

The Geneva School

**Arsenal of Democracy Again:
American Support for Ukraine in the Russo-Ukrainian War**

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Exordium

In today's world, where we live, there is no longer someone else's war. None of you can feel safe when there is a war in Ukraine, when there is a war in Europe. And it can be fatal to think that this does not concern you and will never affect you. You can't think of the global and close your eyes to the details. . . . Because that's how the foundation for the two world wars was laid. And tens of millions of human lives became the price of inattention, silence, inaction or unwillingness to sacrifice one's ambitions.¹

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy of Ukraine spoke these words to the United Nations on September 25, 2019. He addressed five years of fighting between his country and Russian-backed separatists in the east, and he called on members of the UN to support a resolution to the conflict. Less than three years later, his country would be fighting for its life. And yet, his words still hang in the air: Shall we close our eyes to this “war in Europe”?

Narratio

Ukraine is Europe's second largest country, situated in Eastern Europe and on Russia's southwestern border.² On August 24, 1991, after a long period as an integral part of the Soviet Union, Ukraine declared its independence. This was followed by a referendum on December 1, which returned a vote of 92.3% in favor of independence.³

Early on, many in Russia were dissatisfied with this state of affairs. Paul D'Anieri, Professor of Political Science and Public Policy at the University of California, Riverside, comments that, “Both the West and Ukraine regarded the territorial changes of

¹Volodymyr Zelenskyy, “Statement by President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy at the General Debate of the 74th Session of the UN General Assembly,” In-Person (September 25, 2019), <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/vistup-prezidenta-ukrayini-volodimira-zelenskogo-na-zagalnih-57477>.

²Stepan Andriyovich Kryzhanivsky, and Oleksa Eliseyovich Zasenka. 2019. “Ukraine | History, Geography, People, & Language.” In *Encyclopædia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ukraine>.

³Michigan State University, “Ukrainian Independence Referendum,” September 28, 2015, <https://soviethistory.msu.edu/1991-2/the-end-of-the-soviet-union/the-end-of-the-soviet-union-texts/ukrainian-independence-declaration>.

1991 as final. In Russia, many rejected them, while others hedged, proclaiming their acceptance of the new borders while insisting on Russia's 'special role' in the region. . . . Even if the Russian government grudgingly acknowledged Ukraine's sovereignty and borders, much of its elite and its democratically elected parliament did not."⁴

This did not mean that Ukraine and Russia were destined to someday go to war. However, over the next twenty years, questions regarding Ukraine would grow increasingly entangled with the deepening divide between Russia and the West over issues like democratization, security, and the role of Russia as a great power.⁵ For a long time, Ukraine attempted to seek the benefits of closer integration with the European Union, while at the same time taking advantage of strong ties with Russia.⁶ In 2013, this policy would backfire, as the EU and Russia began making mutually exclusive proposals. Ukraine would have to choose one or the other. As a result of Russian pressure "to join the Eurasian Economic Union and renounce the [competing European Union-Ukrainian] Association Agreement,"⁷ the authoritarian President of Ukraine, Victor Yanukovich, refused to sign the Association Agreement.⁸ Turning his back on the EU, he chose to instead pursue closer ties with Russia. This move sparked a series of events that resulted in President Yanukovich's ouster from office in early 2014, and the creation of an interim government in the capital city of Kyiv.⁹

To understand what happens next, it is important to understand what is meant by terms like "the Donbas" and "Crimea". The Donbas is a region in eastern Ukraine, made

⁴Paul D'Anieri, *Ukraine and Russia: From Civilized Divorce to Uncivil War*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 65, 82.

⁵See D'Anieri, 9-10.

⁶D'Anieri, 74, 311.

⁷D'Anieri, 190-191.

⁸Interfax-Ukraine, "Parliament passes statement on Ukraine's aspirations for European integration," *Kyiv Post*, February 22, 2013, <https://www.kyivpost.com/post/6963>.

⁹D'Anieri, 213-214.

up of the territories of Donetsk and Luhansk. Crimea is a peninsula on the black sea, and was also under Ukrainian control until 2014. Both hold significant Russian-speaking populations.¹⁰ After the establishment of the interim government in Kyiv, counterprotests in the south and east of Ukraine soon followed, gaining an especially strong foothold in the Donbas and Crimea.¹¹ With strong support from Russia, these counterprotests led to the proclamation of the Peoples' Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk, as well as the direct seizure and annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation.¹²

Despite attempts at an agreement, low-level fighting would continue in the Donbas between the Russian-backed separatists and the Ukrainian government. By 2021, the conflict had taken thirteen thousand lives.¹³ The situation would escalate dramatically on February 21st, 2022, when President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin asked the Russian Federal Assembly to support both an official recognition of the “independence and sovereignty” of the Donetsk and Luhansk Peoples' Republics, as well as to ratify a “Treaty of Friendship and Mutual Assistance with both republics.”¹⁴ It was not yet clear, however, if this meant all-out war.¹⁵ Three days later, we got our answer. On

¹⁰Agnia Grigas, *Beyond Crimea: The New Russian Empire* (Yale University Press, 2016), 95, map 2.

¹¹“Whether the conflict that emerged [in the Donbas] was a ‘civil war’ or an invasion has divided scholars and analysts along predictable lines. The debate rests in part on a false dichotomy.” However, “If this was a civil war, it would likely have been over by summer 2014. Only the intervention of the Russian army made it possible for the separatists to hold off Ukrainian forces.” See D’Anieri, 224-225. For an account of the Russian annexation of Crimea, see D’Anieri, 217-222.

¹²D’Anieri sums up Russian actions in 2014 by saying: “Between Ukraine, Russia, and the West, the possibility that Yanukovich’s ouster would permanently reorient Ukraine toward the West seems to have convinced Putin that there was little to lose, and perhaps much to gain, in seizing territory that Russia had long claimed. . . . The alternative for Putin [to annexing Crimea and fomenting a rebellion in eastern Ukraine], it seemed, was to accept the loss of Ukraine. Clearly, he could have chosen to do that, and Russia had made treaty commitments to that effect. He chose instead to seize the unique opportunity that presented itself to seize Crimea and to make a bid for a much larger part of Ukraine.” See, D’Anieri, 241-242.

¹³D’Anieri, 240-241.

¹⁴Vladimir Putin, “Address by the President of the Russian Federation,” *President of Russia*, (February 21, 2022), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828>.

¹⁵D’Anieri, 280.

February 24th, 2022, around 150,000 Russian army personnel invaded Ukraine from the north, east, and south.¹⁶ What for Russia began as a “special military operation” to “demilitarize and denazify Ukraine,” and which did not intend to “occupy any Ukrainian territory,”¹⁷ has since developed into a war of attrition,¹⁸ with Russia annexing the Ukrainian states of Zaporizhzhya, Kherson, Donetsk, and Luhansk.¹⁹ U.S. officials estimate that Russia has sustained a total of 300,000 casualties in this war, 60,000 of which are deaths; estimates for Ukraine number approximately 70,000 dead, with twice as many wounded.²⁰ The war has sparked a humanitarian crisis,²¹ caused global economic challenges,²² and has sparked a diplomatic revolution, as previously neutral states like

¹⁶D’Anieri, 1.

¹⁷Vladimir Putin, “Address by the President of the Russian Federation,” *President of Russia*, (February 24, 2022), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>.

¹⁸D’Anieri, 1.

¹⁹Janice Dickinson, “Putin Signs Documents to Illegally Annex Four Ukrainian Regions, in Drastic Escalation of Russia’s War,” *The Globe and Mail*, September 30, 2022, <https://web.archive.org/web/20221001031159/https://www.theglobeandmail.com/world/article-putin-signs-documents-to-unlawfully-claim-4-ukrainian-regions-in/>.

²⁰Max Maldonado, “Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine, Two Years Later,” *PBS Frontline*, February 23, 2024, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/ukraine-war-russia-second-anniversary/>.

²¹“Russia’s invasion transformed Ukraine overnight into a country at war. Many Ukrainians rushed to join the military effort. Others joined support roles. Millions, primarily women and children, fled westward, creating a gigantic problem of internally displaced persons (IDPs) within Ukraine, and as they left Ukraine, Europe’s largest refugee crisis since World War II.” See, D’Anieri, 294-295. Also, see Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Ukraine - protection of civilians in armed conflict (October 2023)* (2023), <https://ukraine.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/Ukraine%20-%20protection%20of%20civilians%20in%20armed%20conflict%20%28October%202023%29.pdf>.

From the beginning of the Russian invasion on February 24, 2022, through the month of October 2023, the confirmed civilian casualties include 9,965 killed, and 18,380 wounded.

²²United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *World Economic Situation and Prospects 2023* (2023), 9, 78-79, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/world-economic-situation-and-prospects-2023/> According to the UN’s *World Economic Situation and Prospects 2023*, during the year of 2022 food and energy markets were disrupted, as sanctions on Russian energy, and unreliable access to Ukrainian and Russian grain and fertilizers decreased global supply and inflated prices. Ukraine’s economy contracted by over 35%, while Russia’s contracted by about 3.5%.

Finland and Sweden have applied to join NATO,²³ and Germany has pledged to raise its military spending from 1.5% to 2% of its GDP.²⁴

America has played a significant role in supporting Ukraine's war effort since the start of the Russian invasion. From January 24, 2022 to February 29, 2024, the U.S. has allocated a total of \$72.47 billion to supporting Ukraine, \$46.58 billion of which consists of military aid.²⁵ Initially, the American public was behind such measures. However, over time, opinion began to shift. According to a Pew Research Poll conducted from November 27 to December 3 2023, 31% of Americans now believe that we are sending too much aid to Ukraine, compared to 7% in March of 2022. The change in support has been especially dramatic among Republicans and Republican-leaning independents. Forty-eight percent now believe we are sending too much aid to Ukraine, compared to just 9% in March of 2022.²⁶ The frustrations many republicans share can be summed up by Marc Thiessen, a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute and former chief speechwriter for President George W. Bush:

[Republicans] hear Ukraine skeptics on the right arguing that the war is costing too much, depleting our military readiness, increasing the risk of nuclear confrontation with Russia and distracting us from the larger threat posed by

²³Matthew Lee and Lorne Cook, "Sweden Officially Joins NATO, Ending Decades of Post-World War II Neutrality," *AP News*, March 7, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/sweden-nato-us-russia-ukraine-8372bc866c8ddcf42d2b8209fa5cd2b1>.

²⁴"A Big Defence Budget Shows Germany Has Woken Up," *The Economist*, March 19, 2022, <https://www.economist.com/leaders/a-big-defence-budget-shows-germany-has-woken-up/21808225>.

²⁵Pietro Bomprezzi, Ivan Kharitonov, and Christoph Trebesch, "Ukraine Support Tracker - a Database of Military, Financial and Humanitarian Aid to Ukraine," *Kiel Institute for the World Economy*, February 16, 2024, <https://www.ifw-kiel.de/topics/war-against-ukraine/ukraine-support-tracker/>. (Data converted from 67.07 billion Euros and 43.08 billion Euros, respectively using February 29, 2024 exchange rate)

²⁶Andy Cerda, "About Half of Republicans Now Say the U.S. Is Providing Too Much Aid to Ukraine," *Pew Research Center*, December 8, 2023, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/12/08/about-half-of-republicans-now-say-the-us-is-providin-g-too-much-aid-to-ukraine/>.

Communist China. Some are beginning to ask whether U.S. support for Ukraine is really in the nation's interest.²⁷

Propositio & Divisio

I will argue that the United States should continue to support Ukraine, since a complete Russian victory would embolden Russia to pursue an aggressive foreign policy towards our allies. First, I will argue that the nature of Russia's war in Ukraine has changed into an aggressive reassertion of Russian territorial ambitions. Next, I will demonstrate that the Russian government holds significant territorial ambitions in neighboring NATO countries, namely those in the Baltic. From this I will conclude that failing to come to the aid of Ukraine will not satiate Russia. Rather, it will only lead to a much costlier conflict with Russia down the line.

Confirmatio

I will begin by arguing that the nature of Russia's war has changed. To do this, I will primarily use Vladimir Putin's own words and actions, as he is the central figure on the Russian side of the war. On March 18, 2014, Vladimir Putin would give a speech on the ongoing annexation of Crimea, framing the contemporary conflict between Russia and Ukraine as originating with the creation of Ukraine's modern borders under the Soviet Union. The southern territories of Ukraine, he claimed, were unjustly taken from Russia and given to Ukraine by the Soviet government. Yet, this wasn't viewed as a problem at the time because Russians and Ukrainians were, after all, united under the Soviet Union.

²⁷Marc Thiessen, "This Is the 'America First' Case for Supporting Ukraine," Washington Post (The Washington Post, May 30, 2023), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/05/30/ukraine-counteroffensive-support-america/>.

As you know, the Soviet Union fell in 1991. Putin claimed that after Russia and Ukraine failed to reintegrate in the 90s, it became clear to Russians that their country “was not simply robbed, it was plundered.” So, what was to be done? To Putin, this injustice was not a problem as long as, “Russian citizens and Russian speakers in Ukraine, especially its southeast and Crimea, would live in a friendly, democratic and civilised state that would protect their rights in line with the norms of international law.”²⁸ However, if Ukraine was moving away from Russia (as the anti-Yanukovich revolution of 2014 seemed to suggest), then there was reason to revisit the issue.

However, even after the seizure of Crimea, it was unclear how exactly Putin wished to pursue this goal. After all, in that very same March 18 speech, Putin commented on the strategic and historical value of the Crimean port of Sevastopol for the Russian navy,²⁹ which shows that his decision to take Crimea was not solely motivated by ideological sentiments. In 2014, Marek Mekiszak, Head of the Russian Department at the Centre for Eastern Studies, stated that, “Today Russia believes in its power and

²⁸“The Bolsheviks, for a number of reasons – may God judge them – added large sections of the historical South of Russia to the Republic of Ukraine...in 1954, a decision was made to transfer Crimean Region to Ukraine, along with Sevastopol, despite the fact that it was a federal city...But on the whole – and we must state this clearly, we all know it – this decision was treated as a formality of sorts because the territory was transferred within the boundaries of a single state. Back then, it was impossible to imagine that Ukraine and Russia may split up and become two separate states. However, this has happened...Many people both in Russia and in Ukraine, as well as in other republics hoped that the Commonwealth of Independent States that was created at the time would become the new common form of statehood. They were told that there would be a single currency, a single economic space, joint armed forces; however, all this remained empty promises, while the big country was gone. It was only when Crimea ended up as part of a different country that Russia realised that it was not simply robbed, it was plundered...However, we expected Ukraine to remain our good neighbour, we hoped that Russian citizens and Russian speakers in Ukraine, especially its southeast and Crimea, would live in a friendly, democratic and civilised state that would protect their rights in line with the norms of international law.” See, Vladimir Putin, “Address by President of the Russian Federation,” *President of Russia*, (March 18, 2014), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>.

²⁹“Let me note too that we have already heard declarations from Kiev about Ukraine soon joining NATO. What would this have meant for Crimea and Sevastopol in the future? It would have meant that NATO’s navy would be right there in this city of Russia’s military glory, and this would create not an illusory but a perfectly real threat to the whole of southern Russia.” See, Vladimir Putin, “Address by President of the Russian Federation,” *President of Russia*, (March 18, 2014), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>.

determination, and is seeking to reclaim as much as possible of what it has lost, unjustly in its own opinion.” However, Russia might have sought to do this through, for example, a renewed effort to expand and consolidate the Eurasian Economic Union.³⁰ Even as Putin boldly proclaimed that Russians and Ukrainians were “one people” in 2021, he would add that “I am confident that true sovereignty for Ukraine is possible only in partnership with Russia,”³¹ implying that he still believed in the notion of Ukrainian statehood.

When Putin made his move on February 24, 2022, he gave an address outlining the goals of Russia’s so-called “special military operation”. In it, he claimed that “in territories adjacent to Russia, which I have to note is our historical land, a hostile ‘anti-Russia’ is taking shape,” and that the objective of this operation was to “demilitarise and denazify Ukraine.”³² This suggests that Russian plans initially only called for regime change in Kyiv as well as its removal as a security threat to Russia.³³ The movements of the Russian army in the initial days of the invasion certainly made clear that a major objective of the operation was the capital city of Ukraine. D’Anieri writes that, “The goal, it now seemed, was to depose the Zelenskyy government and put a puppet regime in place.”³⁴ John J. Mearsheimer, a Professor of Political Science at the University of

³⁰Marek Menkiszak, “The Putin Doctrine: The Formation of a Conceptual Framework for Russian Dominance in the Post-Soviet Area,” ed. Olaf Osica et al., *Centre for Eastern Studies*, March 27, 2014, https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2014-03-27/putin-doctrine-formation-a-conceptual-framework-russian#_ftn9.

³¹Vladimir Putin, “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians,” July 12, 2021, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>.

³²Vladimir Putin, “Address by the President of the Russian Federation,” *President of Russia*, (February 24, 2022), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>.

³³This might have been accompanied by the annexation of (or perhaps simply independence of) the Russian-dominated Donetsk and Luhansk, as the invasion was preceded by a recognition of their independence and justified by their requests for help. For details on how Donetsk and Luhansk played into events directly preceding the war, see D’Anieri, 278-279.

³⁴D’Anieri, 286.

Chicago, argues that a direct annexation of all of Ukraine was certainly not the goal, citing the paucity of Russian troops assembled to carry out such a task.³⁵

Ukraine, however, would hold against Russian offensives in the north and east (most critically the assault on Kyiv), forcing a Russian retreat to more defensible positions in the southeast.³⁶ In response to this initial failure, it appears that Russia has changed strategy, embracing much more extensive war goals than the ones previously outlined on February 24, 2022. On September 30, 2022, Russia would formally annex the Ukrainian regions of Kherson and Zaporizhia along with the separatist republics of Donetsk and Luhansk.³⁷ Dr. Samuel Scheibler, a fellow at the Institute for the Study of European Ethnology at Philipps-Universität in Marburg, Germany and a Registered Agent of both the governments of Ukraine and the Russian Federation in the United States of America, noted that after the failure of the initial Russian strike on Kyiv, “Then it moved into ‘we gotta protect Crimea’, ‘we gotta protect the Donbas’, and the next thing you knew, they were pushing all the way to the right bank of the Dnieper.” He remarked that, “this is not any longer about saving Russians in two culturally Russian regions. This is about destroying Ukraine.”³⁸

On March 4, 2024, Deputy chairman of the Russian security council and former Russian president Dmitry Medvedev gave a speech at the Russian World Youth Festival,

³⁵“There is no way they could have conquered Ukraine with 190,000 troops. And they didn’t have the troops in reserve to do that. When the Germans invaded Poland, in 1939, they invaded with 1.5 million troops. That’s the size army you need to conquer a country like Ukraine, occupy it and then incorporate it into a greater Russia.” See, “John Mearsheimer: We’re Playing Russian Roulette.” interview by Freddie Sayers. *UnHerd*, November 30, 2022, <https://unherd.com/2022/11/john-mearsheimer-were-playing-russian-roulette/>.

³⁶D’Anieri, 288.

³⁷Vladimir Putin, “Presidential Address on the Occasion of Signing the Treaties on the Accession of the DPR, LPR, Zaporozhye and Kherson Regions to Russia,” *President of Russia*, (September 30, 2022), <http://en.kremlin.ru/catalog/regions/X2/events/69465>.

³⁸Samuel Scheibler, January 31, 2024, Interview by author, The Geneva School, Casselberry, FL.

stating that “The territories [of Ukraine] on both banks of the Dnieper are an integral part of Russia's strategic historical borders. . . . Ukraine is, of course, Russia. Attempts to ignore Russian public opinion should also sink into oblivion. It rightly considers Ukraine and its population to be part of our all-Russian civilization.”³⁹ All of this while a map behind him showed Russia occupying half of Ukraine.⁴⁰ Mr. Medvedev has a close relationship with Vladimir Putin, and Dr. Scheibler writes that, “It is a common understanding amongst those working closely with the Kremlin that Putin uses Medvedev to 'say what he considers it impolitic to state himself.’”⁴¹ It is clear that Russia has chosen to aggressively pursue her territorial claims.

Russia’s actions in Ukraine are especially worrying, as Russia similarly holds significant territorial claims in the Baltic states of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. This is important because all of these countries are members of NATO. Political scientist Agnia Grigas observes that, “Estonia and Latvia have especially high populations of Russian minorities, totaling about 24 percent and 27 percent of the population respectively.”⁴² Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, however, Estonia has “called for transition to Estonian in Russian-language schools by the 2024-2025 school year,” and Latvia has passed laws “establishing Latvian as the only language in which to impart education,” and prohibiting “the use of Russian in airports, train stations, and several commercial establishments.”⁴³ Similar language laws passed in Ukraine played a

³⁹Dmitry Medvedev, “Full Version of Dmitry Anatolyevich Medvedev’s Speech to the Delegates of the World Youth Festival,” trans. Samuel Scheibler (March 4, 2024).

⁴⁰George Barros et al., “Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 4, 2024,” *Institute for the Study of War*, March 4, 2024, <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-march-4-2024>.

⁴¹Samuel Scheibler, email message to author, March 13, 2024.

⁴²Grigas, 137, 156-159.

⁴³Anchal Vohra, “Latvia Is Going on Offense against Russian Culture,” *Foreign Policy*, March 21, 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/03/21/latvia-is-going-on-offense-against-russian-culture/>.

significant role in the precipitation of war.⁴⁴ Furthermore, Putin has not remained silent on this issue of Russian populations in the Baltics, saying on December 19, 2013, that, “We continually raise questions about our compatriot situation in some European Union countries, specifically in the Baltic states, where the completely uncivilized perception of a person as ‘non-citizen without the rights and freedoms’ still exists.”⁴⁵

On June 9, 2022, in a meeting with young entrepreneurs, engineers, and scientists, Vladimir Putin would liken Russia’s contemporary actions to the conquests of Peter the Great, first emperor of the Russian Empire, in his fight against Sweden in the eighteenth century. He remarked that, “On the face of it, [Peter the Great] was at war with Sweden [to take] something away from it. . . He was not taking away anything, he was returning. . . The same is true of the western direction, Narva and his first campaigns. Why would he go there? He was returning and reinforcing, that is what he was doing. Clearly, it fell to our lot to return and reinforce as well.”⁴⁶ Here, he specifically identifies Narva, the third-largest city in Estonia (and one with an 82% ethnically Russian population),⁴⁷ as an integral Russian region which justifies reconquest, while at the same time describing his current foreign policy as falling within such a tradition of “return[ing] and reforc[ing]”.

Like in Ukraine, Russian ambitions do not stop at these ethnically Russian areas. Dr. Scheibler writes that Russia’s attitude towards the Baltic Republics is currently guided by the following formula:

A) Russia is the legal successor to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

⁴⁴D’Anieri, 180-181, 214, 250-251.

⁴⁵Grigas, 136.

⁴⁶Vladimir Putin, “Meeting with Young Entrepreneurs, Engineers and Scientists,” *President of Russia*, (June 9, 2022), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/68606>.

⁴⁷Grigas, 157.

B) The secession of Ukraine, the Baltic Republics, and the Caucasian Republics was unconstitutional under the existing Constitution of the USSR and thus, illegal.

C) These territories must be returned to Russia as the legal successor to the USSR.⁴⁸

This attitude of the Russian government towards former Soviet states is particularly strong with Putin. Scheibler states that, “If you were to ask me point-blank, ‘Dr. Scheibler, would Vladimir Putin like to reassemble the Soviet Union,’ the answer is absolutely yes. . . . If he could reassemble the Soviet Union and he thought he could do it without nuclear war, he would do it in a heartbeat.” Scheibler further states that, “There’s a very strong theory that he’s testing the waters. [And] NATO is not doing that great of a job defending Ukraine.”⁴⁹

If the West vacillates on checking Putin’s moves on Ukraine, it would give Putin reason to believe that the West might be similarly irresolute in supporting the Baltics. If Putin believes that, he will be strongly incentivized to make his move there as well. As all of the Baltic states are NATO members, a confrontation with Russia here could be disastrous.

Refutatio

⁴⁸Samuel Scheibler, email message to author, April 1, 2024. As evidence for point A, Dr. Scheibler points to Paragraph one of Article 67.1 of the Russian Constitution, added on March 11, 2020, which states that, “The Russian Federation shall be the successor of the USSR within its territory, and the successor (continuing legal personality) of the USSR in relation to membership of international organisations, their bodies, participation in international treaties, and also in relation to any obligations and assets of the USSR outside the territory of the Russian Federation which are provided for in international treaties.” As evidence for point B, he points to a June 28, 2022 Resolution of the State Duma, which states that, “we can safely state that the President of the USSR [by recognizing the secession of the Baltic states from the USSR] acted...in violation of the formal requirements of the Constitution of the USSR, as well as the relevant laws.” Scheibler finds it notable that a similar line of argument was adopted by the State Duma to justify the invasion of Ukraine. On October 7, 2022, the State Duma passed a Resolution stating that, “Ukraine left the USSR illegally, and Russia, as the legal successor of the Union, has every right to restore order there.”

⁴⁹Scheibler, Samuel. January 31, 2024. Interview by author. The Geneva School, Casselberry, FL.

Multiple counter arguments may be levied against the position of this paper. First, one could argue that NATO's Article V makes such an attack by Russia unthinkable.

Article V states:

The parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them...will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.⁵⁰

This raises the obvious question: *If the Baltics are protected by Article V, then wouldn't the threat of nuclear war prevent Russia from ever attacking them?*

While it is true that Senator Arthur Vandenberg, one of the principal architects of the alliance, called NATO "the greatest war deterrent ever devised," he also stated that, "the North Atlantic Pact is fundamentally of an entirely different character" from "a military alliance in the historic pattern."⁵¹ Former U.S. ambassador Robert Zoellick writes, "Vandenberg assured his colleagues that the treaty was not an automatic commitment to go to war."⁵² Thus, Russia could conceivably advance her aims in the Baltics without automatically triggering a nuclear war, a risk she might be willing to take if she believes that the West will back down.

While this might seem like a stretch, it appears that recent NATO policy has made such a scenario plausible. According to *Lithuanian Radio and Television*, on June 6, 2022, Estonian prime minister Kaja Kallas stated that, "the alliance's current plans

⁵⁰North Atlantic Treaty, United States of America-the Kingdom of Belgium-Canada-the Kingdom of Denmark-France-Iceland-Italy-the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg-the Kingdom of the Netherlands-the Kingdom of Norway-Portugal-the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, April 4, 1949, *TIAS* 1964.

⁵¹Robert Zoellick, *America in the World* (Hachette Book Group, 2020), 289-290.

⁵²Zoellick, 289.

envisage that the Baltic states would be overrun, but then be retaken 180 days later.”⁵³ If Russia could strike deep into the Baltics during this period, she could present a *fait accompli* to the West, forcing the US and her allies to choose between escalation into a potential nuclear war or undermining NATO’s principle of collective defense. In April 2023, Estonia’s Minister of Defense Hanno Pevkur stated that “since the NATO summit in Madrid, the alliance’s general defense posture has been shifting toward deterrence and defense plans to immediately defend every meter of allied territory.”⁵⁴ Thus, it appears that work is being done to resolve this problem. This recent episode, however, reminds the world that Article V is not an absolute assurance against Russian aggression.⁵⁵

⁵³Lithuanian Radio and Television, “Estonian PM Says Baltic States Would Be ‘Wiped off the Map’ under Current NATO Plans,” *Lithuanian Radio and Television*, June 23, 2022, <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1725924/estonian-pm-says-baltic-states-would-be-wiped-off-the-map-under-current-nato-plans>.

⁵⁴ERR, “Pevkur Confirms NATO Defense Plans Changes Favor Estonia,” ed. Marcus Turovski, *ERR News*, April 18, 2023, <https://news.err.ee/1608951526/pevkur-confirms-nato-defense-plans-changes-favor-estonia>. U.S. permanent representative to NATO Julianne Smith has also stated that, “We have taken many steps to ensure that this never happens, to deter Russia from encroaching on NATO territory. We have recently deployed four new battalions in Eastern Europe that can be expanded to a brigade. We have changed our strategy and doctrine and developed new regional plans that will ensure that we can defend every inch of NATO territory. Many countries, including the US, have moved forces into [Lithuania’s] neighbourhood to ensure that Russia gets a very clear message – it must not and cannot attack NATO.” See, Julianne Smith, “We’re Taking Steps to Ensure That Russia Can Never Attack NATO” – Interview with US Representative to NATO, interview by Justina Ilkevičiūtė, *Lithuanian Radio and Television*, December 12, 2023, <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/2147632/we-re-taking-steps-to-ensure-that-russia-can-never-attack-nato-interview-with-us-representative-to-nato>.

⁵⁵Dr. Scheibler puts this dilemma simply: “NATO’s credibility is grounded in the popular assumption among the citizens of the thirty-two nations joined by the treaty and their adversaries (real or imagined) that Article 5 provides immediate, lethal reaction from the entire alliance in response to an attack on any member state. Pragmatically speaking, the daily reality of NATO’s defensive alliance meanders inconsistently somewhere between malleable and amorphous in the immense no man’s land between traditional, land-based military conflict and nuclear Armageddon.” Samuel Scheibler, email message to author, April 8, 2024.

As mentioned before, Putin has strong motivations to push the envelope as far as he can without triggering such nuclear armageddon. If he decides that a direct military action in the Baltics is too risky, he may choose to instead pursue a strategy of asymmetric warfare. Grigas writes that, “As the conflict in eastern Ukraine has demonstrated, Russia no longer relies on traditional military fighting power but rather on shadow war using proxy military groups. The resulting military conflict can thus be made to resemble civil war or separatist efforts by local Russian populations.” Grigas quotes Andrei Zarenkov, a board member of the Estonian Russian Compatriots Coordination Council: “They are afraid we will follow the Donbas scenario. Northeastern Estonia is the same as southeastern Ukraine.” Whether such a proxy conflict as occurred in the Donbas could be sparked is debatable, as Grigas explains that popular support for this kind of action seems to be lacking. For example, the mayor of Narva in 2014 stated: “it’s hard to find anyone

A second objection one might raise is that our aid to Ukraine is not limited enough in scope. On April 20, 2023, nineteen Republican members of Congress signed a letter to President Biden, calling for America to stop supporting Ukraine. The letter argued that, while Russia’s invasion “upended decades of peace in Europe”,

There are appropriate ways in which the U.S. can support the Ukrainian people, but unlimited arms supplies in support of an endless war is not one of them. Our national interests, and those of the Ukrainian people, are best served by incentivizing the negotiations that are urgently needed to bring this conflict to a resolution. We strongly urge you to advocate for a negotiated peace between the two sides, bringing this awful conflict to a close.⁵⁶

It is true that the end of a war which has caused so much death and destruction is a noble and vital goal; the congressmen are also right to ask that American military actions be attached to concrete goals.⁵⁷ However, the congressmen go too far in asserting that, “Open-ended U.S. aid to Ukraine is fundamentally incompatible with our strategic interests,” and that they must therefore “adamantly oppose all future aid packages unless they are linked to a clear diplomatic strategy designed to bring this war to a rapid conclusion.”⁵⁸ Such a “rapid conclusion” would, in practice, mean a complete capitulation on Ukraine’s part at the negotiating table, as Russia would not have any reason to compromise on its goals in Ukraine. As this paper has shown, maximalist Russian demands far exceed Donetsk and Luhansk. Additionally, by putting concrete limits on future aid to Ukraine, America would also be showing that her resistance to

who wants to be a part of Russia,” and coordinator of Russian-speaking NGOs Ivan Lavrentjev has remarked that, “In Estonia people view themselves as European, even though they can like Putin. They also prefer to live in a stable society, with greater economic stability.” However, the possibility, at least, seems to be there (especially since “the Kremlin’s tactics do not require enlisting local majorities among such populations but often just minorities”). See, Grigas, 155, 158, 169-170.

⁵⁶Michael Lee et al. to Joseph Biden, April 20, 2023, 1-3.

⁵⁷See Zoellick, 355-357.

⁵⁸Lee et al., 1-2.

Russian expansion is something overcome with time, a dangerous precedent to establish, considering Russia's ambitions elsewhere.

Finally, one might make the case that, while supporting Ukraine may be an admirable project in the best of times, it is irresponsible to spend such a large sum abroad when we are facing financial troubles here at home. The aforementioned letter to President Biden, for example, mentions that:

While the pace of our aid would suggest otherwise, the U.S. is in no position to expend \$113 billion reinforcing a foreign military as our own military atrophies. . . . To prop up a foreign government that is historically mired in corruption while the American people suffer from record inflation and a crippling national debt is wildly irresponsible on its own – but to do so while our military contends with aging weapons systems and depleted stockpiles is disgraceful.⁵⁹

While this argument certainly takes into account the costs of supporting Ukraine, it does not properly acknowledge the greater costs of refusing to do so. If the West capitulates to Russia over Ukraine, this paper has shown that Russia is likely to come back later.⁶⁰ We must ask ourselves whether the money saved today by halting aid to Ukraine is worth the heavier price paid down the line.⁶¹

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⁵⁹Lee et al, 2.

⁶⁰Thiessen summarizes the situation when he writes, “Russian adventurism is a drain on U.S. resources. By decimating the Russian military threat, Ukraine is reducing the amount of money the United States will have to spend defending Europe — without risking American lives to do it.” Thiessen also writes of a conversation he had with former national security advisor Stephen Hadley, who concluded that, after winning in Ukraine, Russia would then annex Belarus before moving on to Moldova and the Baltics. See, Marc Thiessen, “This Is the ‘America First’ Case for Supporting Ukraine,” *The Washington Post*, May 30, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/05/30/ukraine-counteroffensive-support-america/>.

⁶¹Thiessen also addresses the concerns stated by Lee et al. over American military readiness, arguing that “arming Ukraine is revitalizing our defense industrial base”. See, Marc Thiessen, “This Is the ‘America First’ Case for Supporting Ukraine,” *Washington Post* (The Washington Post, May 30, 2023), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/05/30/ukraine-counteroffensive-support-america/>.

You may hear that this war is about nothing more than “ensuring one corrupt despot maintains power over eastern Ukraine instead of another corrupt despot.”⁶² I hope I have convinced you that this is about so much more.

In the midst of the Second World War, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt declared that the United States must become “the great arsenal of democracy.” Speaking to the American people, he stated that,

The people of Europe who are defending themselves do not ask us to do their fighting. They ask us for the implements of war, the planes, the tanks, the guns, the freighters which will enable them to fight for their liberty and for our security. Emphatically, we must get these weapons to them, get them to them in sufficient volume and quickly enough so that we and our children will be saved the agony and suffering of war which others have had to endure.⁶³

War has again broken out in Europe. America must not now abandon the fight.

⁶²Liam Cosgrove, “Zelensky’s Well-Documented History of Crushing Dissent,” *The Mises Institute*, November 29, 2022, <https://mises.org/power-market/zelenskys-well-documented-history-crushing-dissent>.

⁶³Franklin Roosevelt, “December 29, 1940: Fireside Chat 16: On the ‘Arsenal of Democracy’ | Miller Center,” Radio, *Millercenter.org*, (October 20, 2016), <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/december-29-1940-fireside-chat-16-arsenal-of-democracy>.

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