in just the incursion's first few days.

In contrast to the Soviet era, Russia is far more dependent on the increasingly globalized economy, so the economic sanctions are already hurting, particularly the oligarchs on whose support Putin depends. And the bravery of Ukrainians in both the armed and unarmed resistance has slowed and, in some cases, even reversed the Russian advance.

It is unclear what the right course is for the United States to take, and Washington's hypocrisy and double standards has weakened U.S. leadership on this issue. However, unlike many international crises, the world appears united in opposing Russian aggression and it is likely Putin will ultimately be defeated.

The only question is, how long it will take, and how many people will die in the meantime?