

Nato's One-Inch War

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Abstract

Even before the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine, there were conspicuous and palpable festering issues simmering between Russia and the United States. These unresolved and pending issues, so intransigently clung to by pretentious diplomats from all parties involved, ultimately led to the unnecessary and avoidable War in Ukraine.

The War raging in Ukraine raises many questions regarding great power politics, NATO's purpose, issues of national interest, spheres of influence, Western ideals of liberal democracy versus the Russian perspective – which is steeped in concern over a history of being invaded through the Great European Plain. All of which has led to the two sides pertinaciously screaming past each other with vitriol and passion often displayed in a bloody and costly war.

My objective was to identify and decompose the foundations of these issues, offering a fair and dispassionate discussion of the perspectives from the parties involved and the resulting chaos which ensued. In order to do this, I identified misinterpretations, miscalculations and oversights made by both sides which have thus far led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people, destruction of thousands of nuclear families and infrastructure, the tragic creation of a Ukrainian diaspora and a great adjustment to the pre-war world order.

By writing this piece, I hope to shed light on a way forward to peace and prosperity enlightened by the now visible path behind us; outlining concerning issues and ensuing results suffered to date by all parties involved regarding the tragedy of the War in Ukraine still unfolding before the eyes of the world.

Keywords: Ukraine War, World Order, Sphere of Influence, Vital National Interest, Slavs, Russia, Ukraine, NATO Expansion, Not one inch eastward, Former Soviet Union, Russian Invasion, Entangling Alliance, Maidan Coups, Minsk Agreements, Istanbul Communiqué, Orange Revolution, Bucharest Summit.

Date of Submission: 24-04-2024

Date of Acceptance: 04-05-2024

I. Nato's One-Inch War

The world changed significantly after World War II regarding United States' foreign policy, neutrality, and isolationist possibilities. "NATO...was created in 1949 by the United States, Canada, and several Western European nations to provide collective security against the Soviet Union" (*Milestones: 1945–1952—Office of the Historian*, n.d.).

NATO outlived its original purpose as the West relegated the Soviet Union to the dustbin of history. Today, "NATO's purpose is to guarantee the freedom and security of its members through political and military means" (*What Is NATO*, n.d.).

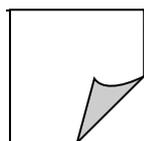
President George H.W. Bush's administration was worried about the U.S. losing relevance in Europe and accordingly sought to retain U.S. relevance through NATO expansion. "By mid-1992, a consensus emerged within the administration that NATO enlargement was a wise realpolitik measure to strengthen Euro-American hegemony" (Shiffrinson, 2020). Otherwise, that...the European Union might fill the security vacuum in Central Europe, and thus challenge American post-Cold War influence" (Shiffrinson, 2020a). The rest is history.

Naturally, countries look out for their national interests, which are "the interest of a nation as a whole held to be an independent entity separate from the interests of subordinate areas or groups and also of other nations or supranational groups" (National Interest, n.d.). She must also cohere to her sphere of influence, "the claim by a state to exclusive or predominant control over a foreign area or territory" (Deudney, 1998).

Although the United States has regularly intervened in Europe through NATO, Ukraine is neither within the U.S. sphere of influence nor is it a U.S. vital national interest. It is both for Russia.

II. Nato Expansion Vis-À-Vis Russia

When considering NATO expansion, a forthright person cannot deny one fact: the West is sanctimoniously ignoring Russia's vital national interests. As political expert Georgy Bovt stated, "The



deployment of NATO military infrastructure close to Russia's borders is seen in Moscow as a real threat to the security of the country" (Times, 2023a). This Russian view was not news to the U.S. Norton (2022) noted the 2008 State Department Cable from the U.S. Ambassador to Russia at the time and current CIA director Bill Burns, who,

"...published a prescient analysis that would foreshadow Moscow's actions in 2022: Ukraine and Georgia's NATO aspirations not only touch a raw nerve in Russia, they engender serious concerns about the consequences for stability in the region. Not only does Russia perceive encirclement and efforts to undermine Russia's influence in the region, but it also fears unpredictable and uncontrolled consequences which would seriously affect Russian security interests" (Norton, 2022).

Indeed, "Putin...condemned the United States' policy of democracy promotion, which he saw as a mask for interference with other countries' affairs; the United States' policy of NATO expansion in eastern and central Europe; and its military interventions" (Comms & Comms, 2021).

This fear of encirclement was not without merit, as supported by a recent NATO statement. "So if Kremlin's aim is to have less NATO on Russia's borders, it will only get more NATO" (Remarks by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the Munich Security Conference Session, 2022).

One may not care about Russia's position, claiming it is Ukraine's right to become a NATO member if it desires. This begs the question: is ignoring Russia's sphere of influence and vital national interests a wise position regarding the world's largest country by surface area? A country that possesses more nuclear weapons than any other and is capable of mutually assured destruction? Missing is our modern-day version of George Kennan.

It is also the height of Western hypocrisy as the United States shut down the Atlantic Ocean in 1962 over a threat of Soviet nuclear missiles 90 miles from the coast of Florida because it was in the vital national interest of the United States. United States history is replete with interventions in the Western hemisphere due to our vital national interests, including Panama, Guatemala, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Grenada, etc., yet NATO and the United States today behave as if spheres of influence and vital national interests don't matter. Many other interventions were outside our hemisphere, from Vietnam to the Middle East. Our history underscores Georg Hegel's fitting words, "The only thing that we learn from history is that we learn nothing from history" (Sanghi, 2019).

In light of this fact, it is viewed by many as simply arrogant to suggest Russia cannot oppose the West shoving nuclear weapons and massive armies onto her border with Ukraine. One can only imagine our reaction to Russian divisions, airbases, and atomic weapons on Canadian or Mexican borders with the U.S., even if by proxy.

Some view it as blasphemous not to adhere to the West's approach. When viewed with an open mind, my position is pro-Ukraine and anti-war such that, based on realpolitik, it saves Ukraine from itself and the ill-informed folly of Western leaders, notwithstanding their self-proclaimed good intentions – more on that below. I more broadly align my position with American diplomat and historian George F. Kennan from his 1997 New York Times article in which he wrote,

"...expanding NATO would be the most fateful error of American policy in the entire post-Cold War era. Such a decision may be expected to inflame the nationalistic, anti-Western and militaristic tendencies in Russian opinion; to have an adverse effect on the development of Russian democracy; to restore the atmosphere of the cold War to East-West relations, and to impel Russian foreign policy in directions decidedly not to our liking ... " (Kennan, 1997).

III. The Promise

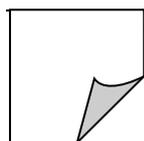
"Never believe anything in politics until officially denied. When you want to fool the world, tell the truth" (Otto Von Bismarck Quotes (Author of Gedanken Und Erinnerungen), n.d.).

In a 2009 interview, Gorbachev, in no uncertain terms, made clear his understanding of NATO expansion:

"Former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev has criticized NATO's eastward expansion and the failure by Western powers to keep their promise not to deploy military bases near Russia's borders. Gorbachev said in an interview with Germany's Bild newspaper published on Thursday that Western Germany, the United States and other powers had pledged after Germany's reunification in 1990 that "NATO would not move a centimeter to the east." Gorbachev said the Americans had failed to fulfill the promise and the Germans had also turned a blind eye" (*Gorbachev Blasts NATO Eastward Expansion*, 2009).

Gorbachev contradicts himself in a 2014 interview when asked about James Baker's quote, "NATO will not move one inch further east." Gorbachev responded curiously.

"The topic of "NATO expansion" was not discussed at all and wasn't brought up in those years. I say this with full responsibility. Not a single Eastern European country raised the issue, not even after the Warsaw Pact ceased to exist in 1991. Western leaders didn't bring it up, either. Another issue we brought up was



discussed: making sure that NATO's military structures would not advance and that additional armed forces from the alliance would not be deployed on the territory of the then-GDR after German reunification. Baker's statement, mentioned in your question, was made in that context. Kohl and [German Vice Chancellor Hans-Dietrich] Genscher talked about it" (Kórshunov & Rbth, 2024)

This conflict between interviews begs the question, in which of the two interviews was Gorbachev disingenuous? I surmise Gorbachev was less than honest in his 2014 interview, as Gorbachev was half Ukrainian, and grew up in a village in Stavropol populated by Ukrainians and Russians. At the time of the 2014 interview, he was in his eighties. According to his interpreter of 37 years,

"He (Gorbachev) was shocked and bewildered by the Ukraine conflict in the months before he died and psychologically crushed in recent years by Moscow's worsening ties with Kyiv...and said he and others had been struck by how traumatized he was by events in Ukraine...It's not just the (special military) operation that started on February 24, but the entire evolution of relations between Russia and Ukraine over the past years that was really, really a big blow to him. It really crushed him emotionally and psychologically" ("Gorbachev Died Shocked and Bewildered by Ukraine Conflict - Interpreter," 2022).

Additionally, overwhelming evidence suggests Western leaders made promises to the Russians regarding NATO expansion as outlined in declassified documents from the National Security Archives. "Declassified documents show security assurances against NATO expansion to Soviet leaders from Baker, Bush, Genscher, Kohl, Gates, Mitterrand, Thatcher, Hurd, Major, and Woerner" (National Security Archive, n.d, as cited in NATO expansion: What Gorbachev heard, 2017). "The West has vigorously protested that no such deal was ever struck. However, hundreds of memos, meeting minutes, and transcripts from U.S. archives indicate otherwise" (Shifrinson, 2016).

That 2009 interview aligns with Baker's, and the evidence is noted below from subsequent declassified documents.

U.S. Secretary of State James Baker's famous "not one inch eastward" assurance about NATO expansion in his meeting with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev on February 9, 1990, was part of a cascade of assurances about Soviet security given by Western leaders to Gorbachev and other Soviet officials throughout the process of German unification in 1990 and on into 1991, according to declassified U.S., Soviet, German, British and French documents posted today by the National Security Archive at George Washington University. (National Security Archive, n.d, as cited in NATO expansion: What Gorbachev heard, 2017)

According to declassified documents, in a February 1990 call from British Secretary of State Hurd with German Foreign Minister and Vice Chancellor Hans-Dietrich Genscher, Genscher was quoted as saying:

When he talked about not wanting to extend NATO, that applied to other states besides the GDR. The Russians must have some assurance that if, for example, the Polish Government left the Warsaw Pact one day, they would not join NATO the next. (Mr. Hurd To Sir C. Mallaby (Bonn). Telegraphic N. 85: Secretary Of State's Call On Herr Genscher: German Unification., 1990)

While present-day diplomats and analysts debate nuances and wording, "The documents reinforce former CIA Director Robert Gates' criticism of "pressing ahead with expansion of NATO eastward [in the 1990s], when Gorbachev and others were led to believe that wouldn't happen." The key phrase, buttressed by the documents, is "led to believe" (National Security Archive, n.d, as cited in NATO expansion: What Gorbachev heard, 2017).

A signed treaty or formal agreement would have helped subsequent political discourse, direction, and clarity. However, as Stephen F. Cohen said, "a signed treaty is not needed when the U.S. gives its word," much of the world still believes this today.

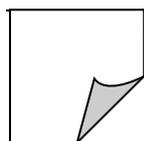
Based upon the overwhelming evidence highlighted above and the reality in Ukraine today, it seems irresponsible to dismiss what the Russians view as "promises made" or what they were "led to believe" as not applicable to NATO vis-à-vis post-Soviet Russia. The Russians do not see a difference. They also, quite apparently, do not see a strategic reason for NATO expansion to Russia's Ukraine border aside from threatening Russia. "The realization of an 'open door' policy towards Ukraine and Georgia will be a sign for us that the West has made its choice in favor of unilateral actions rather than forming Trans-European institutions" (Sweeney & Shchedrov, 2008).

IV. Screaming Past Each Other

"Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they aren't after you" (Heller, 1970, as cited in Jordison, 2019).

Recalling a most accurate anonymous comment from one of my Soviet, East Europe lectures at the Naval Postgraduate School, "There are two mistakes Americans make when dealing with the Russians. The first is thinking we can match their drinking, and the second is thinking we understand them."

On the face of it, the West does not see NATO as a threat to Russia but instead as an instrument of freedom and stability for Europe. Russia, according to Dawar (2017, para. 1), "sees NATO expansion to include Ukraine as an existential threat" and a provocation of Western ideals. The question is, why? It is



instructive to understand the Russian perspective. Brushing it off to date has gotten us, the West, and our friends in Ukraine to where we are today.

Accordingly, one must consider Russian paranoia as an overlooked parameter in part resulting from being invaded many times in her history.

"In the past 500 years, Russia has been invaded several times from the West. The Poles came across the European Plain in 1605, followed by the Swedes under Charles XII in 1707, the French under Napoleon in 1812, and the Germans—twice in both world wars, in 1914 and 1941. In Poland, the plain is only 300 miles wide—from the Baltic Sea in the north to the Carpathian Mountains in the south—but after that point, it stretches to a width of about 2,000 miles near the Russian border, and from there, it offers a flat route straight to Moscow. Thus, Russia's repeated attempts to occupy Poland throughout history represent a relatively narrow corridor into which Russia could drive its armed forces to block an enemy advance toward its own border, which, being wider, is much harder to defend" (Marshall, 2015).

From everything I know of Russians, they still remember this inconvenient fact. As Bunzel (2024) noted in his Foreign Policy piece,

"From 1918 to 1920, the United States, Britain, France, and Japan sent thousands of troops from the Baltics to northern Russia to Siberia to Crimea—and millions of dollars in aid and military supplies to the anti-communist White Russians—in an abortive attempt to strangle Bolshevism in its crib. It's one of the most complicated and oft-forgot foreign-policy failures of the 20th century" (Bunzel, 2024).

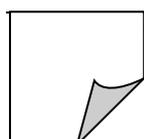
And reminiscent of French president Macron recently charging French soldiers into Odessa,

"The mercurial French—at first the most hawkishly pro-intervention out of all the Allies—led the occupation of southern Ukraine, tussling with the Reds over cities now familiar to readers: Mykolaiv, Kherson, Sevastopol, Odessa. The British—who invested the most in the intervention, including 60,000 troops—were crawling all over Russia's fringes" (Bunzel, 2024).



The European Plain, shaded in orange. (Anderson, 1999)

Another aspect contributing to Russia's inherent paranoia is from passing through the meat-grinder of the communist system where, harking back to my graduate classes, the Soviet Union directly murdered a conservatively estimated 20 million of its citizens, indirectly murdered another 20 million, such as through the



intentional Ukrainian famine, and placed another 20 million into the Soviet gulag. Additionally, the Soviet Union lost over 25 million people killed in World War II after being invaded by Germany. The U.S., by comparison, lost nearly 407,000. Or in the words of President Kennedy,

"...no nation in the history of battle ever suffered more than the Soviet Union suffered in the Second World War. At least 20 million lost their lives. Countless millions of homes and farms were burned or sacked. A third of the nation's territory, including nearly two-thirds of its industrial base, was turned into a wasteland--a loss equivalent to the devastation of this country east of Chicago" (Commencement address at American University et al., n.d., n.d.).

As a result of this explosive cultural tumult, the vibrant Russian culture, psyche, and character are permanently scarred and influenced by such events.

Many important people proclaim the West's good intentions toward Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This fallacy is misinformation at best and disinformation at worst.

"We went to remake Russia as we saw fit. It's called democracy promotion, and so the Clinton administration adopted a triumphalist, winner-take-all approach toward a temporarily...weak Russia. Those unwise policies, you know; it was expanding NATO Eastward; it was thereby excluding Russia from the post-Cold-War security arrangements in Europe; it was refusing to negotiate on missile defense and even cooperate; it was continuing so-called democracy promotion intrusions in Russia's internal politics; and it was an array of outright broken promises to the Russian leadership. This American winner-take-all approach has continued through every presidency and every American Congress since the Clinton Administration...to today, the Putin that is so irrationally demonized in America today, and not only in Washington but in popular culture on television, novels, and movies... this Putin is the almost inevitable result of these unwise American policies. He is the effect, not the cause" (Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs, 2016).

Gorbachev confirmed this in an October 16, 2014 interview.

"Today we need to admit that there is a crisis in European (and global) politics. One of the reasons, albeit not the only reason, is a lack of desire on the part of our Western partners to take Russia's point of view and legal interests in security into consideration. They paid lip service to applauding Russia, especially during the Yeltsin years, but in deeds they didn't consider it. I am referring primarily to NATO expansion, missile defense plans, the West's actions in regions of importance to Russia (Yugoslavia, Iraq, Georgia, Ukraine). They literally said, "This is none of your business." As a result, an abscess formed and it burst. I would advise Western leaders to thoroughly analyze all of this instead of accusing Russia of everything. They should remember the Europe we managed to create at the beginning of the 1990s and what it has unfortunately turned into in recent years" (Kórshunov & Rbth, 2024).

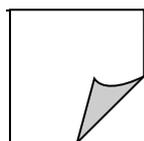
In what became a common thought among Russians, "...the hardship and turmoil of the early post-Soviet years led to a steady disappointment in westernizing reforms. Indeed, the belief that the West had intentionally lured Russia into that trap in order to further weaken it was not uncommon among Russians" (Comms & Comms, 2021).

Accordingly, the Russians felt betrayed, and the U.S. felt misunderstood. Hence, both sides are screaming past each other. "The whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed (and hence clamorous to be led to safety) by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins, all of them imaginary."-- H. L. Mencken (QUOTES, n.d.-b).

While mistakenly conflating the sphere of interest and vital national interest with revanchist ideals, some choose to believe Putin wants to reestablish the Soviet Union in whole or in part. They use his infamous quote as the foundation of their thinking, "The demise of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century." More often than not, many conveniently omit his follow-up: "Anyone who doesn't regret the passing of the Soviet Union has no heart. Anyone who wants it restored has no brains" (Steele, 2022a). Additionally, I've seen no evidence Putin intends to permanently occupy the entirety of Ukraine, as complications of such an endeavor are apparent from their nightmarish days of Soviet occupation in East Europe and from observing the U.S. experience in Iraq and Afghanistan.

V. Looking Back

To understand how we got to where we are today, one could start the year 862 with the founding of the Rus' state by Oleg of Novgorod. However, I offer a brief synopsis beginning with the 1994 Budapest memorandum in which Ukraine relinquished its nuclear weapons and Russia agreed, in addition to other things; to respect the independence, sovereignty and existing borders of Ukraine. However, Pifer (2014a) highlighted a problem, "The Budapest memorandum is a politically-binding agreement rather than a legally-binding treaty" (Pifer, 2014a). Soldatenko (2023) took the point a step further, "The parties purposefully left this issue ambiguous to make the agreement possible in the first place" (Constructive Ambiguity of the Budapest Memorandum at 28: Making Sense of the Controversial Agreement, n.d.). Pragmatically, politically-binding



agreements are easier to leave than legally binding treaties in accordance with international law. Accordingly, the Russians exploited this weakness.

Ten years later came the 2004 Ukrainian Orange Revolution, apparent mostly in Kyiv's Independent (Maidan) Square, a revolution originating from a dispute over the integrity of the Ukrainian presidential election.

Russian-speaking Ukrainian separatists, Russia, her ally Belarus, and much of Eastern Ukraine are, in essence, the East Block. The Ukrainian armies of the regime in Kyiv, most of Western Ukraine, West European and NATO interests are the West Block. According to Bivings (2024), the West Block supported ex-Prime Minister Viktor Yushchenko and declared voter fraud. The East Block, supporting Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich, denied the fraud and, according to Sukhov (2013), claimed Western interference and Western sponsorship of the ensuing protests. Yushchenko won the subsequent run-off.

While the West accuses Russia and its allies of intrusive interference, it is clear both sides were active in this endeavor. "Did Americans meddle in the internal affairs of Ukraine? Yes. The American agents of influence would prefer different language to describe their activities..." ("Meddling et al., 2004). The Orange Revolution had mixed results and was,

"...considered to have failed to bring about meaningful change and reforms in society. Yushchenko's presidency was marred by scandals and political dismissals. In the 2010 elections, he was unable to garner enough support to even make it to the run-off elections, and his former political rival Viktor Yanukovich capitalized on Yushchenko's failures and people's discontent with the lack of results after the Orange Revolution to win the presidency" (Bivings, 2024).

The Orange Revolution...made Putin more suspicious of Western influence. He saw those events as an attempt by the West, acting through non-governmental actors, to execute regime change in a country that Russia regarded as within its legitimate sphere of interest" (Comms & Comms, 2021).

At this point, the West was in deep. "Western involvement helped bring the country to this crisis. There's little reason to think it'll now get it out" ("Meddling et al., 2004).

The tensions never let up. Russia tolerated NATO's two previous expansions in 1999 and 2004, and clearly, NATO did not consider Russia a threat as NATO invited Russia to the 2-4 April 2008 Bucharest Summit. However, regarding the next tranche of possible NATO expansion, Russia made its position clear. "Russia warned NATO...against expansion into ex-Soviet neighbors Georgia and Ukraine ahead of a NATO summit...that will discuss what Moscow sees as deep encroachment into its backyard" (Sweeney & Shchedrov, 2008).

Additionally, before the 2008 Bucharest Summit, the U.S. Ambassador to Russia "...admitted in a classified 2008 embassy cable that NATO expansion to Ukraine crosses Moscow's security "redlines" and "could potentially split the country in two, leading to violence or even, some claim, civil war, which would force Russia to decide whether to intervene" (Norton, 2022).

The West had long since engaged in imprudent behavior by dismissing historical Russian spheres of influence and what Russia considered vital national interests. Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov clarified that "...possible NATO membership for the two countries (Georgia and Ukraine) would have repercussions for any plans to improve Moscow's ties with the Western military alliance" (Sweeney & Shchedrov, 2008). On April 4, 2008, Vladimir Putin repeated his warning that Moscow would view any attempt to expand NATO to its borders as a "direct threat" (Dawar, 2017).

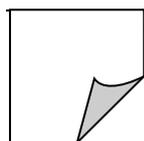
For American readers, imagine Ukraine vis-à-vis Russia, as Texas vis-à-vis the United States. One does not have to like it, but it is realpolitik!

Once again, dismissing historical Russian spheres of influence and what Russia considers a vital national interest, and after repeated warnings by Russia not to do so, "NATO Allies welcomed both Ukraine and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership and agreed that these countries will become members of NATO" (Nato, n.d.). This ill-advised and unnecessary expansion by stated intent and later by proxy forced the start of an utterly avoidable war. The West's dismissive approach to a country with thousands of nuclear weapons and a legitimate concern for her vital national interest was full of hubris.

Accordingly, NATO greatly miscalculated the Russian reaction. It does not take a scholar of the region to recognize the realpolitik at hand. Russia had repeatedly forewarned the West that this was a red line for Russia, an existential threat and of vital national interest to her. Accordingly, NATO's behavior at the 2008 Bucharest Summit resulted in a predictable Russian reaction.

Chaos ensued through the 2014 Maidan Coups, essentially a continuation of the stressful dynamic that drove the Orange Revolution. "There's no doubt U.S. officials backed and exploited Euromaidan for their ends" ("Meddling et al., 2004).

As Marcetic noted, "...at the heart of the Maidan protests was the push by some Western governments, especially the United States, to isolate Russia by supporting the integration of peripheral parts of the former



Soviet Union into European and Atlantic institutions — and Moscow's pushback..." (A US-Backed & far Right-Led revolution in Ukraine, 2022).

Russia attempted to put the kibosh on Ukraine's Western lean in late 2013 by countering an EU integration offer with a more lucrative deal. Accordingly, bloody protests once again erupted from Ukraine's Western-leaning block in Kyiv's Maidan Square, resulting in Yanukovich's ouster amid Russian objections claiming it "...was the result of a "coup-de-tat" orchestrated by the United States and supported by Washington's European allies" (Jazeera, 2021). "The fact that it was sponsored from abroad has been acknowledged, directly and indirectly, by representatives of foreign countries. That is no secret to anyone" (French Revolution, n.d.; "Kremlin calls Ukraine's 2014 revolution a foreign-sponsored coup, 2023).

Yanukovich was replaced by an interim leader, Arseniy Yatsenyuk, as Prime Minister, who was awaiting future presidential elections scheduled for May 2014. "With Yanukovich out, the interim government and Washington's handpicked prime minister signed the EU deal whose rejection had started it all, solidifying Ukraine's move to the West, and ushering in the brutal austerity measures demanded by the IMF" (A US-Backed & far Right-Led revolution in Ukraine, 2022).

In the meantime, in March 2014, Russia annexed Crimea. Analyzing it geopolitically, it appears Russia took this action to stave off the future mooring of a NATO fleet in Crimea. A NATO fleet in Crimea is a manifestly existential threat to Russia within her sphere of influence, and retention of which is of vital national and strategic necessity.

At about the same time, the civil War between Ukrainian citizens in the East and West blocks was escalating in Eastern Ukraine. On May 25, 2014, Petro Poroshenko was elected President of Ukraine. "On June 27, amid strenuous Russian objections, Poroshenko signed the long-delayed association agreement with the EU, pledging closer ties with Europe" Ukraine (2024b). In *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

By 2015, the two sides had signed Minsk I and II agreements "in an unsuccessful effort to resolve a war in eastern Ukraine..." (Kramer, 2022).

As noted by Reuters, by the time of the signing of Minsk I in "September 2014, President Zelenskiy stated (that the War) had killed around 15,000 people" ("What Are the Minsk Agreements on the Ukraine Conflict?" 2022).

The Minsk I agreement did not result in a legitimate ceasefire, and both sides blamed each other. A few months later, they made another ceasefire attempt.

Leaders signed Minsk II in February 2015 and "...set out military and political steps that remain unimplemented" ("What Are the Minsk Agreements on the Ukraine Conflict?" 2022). "The cease-fires never held. More civilians and soldiers on both sides have died in the seven years after they were announced than the year of war that preceded them" (Kramer, 2022). The bloody Ukrainian Civil War continued until a drastic change in 2022.

Using the signed Minsk Agreements as a foundation, both sides attempted to find common ground for peace at the Istanbul Summit in early 2022. Due to feverish last-minute negotiations in both Minsk and Istanbul in early 2022, the Russian Special Military Operation, which started February 7, "...could have resulted in a settlement just weeks after the war began" (Radchenko, 2024).

There were disagreements on both sides, but,

"Despite these substantial disagreements, the April 15 draft suggests that the treaty would be signed within two weeks. Granted, that date might have shifted, but it shows that the two teams planned to move fast. "We were very close in mid-April 2022 to finalizing the war with a peace settlement," one of the Ukrainian negotiators, Oleksandr Chalyi, recounted at a public appearance in December 2023" (Radchenko, 2024).

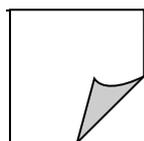
The talks failed in part because Ukraine failed to include her Western partners comprehensively. Accordingly, "...instead of embracing the Istanbul communiqué and the subsequent diplomatic process, the West ramped up military aid to Kyiv and increased the pressure on Russia, including through an ever-tightening sanctions regime" (Radchenko, 2024).

In a 2023 interview, Zelensky's representative in the talks, David Arakhania stated, "When we returned from Istanbul," he said, "Boris Johnson came to Kyiv and said that we won't sign anything at all with [the Russians]—and let's just keep fighting" (Radchenko, 2024). Accordingly, the bloody fighting continues.

In the meantime, complaints of governing style went unaddressed as there appeared to be little change after the 2019 passing of power from Porshenko to Zelensky. "Each has governed like an autocrat, using their powers to go after political opponents and weaken dissent, and have been embroiled in personal enrichment scandals that remain endemic to the Ukrainian political class" ("Meddling et al., 2004).

What good has come of this NATO expansion folly? Not since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis has the world been this close to nuclear War.

Notwithstanding Putin's propensity to dictate and concerns about his treatment of political opponents, including Navalny, Litvinenko, and many more, one must have the ability to separate those truths from emotion



when it comes to the issue of Ukraine. It is apparent the West was, from the beginning, encouraging Ukraine's self-destruction through motivating and inspiring an avoidable and unwinnable war. Some argue it is Ukraine's right through the principle of self-determination. This breathtaking hypocrisy ignores U.S. action against neighbors in the American hemisphere, realpolitik, historical spheres of influence, and the fact that Russia considers Ukraine of vital national interest and NATO expansion in Ukraine as noted above, an existential threat.

There are those who posit that all of this is irrelevant. Okay, what has Ukraine gained in what amounts to a civil war between brothers and fellow Slavs with nearly identical cultures and intertwined histories? That "well-informed position" gained us, through a completely avoidable war with a foreseeable outcome, the degradation or destruction of much of Ukraine's infrastructure, over half million Ukrainian soldiers killed with hideous wounds to over a half million more, damaged or destroyed nuclear families of each of those soldiers killed or wounded, a massive reduction of Ukraine's population through a new Ukrainian diaspora most of whom declare will never return to Ukraine and a now "permanent" loss of Kherson, Lugansk, Donets, Zaporozha and Crimea; well-done!

In 2022, Kherson, Luhansk, Donets, and Zaporizhzhia held referendums to become legally part of Russia. The West widely condemned these referendums as a sham.

However illegitimate the West says it was, the vote went in favor of Russia, and the four regions will forever be part of Russia, and occupied by Regular Army Russian troops. Once Russia confirmed the referendum results, Russia formally annexed all four regions and Russian troops replaced the local militia.

Dmitry Medvedev, a former president who is currently deputy chairman of the Security Council, suggested before the announcements that the outcome of such votes would be irreversible and give Moscow — which has the largest stockpile of nuclear weapons in the world — *carte blanche* to defend what it would regard as legally its territory. "Encroachment onto Russian territory is a crime that allows you to use all the forces of self-defense," Medvedev said in a post on Telegram. "This is why these referendums are so feared in Kyiv and the West...No future Russian leader would be able to constitutionally reverse their outcome, he added" (Dawn.com, 2022).

The outcome of this war, as with most, is determined by the combination of will and capability, including industrial production capacity and short, efficient lines of communication. The Russians are the only power with all; thus, the outcome of the avoidable War in Ukraine was a *fait accompli*.

VI. Conclusion

Viewing the above, what made sense in the '90s and today is a neutral Ukraine pursuing the best economic strategy, which excludes NATO meddling. Writing in 2021, Maria Lipman addresses the Russians' view of the West, seen since 2014 as an enemy seeking Russia's destruction, leading to the need for Russia to protect itself in not just defense and security but also values under attack from Western immorality and decadence (Comms & Comms, 2021).

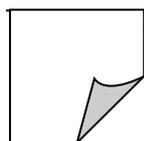
The Monroe Doctrine essentially put Europe's colonies in the America's off limits to Europe and established that the U.S. would stay out of European affairs while the 1845 philosophy of Manifest Destiny, "drove 19th-century U.S. territorial expansion" (Onion, 2019). Accordingly, NATO is exercising its version of Manifest Destiny when no bogeyman was out there. The collapse of the Soviet Union brought the original purpose of establishing NATO into question. NATO is, in fact, an entangling alliance replete with unintended consequences, inveigled through blind hubris, and has the world on the verge of a third world war through unnecessary expansion. Accordingly, it does not provide or guarantee security. Ukraine and Georgia discovered this to their detriment in the false hopes supplied and encouraged by NATO.

There was not much of a different outcome in 2008 in Georgia, where NATO lured Georgia into a war with false hope of membership and security. While many passionately argue that the Georgians fought for freedom from Russian occupation, what they won was the permanent and irreversible loss of two regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Until then, Georgia had a chance to regain the two regions over time. There was also significant damage to infrastructure and loss of precious life.

What has NATO learned? NATO learned that a 600-pound gorilla, in this case, Russia, within its sphere of interest, sits where it damn-well wishes and that putting realpolitik aside in favor of bombast often gets one usually to where one doesn't want to be.

While NATO remains the largest peacetime alliance in the world, in light of today's realities one must question NATO's purpose and necessity. Has NATO grown to a size such that it is too politically challenged and bureaucratically cumbersome to move? Has NATO become an entangling alliance, which Jefferson warned of, potentially drawn into war through unintended consequences of 'other partner's' actions? The indicators are there.

The War in Ukraine, indisputably the result of NATO expansion, is pushing the world to pick sides between the West's liberal democracies and the China-Russia-India coalition. This coalition is long-fed-up with



the West using the Swift Code Banking System¹ as an instrument of both extortion and coercion in the implementation of the policies of liberal democracies. These policies are manifest in the West's sanctions against Russia vis-à-vis Ukraine. Significantly strengthening this opposing coalition is the increasing legitimacy of BRICS "comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa and, as of 2024, new members Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates. BRICS is an economic initiative to mark the transfer of economic power to the emerging world" (Garcia-Herrero & Garcia-Herrero, 2024). Accordingly, BRICS is gaining validity and gravitas in the realm of geopolitics.

Additionally, contrary to the West's corporate media narrative, the War in Ukraine overtly or covertly alienated much of the world against the United States driving Russia and China closer together.

"China's President Xi Jinping has made Russia his most important strategic partner. Also, he is using the Belt and Road Initiative and other economic and political levers at his disposal to pull the Global South into China's orbit and expand its influence in the United Nations" (Ziomecki, 2024).

The Belt and Road Initiative is "...an ambitious plan to develop two new trade routes connecting China with the rest of the world" (Jie, 2022).

Over half the world's population lives in the Global South, "It rests on the fact that all of the world's industrially developed countries (with the exception of Australia and New Zealand) lie to the north of its developing countries" (*Forging a Global South*, 2004).

It is apparent that instead of sharing the common burden, NATO has become burdensome. Through imprudence, NATO brought Europe to the brink of nuclear War. There is no such thing as limited or tactical nuclear war for two sides capable of mutually assured destruction. A nuclear war need not start with ICBM launches across oceans. Atomic powers can shoot modern-day nukes from artillery. Special Forces can carry nuclear weapons in rucksacks.

Once the genie is out of the bottle, both sides will likely let their arsenal loose on short notice as a fait accompli for their perceived survival. It is instructive to recall President Kennedy's words regarding when nuclear powers collide, "Above all, while defending our own vital interests, nuclear powers must avert those confrontations which bring an adversary to a choice of either a humiliating retreat or a nuclear war. To adopt that kind of course in the nuclear age would be evidence only of the bankruptcy of our policy--or of a collective death-wish for the world" (Commencement address at American University et al., n.d., n.d.).

Given the state of affairs in Ukraine, Russia will not be the first to use a nuclear weapon. With Russia dominating the War and the West's increasingly impending humiliation, I worry about Washington.

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¹ Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication

