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500 Days of Russia's War: NATO, Europe, and the New Great Power Competition

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THE INSTITUTE FOR
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Introduction

ZACHARY PAIKIN



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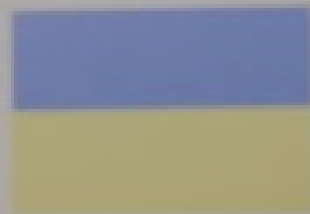


IMAGE CREDIT: PRESIDENTIAL OFFICE OF UKRAINE



Russian Aggression and Great Power Conflict: Which Realism Should Guide Western Policy?

The short essays in this collection might all, to some degree, be classified under the category of “realism”, a policymaking perspective that privileges considerations of power and national interests over values or ideology. Yet realism is a broad church — a fact made apparent by the diverse range of opinions featured in these pages.

For Patrick Porter, meeting the challenge of a rising China will eventually require the United States to reorient away from Europe — and European countries to pick up the slack and increase their defence spending to deter Russia and uphold continental order increasingly on their own. Conversely, Andrew A. Michta makes the case that admitting Ukraine to NATO as a full member is not only the more reliable and credible guarantee, but also the most cost-effective, given the gargantuan task of continually supplying Ukraine’s military to deter a future Russian attack. Paul Robinson, for his part, articulates a view which falls more within the tradition of “restraint”, questioning whether the international order is in crisis and thus casting doubt on whether a militarized Western response is most appropriate to respond to present-day challenges.

That such wide-ranging sets of policy recommendations can exist within the rubric of an interests-based analytical framework serves to demonstrate the complexity of the challenges that NATO faces today.

The asymmetrical nature of great power competition in Europe today — pitting a mammoth transatlantic alliance against a relatively weaker Russia — provides incentives for Moscow to eschew forms of cooperation as a means of keeping the West off balance. This suggests, contra the [formu-](#)

[lation](#) of former EU High Representative Federica Mogherini, that selective engagement with Russia presents an unlikely path toward a more stable and predictable European security order. Absent a more fundamental transformation of Russia-West relations toward a more fully cooperative paradigm, a model of deterrence — paired with a modicum of dialogue, reassurance and restraint to avoid escalation — selects itself by default. The degree to which this model must account for Moscow’s declared red lines, including Kyiv’s future as a member of the Western institutional community, will be a question of utmost delicateness.

Absent a more fundamental transformation of Russia-West relations toward a more fully cooperative paradigm, a model of deterrence – paired with a modicum of dialogue, reassurance and restraint to avoid escalation – selects itself by default.

Today, Western tensions with China are mounting, threatening a spiral of mutual recriminations and security competition which may be difficult to control. However, Beijing’s aims appear mostly geared toward undermining US hegemony and reshaping certain contours of the international order to better reflect its preferences, rather than overturning the entirety of the global normative and institutional architecture writ large.

By contrast, whatever the [nuances](#) of Russia’s post-Cold War foreign policy up until 2022, Moscow now appears increasingly intent on running



roughshod over cardinal norms of the post-1945 international order, including respect for sovereignty and state borders. With the cat of Russian imperialism now out of the proverbial bag, it is uncertain whether Western countries will have the wherewithal to confront Moscow over the long term, while also pivoting resources to the increasingly economically and strategically central “Indo-Pacific” theatre. For Canada, there is also a third theatre competing for attention, namely the defence of North America. The political questions of the hour, such as whether or how quickly to support Ukraine’s accession to NATO, must be considered against this broader backdrop.

The present situation may have been partially birthed by Washington’s decision to jettison aspects of the great power concert and normative pluralism which constituted the post-1945 order — exemplified by the UN Security Council and respect for state sovereignty — in favour of a post-1991 approach rooted in unilateralism, interventionism and global military primacy. But irrespective of the cause, as realists would naturally intuit, NATO allies must address the world as it is, rather than as they would like it to be.

Published in advance of NATO’s pivotal July 2023 summit in Vilnius, this brief compendium analyzes the varied — and complex — policy imperatives and shifting landscapes that transatlantic partners face in the new great power competition.

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The West Reborn? Not So Fast.

PATRICK PORTER

IMAGE CREDIT: PRESIDENTIAL OFFICE OF UKRAINE



The West Reborn? Not So Fast.

As of May 2023, there has formed a triumphalist reading of the Russia-Ukraine war. It is typically offered by those who advocate a continuation of the US-led, transatlantic security order along traditional lines. They believe Washington must maintain the scale of its commitment to continental Europe, a critical power centre in the world, doing most of the heavy lifting not only to safeguard its allies under its protective wing, but to reassure them and thus prevent them from becoming remilitarized rivals. Conversely, they oppose the counterargument of “Asia First,” and indeed often resist the suggestion that Washington must prioritize its efforts between theatres.

This argument has been mounted by prominent institutions such as the Atlantic Council, eminent strategic minds such as [Michael Mazarr](#), [Eliot Cohen](#) or [Matthew Kroenig](#), current officials such as U.S. NATO ambassador [Julianne Smith](#), Taiwan’s de facto ambassador to Washington, Hsiao Bi-khim, also [echoed](#) the notion that Ukraine, to put it crudely, equals a “win-win” globally for the Western-led global order.

The triumphalist story goes something like this: the United States can and should maintain its current commitments at the grand strategic level, and recent events reinforce this point. It has successfully led an international campaign to bleed Russia, one of its main adversaries in an age of great power competition. For investments equivalent to a fraction of its defence budget, it has helped Ukraine inflict attrition on Moscow, killing or wounding its armed forces, running down its weapons stocks, depleting its economy, injuring the domestic consensus of the Putin regime, attracting new allies to NATO (Finland and potentially Sweden) and blunting Russia’s general capacity to project power. Not only is the proxy war

in Ukraine a righteous one, but a prudent one that reinforces America’s overall preponderance of power. It signals a deterrent example to Beijing, that armed adventurism will not stand. And because aid to Kyiv is relatively cheap, it does not detract from America’s overall primacy in the world. Should Americans fall prey to undue pessimism and “Asia First,” their abdication of power in Europe will invite renewed Russian aggression and embolden the emerging formation of Eurasian “Central Powers” against them: Russia, China and Iran. NATO itself should become a more global institution, working to harmonize its efforts with the containment of China. The superpower can — in fact, it *must* — walk and chew gum at the same time.

However desirable, it is no longer possible to sustain a set of arrangements that worked to contain a weaker, poorer Soviet Union and then to oversee a unipolar order, when the U.S. could far more readily deter adversaries and reassure allies.

As an account of Western power and interests — indeed, as an account of how the world is — this tale deserves cold demolition. It does not take China’s precipitate rise seriously enough, as a transformative development that requires adjustment. And it denies the imperative task that is common to all periods of multipolar competition, that is, the need to prioritize. However desirable, it is no longer possible to sustain a set of arrangements that worked to contain a weaker, poorer Soviet Union and then to oversee a unipolar order, when the U.S. could far more readily deter adver-



saries and reassure allies.

The Case for Prioritization

Put simply, China is the richest, near-peer adversary the United States has ever confronted. China and the United States have already entered into a long-term security competition. We know from Rush Doshi's magisterial study of Beijing's internal decision-making that during the Global Financial Crisis, it decided to move from "hide and bide" to challenging U.S. primacy in Asia, in order to construct a Sino-centric world order. While Beijing would have a hard time physically conquering much of the region, it could tip the balance and dominate if Washington were reluctant to lead a counterbalancing coalition. That this competition is underway was confirmed by America's recent legislation to kneecap China's imports of microchips. Asia is the main theatre of this intensifying competition. And Taiwan, as well as the first island chain, is likely to be the focal point, not only due to its geo-strategic location but also because of the central place it occupies in global advanced microchip production.

Striking is not only the scale of China's growth and its militarization, but the growing intensity of its bid for primacy. As the Sinologist Rush Doshi documents, Beijing not only works to surpass the United States but building what Xi Jinping called "comprehensive national strength and international influence", or in the words of a state-approved outlet, "China is set to regain its might and re-ascend to the top of the world." This challenge will make increased calls on U.S. attention, energy and resources.

Yet one of the effects of Russia's invasion of Ukraine has been to reverse America's focus on Asia as the principal theatre of great power competition. Washington has partially re-pivoted back

to Europe, in terms of both capability and renewed attention, as reflected in its [most recent](#) National Security Strategy.

In turn, this development has had three pernicious consequences. First, it splits America's capabilities in conditions where they will likely need to be concentrated. Second, it reduces the chances of one of the initial possibilities of February 2022, that Russia's aggression would stimulate serious rearmament not only in "frontline" NATO states but further behind the front, in Germany and France. And third, it clouds a larger problem which will likely intensify: America's increasing inability to shoulder the burden everywhere at once.

The relationship between the actual and hypothetical crisis points, Ukraine and Taiwan, is more conflicted than complimentary. Balancing Russia in Ukraine does not straightforwardly deter China's adventurism across the Strait.

The relationship between the actual and hypothetical crisis points, Ukraine and Taiwan, is more conflicted than complimentary. Balancing Russia in Ukraine does not straightforwardly deter China's adventurism across the Strait. As well as diverting military power, sanctions on Russian trade also deplete the sanctioning states' capacity to wage further economic war, especially against an adversary ten times Russia's size and far more commercially important. In turn, that makes it harder economically to repeat the effort elsewhere in the short to medium term. Were China to move



on Taiwan soon, European states would be reluctant to wage economic warfare against Beijing at the same time as Moscow. Western states cannot blockade and Lend-Lease everywhere, all the time.

The idea that arming Ukraine will deter China from moving on Taiwan is too convenient. It offers the promise that China, a determined revisionist power when it comes to the balance of forces and influence in East Asia, would be deterred from pursuing one of its most coveted objectives rather easily, by the large but indirect efforts of the West in another fight. Since America exercises deterrence over Taiwan by leaving open the possibility it would fight to defend it, measures short of war in Ukraine are not a commentary on Washington's willingness to fight a war in the Strait.

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A further problem is the simple difference between land and water. The West can supply and resupply Ukraine across contiguous territory without fighting through the aggressor's defences. It can't do this in Taiwan. Shifting materiel via NATO-assured land routes tells us nothing about the willingness to break a naval blockade with a sealift, by fighting, or both. This weakens the "precedent" effect that Atlanticists presume will

work in the West's favour. So it is not clear how Beijing is supposed to read the West's hitherto bounded commitment to Ukraine as a signal of its war-willingness to defend Taiwan directly against a larger, richer adversary. And to judge by recent events, the war in Ukraine is not dampening down China's demands or preparations towards Taiwan and in the neighbourhood: in its exercises, rhetoric and preparations, it is pressing harder.

Moreover, against claims that U.S. heavy-lifting efforts in Europe, Asia and beyond are "cheap," a diversion of 20,000 military personnel into Europe is not cheap, strategically speaking — especially as it also diverts precious air, naval, logistics, surveillance and reconnaissance assets. Neither is it cheap to deplete weapons and munitions stocks to the point where it exceeds the capacity to reproduce them. Political effort is also needed, for instance, in increasing U.S. shipyard capacity, to compete with China's naval build-up. And since Taiwan is the focal point — and greatest potential flashpoint — there are hard trade-offs there as well: anti-aircraft missiles, anti-tank missiles or rocket artillery launchers sent to Ukraine can also be used against an invading force of landing craft or helicopters. And an effort to maintain commitments at the same scale, which is what the re-pivot amounts to, further incentivizes free riding from some states that have the capacity to shoulder more of the burden themselves.

A World of Trade-offs

If this is the case, and if we do live in a harsh, tragic world of trade-offs, the issue is not whether the U.S. must prioritize. It must and it will. Notwithstanding the immediate impression of the re-pivot, the scale of the challenge to America's pre-eminence in the "Indo-Pacific" region is likely to exert a near-gravitational pull on its attention. It will increase the demand on its diplomacy, its



military power, its industrial base and presidential time.

The issue, rather, is under what circumstances the U.S. and its allies will be forced to prioritize, and whether it and its allies manage the process in a chaotic or relatively orderly fashion. Across Europe, a strategic shock lies dormant in the shifting structure of world politics, one that Washington's response to the war in Ukraine temporarily clouds — namely, a partial U.S. withdrawal from continental Europe, and the realization that locals must shoulder most of the security burden themselves.

A strategic shock lies dormant in the shifting structure of world politics, one that Washington's response to the war in Ukraine temporarily clouds — namely, a partial U.S. withdrawal from continental Europe, and the realization that locals must shoulder most of the security burden themselves.

This need not be absolute: “Asia First” does not mean “Asia Only.” For this reason, there ought to be an earlier, more painful reckoning, both in the dialogue over the division of labour in the transatlantic alliance, and independently from Europe. A good start would be a revived *Entente Cordiale* between the three leading military states of Europe, Britain, France and Poland. To hedge against the possibility of less U.S. presence, it would collectively negotiate the strengthening of capability in the neighbourhood independent of the United

States. It would proceed on the common assumption that European powers will soon be forced to shoulder far more of the burden of their own defence, and will have to develop a greater ability to operate independently of their traditional guarantor, increasing defence spending beyond the 2% GDP minimum, increasing British and French nuclear stockpiles, adding forces such as additional squadrons or defensive light brigades, and addressing deficiencies in readiness, spare parts and ammunition stocks). It would work both on a diplomatic level and between military staffs.

As the U.S. becomes increasingly preoccupied with the Indo-Pacific, it will find that the Entente facilitates its efforts in the Asian theatre; it will free up its people, money and equipment to concentrate power where it matters most. But there is much to do, so this is no time for triumphalism.

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NATO Needs Ukraine as Its Member

ANDREW A. MICHTA

IMAGE CREDIT: PRESIDENTIAL OFFICE OF UKRAINE



NATO Needs Ukraine as Its Member

More than a year into the war in Ukraine, and as Kyiv's spring/summer counteroffensive gathers speed and the Vilnius NATO summit approaches, the U.S. and its European allies face a decision point that will define both the shape of Europe's security architecture and the balance of power worldwide. Irrespective of its losses thus far, the tough fighting in the early stages of the counteroffensive suggests that Russia continues to present a serious military threat, and that unless the West is prepared to supply and sustain Ukraine in a protracted conflict with Russia for years to come, it needs to find a formula that effectively deters Moscow from launching another incursion into Eastern Europe, and possibly beyond.

Unless Ukraine is securely anchored in the West and has both military resources and security guarantees to ensure that Russia is dissuaded from launching another invasion, the country's postwar reconstruction will not succeed.

Simply put: The key challenge is how to secure Ukraine in a way that ends the war on democracies' terms and deters Russia from invading again, all while creating the conditions for Ukraine's postwar reconstruction. The issue is one of utmost importance, for unless Ukraine is securely anchored in the West and has both military resources and security guarantees to ensure that Russia is dissuaded from launching another invasion, the country's postwar reconstruction

will not succeed.

Only if Ukraine's security is ensured will private investment into Ukraine occur at scale, and the necessary reforms occur to pave the way for its subsequent inclusion in the European Union. Hence, the various options that fall short of bringing Ukraine into NATO as a full member which are currently being mooted offer neither the requisite reassurance, nor — even assuming that the West would continue to arm Ukraine for years to come — do they offer comparable deterrence against future Russian aggression. If this conflict has shown anything in no uncertain terms it is that Putin doesn't dare to attack across NATO's line, notwithstanding his bluster and threats. The stakes could not be higher, for if Russia regains control over Ukraine, it will have won the key battle of its campaign to restore its imperial dominion in Eastern Europe.

Why Full Membership?

Several analysts have posited that Ukraine should receive a security guarantee within the NATO context, but not full membership. Others have suggested that a workable pathway to security could lie in the West's commitment to supply Ukraine with state-of-the-art Western weapons and munitions so that Ukraine could deter and, if necessary, beat back a Russian attack.

The dubious long-term credibility of such an open-ended commitment aside, there is the larger question of how the West would respond were Russia to attack Ukraine again, and how long it would be able to supply it with weapons and munitions while also ensuring its own militaries are properly supplied and ready. The European NATO allies are struggling to ramp up production to meet their own requirements, and in light of the degree to which Europe's defence



industrial base contracted during the post-Cold War decades, there will be serious questions when it comes to capacity going forward. The United States can offset some of the demand, but it also needs to increase its production of weapons and ammunition.

In short, these and other recommendations that avoid bringing Ukraine into NATO fall short of what is needed for two reasons: first, what the Russian invasion of Ukraine has shown is that being a NATO partner without the Article 5 guarantee is insufficient — if anyone doubts this, ask the Finns or the Swedes why they moved to become NATO members after Russia invaded Ukraine; second, foreclosing NATO membership for Ukraine would be tantamount to acceding to Putin’s demands, belying the Western claim that NATO accession is a voluntary process subject to consent from allies, and that it is not up to outside powers to veto it. Foreclosing NATO membership for Ukraine would amount to underwriting Putin’s neo-imperial claims in Eastern Europe and allowing him to continue to re-litigate the post-Cold War settlement once his land forces have been reconstituted, with more Russian aggression to follow.

What happens in one theatre inevitably affects what happens in the other, as the United States’ inability to live up to its security commitments in Europe will be seen in Beijing as an indication that America may not be able to deliver in the Pacific either.

Another dimension of this debate is the impact of this war’s outcome on China and the credibility of U.S. security guarantees in the “Indo-Pacific”. The Atlantic and Pacific theatre are interconnected — what happens in one theatre inevitably affects what happens in the other, as the United States’ inability to live up to its security commitments in Europe will be seen in Beijing as an indication that America may not be able to deliver in the Pacific either. As a quintessentially naval power, the United States depends for its security and prosperity on open and unhindered access to the world’s resources, with the Atlantic and the Pacific providing the essential connectivity to Europe and Asia. The global security architecture rests on stability in both theatres, and failure in the Atlantic would raise questions among our key allies in Asia about our willingness to take risks in their defence.

Should the West demonstrate that it lacks the staying power to help Ukraine defend itself and reconquer its territory seized by Russia in violation of the treaties and principles it pledged to respect, China — and, more importantly, U.S. allies in Asia — would conclude that the United States has little staying power and that its security guarantees lack credibility. In other words, the outcome of the conflict in Ukraine — including the postwar settlement — will impact Beijing’s calculus should it decide to launch an attack against Taiwan, even if this will not be the only factor shaping events in the Taiwan Strait and its environs.

Russia, Ukraine and Europe’s Security

The final and perhaps most important argument for letting Ukraine into NATO pertains to the larger security equation in Eastern Europe. As long as Ukraine is denied NATO membership, it will be subject to direct Russian pressure and



possible invasion. There should be no doubt today that controlling Ukraine as the key state in the region, allowing Moscow direct access to Central Europe and direct control of the Black Sea, is a sine qua non of Russia's aspiration to reconstitute its empire — all part of its bid to revive “russskiy mir” (*Pax Russica*).

To put it differently, as Zbigniew Brzezinski famously noted, Russia can remain an empire only if it controls Ukraine; conversely, anchoring Ukraine in NATO forecloses Moscow's imperial path, even if it will not destroy the political and ideological sources of Russian imperialism overnight. This would set the conditions for a historic transformation of the region — including Belarus — from that of the “crush zone” between Europe and Eurasia, as the British geographer James Fairgrieve described it more than a century ago, to the boundary of a secure and stable Europe.

Democracies should not look to the power alignments of the past, but rather ask how Europe can be transformed at a moment when it faces the deepest crisis the continent has confronted since the end of the Second World War.

The U.S. and its European allies need to fully appreciate the historic power shift underway in Eastern Europe. Democracies should not look to the power alignments of the past, but rather ask how Europe can be transformed at a moment when it faces the deepest crisis the continent has confronted since the end of the Second World

War. This is not only about the security of Ukraine, but about European security overall, and by extension, about the global security architecture that democracies should attempt to shape going forward.

Secure in NATO, Ukraine — alongside Poland, Finland, the Scandinavians, the Baltic States and Romania — will provide a powerful deterrent to future Russian adventurism, freeing the United States to focus more on the Indo-Pacific. Let's not miss the opportunity at this month's NATO summit in Vilnius to secure Ukraine by bringing it into NATO, for by doing so we will secure and stabilize both Europe and the transatlantic space.

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Russia's Aggression Against Ukraine: Is the International Order in Crisis?

PAUL ROBINSON



IMAGE CREDIT: PRESIDENTIAL OFFICE OF UKRAINE



Russia's Aggression Against Ukraine: Is the International Order in Crisis?

Over the past decade, events such as the 2008 financial crisis, Brexit and the presidency of Donald Trump have made headlines such as “[The Collapse of the Liberal World Order](#)” and “[The End of the New World Order](#)” commonplace. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has provided further grist to the mill. In January 2023, NATO General Secretary Jens Stoltenberg [warned](#) that a Russian victory in Ukraine would encourage countries all over the world to use military force to achieve their political goals, and that consequently “this is not just a European crisis, but a challenge to the world order.” There is a widespread sense that the entire international order is under threat.

In reality, the world is not descending into anarchy. While the war in Ukraine appears to be accelerating certain changes in the way states manage their mutual relations, these changes constitute an adaptation of the international order, not its dismantling.

In reality, the world is not descending into anarchy. While the war in Ukraine appears to be accelerating certain changes in the way states manage their mutual relations, these changes constitute an adaptation of the international order, not its dismantling. In this sense, the Russo-Ukrainian war is less important than often portrayed. That said, it does mark a potentially decisive historical turning point — a moment at which Russia and

the West [cut themselves off](#) from each other and go their separate ways.

A Crisis for the International Order?

The [international order](#) may be [defined](#) as “the body of rules, norms, and institutions that govern relations among the key players in the international environment.” It consists of various sub-orders of which the most important are those concerned with international security and economics. Both these sub-orders rest on a wide set of international treaties, international laws, and international and regional institutions (such as the United Nations and the World Trade Organization).

Both the security and the economic orders are today under some degree of stress. After a dip following the end of the Cold War, the number of armed conflicts around the world has increased in the past decade. According to the [Uppsala Conflict Data Program](#) at Uppsala University which tracks armed conflict worldwide, [at least 237,000 died](#) as a result of such conflicts in 2022, the highest number since the Rwandan genocide of 1994 and an increase of 97 percent over 2021. Meanwhile, efforts to integrate the global economy have largely halted, due both to economic protectionism and to the increasing use of economic sanctions. As the RAND Corporation [noted](#) in 2018, “After a short recovery after the 2008 financial crisis, trade integration has stalled [...] global flows of goods, finances, and services are down more than 14 percent from their peak in 2007 and, after a brief post-2008 burst, have stagnated.” Matters have not improved since then.

The war in Ukraine may accentuate some of these trends. For instance, the sanctions imposed against Russia have disrupted international trade and accelerated efforts by many countries to



“de-dollarize” their exchanges, leading to [predictions](#) of “a split of the world into different regions” accompanied by “the complete destruction of the international monetary system.” The Western response to the Russian invasion has reinforced suspicion in some circles that international institutions are beholden to Western interests and need replacing or at least supplementing. An example would be a recent International Monetary Fund decision to [rewrite its rules](#) so as to allow it to make loans to Ukraine in spite of it being in a state of war. Faced with a “rules-based” international order in which the rules seem to change according to the political whims of the West, it is unsurprising that many states are looking to create new institutions of their own. News in April 2023 that 19 countries have applied to join the BRICS is indicative that many states are [seeking to reshape](#) the international order to reflect better their own interests and worldviews.

Faced with a “rules-based” international order in which the rules seem to change according to the political whims of the West, it is unsurprising that many states are looking to create new institutions of their own.

One should be careful not to exaggerate the negatives, however. The reality is that interstate warfare remains rare, and the current level of interstate conflict is [no higher](#) than in the 1970s and 1980s. The world is not descending into chaos. And while global economic integration has stalled, the world economy remains far more integrated than it was 30 or 40 years ago. This is also true of states more generally: Far from splitting apart

into 200 or so isolated polities, states are forming more and more international institutions, agreeing to be bound by common regulations. There were around 10,000 international organizations in 1980, and 30,000 in 1992 at the end of the Cold War. There are now [nearly 70,000](#). States continue to submit their disputes to international institutions such as the WTO for resolution at the same rate as before, while “the total numbers of U.N. Security Council meetings, resolutions taken up, and resolutions passed have remained steady since about 2005” and the use of Security Council vetoes is substantially less common than in the 1970s and 1980s. While it faces challenges of varied proportions, the international order is certainly not disintegrating.

Nor will it as a result of the war in Ukraine. Stoltenberg’s claim that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine would encourage other states to attack their neighbours doesn’t fit with past evidence. This is hardly the first time in recent years that a country, or group of countries, has attacked another in contravention of international law. The American invasions of Panama, Grenada, or Iraq didn’t set in motion a cascade of international wars. There is no particular reason why the Ukrainian example should be any different. Should war erupt between China and Taiwan, for instance, it will most likely be because of some sequence of local events, as well perhaps as a side-effect of deteriorating Sino-American relations, rather than because of the Ukraine war.

A Crisis in Russia-West Relations

The primary impact of the war in Ukraine is local rather than global, in that it marks the start of a long-term estrangement between Russia and the West.

More than an expression of geography, the “West”



has an ideological meaning, in the sense of embodying a certain set of values. It has therefore [been described](#) as a “subjective” construct. However, through organizations such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU), the West has over time acquired a more objective, institutional character. As more and more European countries joined NATO and the EU in the post-Cold War era, a sharp structural division has developed in Europe between the countries within those organizations (i.e., the “West”) and Russia. The primary institution that contains both parties, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, is largely moribund. Consequently, Russia and the West are now institutionally separate beings and will likely remain such for a very long time.

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Russia's institutional separation from the West is now being supplemented with economic and cultural separation. After Josef Stalin's death, from the mid-1950s onwards, the Soviet Union opened up to cultural exchanges. Western European and North American students attended Soviet universities. Planes flew back and forth between Moscow and Western capitals. Russian language studies boomed in Western institutes of higher learning. Meanwhile, the United States sought to limit the

potential danger of the Cold War by negotiating arms control agreements with the Soviet Union. Dislike did not imply disengagement.

In the past year, by contrast, Western states have imposed an almost total boycott against the Russian Federation. Students and professors no longer go back and forth; the number of students enrolled in Russian language classes in Western universities has [declined dramatically](#); and institutes that fund academic research have [declared](#) that they will not provide any money for research involving Russian institutions. Even innocent cultural exchanges are [viewed in some quarters](#) as deeply undesirable. Arms control is in tatters, and diplomacy even on matters of mutual interest has largely come to a halt (an example being the suspension of the work of the Arctic Council).

This is not necessarily to the West's benefit. Sun Tzu famously remarked: “Know your enemy and know yourself. In a hundred battles you will never be in peril.” By severing our ties so completely with Russia, we have made it next to impossible for us to understand it. It is likely that future generations of Westerners will grow up almost entirely ignorant of Russia. Meanwhile, as they seek to replace their economic ties with the West with ties with China, India, and other parts of the globe, it is likely that Russians will increasingly turn their gazes in that direction. All this will further the two sides' long-term separation.

This situation may be avoided if the war in Ukraine ends in such a way as to make reconciliation possible. At present, though, the prospects of such an outcome seem poor.

There are two possible ways in which the war in Ukraine could end: with a formal peace treaty, or without one. In the latter case, the outcome would be something akin to what happened after the Korean War — the fighting stops, but the war never



officially comes to a close. Attempts to predict the outcome of the war in Ukraine are rash, but as things currently stand, the latter option looks more likely than the former. An important reason for this conclusion is that if, as seems likely, some Ukrainian land remains under Russian control when the guns fall silent, a final settlement will require either Ukraine to accept the formal loss of territory or the Russian Federation to give that land back to Ukraine. It is very difficult to see how either side could agree to this.

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Consequently, the “Korean scenario” seems a likely eventual outcome. This will leave the underlying causes of Russian-Western tensions unresolved. Without a negotiated political settlement, neither side will trust the other not to restart the war at some future point. The West will seek to deter further Russian aggression by arming Ukraine to the hilt. Russia, meanwhile, will be perpetually concerned that Ukraine will seek to regain its lost territories by force. It will respond by rebuilding its own military, in turn causing anxiety in Ukraine and the West. Western sanctions against Russia will continue and the two sides will remain in a state of mutual hostility. The Korean example, as well as the example of US sanctions against Cuba and Iran, show that such a state of hostility can last for a very

long time. It is possible, therefore, Russian-Western relations may remain in a state of tension for many decades.

In short, the international order is not collapsing. But there is a high chance that Russia and the West are facing a very long period in which their relations are, if not entirely severed, at least reduced to a bare minimum of mutual interaction. Both sides will need to consider how they will respond to this possibility.

About the Author

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