

ΚΕΔΙΣΑ  ΚΕΔΙΣΑ

ΚΕΝΤΡΟ ΔΙΕΘΝΩΝ ΣΤΡΑΤΗΓΙΚΩΝ ΑΝΑΛΥΣΕΩΝ  
CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL STRATEGIC ANALYSES

# What does the current crisis in Ukraine tell us about the future of US Foreign policy?

**Panagiota Nakou**

*Research Paper no. 99*

**ΚΕΔΙΣΑ  KEDISA**

**ΚΕΝΤΡΟ ΔΙΕΘΝΩΝ ΣΤΡΑΤΗΓΙΚΩΝ ΑΝΑΛΥΣΕΩΝ  
CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL STRATEGIC ANALYSES**

## **Board of Directors**

**Dr Andreas Banoutsos**, *Founder and President*

**Dr Panagiotis Sfaelos**, *Vice President and Director of Research*

**Vasilis Papageorgiou**, *Secretary General*

**Argetta Malichoutsaki**, *Financial Director*

**Evangelos Diplaras**, *Member*

**Anastasia Tsimpidi**, *Member*

**© 2023 Center for International Strategic Analyses (KEDISA, All Rights Reserved)**

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without permission of the publisher

*What does the current crisis in Ukraine tell us about the future of US policy? Are we heading “back to the future,” towards a traditional, values-based foreign policy? Or are the changes and challenges of the post-Trump era taking US policy in a new direction?*

**By Panagiota Nakou**

The period that followed the end of the Cold War and the subsequent fall of the Soviet Union was considered by many to be a period of future peace and prosperity. Many considered it the ideal opportunity for the spread of democracy and the re-establishment of alliances with existing or emerging powers. The US took advantage of the new international situation by making itself the only superpower that would eventually take on the role of world ruler and protector. During the following decades, the United States consolidated this position by making enormous efforts to spread its national values on a global scale, considering them to be global principles. US policy tended to change only recently under the presidency of Donald Trump, who sought to completely change the American methods that had been in place for almost a century and that continued to exist even stronger after the tragic events of 9/11. Trump's administration challenged the very foundations of the international community and the American perception. He revised old alliances and created tensions with friendly states while at the same time he was trying to side politically with authoritarian personalities and states that are not in line with the principles of democracy, freedom and liberalism. Trump's behavior made it clear that US foreign policy was no longer driven by any moral principle but was based on the impending short-term gain and the coveted support of his voters while it would also focus the eyes of the international community on him to meet his bigotry. The four years of the 2016-2020 presidency was a challenge for the rest of the world as it made it almost impossible to predict his following political choices. That is why when Biden took office as President of the United States of America, there was widespread enthusiasm both domestically and internationally as citizens hoped that things would return to normal and that US would reclaim its role as global and moral leader. The recent tragic events taking place in Ukraine to this day, provide a favorable framework for the analysis of the political methods that Biden's administration will implement in both the immediate and the distant future, thus enabling us to understand whether American politics are indeed returning to its traditional methods or whether, despite efforts, the political environment will never fully return to its original state.

The current situation in Ukraine is an ideal opportunity for America to show how willing it is to reassume its dominant role and take action as a key player on the international stage. Russia's illegal initiative to invade Ukraine's national territory violates the rules of international law and, of course, since it uses widespread forms of violence, it also violates Human Rights. It is quite logical that this new crisis is

affecting the whole international community and especially the European countries, many of which are already suffering the consequences of the war, such as the millions of refugees. Countries within the NATO that are a short distance from the power-hungry Russia are increasingly worried about its hegemonic ambitions. In this context, the international community expects America to take strong and decisive action to stop Russia's aggression. Unfortunately, despite their willingness, the United States does not really have the means to end this new war immediately, at least without risking a catastrophic escalation of the conflict. The bitter truth is that Russia has a huge armed force at its disposal with its most important acquisition being nuclear weapons. But even if we did not take into account its nuclear weapons systems, Russia after the election of Vladimir Putin has managed to become a major international player, strongly questioning the monarchy of the United States. The Russian economy now has a huge impact on the world economy and at the same time is now one of the largest producers and suppliers of energy in the world. For all the reasons mentioned above, Biden's administration chose to handle this crisis by submitting strong mainly financial sanctions. Although the immediate fall of the Russian ruble is a positive result it was not enough to stop the Russian attack. Unfortunately, substantial results resulting from such sanctions can occur after a long period of time. In the meantime, unfortunately, the West must also bear the great financial cost. Although sanctions provide for gradual independence from both the Russian economy and energy supply, it will take a lot of time for them to adjust. Theoretically, in the long run Russia will suffer so much financially that it will realize that the cost of war is so great that it no longer benefits from it being carried out. Therefore, this indirect American approach to the current situation could foreshadow possible US political reactions in similar circumstances.

Until recently, as previously mentioned, American hegemony was unquestionable as Russia, after the fall of the Soviet Union, sought to reorganize itself and retain at least some of its remaining influence. US troops were scattered around the world in support of the US fight against terrorism, also known as the War on Terror. Even financially Russia did not reach at any level the economic power of the US. After Putin's election in 2000, everything changed for Russia. It began to regain its power. It emerged both economically and politically in a very short time and in fact with the war between Russia and Georgia in 2008 it showed its steadily growing ambitions, ambitions that would lead to many other conflicts in the future. The Russo-Georgian War was the first indication of Putin's political goals and the first living example of what he was willing to use to achieve them. He was willing to use all forms of violence, to violate human rights and international law, and to invade the national territories of another independent nation illegally, all on the altar of power. The sanctions imposed on Russia at the moment are not the first time the United States has tried to manipulate Russia's brutality financially. Attempts have been made in the past to avoid extra violence but ultimately with little results. In fact, Biden's current policies are quite similar to the way Obama's administration handled the Crimean War. Obama refused to use any kind of military force and actually tried imposing sanctions on Russia. Both then and now these measures have proved to be insufficient. Biden's

political strategy towards Russia can prove to be extremely damaging not only to Russia but also to the West itself. With Russia being one of our largest energy suppliers, gas and electricity prices have skyrocketed. Russia has also a huge part of the international stock market, so any negative developments in its national economy will be reflected in it. We are therefore witnessing an economic confrontation, the outcome of which will ultimately determine the formation of an international balance of power.

President Biden's response to Russia's aggressive aspirations is likely to be seen by some as a sign of weakness. On the contrary, if we take into account that the same means have been used in the past towards Russia, and even at a time when America's power was unmatched by any other country, we will realize that they are merely a less violent approach. Even a superpower must prudently calculate the cost of any of its military operations and understand that it is by no means invulnerable. It is not always possible to come out as the ultimate winning force. Especially nowadays where there are other emerging superpowers such as Russia militarily and China mainly economically, any US choice at a strategic and tactical level must be carefully selected. Prioritization and indirect involvement are prudent policy elements that enable the United States to uphold the principles and values it has advocated for so many years but at the same time does not place them in an extremely dangerous position. Therefore it is obvious that while the Biden's administration handles the current crisis quite differently from what his last predecessor would have done has not returned to the traditional attitudes of American foreign policy to the extent we expected. Biden makes sure the US presence is felt but does not take strong initiatives.

It is important to note that the current state of affairs in Ukraine is not the permanent way for the United States to respond to any crisis. Biden's choice not to deplete military units in a direct battle with Russia does not mean that he will not use armed forces another time to achieve his future goals. Right now Biden focuses on the fact that although Russia is trying to implement its expansionist ambitions, it is not a real threat to American hegemony. The real danger comes from China, with which the United States was actually in an economic war during Trump's presidency. Relations between them have not been fully bridged and may be disturbed again in the near future. If China were to try to expand territorially in areas of geographical importance to the United States, it is very likely that there would be many more and of course more intense reactions from the American leadership.

We must not forget that the American people themselves would probably not support armed involvement in the Ukrainian war. After two long wars in both Afghanistan and Iraq with no memorable results the American people are tired of such interventions. Since the Obama presidency, citizens have been demanding an end to armed conflicts. Obama had already reduced US troops in the Middle East since then but was careful not to withdraw them altogether claiming that it was the US's duty to uphold global values in practice. Under Trump, the decision not to increase the US presence in the Middle East remained. However, Trump argued that America no

longer benefited from these wars and he was not at all interested in the values of the international community nor considered them duty of American leadership. During Biden's presidency, America permanently withdrew from the Middle East and turned its attention to different parts of the world. Unfortunately, as US troops withdrew, the Taliban took control of many areas and the city of Kabul fell. Based on the above we understand that although the US is returning to the international scene as a major player they have not fully returned as a hegemonic power.

Overall, Biden is trying to correct many of the questionable choices Trump made. In many areas he has sought to restore the former American glory. Take, for example, the way in which, unlike his predecessor, he handles the environmental crisis. Almost immediately after his election, Biden made sure that America would participate again in the Paris agreement on the environment. During his presidency, Trump had removed America from the agreement, claiming that he did not even believe in the existence of this phenomenon. Environmental change was not the only issue on which Trump did not believe in the views of the scientific community and which he sought to downplay. He had the exact same behaviour with the sanitary crisis that was caused by Covid-19. He preferred to undermine the risk faced by the citizens and to hide the real numbers of people who lost their lives due to the virus, not wanting to weaken the country's economy. This changed immediately after the election of President Biden. The US also rejoined the UN Human Rights Council during Biden's presidency. All this in combination with the public support of international organizations and alliances such as NATO from the American side, especially after Trump's threats that the US would leave them, show that US wants to cooperate with the international community. To sum up, the US wants to be a key player and wants to be involved in international affairs.

In conclusion, taking all the above into consideration the US response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine is an example of possible similar behaviour in the future. It can tell us a lot about its new foreign policy but it is also not the only defining factor. We can definitely see a return to American values and principles and America's effort to return dynamically to its role as a superpower. We must nevertheless consider that a full return to this state may not be possible. The US must carefully set their priorities and choose their future battles as their hegemony is likely to be challenged even further in the following years.

## **SOURCES**

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/12/us/politics/biden-ukraine-diplomacy.html>

<https://time.com/6151085/joe-biden-russia-ukraine-foreign-policy/>

<https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/ukraine-united-states-re-establishes-its-credentials>

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Donald-Trump/Foreign-relations>

<https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/12/us-spotlight-year-review-and-looking-ahead>

<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/07/united-states-needs-new-foreign-policy/614110/>

<https://theconversation.com/out-of-afghanistan-joe-biden-and-the-future-of-americas-foreign-policy-166914>

<https://www.state.gov/a-foreign-policy-for-the-american-people/>

<https://www.vox.com/22951264/russia-ukraine-war-american-superpower-limits>