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Conflicts Of The Past As Lessons For The Present

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NATO ENLARGEMENT

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NATO's Future: Expansion and Reinvigoration

By Paul A. Rahe

Military alliances are fragile. Some are held together by intimidation on the part of the hegemon. These tend to collapse as soon as the power at their helm suffers a defeat or evidences weakness. Witness the collapse of the Warsaw Pact. Others are summoned into existence by a common threat. When that threat recedes or disappears altogether, the members celebrate their victory, then begin to eye one another warily—as the United States and the Soviet Union did after 1945. If the falling out of these two powers took place quite quickly, it was arguably because their regimes and the attendant ways of life were opposed and there was little to unite them apart from their fear of Nazi Germany.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) owed its existence to the Soviet threat. If it survived the defeat of the Soviet Union and its dissolution, that was largely due to the fact that the United States and its allies in Europe were culturally and politically alike and were bound together by trade and a desire to extend the reach of the commercial republican experiment. If truth be told, however, the NATO alliance had well before the beginning of 2022 become an empty shell. For Emmanuel Macron to describe it in 2019 as “brain-dead” may have been rude, but his comment was also apt—and the fact that NATO had acquiesced in the Russian seizure of great swathes of Ukrainian territory five years before proved his point.

NATO's de facto dissolution arose as a consequence of an illusion that history had come to an end, that a new world political order had emerged, and that there would be no more wars of any consequence. Woodrow Wilson's dream had come to fruition. The Cold War had really been the war to end all wars. Or so it seemed.

Vladimir Putin's invasion on February 24, 2022, of what remained of Ukraine after 2014 shattered this illusion. It resembled Hitler's seizure of Bohemia and Moravia in March 1939. It destroyed once and for all the supposition that the man's ambitions were restricted to territory where Russian speakers formed a majority, and it awakened even the Japanese, convincing them to get serious about the Chinese threat and double their military budget.

Had the leaders of what was once called the Free World read Polybius, their ruminations on what he wrote might have tempered their susceptibility to utopian dreams and encouraged vigilance. In pondering the settlement that ended the First Punic War and prepared the way for its successor, the Greek historian articulated a principle that applies to virtually any arrangement that a polity negotiates at the end of an extended conflict with a genuine strategic rival.

“Statesmen,” he warned, “must take heed lest the aims of those breaking off hostilities . . . escape their notice. Above all else, they must ascertain whether those coming to terms have yielded to circumstances



Image credit: Poster Collection, TU 34, Hoover Institution Archives.

or are broken in spirit. In this fashion, they can be constantly on guard against the former, who are apt to be lying in wait for a favorable opportunity, and they may trust in the latter as subjects and true friends and readily call upon them for whatever services occasions demand.”

As Polybius implies, if the conditions that initially gave rise to a strategic rivalry persist, that rivalry is almost certain to revive, and a renewal of war (hot or cold) may well be the consequence.

Russia’s imperialism was not a product of communism. The country’s predilection for imposing itself upon its neighbors has a long history. Just ask the Finns; the Estonians, Lithuanians, and Latvians; and the Poles. Or interrogate the Uzbeks, the Kazaks, the Azerbaijanis, the Mongols, the Tajiks, the Turkmen, the Kyrgyz, the Moldavians, the Georgians, the Armenians, and the peoples of the Transcaucasus. In and after 1989, the Russians “yielded to circumstances.” They were not “broken in spirit.” We should not forget that it took two world wars, innumerable deaths, and terrible suffering to break the spirit of their German neighbors.

Of course, some argue that NATO expansion caused Russian belligerence—that had we allowed the Russians a sphere of influence including the states that constituted the old Czarist empire they would now be our allies against China. They point to the Russian fear of an invasion from the west—as if anyone could believe that today’s France was capable of Napoleonic ambitions or that today’s Germany still harbored the ambitions evidenced by the Kaiserreich in World War I and Hitler in World War II. Others contend that there is no Ukrainian nation and that Ukraine is really a part of Russia and that its independence is artificial—a regrettable consequence of Lenin’s decision to reconstitute the old Czarist regime formally as a federation of Soviet republics and of the reaffirmation of that arrangement by Stalin, Khrushchev, and their successors.

The Ukrainians who have sacrificed their lives on the battlefield in the last seventeen months have disproven the latter claim. And Russia’s closest European neighbors—the Swedes, the Finns, the Poles, the Estonians, the Lithuanians, the Latvians, the Moldavians, the Rumanians, and the Czechs—are united in seeing Putin’s invasion of Ukraine as a threat to their own well-being. Russian imperialism is not remembered as something benign. All of the peoples once under the Russian yoke—including the Uzbeks, the Kazaks, the Azerbaijanis, the Mongols, the Tajiks, the Turkmen, the Kyrgyz, the Moldavians, the Georgians, and the Armenians—want to be free.

The effect of this war has been to breathe new life into NATO. The French are, as always, standoffish. Macron is no less eager than his predecessors to gain something for France at the expense of its allies, and the Germans are reluctant to fully abandon the illusions that, in the days of Angela Merkel, very nearly made their country a dependency of Russia. Strategic autonomy is their watchword; appeasement is the effectual truth of that aim. But the other nations in the alliance—including the Finns who have joined it and the Swedes who will do so—are now alert and vigilant. In the meantime, the Poles are building a mighty army. The alliance is in better shape than it has been at any time since the mid-1990s, and it owes that health in large part to NATO’s expansion—which is to say, to the presence within it of the former members of the Warsaw Pact, who are less inclined to complacency and accommodation than the Germans and the French.

One can, of course, cite Turkey as an exception. The rise to power of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and of the Islamist party that he leads has rekindled the Ottoman ambitions that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk spurned, and his government, in a manner that would put even the French to shame, is intent on exploiting the Ukrainian conflict for its own profit. But the Ottoman delusion will not last. None of the peoples once governed from Constantinople look back on their subjection with nostalgia. In any case, Erdoğan was very nearly defeated in the recent presidential elections; his tenure at the top will soon come to an end; and there will come a time—fairly soon—when the Turks once again begin to think of their country as an extension of Europe.

The only question that remains to be pondered is whether Ukraine should be brought into the NATO alliance. That question will, I think, be answered on the battlefield. If the Ukrainians sustain themselves against their Russian foe—as they are likely to do—bringing them into NATO will contribute mightily to the containment of the one country that is a threat to peace and freedom in Europe. Surely, that is what the Swedes, the

Finns, the Poles, the Lithuanians, Latvians, and Estonians, the Moldavians, the Rumanians, and the Czechs want: a well-fortified barrier against Russian expansionism.

A Ukrainian victory might also encourage Chinese sobriety. That is what the Taiwanese think. After all, Xi Jinping is the Chinese Putin; and, though China has had ample experience with defeat in the last two centuries, it, too, “yielded to circumstances” and was never “defeated in spirit.” Had the United States and its allies in Europe and Asia not succumbed to the Wilsonian dream, we would now be in a better relative position. It would be a good thing if Xi Jinping was left wondering whether, if he continues on the path laid out for him, there will be a reckoning awaiting him comparable to the one faced by his Russian counterpart. The resolve displayed by the West in Europe may yield dividends in Asia.



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From the Washington Treaty to Vilnius: How Blowback in the Kremlin Helped Make NATO the Most Powerful Military Alliance in the World

By Norman M. Naimark

International organizations can fade or grow in importance, depending on how they meet shifting challenges in their history. NATO has had its ups and downs since its founding on April 3, 1949, but there can be no question that it has developed today into the most formidable military alliance since the Grand Alliance (the United States, Great Britain, and the USSR) during World War II.

It has done so by being fully integrated into the postwar foreign policy of the increasingly prosperous and internationally ambitious U.S. and by meeting the challenges Washington has faced from its major rivals in the international system, the Soviet Union and today, China excepted, the Russian Federation. From the beginning of the negotiations between the original twelve signatories of the Washington Treaty, NATO's founding document, the U.S. drove the goals and policies of the Atlantic Alliance. This was even codified in Articles 11 and 13 of the Treaty, which explicitly single out the U.S. government as the repository of the original instruments of ratification and of the documents of intent by individual countries to withdraw from the alliance, which, despite some shaky moments, has never happened.

Intersecting with the immediate postwar goals of the United States in achieving peace, stability, and economy recovery in Europe, were the hostile actions of Moscow without which, from the outset, NATO was inconceivable. The blowback experienced by the Kremlin came in the form of the growth and development of a powerful and committed Atlantic Alliance. The brutal suppression of democratic parties and politicians in Eastern Europe in 1947, culminating in the shocking Czechoslovak communist coup in February 1948, was an important part of the background, as were the violent activities of the Greek communists that triggered Harry Truman's policies of containment articulated before Congress in March 1947.

In the spring of 1948, Stalin ordered his troops to interfere with Western access to Berlin, followed by a general blockade of the western sectors of the city in the second half of June. Stalin's ultimate goal was to prevent the formation of a Western German state, which had become Washington's answer to the nettlesome "German question"; at the minimum, he hoped to force the Western Allies out of Berlin. A full-scale international crisis ensued, one that threatened outright warfare between the former Allies. Not only did Stalin underestimate the ability of Washington (and London) to stand up to his bullying and to find a "no war, no

peace” solution to the crisis through the Berlin Airlift, but he completely miscalculated the effects of the blockade on the Germans.¹

By the end of the crisis in May 1949, a new consciousness of a free “West Berlin” had been forged among its population in facing down Soviet intimidation and threats. (One could easily make a similar argument about the strengthening of Ukrainian identity as a free country in resisting Putin’s war of aggression.) The formation of NATO, in short, was blowback to Soviet aggression on the continent, not just from the United States, but also from the West Europeans, who responded to real and potential Soviet aggression by intensifying their attachment to democracy and the Atlantic Alliance.

The expansion of NATO into West Germany in 1955 also represented in part the need to face down Soviet intimidation, in this case the overwhelming preponderance of Soviet ground forces attached to the Group of Soviet Forces in Germany that threatened to pour through the Fulda Gap, the most direct route to France and the English Channel. Once the official occupation of West Germany ended in May 1955, Washington needed to harness the West German state and its potential military manpower to its security zone in Europe, while defending against threats by the Soviet military in Central Europe.

Meanwhile, West Germans, despite internal opposition and hostility on the part of the French, desperately wanted to anchor themselves and their Bonn democracy in the West by entering NATO. Article 10 of the NATO treaty guaranteed open accession to those countries invited to join.² Greece and Turkey sought and gained accession in February 1952, reflecting NATO’s interests in the Eastern Mediterranean and Black Sea, while resisting Moscow’s pressure on the Straits, and Washington’s gratitude for both countries’ important contributions to Allied efforts in the Korean War.

The expansion of NATO following on the heels of the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe in 1989, and the implosion of the Soviet Union in 1991, remains controversial. In this case, Moscow experienced a form of historical blowback, the consequence of its aggressive actions in Eastern Europe over the course of the previous fifty plus years. The Visegrad Three, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary, initiated the process of expansion using every bit of leverage they could muster to convince the initially hesitant U.S. administration to right historical wrongs—the Soviet takeover of Eastern Europe; the deportations from Eastern Poland, 1939–41, including the murder of 22,000 Poles at Katyn; the crushing of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, the Prague Spring in 1968, and so on. Binding their countries to NATO, they argued, would protect them and their new democracies from inevitable Russian revanchism in the future and secure NATO’s eastern flank.³

Once those countries were admitted into NATO in March 1999, the door was opened to the Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, which had a similar and equally justified litany of historical complaints about Russian depredations during and after World War II, as they were twice forcibly absorbed into the Soviet state. In the case of the Baltic countries, and eventually Ukraine, as well, Moscow not only experienced blowback for its wrongdoings, but also “the Revenge of Empire,” the deep resentment of those nations that had been incorporated against their will and at great loss to their peoples into the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union.⁴

NATO’s expansion to a European continent “whole and free”—no longer just an alliance of North Atlantic and West European nations—was completed in the main with the admission of most of the remaining East European and Balkan countries into the alliance in 2004, 2009, 2017, and 2020. Potential future members are Sweden (Turkey still withholds its approval), Bosnia-Herzegovina, Georgia, and Ukraine. Finland’s entry into NATO that took place in April 2023 is one of the most important, given its 830-mile border with Russia, its attachment to Western values, and its historical experience of fighting for its independence when threatened by Moscow. Since 1991, Finland had worked increasingly closely with NATO; nevertheless, its actual admission into the ranks of the Alliance was the direct result of Putin’s war of aggression against Ukraine, another self-imposed defeat suffered by the Kremlin as a consequence of its own misplaced policies. This means that since 1949, NATO’s membership has grown from twelve to thirty-one countries in nine rounds of enlargement.

NATO agreed in 2008 at the Bucharest Summit that Ukraine, at “The Gates of Europe,” would become a member of NATO.⁵ It also agreed that Georgia would become a member but was soon sobered by Russian military aggression in Southern Ossetia and Abkhazia, both formally part of Georgia, about which NATO could do next to nothing. Ukrainian interest in NATO appeared to fade when European Union membership appeared more realistic and attainable in the fall of 2013. But that effort, too, was squelched by Moscow, prompting the Euro-Maidan demonstrations and violence in the winter of 2013–2014. The Russian seizure of Crimea and then the Donbass in the spring and summer of 2014, accompanied by armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine, settled into an uneasy stalemate until February 24, 2022, when Russia launched an all-out attack on Ukraine, seeking to remove the government of Volodymyr Zelenskyy and threatening the country with “de-Nazification,” essentially de-Ukrainianization.

NATO officials and individual Allies began working with Ukraine’s armed forces and armaments industry already in 2014. Especially since the February 24 invasion, NATO countries, led by the United States, have been supplying Ukraine with tens of billions of dollars of weapons, munitions, intelligence support, and military hardware. F-16 fighter jets are next on the docket as Ukrainian pilots are being trained by Danish and Dutch air force advisors this summer. The blowback experienced by Moscow is extreme; its brutal and foolhardy war of aggression against Ukraine has only increased the Ukrainians’ determination to fight, strengthened the unity of the country, and bolstered the willingness of NATO to come to Kyiv’s aid. It is not true that the Russian armed forces are fighting NATO in the Donbass, as claimed by Moscow’s television propagandists.⁶ It is the case that the NATO allies and NATO itself are extensively engaged with advising and materially aiding the Ukrainians.

Will the NATO summit to be held in Vilnius on July 11–12 admit Ukraine into NATO or set conditions for joining after the war? There has been and will be strong arguments against doing so now, despite the strong support from some of Ukraine’s East European NATO neighbors, Poland and the Baltic states in particular. Though highly supportive of Zelenskyy and Kyiv, the Biden administration has to this point been very restrained about admission to NATO, as have most West European governments. Policy experts argue back and forth about the wisdom of Ukraine’s entry into NATO, much as they did about the East European and Baltic nations after the fall of communism.

In the 1990s, the issue was how much should the West force a resentful Moscow into a corner, and couldn’t NATO find a way to cooperate institutionally with the Russian government and draw the Kremlin into the new European security architecture? NATO tried hard and made some hopeful progress during the Yeltsin era, but the effort ended in failure. Moscow’s extreme sensitivities to being threatened by NATO remain the major argument against Ukraine’s admission. Putin’s threats of using nuclear weapons and stationing tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus have injected worried tones into Western policy debates about Ukraine joining NATO even after the conclusion of the Russo-Ukrainian war. Of course, given Article 5 of the NATO treaty, which obliges members to defend any ally under attack, admitting Ukraine into NATO before the end of the war would oblige the American and European militaries to join the fight against Russia, something that few NATO Allies are ready to venture.

The NATO Secretary-General, Jens Stoltenberg, has stated that Zelenskyy will be the first guest at the Vilnius meeting, and NATO will do everything it can to make Ukraine a part of NATO *without* broaching the issue of membership now.⁷ There will be a new NATO-Ukraine Council “where Ukraine will be equal to NATO Allies.” NATO’s door is open to Ukraine and Ukraine “will become” a member of the Alliance. Military cooperation will intensify as will the interoperability of NATO “standards, doctrines, equipment” with the Ukrainians. The flow of funds and weapons will continue at an accelerated pace. NATO will also deepen its commitment to joint planning “in a way we haven’t seen since the Cold War.” But for Stoltenberg, the bottom line remains: Although the Allies agree that one day Ukraine will join NATO as a member state and they strive to bring Ukraine closer to the alliance, “We’re not going to discuss an invitation at the Vilnius summit.”⁸

Through its war of aggression against and war crimes in Ukraine, Russia has suffered severe blowback in the forms of a brave and determined Ukrainian enemy at war and a focused and resourceful NATO alliance

supporting Kyiv. As a result, Putin himself faces a grave internal crisis of unknown proportions. NATO has evolved yet again, its mission growing, its membership increasing, and its capabilities deepening. It is hard to predict when the war in Ukraine will end and how the peace will be secured. But it is not hard to predict that NATO, with the United States at its helm, as it was in the beginning, will shape the future of the international order.

- 1 See my chapter on the Berlin Blockade in Norman M. Naimark, *Stalin and the Fate of Europe: The Postwar Struggle for Sovereignty* (Harvard University Press, 2019), 157–195.
- 2 Article Ten has been interpreted by NATO as follows: “NATO’s door remains open to any European country in a position to undertake the commitments and obligations of membership, and contribute security in the Euro-Atlantic area.” “Enlargement and Article 10,” April 12, 2023, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49212.htm?selectedLocale=en.
- 3 See the argument about East European agency in Ronald D. Asmus, *Opening NATO’s Door: How the Alliance Remade Itself For A New Era* (Columbia University Press, 2002). Asmus was a U.S. government official leading up to the expansion. For a counterargument, which questions Washington’s willingness to go along with the East Europeans in seeking full admission, see M. E. Sarotte, *Not One Inch: America, Russia, and the Making of Post-Cold War Stalemate* (Yale University Press, 2021).
- 4 See Ronald G. Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford University Press, 1993).
- 5 Serhii Plokyh, *The Gates of Europe: A History of Ukraine* (Basic Books, 2015), xxi. Plokyh writes here: “Europe is an important part of the Ukrainian story, as Ukraine is part of the European one. Located at the western edge of the Eurasian steppe, Ukraine has been the gateway to Europe for many centuries.”
- 6 *Vremya Pokazhet*, host Artem Sheinin, Channel 1, June 29, 2023.
- 7 Stoltenberg has just signed on for an additional tenth year as NATO Secretary-General, which will ensure continuity in the alliance’s Ukraine policy.
- 8 NATO, “Press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg following the meeting of NATO Ministers of Defence in Brussels.” Last Updated: June 16, 2023, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_215694.htm?selectedLocale=en.



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NATO: The Comeback Kid Who Never Left

By Ralph Peters

Insatiable in their need for gloom, North American and European commentators have, for over a half-century, declared NATO to be in decline, or moribund, or dysfunctional, unnecessary and—the most-preposterous claim of all—provocative.

Yet, every time that Europe's *Ostpolitik* club, its violent pacifists and subversive industrialists, suggested that NATO, not the Soviet Union, was the problem, the Soviets leapt to NATO's assistance by strangling a neighbor: Hungary, East Germany, then-Czechoslovakia, Poland . . . and toss in distant Afghanistan. The most-cynical as well as the most-earnest anti-NATO efforts in Europe, whether Charles de Gaulle's theatrics or the later anti-Pershing II demonstrations, just couldn't help a USSR predisposed to play the mean drunk at the garden party.

After the Soviet collapse, the Serbs did their best to fill the threat vacuum, violating the longest period of peace Europe's western half had *ever* experienced.

NATO proved its worth yet again—and proves it still in the Balkans. Then Putin arrived, alarming an attentive minority but excused by the somnolent or craven. But the through line for NATO has been Russian, whether in its Soviet or Putin-era neo-tsarist incarnation. And for their part, the Russians always took NATO seriously, even when Westerners insisted it was superfluous at best and, at worst, menacing.

Through all the criticism, NATO *triumphed*—that word is carefully chosen—as Europe-at-peace achieved levels of prosperity unimaginable in the first bleak, hungry post-WWII years. The fighting stopped and a battered continent bloomed. Far from being a strategic money pit, NATO proved to be the bargain of the last century and may prove an even better deal in this one.

NATO is often frustratingly bureaucratic, but the ornate bureaucracy in Brussels and Mons prevents rash errors. NATO can appear inefficient—but what greater efficiency could we ask than prolonged peace on a continent soaked in blood for millennia? To Americans in particular, NATO can appear “all hat, no cattle,” yet look how prodigiously its varied members, with only a few exceptions, have supported Ukraine. NATO's collegiality, if sometimes strained, has served multiple operational-handyman purposes, as well: Officers from diverse countries and varied military cultures learn to work together under common protocols—an enormous advantage, should a “black swan” war erupt: It's far better to go to war with a team that's been practicing together for decades, rather than a pick-up squad already under fire.

But the greatest value NATO delivered has been that “dog that didn't bark,” the many wars that didn't happen. For all the ingrained animosity, Turks and Greeks have not gone to war with each other, nor have yesteryear's trigger-happy nationalists in Central and Eastern Europe resorted to force to advance mythologized

territorial claims (except in the former Yugoslavia, in which none of the combatants of the 1990s were yet NATO members).

Human beings, no matter their intellect, have trouble with reality (a state of existence particularly distasteful to intellectuals); we see what we want or need to see. In recent years, NATO again came in for criticism on both sides of the Atlantic as having outlived its relevance—despite Vladimir Putin’s lengthy record of aggression and lawlessness, which had been dismissed as blithely as Hitler’s early land grabs had been by the grandfathers of today’s pundits and politicians.

Then, in late-winter 2022, Putin’s bloodthirsty megalomania became impossible for anyone but paid hirelings to deny, and NATO proved to be the indispensable actor. The European Union did what it could with sanctions, but it was NATO’s startling unity (stunning to Putin) that gave Kyiv’s troops a logistic lifeline and kept Ukrainian hopes alive. The United Nations proved worthless. Various economic alliances made it harder for Russians to get a Big Mac, but none could protect a single Ukrainian woman or child from Russian torturers, rapists, and butchers.

Nor could the United States unilaterally have done all that NATO has done. The display of unity and common values—and a sobered sense of strategic reality—on the part of NATO’s members bewildered Russian toadies and prognosticators who had expected yet another free hand in the ravishment of a major state and neighbor.

Not least, long-term neutrals, Sweden and Finland, applied for NATO membership, with Finland’s entrance already ratified and Sweden’s accession inevitable, despite a Turkish tantrum. And this latest expansion of NATO isn’t merely of symbolic value: Should Russia somehow rebuild its now-depleted, exposed-as-inept military and feel a renewed urge to expand westward, it would no longer enjoy a huge northern buffer; instead, NATO would be on its northwestern border in seamless unity, requiring the diversion of Russian forces from any intended thrust westward. Beyond that, NATO’s new Nordic members bring tremendous strategic advantages to the alliance, enhancing everything from NATO’s freedom of maneuver and operational depth to its wartime ownership of the Baltic Sea and control of arctic sea lanes. From integrated strategic air defenses down to enhanced (if still imperfect) tactical interoperability, this is all good news.

So . . . is NATO in danger of becoming too large and unwieldy? Well, that was the argument when those states formerly occupied by the Soviets joined the alliance. Now look at the result: reinvigorated resolve, vital proximity, and unprecedented solidarity in the cause of self-defense, independence, and democracy. Even NATO’s current bad boys (there always have been one or two), Hungary and Turkey, have not meaningfully impeded NATO’s response to Russia’s aggression against a non-NATO state.

POLL: A Ukrainian NATO membership would

- fortify the alliance with seasoned troops and expertise.
- be a wash, given both increased deterrence against Russia and greater exposure to its aggression.
- create tensions within the Alliance between eastern and western European members.
- be an utter disaster, ensuring an inevitable NATO war with the Russian Federation.
- end NATO as we know it, with more potential enemies and less willing members to confront them.

Now consider how different the far marches of Europe might look at this moment had Ukraine been a member of NATO.

As a former soldier, I long viewed NATO as primarily a strategic political mechanism, rather than a real military force.

I have changed my mind.



RALPH PETERS is the author of thirty-four books, including works on strategy and security affairs, as well as best-selling, prize-winning novels. He has published more than a thousand columns, articles, and essays here and abroad. As a U.S. Army enlisted man and career officer, he served in Infantry and military intelligence units before becoming a foreign area officer for the dying Soviet Union and the new Russia. As a soldier, journalist, and researcher, he has experience in more than seventy countries, covering various wars and trouble spots. His historical fiction won the American Library Association's Boyd Award for Literary Excellence an unprecedented four times and also received the Herodotus Award and the Hammett Prize. Additionally, he was the 2015 recipient of the Goodpaster Award, presented each year to a distinguished American soldier-scholar. In 2017, he was selected for the U.S. Army's Officer Candidate School Hall of Fame.

Turkey: “Unfaithful Ally” No More

By Gordon G. Chang

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is now engineering a “pivot,” fast turning away from Russia and embracing Europe and America instead.

Turkey’s strongman leader, for instance, allowed Finland to join NATO, which occurred in April. Furthermore, he has just given his initial okay on membership for Sweden. That Scandinavian country probably will, despite some last-minute foot-dragging by Erdoğan, become the alliance’s 32nd member by the end of the year.

Not long ago, Turkey was a NATO member in name only.

“Unfaithful ally” is how Senator Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) correctly characterized that country in early February.

Early this year, Erdoğan was doing Vladimir Putin’s bidding by, most notably, blocking NATO expansion, vetoing the membership proposals of both Finland and Sweden.

Moreover, Erdoğan had aided the Russian war effort in Ukraine by allowing Moscow to use Turkey as a conduit for the flow of goods, some of them sanctioned by NATO countries. Turkish companies had even sold, in violation of sanctions, products to Russia.

Ankara was also helping Putin finance his war with elevated commodity purchases. “Turkey has deepened its energy ties to Russia” with imports of crude oil, diesel fuel, and coal, the *New York Times* reported in early December. “Russian oil is increasingly being routed through Turkey,” the paper noted last December.

And then there was the S-400 purchase. Despite strenuous objections from Washington, Erdoğan bought the surface-to-air missile system from Russia’s Rosoboronexport, taking delivery in 2019.

The Turkish leader had also allowed China, Russia’s friend, to take over critical infrastructure. In 2015, for instance, a Chinese consortium purchased 65% of Kumport, the country’s third-largest container operation, in the strategic city of Istanbul.

Erdoğan, in sum, was closer to Russia and China than the United States and other NATO partners.

Yet Turkey remained in NATO, and most of the time the other members had found a way to work with Erdoğan. It is not hard to see why: Turkey’s location was too strategic for the alliance to eject it.

Fortunately, Erdoğan could often be talked into doing the right thing. Turkey, under intense pressure from both the United States and the European Union, in March began to block the transit of sanctioned goods to Russia. This development followed reports that Brian Nelson, the top U.S. Treasury sanctions official, met with Turkish counterparts the previous month in Ankara and Istanbul.

Moreover, the Turkish president dropped plans to deploy the S-400 missile system. The missiles and associated equipment are now in storage in Turkey. In a related development, Erdoğan has not yet bought a second S-400 batch as he had apparently threatened to do.

What is Erdoğan’s game? Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, he has been generally successful in his “delicate balancing act” between Russia on one side and NATO partners and Ukraine on the other.

Turkey will always try to please everyone. There are signs, however, that Erdoğan’s sly maneuvering, which has greatly aided Vladimir Putin, is “increasingly untenable.” The Turkish strongman’s recent tilt to the West is evidence that he understands that Putin cannot be his long-term partner.

Erdoğan's fundamental problem has been his struggling economy. Energy is now at the top of his economic agenda. Ankara is developing Black Sea gas fields but the country also needs a gas pipeline from Israel. Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu is now considering whether to greenlight the project, so Washington can lessen Ankara's dependence on Russian energy by getting Israel to give the go-ahead.

There is something else the West can do. It is significant Erdoğan has just renewed efforts to join the EU. It was the EU's suspension and freezing of Turkey's membership application last decade that set him looking for help elsewhere.

"Loyalty runs both ways," says Jonathan Bass of InfraGlobal Partners to Strategika, pointing out that the EU's rejection of Turkey's membership had scarred Ankara's relationship with the West. As Bass, an energy consultant working for Turkish parties, says, Washington and Brussels should cement ties with Erdoğan. "Turkey is now open for business, especially American business and especially manufacturers, and this would be a particularly good time to forge commercial links."

Yes, it would not hurt to give Turkey reasons to be loyal to the West. The relationship is far too important for holding grudges, especially now that Erdoğan is reconsidering his recent bad choices. Washington and Brussels can replace Turkey's flows of cash and energy from Russia and China and make Erdoğan see that his future does not lie to his north and east.

Erdoğan has shown he is capable of changing friends quickly, so it's best to not give him reasons to move away from the West once more.



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Keeping Turkey within the NATO Orbit

By David Goldman

Even before the Ukraine war, Turkey had moved closer to China, a critical source of financing and imports after the country's 2021 financial crisis. The war gave Turkey the opportunity to act as an intermediary between China and Russia, and its exports to Russia doubled. Turkey has exploited the war for its own economic and strategic advantage to the detriment of NATO interests. It has no allies, only partners of convenience. It is not an ally of Iran. The Gulf states have provided Turkey with financial support in the hope that

Turkey will act as counterweight to Iran’s extraterritorial ambitions, as it has in Syria. It also benefits from the transshipment of Russian hydrocarbons through the Turkish energy hub. Despite its opening to China and Russia, Turkey’s main export markets remain Europe and the United States, and the West can employ a combination of carrot and stick to keep Turkey within the NATO orbit.

The Risks of an Alliance with Ukraine

By David Goldman

Henry Kissinger once remarked that “it may be dangerous to be America’s enemy, but to be America’s friend is fatal.” Ukraine faces a bloody war of attrition against a determined and well-armed enemy with four times its population. NATO has struggled to provide Ukraine with sufficient ammunition to match Russian artillery, or with enough tanks and other weapons to expel the Russians from its borders. The West lacks the industrial capacity to remedy this dearth. If Ukraine joined NATO today, Article 5 would turn the conflict into a NATO-Russia war with unacceptably high risks of nuclear escalation. A bilateral alliance with the United States implies commitment of U.S. ground forces, with similar risks. EU membership would place the main burden of reconstruction onto the Europeans and would have little strategic impact, but would do little to affect the conflict. A security guarantee by NATO members as part of a peace settlement, though, might have a positive impact.



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Why Ukraine Should Be in NATO Soon

By Robert G. Kaufman

How desirable and just that the Russian invasion of Ukraine aimed at weakening NATO may end up considerably strengthening it. Sweden and Finland have joined NATO as a result, adding their formidable militaries

to the alliance while considerably increasing NATO's strategic depth on its northern flank. Ukraine's heroic and effective resistance to the Russian invasion also has established a strong gravitational pull for Ukrainian membership in NATO sooner rather than later.

Unrealistic realists opposed to Ukraine joining NATO gullibly base their objections on Putin's tendentious account of Russian history, and on his spurious claim that NATO's eastward expansion provoked Russia needlessly and recklessly. This is false. NATO is a defensive alliance, hardly a genuine threat to a Russian state spanning eleven time zones even minus Ukraine.

NATO expansion is indeed the pretext, not the cause, of Putin's implacable ambition illegitimately to reassert Russian dominance over central Europe, starting but not finishing with Ukraine. The United States has a vital moral and strategic interest in thwarting that ambition. NATO's eastward expansion came about in the first place largely because of the ardent, prudent, and prescient desire of formerly captive nations to become part of the West while protecting themselves against a resurgence of Russian authoritarianism and revanchism. This is especially true for Ukraine, the victims of Great-Russian authoritarianism, an even more repressive Soviet totalitarianism, and Stalin's Holodomor, one of the worst crimes in European history.

The United States and the rest of NATO owe Ukraine a great deal for thus far repelling the Russian invasion, because Ukraine is fighting our fight as much as their own. Writing in 1997, Zbigniew Brzezinski foresaw why Putin envisaged Russian subjugation of Ukraine as a pivotal first step for achieving his grand design: "Without Ukraine, Russia ceases to be a Eurasian empire. . . . However, if Moscow regains control over Ukraine, with its 52 million people and major resources as well as its access to the Black Sea, Russia automatically regains the wherewithal to become a powerful imperial state, spanning Europe and Asia."¹ Brzezinski's logic encapsulates why NATO should provide without delay all the military, political, and economic assistance Ukraine requires to keep the Russians at bay.

Any outcome of the war which leaves Ukraine without credible security guarantees will only invite a reprise of Russian aggression so long as Putin remains in charge. Putin will never stop striving to subjugate Ukraine and dominate Europe absent a clear, credible, muscular deterrent that eventually—after integrating a capable and fiercely motivated Ukrainian military into NATO—will be enhanced significantly. The prospect of soon joining NATO also would provide a major and timely impetus for Ukraine to reform its heretofore corrupt and dysfunctional political institutions to satisfy the NATO membership requirement of having stable, transparent, accountable, democratic, market-oriented regime under the rule of law. Those worried about the cost benefit analysis of American commitments abroad will find few national security bargains in our portfolio better than enabling Ukraine to stop Putin in his tracks. Should Ukraine fail, the United States and NATO will pay a staggeringly steeper price in the long run.

Conversely, unrealistic realists advocating propitiating Putin's sensibilities by sacrificing Ukraine do not have history in their corner. On the contrary, Putin has a long record of using negotiations to wage war by other means. He has serially violated security agreements that rely solely on his goodwill, starting with the 1994 Russian-Ukrainian-American accord whereby Ukraine gave up its nuclear weapons in exchange for a Russian promise, which Putin shredded, to respect Ukrainian sovereignty, including Crimea. Obama's conciliatory policies toward Russia did not placate but emboldened Putin to invade Ukraine the first time in 2014, to underwrite Assad's murderous regime in Syria, and to reassert itself as a major power in the Middle East at U.S. expense. Likewise, President Biden's rerun of Obama's Reset early in his administration—an inadequate and shrinking defense budget, reentering a START heavily favorable to Russia, and the administration's ignominious pullout from Afghanistan—did not placate Putin but emboldened him to invade Ukraine for a second time.

Unrealistic realists thus exaggerate the risks of Ukraine joining NATO and underestimate the benefits. They minimize, too, the moral and strategic cost of giving Putin a veto on NATO expansion. We should take Putin's enmity as a given, regardless of what we do. So why not deter Putin by denial [of what?], augmenting NATO's massive preponderance of power and resources by integrating Ukraine's military into NATO along

with Sweden's and Finland's? Confounding Putin's expectations also may bolster deterrence beyond Europe, warning Xi Jinping in particular that any showdown with a strong, resolute American-led alliance system risks leaving the PRC substantially worse off rather than before.

- 1 Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives* (Basic Books, 1997), 46.



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Turkey: Difficult Partner, Vital Ally

By Peter R. Mansoor

Turkish president Recep Erdoğan is hardly what his fellow NATO leaders would call a loyal ally. Although Turkey has been a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization since 1952, under Erdoğan's leadership it has edged closer to Russia in recent years. In 2017, Turkey placed an order for Russian S-400 surface-to-air missiles, resulting in suspension from the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter program and U.S. sanctions against the Turkish Presidency of Defense Industries, a civil institution that manages the acquisition of military equipment. In 2019, Turkish forces invaded northern Syria to strike at the Syrian Democratic Forces, an ally of the United States in the war against ISIS but which Erdoğan's government claims is affiliated with the Kurdistan People's Congress (KGK—formerly the Kurdistan Worker's Party, or PKK), a terrorist group that has been at war with Ankara since 1984. This action led to further U.S., Canadian, and European Union sanctions and an arms embargo against Turkey. Since the start of the Ukraine War, more than 150,000 Russians have flooded Turkey and many have opened businesses there, giving a distinct Russian tint to Turkey's larger cities. Turkey has become an economic and financial refuge for Russia, an essential outlet to the rest of the world as U.S. and European sanctions begin to bite deeply.

Geography explains why Turkey has survived as a NATO member despite its precarious balancing act. It is the critical bridge between the Middle East and Europe. The Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits connect the

Black Sea with the Mediterranean. Turkey borders Syria, Iraq, and Iran to the south; Armenia and Georgia to the east; Ukraine and Russia (across the Black Sea) to the north; and Bulgaria and Greece to the west. Hotspots abound on its borders; Turkey and Greece share little affinity for one another despite belonging to the same military alliance. Turkey is positioned in a dangerous neighborhood, which offers its leaders both challenges and opportunities.

The Ukraine War shows this tension in stark relief. Turkey has armed Ukraine with Bayraktar TB2 drones, while ameliorating economic conditions on both sides of the conflict by negotiating a deal to allow Ukrainian grain to transit into the Mediterranean and by purchasing Russian oil and gas, albeit at a deep discount. On the other hand, Turkey delayed the entry of Sweden and Finland into NATO, playing hardball in an effort to force the Nordic countries to crack down on KGK/PKK emigres who live in the two states and prying F-16 fighters out of the Biden administration (to replace the canceled F-35 contract). Playing hardball against the rest of NATO also burnished Erdoğan's nationalist credentials and helped him win a tough election in May.

While he remains in power, Erdoğan will continue to execute a difficult balancing act to squeeze the most he can from all the players in the region. But Turkey's relationship with NATO, the EU, and the United States offers significantly more than its relationship with Russia. Although Ankara can be a difficult partner, for the foreseeable future Turkey will remain tied, however precariously, to the West.



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An Alliance to Bring Peace to Ukraine

By Mark Moyar

None of these options (i.e., Ukraine joining NATO, or the European Union, or forging a bilateral alliance with the United States) would work well in the short term, but they could become an integral part of a long-term solution. Historically, alliances have often been useful as means of deterring aggression. In the case of Ukraine, however, aggression is already upon us. Alliances have been helpful in ensuring aid to a

beleaguered ally, but the United States and Western Europe are already providing extensive assistance to Ukraine, and an alliance would be unlikely to affect the level of support.

The most significant reasons to bring Ukraine into a formal alliance, therefore, would be to stiffen Ukraine's backbone and convince Vladimir Putin that continued aggression will lead to further costs for Russia and possibly to direct foreign intervention. Yet at present, Ukraine has plenty of backbone, while Putin seems indifferent to costs. The Ukrainians continue to fight resolutely and are planning a counteroffensive. The numerical superiority of Russia's population, the success of the Wagner Group in sacrificing convicts on the battlefield, and the willingness of China and India to provide economic support give Putin confidence that he can outlast Ukraine in a war of attrition.

For the United States, an alliance with Ukraine at the present time would produce adverse consequences of serious proportions. Including Ukraine in NATO would bind the NATO countries to direct intervention should Russia make further advances, though Article 5 of the NATO treaty leaves enough wiggle room for the timorous to stay out. An alliance would weaken the ability of the United States to exert diplomatic pressure on the Ukrainians to agree to a peace settlement, something that may be necessary to end a war that is becoming very expensive for the United States and its allies. With the United States committed unconditionally to supporting Ukraine, it could not credibly threaten to withdraw support to Ukraine were its leadership to reject a diplomatic compromise. Such a threat may well become necessary in the months ahead, for the Ukrainian government's vows to recapture of all the territory lost to Russia since 2014 appear to be incompatible with the balance of forces, the lack of Ukrainian victories in recent months, and external support to Russia.

On the other hand, an alliance might be useful as part of a peace settlement, as some NATO members have been openly discussing of late. The United States or NATO could insist on a formal alliance with Ukraine as the price Putin must pay for retaining possession of some Ukrainian territory. However harmful to Ukraine and the international order Russian retention of Ukrainian territory would be, Western Europe and the United States seem increasingly willing to accept it as a necessary ingredient of a peace agreement.

A NATO alliance would serve as a powerful enticement to the Ukrainians to accept a compromise peace. Any lasting agreement will require provisions that discourage renewed Russian aggression, and a peacetime alliance seems the most promising option. Averting future warfare between Russia and Ukraine would serve the interests of the United States well, particularly in light of the larger threat posed to the United States by China.



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Future Alliances for Ukraine

By Williamson Murray

As the truism goes, “all wars must end.” Certainly, the Russo-Ukrainian conflict will at some time in the future come to its dismal denouement. One of the issues of the moment, then, is how a future Ukraine should relate to NATO and the European Union after the conflict’s termination. The problem that confronts the United States, the Ukrainians, and the Europeans is the reality that no matter how Russia’s current “special military operation” ends, the outcomes will be much the same: a truculent, hostile Russia with its traditional paranoia firmly in place. There are three potential endings: a Russian victory, some form of compromise that leaves one or both of the contestants dissatisfied, or a Ukrainian victory in which the Russian Army has been humiliated both abroad and at home. And this state of affairs has profound consequences for what track the United States should encourage the Ukrainians to follow.

A Russian victory, of course, would carry with it massive, deleterious consequences that would remove the question of Ukraine’s continued existence, much less its security, from the international arena. We would see the dismal recreation of Peter the Great’s state in Putin’s Russia, along with Moscow intending to maintain control over its neighbors, Finland, Sweden, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Romania, for their outrageous efforts to provide support for “Russia’s little brother.” NATO would either disappear or become irrelevant, while the European Union would become a pale shadow of its idealistic hopes for the future. And perhaps, most important, the United States would retreat into the disastrous isolationism that had marked its performance before 1940, when it had to be dragged kicking and screaming into global politics. And finally, with memories that American weapons or those it had persuaded its allies to provide the Ukrainians had terminated or permanently injured hundreds of thousands of its soldiers, Russia would remain a power deeply inimical to the interests of the United States.

Luckily, it appears, at least at present, there is little likelihood the Russians will be able to achieve a significant military victory over the Ukrainians armed with vast amounts of Western military kit far superior to anything the Russians possess. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that the Ukrainians will achieve a decisive victory, at least over the course of this year. Thus, the only foreseeable peace would be that which the current appeasers have called an “off ramp.” Such a peace could only occur after the two contestants have become so exhausted that they agree to an armistice.

However, it would require that the Ukrainians suffer so badly that their nation’s will would have been broken by the casualties and damage the Russians have inflicted on them. Given the support the United States and others have tendered and will continue to provide over the coming year, not to mention the justified fury the Ukrainians feel given Russian atrocities, it is unlikely the Ukrainians would agree to any “off ramp” armistice. As for the Russians, there is no chance of a lasting armistice with the Ukrainians as long as Putin remains in control. The only chance of any “off ramp” succeeding would be his assassination, and that is indeed an idle hope.

The third possible ending to the war is an outright defeat for the Russian military: one that involves the collapse of the army throughout Russian-occupied Ukraine as well as the surrender of tens of thousands of Russian soldiers and their arms. Even then, it is unlikely that Russian leaders, even in a post-Putin era, would agree to a lasting peace that involved a return of the territories occupied by the Russians in 2022 as well as most of the pre-2014 areas. Instead in this scenario we shall see well into the next century a situation quite similar to the period which followed Germany’s defeat in World War I and the signing of the treaty of Versailles. Then, the great majority of Germans, and not just the military, firmly believed the myth that their army had remained in the field unbroken and undefeated. But stabbed in the back by Jews and Communists, the so-called Dolchstoß legend, the Reich had lost the war. For the next twenty years, the Germans prepared ruthlessly and effectively for der Tag when they could repay not only what they termed

the “season states” of Eastern Europe, but eventually gain revenge over the Allies that had humiliated them in 1918. That day came in September 1939 and May 1940.

It is likely that we would see the same pattern repeated in the post-Ukrainian conflict, as the Russians absorbed the implications of defeat. This will be especially true given the heavy losses they have already suffered and are likely to suffer in the future. Faced with the open hostility of the great mass of the Russian people, the United States has only grim choices. The least attractive would be to run away and hide from a Russian state that will take every chance to sow the seeds of discord in a Europe that has united over the invasion of Ukraine. Continued political and terrorist actions, particularly with cyber warfare, would attack not only the Ukrainians, but the Latvians, Lithuanians, and Estonians, all of whom live with substantial Russian minorities within their state. Moreover, the Russians would aim to restore their conventional military power, this time removing much of the corruption and incompetence that has led to the current catastrophe.

The only reasonable choice would be to encourage the Ukrainians to tie themselves to NATO as tightly as possible. The EU offers less of a stabilizing prospect because it is not a military organization, although a connection between the Ukrainians and both organizations would provide the optimum political and strategic solution. An American alliance with just the Ukrainians makes less sense because it is crucial that, in any future confrontation with the Russians, NATO nations find themselves forced to provide weapons. Unless NATO nations are tied to Ukraine, they might be unwilling to continue providing the support such as they have given over the past year.

There is no doubt, given the geographic realities of contemporary Europe, that the United States would find Russia’s immediate Eastern European neighbors more than willing to support the Ukrainians in any potential hostile action by the Russians. Support from the Western powers like France and Germany, not to mention the other smaller states, could prove questionable unless they are tied to NATO. Thus, whatever the outcome of the current conflict in Ukraine, the Ukrainians and the Americans can only look forward to a hostile Russia that will require the full political, strategic, and military attention of the United States and NATO. To paraphrase the comment made by the British commander at Quebec, General James Wolfe, strategy “is an option of difficulties.”



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Whither Turkey?

By Barry Strauss

Turkish foreign policy is complicated. On the one hand, Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is an ideologue committed to a Neo-Ottoman foreign policy. He aspires to make Turkey a world power again, as it once was before it became “the sick man of Europe.” He is also an Islamist who would like to make Turkey the leader of the Muslim world. He pursues an ambitious, interventionist foreign policy in such places as Syria, Libya, the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, and sub-Saharan Africa.

On the other hand, Erdoğan is a pragmatist, and the product of a culture second to none when it comes to the art of bargaining. As Erdoğan knows, Turkey is a country with great strengths and great weaknesses. It has a population of 80 million people, a strong military with the second-largest army in NATO, and a strategic location that makes it an asset to any potential ally. But its economy is weak, and it lives in a dangerous neighborhood. Turkey’s neighbors include Russia and Iran, two major powers. They also include Syria, a failed state, but one that gives sanctuary to a Kurdish group which most Turks believe to be a threat to the Turkish state, with its very large Kurdish minority.

Is Turkey still a solid member of NATO? Or is it drifting into a de facto Russian, Chinese, and Iranian alliance? The answer is: both. Turkey plays a complex game of balancing. It is not a solid member of NATO, and hasn’t been for quite some time, but it’s a member of NATO and has no intention of leaving. Turkey will use NATO for its own purposes, and yet, under the right circumstances, it may prove a good citizen and a loyal ally—if that serves Turkey’s interests.

After months of insisting that he opposed Sweden’s entry into NATO, for example, Erdoğan did an about-face at a NATO summit meeting on July 10 and agreed to let Sweden in. Or, rather, an about-face more or less. The decision must be approved by the Turkish parliament, which is about to go into recess for the summer. Turkey wants additional Sweden to do more to suppress organizations that Turkey considers to be terrorists. In addition, Turkey wants Swedish support for Turkey’s EU accession process. In short, more bargaining about Sweden’s entry into NATO lies ahead.

Still, some progress has been made. Erdoğan got more flexibility on the matter after winning reelection to the Turkish presidency in May. It’s the economy, however, that is probably the key thing. Turkey’s current account deficit has reached a record level, and Erdoğan is hoping for American and European investments. That goes a long way to explaining his softening on Sweden, whose entry into NATO the Americans and other alliance members greatly wanted. Turkey earlier agreed to the admission of Finland, another new entry to NATO.

Which brings us to Turkish-Russian relations. Turkey may be a member of NATO, but it is happy to do business with Russia. Since the start of the war in Ukraine, Russians from draft-dodgers to businessmen have poured into Turkey, often buying property or opening businesses. The result has helped Turkey’s sinking economy, although certainly not enough to right the ship. Russian gas and oil are essential to the Turkish economy. Russia benefits by Turkey’s willingness to do business, despite the sanctions. It is said that many Western businesses have opened offices in Turkey in hopes of getting around sanctions and trading with Russia.

Then there are security issues. Turkey has supplied drones to Ukraine, but not in sufficient number to threaten Russia much. Meanwhile, Russia is a major presence in Syria, where it supports the Assad regime. Russia opposes the Kurdish fighters whom Turkey considers a threat—fighters whom the U.S. supports. On the principle that the enemy of my enemy is my friend, Turkey and Russia are allies in Syria; Turkey and the U.S., not so much. Turkey and Russia have a long-standing enmity. They have reason not to trust each other, but for now, they have a mutual interest in doing deals.

As for China, it too is a major contributor to the Turkish economy. Turkey, in turn, mutes any protests about China's treatment of its Turkic minority, the Uyghurs.

Turkey and Iran are neighbors with conflicting interests in Azerbaijan, Iraq, and Syria. But they share an opposition to Kurdish nationalism. The two states do a brisk trading business across a shared border. Furthermore, they have a long tradition of peaceful relations, so the two countries maintain a decent if wary relationship.

In sum, Turkish foreign policy is an ambitious and at times aggressive mix of ideology and pragmatism, with economic woes and domestic politics playing a part. Turkey is constantly balancing, bargaining, and pushing. It is less than a solid member of NATO, but it takes the alliance seriously. At the same time, it doesn't hesitate to strike its own deals with Russia, China, and Iran.

Whatever else it is, Turkish foreign policy is never boring. It bears watching.



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Aiding Ukraine without a War Objective

By Bing West

In war, the head of state defines the end state to be achieved by force and allocates military resources accordingly. The end state for Ukraine is to expel Russian forces from all its territory and to insure transit of the Black Sea. The end state for Putin is a settlement leaving Russia in control of Crimea, southeastern Ukraine, and the Black Sea, plus an easing of the sanctions restricting its economy. The end state of President Biden and a majority of NATO nations is a negotiated settlement. This favors Putin because negotiations are based upon compromise; Putin must be provided concessions in return for ceasing fire. Conversely, if Ukraine has regained all its territory, there's no land to concede.

President Biden cannot both mollify Putin and satisfy Zelensky. But despite being asked many times, President Biden has skillfully avoided saying that his objective is a Ukraine governing all its territory. The evidence is overwhelming that the U.S. and the West do not intend for Ukraine to achieve such a win. A few weeks after Russia invaded in 2022, Secretary of State Antony Blinken explained that the war would end by negotiations, not victory. “If it (Ukraine) concludes that it can bring this war to an end . . . and that requires the lifting of sanctions, we’re going to look at that,” Blinken said. “The purpose of the sanctions is not to be there indefinitely. It’s to change Russia’s conduct. And if, as a result of negotiations . . . we achieve that, then at some point the sanctions will go away.” The penalty for aggression was taken off the bargaining table weeks after the invasion began.

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Mark Milley, made it ever easier for Russia. He has shown journalists a card that reads: “Contain war inside the geographical boundaries of Ukraine.” We have seen the consequence. Ukrainian civilians are murdered daily by weapons launched from Russia, while the U.S. refuses to send weapons that could strike military targets inside Russia. Russia is treated as a sanctuary because General Milley seeks to “contain” the war. However, it is not escalation to hit back at the aggressor; it is self-defense.

Milley went even further, suggesting Ukraine cut a deal to avoid further suffering. Similarly, the leaders of Germany and France have urged Ukraine to negotiate. Compared to most of NATO (and especially to Germany), President Biden has shown resolve and generosity. In February of 2023, he told the Ukrainians, “You’re going to continue to prevail, fighting for as long as it takes. And that’s how long we’re going to be with you.”

Mr. Biden’s pledge suggests 2023 will be a slogging war of attrition. Starting a year ago, he determined by intuition what aid to give. He refused to send the types of weapons to shatter the Russian lines and force a pell-mell retreat. His fear of angering Putin underlies his decisions. He simultaneously gives and denies aid—yes to short-range artillery and no to long-range, yes to air defense, and no to fighter aircraft. As a result, Ukraine has arms sufficient for defense and a grinding offense, but not for a mobile, rapid push forward.

This indeterminate fighting favors Putin. In 2022, Russia’s GDP was negative 2 percent, with another 1 percent loss projected this year. That is severe, but not war-altering. China and India continue to scoop up Russian oil at discount prices. Sanctions have not bitten deeply enough to affect battlefield.

In terms of the U.S. public, however, President Biden’s reactive approach to Ukraine seems to be well set up for the next two years. With the 2024 election looming, he occupies the politically secure middle ground. On his one flank, former president Donald Trump is promising to withdraw support, substituting magic in its place. “Before I even arrive at the Oval Office, I will have the disastrous war between Russia and Ukraine settled. It will be settled quickly. I will get the problem solved and I will get it solved in rapid order. It will take me no longer than one day.”¹ On Biden’s other flank, any contender urging offensive arms for Ukraine will be accused of escalating and risking world war.

But the president has also driven mid-term American security policy into a cul de sac. “There’s no basis,” Mr. Biden said in February of 2023, “upon which to know what’s going to be needed a year or two or three from now. Our support for Ukraine will not waver.” Consider the breadth of that declaration. He anticipates providing aid at least through 2026, a long war indeed. Yet he professes not to know what’s needed. The reason is that he has specified no objective. He declares that Ukraine will prevail but will not say what prevailing means. Without an end state, military requirements and aid are infinitely elastic. Given all we read publicly, our military agrees with this baffling meander downstream without a set destination.

In the past half year, Ukraine, if provided armor and offensive weapons, was poised to shatter the Russian army. With that threat removed, America could shift military resources and focus toward China. Instead, President Biden insists that Russia remains a sanctuary, while supporting Ukraine with weapons only for a long war of attrition.

We now face adversaries on two fronts for, to quote the president, “a year or two or three from now.” It is irony to boast that NATO has never been stronger, while America must provide substantial forces and more funds to Europe indefinitely.

The die is cast. History is an account of human decisions, including those made and foregone by President Biden.

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1. Remarks at CPAC, March 5, 2023, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?526456-1/president-trump-speaks-cpac>.



BING WEST is a military historian who has written a dozen best-selling books about the wars in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. His most recent books are *The Last Platoon: A Novel of the Afghanistan War*, and with co-author General Jim Mattis, *Call Sign Chaos: Learning to Lead*. A graduate of Georgetown and Princeton Universities, where he was a Woodrow Wilson Fellow, he served in the Marine infantry in Vietnam and later as Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs. Among other awards, he is the recipient of the Defense Distinguished Public Service Medal, the Marine Corps Heritage Award, Tunisia’s Medaille de Liberté, the Colby Military History Award, the Goodpaster Prize for Military Scholarship, the Marine Corps Foundation Award for Leadership, the Veterans of Foreign Wars National Media Medal, and the Free Press Award.

Discussion Questions

1. Why has Turkey had objections to new NATO memberships?
2. Will NATO be stronger or weaker after the Ukraine war?
3. Can the U.S. sustain its massive arms shipments to Ukraine?
4. Does Russia have any legitimate criticism of a possible Ukrainian NATO membership?
5. Is NATO becoming too large and amorphous—given the current rancor over Turkey, the looming membership of Sweden, the acceptance of Finland, and the possibility of Ukraine joining the alliance?

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

The Russian Way of War



Military History in Contemporary Conflict

As the very name of Hoover Institution attests, military history lies at the very core of our dedication to the study of “War, Revolution, and Peace.” Indeed, the precise mission statement of the Hoover Institution includes the following promise: “The overall mission of this Institution is, from its records, to recall the voice of experience against the making of war, and by the study of these records and their publication, to recall man’s endeavors to make and preserve peace, and to sustain for America the safeguards of the American way of life.” From its origins as a library and archive, the Hoover Institution has evolved into one of the foremost research centers in the world for policy formation and pragmatic analysis. It is with this tradition in mind, that the “Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict” has set its agenda—reaffirming the Hoover Institution’s dedication to historical research in light of contemporary challenges, and in particular, reinvigorating the national study of military history as an asset to foster and enhance our national security. By bringing together a diverse group of distinguished military historians, security analysts, and military veterans and practitioners, the working group seeks to examine the conflicts of the past as critical lessons for the present.

Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict

The Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict examines how knowledge of past military operations can influence contemporary public policy decisions concerning current conflicts. The careful study of military history offers a way of analyzing modern war and peace that is often underappreciated in this age of technological determinism. Yet the result leads to a more in-depth and dispassionate understanding of contemporary wars, one that explains how particular military successes and failures of the past can be often germane, sometimes misunderstood, or occasionally irrelevant in the context of the present.

Strategika

Strategika is a journal that analyzes ongoing issues of national security in light of conflicts of the past—the efforts of the Military History Working Group of historians, analysts, and military personnel focusing on military history and contemporary conflict. Our board of scholars shares no ideological consensus other than a general acknowledgment that human nature is largely unchanging. Consequently, the study of past wars can offer us tragic guidance about present conflicts—a preferable approach to the more popular therapeutic assumption that contemporary efforts to ensure the perfectibility of mankind eventually will lead to eternal peace. New technologies, methodologies, and protocols come and go; the larger tactical and strategic assumptions that guide them remain mostly the same—a fact discernable only through the study of history.



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