

Putinisation and the European Union of Insecurity

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In principle, the EU is a military alliance, but with neutral states in it. In fact, the EU is an organisation with security opt-outs, very much reliant on US military umbrella. Also in principle, Russia still is a provider of (energy) security¹ to the EU. In fact, by Putinisation, is being the main revisionist actor since the end of the Cold War. What is, then, next: a deepening of union by security or a loosening of it by appeasement and fear?

Introduction

As shown in a previous article² of mine, Putinisation could be defined as an autocratic and abusive form of national and international leadership based on the idiosyncratic charisma of Russian President Vladimir Putin, and aiming to restore (at least and at last) the imperial grandeur and status of the Kremlin-based state.

In fact, in Kremlin's view *The Near Abroad* is Russian-bound territory too, lost temporarily due to Western hostile policy. The perennial syndrome of *Russia under siege* has led to the postulate of *Russia has never waged offensive wars* which is true *Fake news* if we take into account several undisputed historical events like general Suvorov's expedition in the Alps (1799), the joint invasion with Nazi Germany of Poland (1939), the Winter War against Finland (1939-1940), or the invasion of Afghanistan (1979).

The invasion of Ukraine has offered the opportunity for many to try and explain Putin's

¹ Beyond controversy and contextual propaganda setup, is undeniable that Russia is concomitantly involved in aggression operation against Ukraine and lucrative supply business deals with the EU. Setting aside the reduced amount of energy supplied to EU member states (of 20 percentile or less) since the aggression, Russia still is strategic partner to the EU, providing, for instance, the giants magnets for ITER fusion project in France. See ***, *The top ring is on its way*, 07 Nov, 2022, ITER Newline, <https://www.iter.org/newsline/-/3810>.

² George Anglițoiu, *Putinization and Neo-Containment*, *Europolity*, Volume 12, No. 2, 2018, pp. 179-190, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3461881.

mindset. In comparison to the first Euro-Asian wars chronicled by single sources like Herodotus and Thucydides, the news is flooded daily with many opinions for readers to choose from.

It is thus difficult to write a definitive contribution about ongoing events. But regardless of consolidated evaluations or (self-) contradictory views³, some elements bear the marks of a continuous pattern.

Imperialism and quest for hegemony are once again on display, as long as established rules are denied and frontiers redrawn by force. History is used to justify unilateral perspectives and countries are either bad or good, depending on their fate and will to conquer, or prowess to resist aggression.

In such dire circumstances, the EU tries to be a rules-based commonwealth confronted with renewed great power rivalries capable of both classic and novel threats to security and order. Any threat means a challenge, which in turn, if coped with, could lead to opportunity for transformation. Urgency is omnipresent now not only for the direct victim of aggression but also for the EU as partner and guarantor.

In the 21st century, a rebellious former imperial subject (Ukraine) backed by the new Athens (EU) and Sparta (NATO) confronts the new Darius of Eurasia (Putin). Meanwhile, the samples of “land and water” as symbols of submission have been replaced by oil and gas pipelines as proof of allegiance. Deny them and you will risk not necessarily a Xerxes-like invasion but the comeback of general *Winter* by missile bombardments against critical infrastructure.

The European integration process of the Cold War had been a success story under the American security umbrella. Bar the exception of French withdrawal from NATO military structures, Western Europe had avoided any consistent posture regarding its autonomous future in terms of great power security.

With the Maastricht Treaty, mainly on the basis of French-German initiative, a Common Foreign and Security Policy, aiming to band together the dormant alliance of Western Union

³ See the articles of Michael Kofman and Andrea Kendall-Taylor in the timespan of a year, one claiming Russia to be a “persistent power” based mainly on “military force to be reckoned with”, and the other one arguing for a “decline” in status: *The Myth of Russian Decline. Why Moscow Will Be a Persistent Power*, Foreign Affairs, November/December 2021, pp. 142-152, and *Russia’s Dangerous Decline. The Kremlin won’t go down without a fight*, Foreign Affairs, November/December 2022, pp. 22-35.

After such works, the reader could be excused for being puzzled about the value of expertise: if scientists cannot assess correctly but contradict themselves, then what about assertive politicians, Putin-like or democrats?

and the economic success of the Single Market, the '90s saw gradual steps towards a joint defence policy with a view to create a common defence. The challenges were few and the overall perception was of an American global hegemony that demanded more from the EU in terms of security contributions at the outskirts of its own backyard. The break-up of former Yugoslavia proved to be a series of bloody events in which NATO had twice the upper hand. Then came the ascension of Al Qaeda and Washington's failed export of the American dream, by military means, in the heartland of the first empires of Antiquity.

In this context, the French-German alignment with the Kremlin in the rejection of American *coalition of the able and willing* proved not to be a solitary moment of temporary balancing act but Western Europe's incapacity to have a coherent approach. The search for its strategic compass emboldened Putin to expand his revisionist take, but closer to home, where a nascent European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was taking shape.

The *Orange* and *Velvet* revolutions were happening and being described as irreversible signs of Westernisation, but this should be taken with many grains of 'strategic' salt. Both movements were also nationalistic and eager to embrace confrontation. The Ukrainian foreign policy, especially, embarked on a quest for regional assertiveness showcased by its difficult neighboring relations with Romania, a newly accepted NATO and EU member. With a lesser actor as Moldova, its views were displaying similar patterns to Kremlin's when the new, pro-West President Viktor Yuschenko proposed to Chisinau his version of federalisation⁴ - a disguised version of the *Kozak Memorandum* which had ignited a Euromaidan like series of protests in the Moldovan capital only two years prior. The centralisation drive of Yuschenko regime was on display not only on administrative matters but also regarding ethnic minorities for which education in their mother tongue was not expanded but restricted. Paradoxically, only the comeback of pro-Russian candidate Viktor Yanukovich to the forefront of Ukrainian politics would provide help in this regard. Thus, his *Party of Regions* would offer more power to oblasts and tackle minority rights in a more

⁴ For my overall approach on the *Yuschenko Plan* and Ukrainian-Romanian tensions of that time, see *Chapter IV* (The Transnistrian Conflict from the Perspective of EU Enlargement) and *Conclusions* of Adrian Pop, Gabriela Pascariu, George Angheloiu, Alexandru Purcăruș, *Romania and the Republic of Moldova - Between the European Neighborhood Policy and the Prospect of EU Enlargement*, The European Institute of Romania, Bucharest, 2006, pp. 68-91, http://ier.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/publicatii/Pais3_studiu_5_en.pdf.

European compatible way.⁵

Such critical viewpoint of Ukrainian foreign policy and human rights protection standards should nonetheless be confused with neo-Nazism, regardless of the importance of controversial pressure groups like the *Azov regiment* and its political proxy.

Russia had in its imperial history a significant track of victories when confronted with aggression. Twice *the patriotic wars* against invaders had led Russia to victory, and cause the overall demise of its Western aggressor. Twice Russian troops had paraded through imperial capital cities like Paris and Berlin. Twice such offensive assertiveness was followed by Russian-centric projection of the World that ended in collapse. And such collapse did not happen overnight but slowly, fueled by military disasters in non-patriotic wars in the Far East (Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05) and Middle East (Afghan War of 1978-1988). Twice the adversary was dismissed as weak and inferior, and twice the West witnessed / helped to contain Russian expansionism through belligerent proxies.

Brzezinski's assessment that Russia without Ukraine is not an empire could be debated. But any student of History should not overlook the dangers of reductionism.

Putin's reductionism is a chronicle of Russia's tribulations at the hands of treacherous West able and willing to corrupt the land, people and soul of Eastern Slavs. Novgorod, Kievan or Muscovite Rus, such denominations are mythical and beyond reproach, not much different to the totalist vision of a perfect Meccan Caliphate.

Both leaders of the current war bear the name of the presumed founding father of Rus Empire - Vladimir / Volodymyr the Great. But beyond names and epithets, *third* or *fourth* Rome, legitimation lies less on reinterpretation of history, and more on deeds. For transformers of the political map, the making of history depends on battlefield success. Therefore, regardless of rhetoric, the fate of both Vladimir will be instilled in the history books of the future less by the bravado and more by the final outcome of the war. But such personalisation of the war is a return to tribalism. The European Union is not an organisation waiting for the barbarians. But *the Barbary of war*, under the spectre of weapons of mass destruction, is affecting EU security beyond calculus of win-win or zero-sum games of power.

⁵ For an analysis on the correlation mother tongue – allegiance, see Dominique Ariel, *Language, Status, and State Loyalty in Ukraine*, The Journal of the Ukrainian Research Institute at Harvard University, Volume 35 (Number 1-4), 2017-2018 (Pages 233-264), <https://www.husj.harvard.edu/articles/language-status-and-state-loyalty-in-ukraine>. Despite bringing into debate complex and interesting elements about the linguistic struggles of the Ukrainian quest for a nation state, the article fails to cover the generic need of ethnic minorities to have an exert administrative, judicial, educational and cultural rights through the very use of their language.

Russian Aggression versus Ukraine

What started out as a more-or-less civil war between Kremlin-backed Russian speaking / ethnic separatists and Ukrainian authorities evolved into a *special military operation* against Neo-Nazi Ukrainian political regime led by President (of Jewish ethnic origin) Zelensky. Of course, this has translated into a propaganda battle of sorts, Ukraine denying the civil war dimension of it and the West willingly accepting Kyiv's rhetoric of being the full-fledged sovereign victim of unprovoked aggression.

But without going into details, not everything that Kyiv claims is true from both historical and International Law viewpoints.

On one hand, regardless of never-ending discussions about the pre-existence of Ukraine as state, its very existence at the end of the Cold War in the context of Soviet Union's dissolution is enough proof of sovereignty and international recognition. All former Eastern satellites of USSR invited to join NATO after the Cold War had to prove their compliance with Europe's political map and therefore concluded explicit treaties of good neighbourhood with Ukraine. Thus, were recognised, among other sensitive issues, as national frontiers, the Soviet borders of Ukraine regardless of how these were acquired or given.

On the other hand, President Zelensky has showcased his communication skills but constantly misled the West by claiming that all Ukrainian territory belonged *per se* to Kyiv, for instance the blatant case of Snake Island, a minuscule but strategic territory which Communist Romania was forced *after* the conclusion of the Paris Peace Treaty (1947) to give to USSR.

Also, many are eager to exhibit the merits of Ukrainian democratic virtues, forgetting too easily recent cases in which Kyiv has acted in violation of the International Law or has promoted similar offensive foreign policy as Kremlin towards smaller neighbours.

But none of the above justifies conquest⁶ regardless of Putin's pseudo-scientific, legalist and moral takes on the matter. For instance, his V-Day celebration speech of 9 May 2022⁷ tried to

⁶ For the invalidity of a territorial claim based on such a successful use of force, see Malcolm Shaw, *International Law*, 4th Edition, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999, pp. 340-342.

⁷ "Russia launched a pre-emptive strike at the aggression. It was a forced, timely and the only correct decision. A decision by a sovereign, strong and independent country." See ***, *Address by the President of Russia at the military parade*, President of Russia, May 9, 2022, Red Square, Moscow, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/68366>.

justify the use of *pre-emptive*⁸ action because of the *de facto* malignant alliance between NATO and Ukraine in order to stop Kyiv from getting nuclear weapons, building up a striking force against the Donbas, and also for being overall hostile and treacherous against Russia.

In fact, *preventive*⁹ action does not go without impunity but is qualifiable under International Law as **aggression**, meaning an anticipatory attack, as early as possible, under false pretences, against a sovereign state in order to cause regime change and territorial gains, regardless of ethnic/human rights gross violations, including genocide.¹⁰

Resolution Scenarios

What should differentiate the 21-century from the past is the capacity to seek and manage peace above anything else. Fail to do so and the follow up will only be limitless destruction. In such context, I can envisage three main resolution scenarios, based not necessarily on feasibility but combatants' will to win¹¹.

The **first** is *military* and almost idealistic¹²: Kyiv's stance that the only acceptable solution for Ukraine is complete victory by liberation of its entire occupied land (including the

⁸ The very concept the Kremlin incriminated in 2003 when siding with Paris and Berlin over Washington's use of its newly branded Bush Doctrine of preemption.

⁹ For the merits of *interceptive self-defence* as the best option of anticipatory response covered by International Law, see Malcolm Shaw, *op.cit.*, p. 790.

¹⁰ See e.g., as academic approach, George P. Fletcher, Jens David Ohlin, *Defending Humanity: When Force is Justified and Why*, Oxford University, Oxford, 2013, pp. 155-176.

For a international resolution initiative at the level of Council of Europe (of which both Russia and Ukraine are members), see Rapporteur Lluís Maria de Puig, *The concept of preventive war and its consequences for international relations*, Political Affairs Committee, Doc. 11293, 8 June 2007, <https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/X2H-Xref-ViewHTML.asp?FileID=11677&lang=EN>.

¹¹ See comparatively the New Year's Eve simultaneous speeches of Zelensky and Putin, both emphasizing fight for land as end game of independence ("Return of *our lands*... The area of independent Ukraine, as it was since 1991. As it will always be." versus "*our historical territories* in the new regions of the Russian Federation").

***, *New Year greetings of President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy*, President of Ukraine Official website, 31 December 2022 - 23:55,

<https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/novorichne-privitannya-prezidenta-ukrayini-volodimira-zelens-80197>

***, *New Year Address to the Nation*, President of Russia, December 31, 2022 23:55,

<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/70315>.

territories lost in 2014), followed eventually by a final peace treaty, is brave and patriotic but does not cope well with the harsh realities of a protracted warfare against one of the most important military forces in the world, led by a geopolitical gambler eager to make glorious history and who is betting his legacy meanwhile. Despite Russian setbacks and Ukraine's apparent ability to wage counteroffensives, the deciding factor will be escalation. Russian partial mobilisation does not mean that both countries are at all-out war but just adapting at a longer than expected conflict. Also, the fact that Ukraine is still facing on three cardinal points (including Belarus) possible pincer manoeuvres or faint attacks has a sapping effect on Kyiv's capacity to concentrate decisive amounts of manpower and assets on a given battlefield.¹³

The **second** is also *military*: Russia has either the option to seek total victory (almost out of question after defeats in the Battles of Kyiv and Kharkov, and withdrawal from Kherson) or partial victory by armistice followed by freezing. The more realistic "partial victory" would mean winning some extra-territories to those occupied in 2014, most likely full Donetsk, Luhansk and the south-west Black Sea coast, merged together in a sort of geopolitical land bridge with Crimea, plus the Azov Sea acting as Russian *mare nostrum*. This scenario could also mean mixed victories for Russia and Ukraine, none of them decisive enough to have strategic consequences for achieving final victory, leading to a sort of 11 November 1918 armistice. Arriving to such a deadlock could in turn fuel a renewal of hostilities later on.

The **third** should be *peaceful*: under mediation of third parties (eg. Turkey / Israel / International organisation), the federalisation of Ukraine would be agreed upon, and also the recognition of some territorial losses to Russia (and its proxies).

These scenarios do not consider, of course, alternative but less probable courses of the war, mainly the full involvement of NATO as warring party alongside Ukraine. Also, the opening of a second, revisionist battlefield in the Indo-Pacific, is not assumed as imminent or guaranteed.

¹² See, for instance, the very optimistic prognosis of Dr. Mike Martin (Kings' College London) about the imminent Ukrainian victory: *Ukraine will declare victory in summer 2023*, Times Radio, Nov 10, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c8AVzK6O0BI>.

For the more skeptical evaluation of battleground perspectives, see US Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley: *Can Ukraine push out Russia? See top US general's blunt assessment*, CNN, Nov. 17, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6OebC60v6z4>.

¹³ For Ukrainian military leadership's assessment of Russian escalation, see ***, *A looming Russian offensive*, The Economist, Dec 15th, 2022, <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2022/12/15/a-looming-russian-offensive>.

How much insecure is the EU?

The ring of friends envisaged by President Prodi in 2003 at the launch of the European Neighbourhood Policy has not been achieved yet. Instead, the EU is confronted by an uneven front of rivals, rogues and deniers sharing anti-Europeanisation / Westernisation views. The driving forces behind such a front are Putin and his renewed Russia, as promoters of revisionism and return to political grandeur, mainly by subversion, false propaganda and use of force.

In such context, the Ukrainian case is the latest in a series of outbreaks of revisionism against the West (depicted as unworthy winner of the Cold War), starting with the Transnistrian Conflict (1991-92).

But such revisionism is emboldened by the perceived *Achilles' heel of the West*, meaning its current unwillingness to wage war like in the old imperial times of the Crimean War (1853-1856). In turn, this leads to the perception that the lesser partner of the transatlantic link, the EU, could be bullied by a combination of vital economic ties (eg. *the Energy lever*) and steady subordination or dismantlement of EU friendly neighbours, mostly in the East. Added to this pattern of frailties are the EU's 3 critical weaknesses: energy dependence; lack of a classic, standing army under supranational decision-making; growing illiberalism and nationalism as opposed to EU deepening (*Neo-Weimarisation*).

Since 2003, the EU has taken several commendable steps to strategize under the leadership of its "foreign and security minister". Standing diplomatic elite has been created in order to implement a global role for the EU with the use of a *compass* of its own devise meant to reach out for *strategic autonomy*. Military corps in the form of interstate battlegroup have been created but have not yet been deployed to face real war threats. Dealing with Petersburg tasks could be seen as a preparatory phase, but 25 years since the proclamation of the *Helsinki Headline Goal* the EU Rapid Reaction Force is still in the making, leaving the EU with only the US as real protector in case of trouble. Losing the United Kingdom has only made the EU more insecure. Military security cannot be overlooked and Cold War-like free riding is no longer an option. But getting military help is subject to political fluctuations of the ally who is good to have but increasingly expensive to hold on to.

Remedies

As mentioned previously, the first and more pressing EU weakness is *energy dependence*. But self-reliance is not easily achievable taking into account the varying degrees of pre-war dependence of EU member states on Russian imports. *The Green Revolution* and

diversification of sources of imports have been started before the Ukraine invasion, **but** the main challenger is represented by the unwillingness of economies and societies to suffer higher costs and scarcities despite the fact that the EU has one of the highest income per capita ratios in the world.

Moreover, the EU does not equate its member states that fought two very (self-)destructive world wars. Contemporary European citizens want consumerist peace and not war.

Cutting off coal and oil imports, capping and phasing out at an accelerated pace gas imports are commendable measures¹⁴, if decided so and implemented unambiguously¹⁵, **but** the protracted war in Ukraine and its potential freezing will fuel crisis in the EU and the rest of the world.

Why so? Because the EU is already forced to deal with helping refugees, supporting Kyiv resilience and tackling soaring costs of food, energy and overall living.

What to do then? Help Kyiv more in order to win back its country. The *Ukrainisation* of war effort is not cheap or easy but constitutes the best option available, including training more Ukrainian troops in the EU / NATO states (up to 10 brigades)¹⁶ for strategically successful counteroffensives.

Also, the West should use better and systemic diplomatic pressure versus OPEC and other major energy producers to extract and sell affordably more fossil energy.¹⁷ The US is less

¹⁴ See the promising inception of the Black Sea electric cable project between Azerbaijan, Georgia, Romania and Hungary: ***, *Statement by President von der Leyen at the signing ceremony of the Memorandum of Understanding for the development of the Black Sea Energy submarine cable*, European Commission, 17 December 2022, Bucharest, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_22_7807.

¹⁵ In comparison, see the news of rivalry and controversy regarding the replacement of troublesome MidCat with BarMar pipeline project, both lacking proper environmental assessment or delivering adequate short-term answers for veering off Russian imports: Anna Gumbau, *The French-Spanish 'BarMar' pipeline will do little to address the energy crisis in the short-term*, Energy Monitor, 28 October 2022, <https://www.energymonitor.ai/tech/networks-grids/the-french-spanish-barmar-pipeline-will-do-little-to-address-the-energy-crisis-in-the-short-term/>.

¹⁶ On the short-term feasibility of training 5 brigades (up to 40,000 troops), see the answers of Ret. US Army Major Gen. Mike Repass: Peter Bergen, *Retired US major general: What it will take for the Ukrainians to win*, CNN, May 5, 2022, <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/05/04/opinions/bergen-repass-ukraine-interview/index.html>.

¹⁷ For the US failed attempts in this regard, see for instance, Mohamad Bazzi, *Saudi Arabia has screwed over the US – and the world – yet again. Enough is enough*, The Guardian, Thu 13 Oct 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/oct/13/saudi-arabia-us-oil-prices-opec>.

energy dependent than the EU and this should once more determine Brussels to accelerate transition to green energy and economy, by increased EU aid as seen in the framework of *REPowerEU*. The Corona procurement and financial frameworks should give impetus for similarly EU backed Energy bonds and acquisitions.

Not last, in such times of danger and hardship more competencies and will to act should be given at EU level in CFSP affairs. Convergently, a clearer division of labour with NATO for solving recurrent *3D Syndrome* (Duplication, Discrimination, Decoupling) should be implemented. Also, discriminatory diplomatic stances in EU policies (like the Schengen Agreements¹⁸), affecting both foreign and home affairs, should be avoided, if nationalistic drives are to be effectively contained and a larger European, by EU means, identity be constructed.

Neo-containment¹⁹ and the strange case of Putinisation of enlargement

Regardless of its noble intentions, expanding the EU to the East instead of continuing to promote and enhance the European Neighbourhood Policy is a source of insecurity. The EU

¹⁸ See the Austrian and Dutch vetoes against Bulgaria at the Justice and Home Affairs Council of December 2022. See also the Austrian veto, coupled with Dutch and Swedish fluctuating positions, against Romania, in the same context - Jorge Liboreiro & Vincenzo Genovese, *Austria blocks Schengen accession of Romania and Bulgaria, while Croatia gets green light*, Euronews, 09/12/2022, <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2022/12/08/austria-blocks-schengen-accession-of-romania-and-bulgaria-while-croatia-gets-green-light>.

By contrast, the acceptance in Schengen Area of Croatia, a country also located on *the Balkan route* for immigrants, and still having problems even at the very top of leadership with grasping and condemning war crimes, seems very much attuned to the same pattern of lack of solidarity and cohesion that has mared European security since the unilateral recognition of Croatia and Slovenia in 1991 (by Austria and newly reunified Germany) while the rest of the West was still trying to promote peaceful resolution within the boundaries of federal Yugoslavia. See for instance, Zeljko Trkanjec, *Twice as many illegal migrants along 'Balkan route' this year*, Euractiv.hr, https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/twice-as-many-illegal-migrants-along-balkan-route-this-year/ and Aleksandar Brezar, *'Final straw': Croatia's president accused of playing down war crimes*, Euronews, 10/12/2021, <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2021/12/10/final-straw-croatia-s-president-accused-of-playing-down-war-crimes>.

¹⁹ One of the first debaters on renewed containment of Russia has been former Ukrainian Prime Minister and presidential candidate Yulia Tymoshenko. While denying wrongly the perspective of a new Cold War, she nonetheless underlined the scenario of a *Weimarisation* of Russia with offensive strings attached, particularly on regaining Crimea. See Yuliya Tymoshenko, *Containing Russia*, Foreign Affairs, May/June 2007, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2007-05-01/containing-russia>.

cannot reasonably accept Ukraine and Moldova as member states as long as they have active / frozen conflicts within.

On the other hand, Finland²⁰ and Sweden abandoning neutrality and joining NATO is very good news both in strategic and tactical terms, including for the EU and its mutual assistance clause. Austria and Ireland will be the only remaining neutral states in the EU which will translate into stronger ties with NATO and enhancement of the EU side of it.

Another side of the unfolding geostrategic story is how the agents of Putinisation, like Victor Orban, Matteo Salvini or Marine Le Pen, will manage or not to still be successful and lead strong contestations against the European model of integration by enlargement and deepening. Brexit might be over but the lesson is still vivid that ambitious and populist politicians do not cope well with the strains imposed by loosening of their sovereign powers under the pressure of Brussels-isation made by the new and expanding breed of Eurocrats.

But let us return to why EU and NATO membership for Ukraine is troublesome and ill advised.²¹

²⁰ I do not share President Biden's view about the end of *Finlandisation*, because an alternative meaning of it could always be not the neutralisation of a neighbouring country but the opportunistic rupture of it. One should not forget the fact that the Winter War of 1939-40 ended, despite Finnish bravery, in Russian victory, the Kremlin managing to get, despite huge losses, not all the intended territories but some strategic territories nonetheless.

²¹ On the issue of Western expansionism to the "Near Abroad" as primary cause, in the context of first use of force by the Kremlin against runaway, Euromaidan Ukraine, see the debate between John Mearsheimer and Michael McFaul / Stephen Sestanovich, *Faulty Powers. Who Started the Ukraine Crisis?*, Foreign Affairs, November / December 2014, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/eastern-europe-caucasus/2014-10-17/faulty-powers>.

See also the variables taken into consideration by experts when disagreeing (in majority) about the West provoking Putin into violent action. ***, *Who Is at Fault in Ukraine?* Foreign Affairs' *Brain Trust Weighs In*, Foreign Affairs, November 9, 2014, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-11-09/who-fault-ukraine>.

While I do not agree with Mearsheimer's view that Western liberal delusions of peaceful expansion are the root cause for Russian aggression, one should not overlook the rather uninspired, unwarranted and contradictory postulate in the NATO Bucharest Summit Declaration of 2008 (pct. 23) that "NATO welcomes Ukraine's and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO. *We agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO...* Therefore we will now begin a period of intensive engagement with both at a high political level *to address the questions still outstanding pertaining to their MAP applications.*" – ***, *Bucharest*

While support for its war and reconstruction efforts are both necessary and commendable, membership could trigger dire consequences for Western security.

Firstly, you cannot barter a prospect of membership. Of course, the West has the antecedent of Turkish candidacy for the EEC / EU, which after 60 years is still being unaccomplished. But this very episode should tell a cautionary story about making promise with low chance of success.

Secondly, this is not a facilitator for peace but could stir up Russian imperialist drive more. Is one thing to accept Finnish and Swedish interest in joining NATO, on the basis of their EU membership status, and a totally different thing to grant hopes for membership to a war-torn country with low expectations of settling territorial disputes peacefully.

Thirdly, is there to expect from Brussels-based bureaucracies of EU and NATO that once membership talks start, Ukraine will just wait diligently for its existential conflict to end and only afterwards fulfill merit-based criteria, and join these two Western organisations? The eagerness of Ukrainian elites to join instantly the EU and NATO is already manifesting, and any postponement under whatever reason will be seen as unwarranted and unfriendly.

Bearing sacrifice and genocide had led in the past to international gestures of good will and support, but that was usually done without direct implications to Western security. The Ukrainian tragedy is gruesome but Western security has not been the outcome of charitable work done by the EU and NATO but of efficient realism.

Fourthly, will Kyiv be willing to accept some territorial concessions to Russia in exchange for peace and a faster track to joining EU and NATO? Less likely, taking into account Zelensky's uncompromising peace proposal²².

Summit Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Bucharest on 3 April 2008, NATO, Press Release (2008) 049, Issued on 03 Apr. 2008, Last updated: 05 Jul. 2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm.

Based on Mearsheimer's neorealist view, no country should have ever joined NATO out of fear of the Kremlin, and NATO should have lost the Cold War out of concern not to endanger Soviet Union's very stability and existence. But this should not be understood as blank cheque for never-ending enlargement and integration. As debated in my PhD thesis of 2007, especially a common defence organisation like NATO and a Euro-federal like entity like the EU (with an evolving assistance clause mechanism in it) have functional and psychological limits to their peaceful, inter-locked expansions.

²² See ***, *Ukraine has always been a leader in peacemaking efforts; if Russia wants to end this war, let it prove it with actions - speech by the President of Ukraine at the G20 Summit*, President of Ukraine Official

Fifthly, will Moscow welcome a long ‘patriotic’ war against an ever-expanding West, or submission and dagger-and-cloak removal of Putin from power? The Kremlin has a long history of confrontation no-matter-the-costs, and posturing as great power that belongs or should be recognized likewise. Defeat had never been in the cards for such expansionist mindset, but failure to stand for pride and grandeur was constantly followed by sweeping (and bloody) measures to terminate unsuccessful leaderships. Would the land bridge between Crimea and Southern Russia, plus an extended grip on Donetsk and Luhansk be considered ‘Success’? Would the loss of Kherson be seen as ‘Defeat’? It depends. Few expected the fall of the might Soviet ‘Empire of Evil’ so suddenly. Many thought about Lukashenko’s regime as collapsing. But constant pressure always works, albeit painfully slow or expensive. Therefore, commitments to Ukraine (and Moldova) should be less binding and more tailor-made to answer war necessities at the Euro-Atlantic borders.

The Ukrainisation²³ of war effort is debatable from moral and strategic viewpoints but when compared to previous attempts (like "Vietnamisation" or anti-Taliban "Afghanisation") it appears to be quite successful. There should be rewards if Ukraine is able to withstand Kremlin’s aggression but also should be conditions if Kyiv is to promote tangible democratic reforms meant to cover minority issues²⁴, local autonomy, good neighbourhood, among many

Webiste, 15 November 2022 - 07:31, <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/ukrayina-zavzhdi-bula-liderom-mirotvorchih-zusil-yaksho-rosi-79141>.

²³ It is both ironical and significant that one of the first episodes of Ukrainian-Russian military cooperation came in the context of expansion against the Ottoman Empire on the Northern Shores of the Black Sea, during the Russo-Turkish War of 1676-1681. As consequence, one of the most celebrated artistic examples of Ukrainian warring mindset and virtues became the historical painting of Russian painter Ilya Repin - "Reply of the Zaporozhian Cossacks to Sultan Mehmed IV of the Ottoman Empire" (State Russian Museum, Sankt Petersburg, 1878-1891).

²⁴ On the lack of progress concerning minority rights in Ukraine, despite official promise and promulgation of a new law (regardless of Romanian and Hungarian diplomatic and NGO protests), see

Madalin Necsutu, *Romania President Presses Ukraine on Minority Rights*, Balkan Insight, January 2023, <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/01/05/romania-president-presses-ukraine-on-minority-rights/>, and

***, *Romania Disapproves of the Ukrainian Minority Law’s Shortcomings*, Hungarian Human Rights Foundation, 01/05/2023, <https://hhrf.org/2023/01/05/romania-disapproves-of-the-ukrainian-minority-laws-shortcomings/>

It is noteworthy that although President Zelensky is an avid communicator on social media, his Twitter post of Jan. 4, 2023 about the phone call with President Iohannis mentions

things.

For all supporters of international peace and security by public diplomacy and democracy, the war in Ukraine should be worrisome. But the lack of will to directly intervene militarily is understandable when taking into account the many variables, including nuclear²⁵.

Appeasement has failed but also lucrative interdependence with Kremlin. Although containment, and not membership, should be the geostrategic tool to be used, if lessons of history (like the Hungarian Revolution of 1956) are to be heeded. There is no betting on the rationale of using weapons of mass destruction. 'Pride' and 'grandeur' in international politics are difficult concepts to grasp or contain. In the absence of a clear aggression by Russia against the EU and NATO, the comeback to *patient containment* could pay higher dividends as the war toll is already burdening the Kremlin. Military victories are never guaranteed, and judging by the first year of war, the combatants will be ever so entrenched in fighting pitched battles. Neo-containment should both mobilise the West²⁶ to allocate high-tech and expertise to Ukraine, but also give Kyiv hope for belonging to the other side of the geostrategic 'hill'. And only after the war, cautious steps should be taken towards granting Ukraine real hope and path towards membership. But rushing all these could only end up in *Insecurity*, not seen in the West since the 35 days of the Cuban missile crisis.

explicitly only agreed "steps to further develop cooperation... primarily in the defense sector" - <https://twitter.com/ZelenskyyUa/status/1610634531551199236>.

²⁵ For Putin's take on American threat of preventive, disarming first strike, and Russian moral "last-resort" approach, see Tim Lister, *Putin floats possibility that Russia may abandon 'no first use' nuclear doctrine*, CNN News, December 9, 2022, <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/12/09/europe/russia-putin-nuclear-weapons-intl/index.html>.

²⁶ On perspectives of a long war which should determine the West to plan accordingly, see Ivo H. Daalder and James Goldgeier, *The Long War in Ukraine. The West Needs to Plan for a Protracted Conflict With Russia*, Foreign Affairs, January 9, 2023, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/long-war-ukraine-russia-protracted-conflict>.

But I do not agree about the status of pre-invasion Donbas conflict as frozen war (but more of a *refrigerated conflict* due to constant skirmishes and artillery fire exchanges on the real line of contact) or the necessity of "integrating Ukraine fully into the West while forging a containment policy that emphasizes both deterrence of Russian aggression and efforts to engage Moscow to avoid the escalation of the war to a broader military confrontation that no one wants". It is **nonsensical** to emphasize full Ukrainian integration (meaning both in NATO and the EU) while aiming to avoid escalation but hoping to deter the Kremlin (by article 5 potential activation?) while being aware that no party wants war (sic!).