# The Trauma of Territorial Break-up: The Russia-Ukraine Conflict and Its International Management—Geopolitical Strategy and Diplomatic Therapy

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**Abstract.** The current Russian-Ukrainian war is more than just a border problem or contest over territory, although both aspects are essential to it. The conflict has roots in ideology and psychology as well as in history, including the experience of the population of the Soviet Union during the Great Patriotic War and also the break-up of the USSR at the end of the Cold War. The *traumatic* effects of those earlier events are being compounded by the physical and psychological damage caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The continuing violence there requires of the international community careful management. Two kinds of responses are in order: *geopolitical strategy*, in the form of "containment" (including self-containment by Ukraine), and *diplomatic therapy*, expressed in empathetic contact at the leadership level and in compassionate services provided to the people caught up in the conflict (including the refugees driven from it). The potential spread of the fighting in "East Europe," as Halford Mackinder advised in 1919, could affect the equilibrium of the "World-Island," and ultimately the "World." Writing in 2014 at the time of the Crimean crisis, Henry Kissinger, with a focus on what the eventual *outcome* of the Russia-Ukraine conflict might be, could imagine the result being, in political and territorial terms, the "balanced dissatisfaction" of both parties. That is an "end" a retrenched Russia and a resilient Ukraine, with international managerial help, might be able to achieve.
**Keywords:** geopolitics; diplomacy; Russia-Ukraine conflict; territorial break-up; border.

## [es] El trauma de la ruptura territorial: el conflicto entre Rusia y Ucrania y su gestión internacional – estrategia geopolítica y terapia diplomática

**Resumen.** La actual guerra ruso-ucraniana es algo más que un problema fronterizo o una disputa por el territorio, aunque ambos aspectos son esenciales para ella. El conflicto tiene raíces en la ideología y la psicología, así como en la historia, incluida la experiencia de la población de la Unión Soviética durante la Gran Guerra Patria y también la desintegración de la URSS al final de la Guerra Fría. Los efectos *traumáticos* de esos eventos anteriores se ven agravados por el daño físico y psicológico causado por la invasión rusa de Ucrania. La continua violencia allí requiere de una gestión cuidadosa por parte de la comunidad internacional. Se requieren dos tipos de respuestas: *estrategia geopolítica*, en forma de "contención" —incluida la autocontención por parte de Ucrania—, y *terapia diplomática*, expresada en contacto empático a nivel de liderazgo y en ayuda humanitaria brindados a las personas atrapadas en el conflicto —incluidos los refugiados expulsados del mismo—. La posible propagación

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de la lucha a "Europa del Este", como advirtió Halford Mackinder en 1919, podría afectar el equilibrio de la "Isla-Mundial" y, en última instancia, del "Mundo". Escribiendo en 2014 en el momento de la crisis de Crimea, Henry Kissinger, centrándose en cuál podría ser el *resultado final* del conflicto entre Rusia y Ucrania, podía imaginar que el resultado sería, en términos políticos y territoriales, la "insatisfacción equilibrada" de ambas partes. Ese es un "fin" que una Rusia restringida y una Ucrania resistente, con la ayuda de la gestión internacional, podrían lograr.

**Palabras clave:** geopolítica; diplomacia; Conflicto Rusia-Ucrania; fragmentación territorial; frontera.

## [pt] O trauma da ruptura territorial: o conflito Rússia-Ucrânia e sua gestão internacional – estratégia geopolítica e terapia diplomática

**Resumo.** A atual guerra russo-ucraniana é mais do que apenas um problema de fronteira ou disputa por território, embora ambos os aspetos sejam essenciais para ela. O conflito tem raízes na ideologia e na psicologia, bem como na história, incluindo a experiência da população da União Soviética durante a Grande Guerra Patriótica e também a dissolução da URSS no final da Guerra Fria. Os efeitos *traumáticos* desses eventos anteriores estão sendo agravados pelos danos físicos e psicológicos causados pela invasão russa da Ucrânia. A violência contínua ali exige da comunidade internacional uma gestão cuidadosa. Dois tipos de respostas são necessários: *estratégia geopolítica*, na forma de "contenção" (incluindo a autocontenção pela Ucrânia), e *terapia diplomática*, expressa em contato empático no nível de liderança e em assistência humanitária fornecida às pessoas envolvidas no conflito (incluindo os refugiados expulsos pelo mesmo). A potencial disseminação dos combates na "Europa Oriental", como Halford Mackinder advertiu em 1919, poderia afetar o equilíbrio da "Ilha-Mundial" e, finalmente, do "Mundo". Escrevendo em 2014 na época da crise da Crimeia, Henry Kissinger, concentrando-se no que poderia ser o *resultado final* do conflito Rússia-Ucrânia, poderia imaginar que o desenlace seria, em termos políticos e territoriais, a "insatisfação equilibrada" de ambos os lados. Esse é um "fim" que uma Rússia entrincheirada e uma Ucrânia resiliente, com ajuda da administração internacional, poderiam alcançar.

**Palavras-chave:** geopolítica; diplomacia; conflito Rússia-Ucrânia; fragmentação territorial; fronteira.

## Introduction

The world of international politics is replete with conflicts over territory and related border disputes. Nearly all are difficult to resolve. Particularly difficult to "negotiate" are those that result from the break-up—the rupture—of large political entities that may still be, for many people once living within them, thought of as wholes. In some cases, the retained sense of the overall polity as a single "body" is so strong that the separation, especially if it occurred violently, is recalled, and can even be

felt again, as *traumatic*.[2] Whether experienced individually and later shared with others—"collected" memory—or experienced simultaneously as a group—"collective" memory—the disruption and territorial fracturing that occurred in the Soviet Union in 1991 and that are taking place now in Ukraine in 2022 are a profound, compounding geopolitical trauma (Tsygankov, 2003). Trauma, it has been argued, is a historical inheritance from the Russian Revolution and its overthrow of the Romanov Empire and also the seventy-seven-year-old Soviet regime that followed, with its detentions and deprivations. For Ukraine, the famine of the 1930s—the Holomodor—was traumatic. Above all it was the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945), which cost the lives of more than twenty million Soviet soldiers and citizens alike, that is remembered as if a wound that cannot be allowed to heal (Dobrenko and Shcherbensk, 2011; Gaufman, 2017). "Victory" has to be declared again and again, not only on the date, May 9 (in Moscow), of the surrender of the forces of Nazi Germany.

The stakes for the world of the current Russia-Ukraine conflict are very high. For neighboring nations, for the world's leading powers, and for international organizations, the achievement of some form of stability in this critical region of the European continent really matters. It is not just political geographers who know, and are forced to contemplate the admonitory "saying" of the British Sir Halford Mackinder in 1919:

> *Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland:*
> *Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island:*
> *Who rules the World-Island commands the World* (Mackinder, 1962, p.150).

The factors that have brought about the current dire situation are many, and the dynamics of their interaction is complex. So, correspondingly, are the factors that may, in time, bring about a settlement, if not a permanent solution, of the struggle. An end to the conflict is, as of this writing, hardly, in sight (at the end of April 2022). Perhaps, however, the contours of an adjustment (let us, euphemistically, call it that) can be discerned in the evolving discourse of the political geography of this problem. Maps are suggestive, although the electronic and other cartography currently appearing in the media is but a surface snapshot of what is actually occurring on the ground (Fafinski, 2022). In the last analysis, it will be the parties themselves—Russians and Ukrainians—who make peace, including a territorial settlement between their two countries. At present, however, it is only the leader of one side, the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelensky, who has reached out and has indicated an interest in coming to terms. Belarus has facilitated peace talks between the two sides at Gomel, a city near its border with Ukraine. Subsequently, the Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has mediated discussions between them in Istanbul. Israel also has been an interlocutor.

The Russian government under President Vladimir Putin did, earlier, propose a kind of "grand bargain" between Russia and NATO—over the heads of the

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[2]     The word *traumatic* encompasses in meaning both bodily injury (wounds, fractures, ruptures) caused by the external application of physical force or violence and the psychological or emotional stress resulting from direct involvement in disturbing events, including social and political upheavals. In some cases, memory of trauma, through a process of sociological construction, can become part of culture (Alexander, Eyerman, Giesen, Smelser, and Sztompka, 2004).

Ukrainians. In exchange for Russia's stopping the fighting and presumably with-drawing, Ukraine would have to recognize its sovereignty over Crimea, assure the rights of Russian-speaking minorities throughout the rest of its territory, and also promise never to join NATO. The Alliance itself would be expected to remove its forces from member countries that formerly were part of the Soviet Union. The eco-nomic and other sanctions that had been imposed on Russia following its 2014 take-over of Crimea and afterward also would have to be lifted. The reaction in the West was that the proposal was so unbalanced as to be a "non-starter." As for the particular question of Ukraine's joining NATO, and the European Union as well, it would be up to the people of Ukraine to decide their own future.

The international community cannot fail to be actively involved, as the Russia-Ukraine conflict poses a challenge to "international peace and security," in the lan-guage of the United Nations Charter, and global stability generally. Since the begin-ning of "the Russian invasion" on 24 February, as UN Secretary-General António Guterres has frankly called it, "the war has led to the senseless loss of thousands of lives; the displacement of ten million people, mainly women and children; the sys-tematic destruction of essential infrastructure; and skyrocketing food and energy prices worldwide. This must stop" (United Nations|Secretary-General, 2022).

A fundamental determinant of whatever outcome results from the conflict will be the existing balance of *power*, primarily that of military forces. The internal political balances of the countries in conflict as well, including public opinion and popular sentiment within them, are factors. The influence of *diplomacy*, including military-related "deterrence diplomacy" (Sartori, 2007) must not be disregarded either. With large-scale fighting—outright "war"—now in progress, the role of diplomacy has become much more complicated. It has new facets. The provision of military assis-tance, shipped openly or supplied surreptitiously, is a crucial matter for the Ukrainian side especially. So too is the humanitarian relief that is needed with so many lives being at risk, not only within the territory of Ukraine itself but also on its margins and beyond.

None of this assistance is provided automatically. Offers and acceptance of sup-port usually are negotiated; procedures for delivery have to be developed; programs for distribution and deployment to be administered. When done across international lines, "diplomacy," almost by definition, is involved. "In the past month, beyond their support to refugee hosting countries," reported UN Secretary-General Guterres in March, "our humanitarian agencies and their partners have reached nearly 900,000 people, mainly in eastern Ukraine, with food, shelter, blankets, medicine, bottled water, and hygiene supplies," adding: "There are now more than 1,000 United Na-tions personnel in the country, working via eight humanitarian hubs in Dnipro, Vin-nytsia, Lviv, Uzhorod, Chernivitzi, Mukachevo, Luhansk and Donetsk" (United Na-tions|Secretary-General, 2022). The latter two locations are where the breakaway "Luhansk People's Republic" and "Donets People's Republic," which the Russian government on 21 February recognized as independent states, are based. This formal recognition implies Russia's military support for proceeding to secure physical oc-cupation of the full territorial extent of Ukraine's Luhansk and Donets oblasts, be-yond the current administrative span of the "Republics." If not more.

## 1. Geopolitical strategy: theory and policy

The actual military conflict between Russia and Ukraine has been confined, so far, to those two countries. However, as noted above, the international community inevitably is involved. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is moving into a posture of confrontation, with the forward deployment of force, and logistical and other support sent from across the Atlantic as well as from within Europe. The frontiers of NATO's eastern members, particularly of the three Baltic states and Poland, are the Alliance's new front lines. Finland and Sweden, operationally close to NATO, and even considering membership, are similarly focused (Bildt, 2022). From the perspective of Western governments, the problem can be seen as one of *containment*—holding the ring, so to speak, while the combatants, with calibrated support and as early as can realistically be hoped, fight to a draw, and even to "win." The logic would be to allow time and space for the political, and perhaps also territorial, adjustments to be made that would provide a basis for longer-term stability—both for internal political equilibrium and for international equipoise.

A policy concept with a long Cold War history, "containment" encompasses a variety of strategies, analytically categorized by the historian John Lewis Gaddis as either "symmetrical" (direct and localized) or "asymmetrical" (indirect and non-localized) (Gaddis, 2005). Both approaches of strategy are, fundamentally, defensive in purpose. As the originator of the containment idea in the late 1940s, the State Department policy planner George F. Kennan, later explained, the object of containment was "simply to cease at that point making fatuous concessions to the Kremlin, to do what we could to inspire and support resistance elsewhere to its efforts to expand the area of its dominant influence, and to wait for the internal weaknesses of Soviet power, combined with frustration in the external field, to moderate Soviet ambitious and behavior" (Kennan, 1967, p.364). In the circumstances of today, the American and other Western governments, mindful of the risk of escalation that could result from a direct clash with the military forces of Russia, given its array of nuclear weapons and rockets and a military doctrine that allows for their tactical use, plainly are seeking to keep the conflict in Ukraine kinetically controlled and territorially confined. The explosions that have occurred at a fuel depot and at other places in Russia, although attributed by a Ukrainian official to "karma," are worrisome (Kingsley, 2022).

Containment, it is too rarely noted, implies the restraint, and even restriction, of the weaker party in its aspirations and objectives as well as in its behavior. "Self-containment," it might be called. This includes international behavior. In the case of the government of Ukraine under President Zelensky, it raises the question of NATO membership for the country. The subject has been on the Alliance's agenda since the North Atlantic Council meeting of its heads of state and government in Bucharest in April 2008. The aspiration of becoming a NATO member is now embedded in the Ukrainian constitution wherein by amendment in 2019 "the European identity and irrevocability of the European and Euro-Atlantic course of Ukraine" is reaffirmed, with the aim of "acquisition of full membership of Ukraine in the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization" (Lapa and Frosini, 2022). Prior to that time Ukraine was formally nonaligned—in effect, neutral.

The change in national policy was made following and as a consequence of the Russian takeover of its territory of Crimea. In 1954 the Crimean region was

transferred by Moscow to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic; with the breakup of the USSR in 1991 it emerged as the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic; and from 1992 became the Republic of Crimea and, with extensive home rule, a part of Ukraine. The "welcome" extended to Ukraine, along with Georgia, by the North Atlantic Council in 2008, was premised on their continued "reform" efforts, which the membership-promise obviously was intended to encourage. Nonetheless, the leaders of the Alliance stated in their Bucharest Declaration of 3 April: "We agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO." The "next step" was a Membership Action Plan (MAP). "Today we make clear that we support these countries' application for MAP." There first would be "a period of progress," with "a period of intensive engagement with both at a high political level to address the questions still outstanding pertaining to their MAP applications." (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2008). This was hardly an ironclad commitment. While the US government under President George W. Bush was strongly in favor of Ukrainian and Georgian membership in NATO, it was widely recognized that France and Germany were not (Bush, 2010, pp.429-431). The "welcome" extended by North Atlantic Council in 2008 was, though genuine, qualified not only by doubt about the contributions that Ukraine and Georgia could make but also by concern about a negative reaction by Russia, on which NATO then was reliant for cooperation in allowing use of its airspace for supplying the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan and also in the field of arms control, notably the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE). Vladimir Putin as Russian president was himself present in Bucharest, and met with the NATO leaders at the end of their meetings. Reportedly, he then leaned over to President Bush, and reminded him that Ukraine is "not a real country" (Ringer, Chakrabarti, and Scheimer, 2022).

From 2008 and even earlier, the containment-restraint of Ukraine itself, including its government's policies, is done not only through words—encouraging but also cautioning, and privately as well as publicly communicated. It also is done through physical positioning and operational steps, which may be considered "signals." The forward deployment of US and other NATO-ally forces to the Alliance's exposed eastern frontiers —but no further—indicates support but also implies control. It suggests limits and, despite the increasing military aid that is being given to Ukraine, territorial confinement of the conflict. Thereby the scope of the struggle and possibly even the shape of its eventual outcome, theoretically, could be managed. Such an approach is, essentially, that of *geopolitical strategy*, the current implementation of which will be further discussed below.


## 2. Diplomatic therapy: concept and method

Given the turbulent, even traumatic nature of the experience of territorial disruption, especially when accompanied by horrifying violence such as has been caused by the incursions of Russian forces into the land, sea, and air spaces of Ukraine, much more than managerial ring-holding is needed. Active intervention by statesmen and diplomats, from capitals, at summit meetings and other high-level encounters, as well as active engagement by internationally authorized professional service providers on the ground, are urgent necessities. The problem is psychological as well as political. Because of "grievances" felt and expressed at the leadership level, by Russian

president Vladimir Putin particularly, attention must be given to the mental states and emotional needs of counterparts among leaders. At the wider social level, amidst populations directly affected by violence, a special awareness of the psychological realities of social and territorial disruption is required. Because of the hurtfulness of the tearing-apart of communities, such "diplomacy" as is called for must now show, in addition to the conventional formal diplomatic characteristics, a *therapeutic* quality. The topic may seem novel, yet the annals of diplomacy do include elements that indicate the existence, and demonstrate the importance, of what here will be termed *diplomatic therapy*.

The notion merits elaboration. Understanding and empathy, along with patience, always have been recognized as diplomatic attributes. To imagine how an adversary sees things—to penetrate his mind and his milieu—and to take a long view in continuous dialogue in order to shape a common perspective—as a basis for genuine agreements that can last—are counsels as old as Richelieu, Wicquefort, and Callières (Berridge, 204, pp.115-149). A therapeutically conscious diplomacy implies something further: a *healing* function. Diplomacy can have, among its other functions, an *assuaging* role: that of making of a deliberate, sustained effort to soothe, to quieten, to reassure, to disarm, and, if and when successful, finally to placate—to make peaceful. *Appeasement*, the more common term, is a success-word as well as a process-word. The function is a necessity of well-regulated social life, among many species. "Curiously enough, appeasement gestures have evolved in a large variety of animals under the selection pressure exerted by behavior patterns releasing aggression," observes the ethologist Konrad Lorenz. "In trying to appease a member of its species, the animal does everything to avoid stimulating its aggression" (Lorenz, 1967, p.126). In international relations, "appeasement," unfortunately, became morally and politically discredited owing to the failure of British foreign policy in the late 1930s, and the word has been used as a rhetorical weapon ever since (Bouverie, 2019). For example, President Zelensky used it when speaking to the 2022 Munich Security Conference in rebuking the Western powers for not more effectively opposing Russian expansiveness: "What did the world say? Appeasement. Result? At least the annexation of Crimea and aggression against my state" (Cohen, 2022).

A similar word such as *assuagement*, without these associations, might be a better descriptor of tactical efforts to reduce the aggressiveness of, and to pacify, an "aggrieved," angry party. "Analysts and historians will long debate whether Mr. Putin's grievances had bases in fact, whether the United States and its allies were too cavalier in expanding NATO, whether Russia was justified in believing that its security was compromised," wrote The Editorial Board of *The New York Times*. "There will also be questioning over whether Mr. Biden and other Western leaders could have done more to *assuage* Mr. Putin" (emphasis added) (The Editorial Board, 2022). While the effort to assuage might be considered a "policy" in the limited sense of an attitude of address, it does *not*, further, entail the making of concessions, either of principle or of interest (including the interests of others). It does imply "treatment" of a kind, even if not conscious therapy. For individuals, including adversaries in positions of power, it can mean a deliberate approach that is soothing—even "stroking"—calculated to induce calm, and, potentially, reasonableness. For the larger society caught up in conflict such as that in Ukraine, it implies alleviation—release from tension, relief from need, and lightening of burdens that can include. painful memories of the past. In a word, "peace."

Although essentially psychological, such an approach has temporal (historical) and even spatial (geographical) dimensions. It allows time for "talking it through," and doing so within spaces that can be called "home." Among its qualities should be these. During and following a conflict, there must be an allowance for mourning, not only for the loss of life and livelihood but also for a familiar past and hope for a corresponding future. Experiences, both hard and happy, should be shared. Guilt should be acknowledged and responsibility accepted (Strenger, 2010). Such dialogue should aim at forming common understanding and, eventually, cooperation in taking practical, incremental steps toward "neighborhood."

While the healing itself can only occur when the adversaries themselves manage somehow to make peace, intervention by diplomats as third parties, representing individual nations and international organizations as well, can contribute essential mediating and moderating service, and may be called upon to do so. The involvement must be much deeper than facilitation, offering of good offices. It involves substantive conciliation. There are a few notable contemporary precedents, one being the role of the American lawyer and politician George J. Mitchell in assisting the opposed sides in bringing about the 1998 Good Friday Agreement for Northern Ireland (Mitchell, 1979). The comparability of the Northern Ireland case with the Russian-Ukrainian problem is that it also had a territorial and border relations aspect, with the competing "mental maps" of the United Kingdom and a United Ireland in play.[3]

## 3. Rupture borders as an international management problem

Rupture borders, as these contested areal contexts may be called, are of course local. Most are territorial divisions and disputed boundary situations between individual countries. There can be rupture borders on a higher, broader political plane as well. *Meta-borders* these might be called. A major historical example—one with relevance in the re-emerging divide in Europe today—is the "Iron Curtain" that Winston Churchill defined in his speech in Fulton, Missouri, on 5 March 1946. "From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic," the British leader famously declared, "an iron curtain has descended across the Continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia; all these famous cities and the populations around them lie in what I must call the Soviet sphere" (Churchill, 1946). Postwar Europe was geopolitically split.

A new dividing line is appearing farther to the east—inescapably reminiscent of the Iron Curtain. The new "cleavage" has not yet been defined in actual "borders," however (Okunev, 2021, pp.375-376). Borders, functionally, are stabilizers. This eastward-shifted dividing line bisects a contested zone—the wide area between the geopolitical cores of Germany and Russia—that extends from Finland down to the

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3    For an application of the "mental map" concept to international relations, see Henrikson (1991). "Mental map" is defined therein as an ordered but continually adapting structure of the mind—alternatively conceivable as a process—by reference to which persons, including planners of foreign policy and diplomats, orient themselves in the world with regard to decisions they are making. Geographical mental maps are analytically complex, consisting of "paths," "edges," "districts," "nodes," and "landmarks." Being subjective, these cognitive elements may not correlate closely with formal cartographic, political-jurisdictional, or actual physical land and water features.

Balkans and the Black Sea. It has been characterized as "Europe-in-Between" (Botić, 2013; Orenstein, 2019; Snyder, 2010, pp.5,44-45). Composed mostly of smaller states, it has been, historically, a "shatterzone of empires" (Bartov and Weitz, 2013; Cohen, 2009, pp.5,36). The current conflict focused on eastern Ukraine represents a cleavage also of new communities that have been imagined. One is the "common European home" that former Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev envisioned (Gorbachev, 1987, pp.180-181). Another is the "European whole and free" of which US president George H. W. Bush spoke in 1989 (Bush 1990), with "and at peace" being added later (Hunter, 2008). Farther to the north, with consideration now being given by Finland and Sweden, concerned as they are about a spread of the war in Ukraine, to joining NATO, northwest Europe and even the Arctic Ocean, hitherto an exceptional "zone of peace," could become geopolitically cleft—bifurcated into a US-dominated security zone and a Russia-dominated security zone (Henrikson, 2020).

## 4. The territorial collapse of the USSR and its successor states' divisions

The foremost contemporary-historical example of a shattered empire is Soviet Russia—the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. On 26 December 1991, the Soviet Union formally dissolved, falling apart into fifteen independent republics. Intra-USSR boundary lines themselves, including administrative divisions within the former Soviet republics, remained nominally unchanged. Inter-republic lines around the "mainland" of Russia—the Russian Federation—became, however, international borders, between sovereign states.

The new national boundaries, although graphically defined on many maps were, on the ground, far less definite. Many soon were disputed. It is not just that they had never been systematically delimited. They were "thick borders," in a sense—"not mere lines, but invested spaces, places of confrontation and cooperation" (Lebedev, Regamey, and Shukan, 2017). The actual demarcation of the borders, with border monuments regularly placed along them, had scarcely begun. "In fact," as the Polish-born American geostrategist and former National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski pointed out, "the Russians have deliberately resisted demarcation of the boundaries in order to prevent their consolidation. It's the new former Soviet states that keep demanding that the borders be demarcated" (Brzezinski and Scowcroft, 2008, p.169).

There is thus a vagueness, an amorphousness in the former Soviet space. This includes Russia's "near abroad" (*blizhneye zarubezhye*)—as seen from the centralizing perspective of Moscow. The boundaries of the Russian Federation, Brzezinski asserted, "are not viewed as natural." It is "The State with Unnatural Boundaries." This is not just because of the relative featurelessness of the land itself, vast expanses of which, apart from the Urals and other mountainous areas, are undifferentiated stretches of tundra, taiga, steppe, and semi-desert. The reason for the "unnaturalness" is, rather, ideational: the continuing identification of Russians with their formerly even more extensive domain. It is "enormous satisfaction" that Russians take "from having this territorially impressive empire," Brzezinski observed in 2008. "It's one of the major sources of their identity. 'We're the largest country in the world.' But if you begin to peel off these countries, they're no longer so large. This territorial

sense is one of the mystiques that has to be redigested and rethought today. And this is why the process is so painful . . ..” (Brzezinski and Scowcroft, 2008, p.169).

The discomforture of the break-up of the USSR in 1991 was felt not only by Russians but also by many of the nationalities and other groups in the populations that found themselves in a territorial and administrative limbo. “You have no idea what a trauma it was when it collapsed,” recalled Brzezinski. “I was there shortly afterwards, visiting the presidents of the different republics. At the end of one of these visits I was taken to the airport. The president was bidding me goodbye, and there were a number of planes parked there. And they were painting new names on the planes. They were no longer Aeroflot, but let's say, 'Air Uzbek' or 'Air Kyrgyz-stan.' I asked the president, 'How did you divide the Aeroflot fleet?' And he said, 'It was very simple. The day the Soviet Union dissolved, any plane on our ground became part of our fleet.' It was a chaotic, confusing, painful process” (Brzezinski and Scowcroft, 2008, p. 169).

Some of the non-Russian post-Soviet states have chosen to remain associated, if only loosely, with the Russian Federation. Most joined the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and subsequently entered into other Moscow-sponsored structures: the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Nearly all of the continent-wide post-Soviet space has been, if somewhat tenuously, “recovered” by the Russian government in this way. However, the smaller republics in the Baltic region—Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—which never had been recognized by the US government or other Western governments as incorporated into the USSR—broke away completely. In 2004 the three Baltic states, after internally reorganizing their politics, joined both the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU). Other former Soviet republics, notably Ukraine and Georgia, as noted, have aspired to do much the same.

## 5. The Russia-Ukraine border relationship

For most practical purposes, much of the international border between Ukraine and the Russian Federation no longer “exists.” There is no mutually determined, jointly established boundary line. A treaty on demarcation of the common border between the two countries was negotiated in 2010, and it came into force that same year. According to a later account by Russian president Vladimir Putin, the president of Ukraine at the time, Leonid Kuchma, asked him “to expedite the process of delimiting the Russian-Ukrainian border”—a process then “practically at a standstill.” Putin recalled:

> Russia seemed to have recognized Crimea as part of Ukraine, but there were no negotiations on delimiting the borders. Despite the complexity of the situation, I immediately issued instructions to Russian government agencies to speed up their work to document the borders, so that everyone had a clear understanding that by agreeing to delimit the border we admitted de facto and de jure that Crimea was Ukrainian territory, thereby closing the issue.
> We accommodated Ukraine not only regarding Crimea but also on such a complicated matter as the maritime boundary in the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait. What we proceeded from back then was that good relations with Ukraine matter

> most for us and they should not fall hostage to deadlock territorial disputes. However, we expected Ukraine to remain our good neighbor, we hoped that Russian citizens and Russian speakers in Ukraine, especially its southeast and Crimea, would live in a friendly, democratic and civilized state that would protect their rights in line with the norms of international law (Putin, 2014).

Although the Ukrainian government was prepared to begin demarcation work upon ratification of the treaty, the ratification process never was completed. Ukraine had begun to define itself. In 1991 the government in Kyiv had unilaterally declared the existence of the boundary of the country with laws "On Legal Succession of Ukraine" and "On State Border of Ukraine." The border became an administrative reality. The flagrant disregard of it by Russian troops "on vacation" and other infiltrators in 2014, when the Crimean crisis occurred, caused the government in Kyiv to determine to build a defensive system ("Project Wall"), some sections of which were constructed. In 2018 the Ukrainian government introduced biometric controls and imposed other restrictions on, specifically, Russian citizens seeking to enter the country. Apart from the immediately self-protective objective, it should be noted, there was a further, "multilateral" purpose in the Ukrainian government's move: to prepare for eventual European Union membership, as that would entail shared responsibility for border management and immigration control.

The Western aspirations of Ukraine were felt as a profound challenge to the Russian leader, who had never concealed his refusal to accept the diminishment of his country, or his intention to reverse it, politically and maybe even territorially. In an address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation in April 2005, Putin said: "Above all, we should acknowledge that the collapse of the Soviet Union was a major geopolitical disaster of the century. As for the Russian nation, it became a genuine drama. Tens of millions of our co-citizens and co-patriots found themselves outside Russian territory. Moreover, the epidemic of disintegration *infected Russia itself*" (emphasis added)" (Putin, 2005). It thus is not just the already-occurred loss of territory, with the substantial separation of "co-citizens and co-patriots" from Russia, that concerns Putin. It is also the danger of a *continuing* geopolitical break-up— within the present Federation itself. He saw this as having been threatened in Chechnya until the rebellion there was brutally suppressed by the Russian government— under his leadership.

What has happened (and still could happen) in the former Russian imperial realm is, for Putin and his Kremlin associates, a source of genuine existential concern. The suddenness and completeness of the Union's break-up profoundly shocked them. "The USSR fell apart," Putin frankly acknowledged in an address from the Kremlin in March of 2014. "Things developed so swiftly that few people realized how truly traumatic those events and their consequences would be" (Putin, 2014).

## 6. Russians' (and Ukrainians') historical memories—and PTSD?

That Russia's behavior toward Ukraine, Georgia, and the Baltic states and others, now including Moldova, is a symptom of "post-traumatic stress disorder" (PTSD) as commentators (including Russian ones) have suggested, is more speculative. First of all, not all people in Russia saw or felt the end of the USSR as a disaster. An example

is the Russia-born writer, Anastasia Edel, who recently reflected: "The breakup of the Soviet Union, which I lived through, was no catastrophe between the two countries." Some of her relatives were Ukrainian. "During summers in the early '90s," she recalls, "I worked as a counselor in a youth camp on the Black Sea: Most of the children were from Donetsk, the Ukrainian coal-mining region. 'U-kra-i-na, I love you!' we screamed at the top of our lungs during soccer matches and dance competitions" (Edel, 2022). For the young KGB officer Vladimir Putin, however, the disintegration of the Soviet empire *was* catastrophic. Stationed in Dresden and active Soviet counterintelligence there, he was caught up in Germans' nationalist fervor and was threatened by it. The Fall of the Berlin Wall (*Mauerfall*) on 9 November 1989 and its aftermath was disorienting. Faced with an "aggressive" crowd outside his building, he was told when he sought instructions: "We cannot do anything without orders from Moscow. And Moscow is silent." From "that business of 'Moscow is silent,'" Putin later said in an interview, "I got the feeling then that the country no longer existed. That it had disappeared. It was clear that the Union was ailing. And it had a terminal disease without a cure—a paralysis of power" (Putin, 2000, p.79). He did not share in the euphoria all around him, or credit its validity. He generalized his personal feeling of abandonment and directionlessness, "projecting" it onto Russians back home.

The experience of trauma, and resulting PTSD, is not the only possible explanation of Putin's and Russia's subsequent behavior. An alternative is the effect of the self-image of Russia as a historical "great power," a vast former "empire," and a related concept of it as potential master of "Eurasia" (Adomeit, 1995; Snyder, 2018, pp.84-91).[4] This is reinforced by a conservative ideological vision of itself as a kind of savior—a spiritual power. The ecclesiastically promoted concept of the "Russian world" (*Russkiy mir*) encompassing Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, and the entire Russian diaspora is a further strengthening influence. An astute student of diplomacy, Paul Sharp, asks: How do "worlds" interact with each other? How *can* they do so? (Sharp, 2009, pp. 118-122). The attraction of this mélange of positive ideas on the leadership to today's Russian leadership is so strong, it can be argued, that forcible domination, rather than negotiated integration, is the only policy that is thinkable. Thus, to attribute political behavior to any single factor, especially that of an entity as complicated as Russia, is perilous. Psychology, history, and ideology combine—against diplomacy, it seems.

The currently widespread use of the psychiatric category of "trauma" to describe a *sociopolitical* condition such as that of Russia and associated peoples, rather than an *individual* person's mentality, has been questioned (Summerfield, 2001). It shifts the focus away from the inherent make-up and present state of a human psyche to external factors, particularly to "wounding" events. Occurrences experienced by entire communities can indeed be "painful," and the effect is collective (Charuvastra and Cloitre, 2008). When mass violence occurs, as on Russian territory during the Second World War, the impact no doubt was traumatic for the entirety of the population caught up in it. The same clearly is true also for those living through the current

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[4]    The "Eurasian" concept, often cited in interpreting Russian policy, is multiple. A.P. Tsygankov differentiates among five "schools" of current Russian political thinking: Expansionists (e.g., Alexander Dugin); Civilizationists (e.g., Gennady Zyuganov); Stabilizers (e.g., Kamaludin Gadzhiyev); Geoeconomists (e.g., Sergei Rogov); and Westernizers (e.g., Dmitri Trenin), who are critical of Eurasianist perspectives (Tsygankov, 2003).

war in Ukraine, especially in areas subject to repeated bombardment, and where Russia's "special military operation" is being met with fierce resistance.

The "fundamentally traumatogenic nature of war" is well understood (Summerfield, 2001). Although the impact on society may be pervasive, soldiers can be uniquely affected—by what they have witnessed and by what they may have done. Their experience can be an emotional, and sometimes a moral, burden. The symptoms of trauma may not at first be clinically apparent—in part for cultural reasons. "When our tooth hurts, we go to a dentist," said a Ukrainian psychological therapist, a veteran of fighting against Russian forces in the east. "When we have emotional problems, we grab a bottle of vodka" (Stern, 2015). Ukrainians "must address the nation's collective post-traumatic stress disorder," urged a guest adviser to the Ukrainian Ministry of Health (Shmigel, 2018). The millions of Ukrainians who are now refugees abroad have geographically expanded th isproblem (HealthDay News, 2022).

To suggest that Vladimir Putin and the Russian people have experienced "PTSD" owing to the break-up of the USSR in 1991 is not of course a political justification—however relevant it may be for purposes of explanation. Inhabitants of Russia, Ukraine, and the other former Soviet republics earlier have endured highly stressful experiences, beyond even the Great Patriotic War, and have survived. Yet the past does live with them. It could conceivably be that "Russia, as a traumatized society, is simply attempting to recreate a sense of belonging as nation in order to heal," as Sean Guillory of the University of Pittsburgh's Center for Russian and East European Studies has observed. But, as Guillory rightly emphasizes, Russia today "should not be excused for its behavior simply because of the trauma it endured; understanding its perspective does not mean condoning it." Nonetheless, Guillory warns, against those who would simply ignore Russia's experience and refuse any dealing with it: to isolate Russia "will only feed its traumatic responses" (Guillory, 2014).

The above characterization of Russia as a traumatized society is an implicit argument for international management of an especially considerate, even sensitive, and, as here suggested, therapeutic kind. It is a social-psychological diagnosis that suggests professional treatment, but it does not indicate a precise prescription or procedures to be followed. One is mindful of the neoliberal Western economic "shock therapy" advice that was given by experts to the Russian government during the early post-Soviet period. With the privatization of state enterprises and accompanying removal of social-welfare subsidies, along with a sharp decline in the value of the ruble, most of the country's citizenry suffered—even as some ("oligarchs") fabulously enriched themselves. A better formula as the journalist Strobe Talbott, a longtime student of Russian affairs who as deputy secretary of state assisted his friend President Bill Clinton in managing relations with Russia, later reflected would have been "more therapy and less shock" (Burns, 2019, pp.93,110).

## 7. Strategy or diplomacy? Experiences of US-Russian-Ukrainian international self-management

How, when, and in what circumstances should the international community "engage" with Russia, given its government's expansionist policies and military

aggression? The two basic approaches remain the *strategic* and the *diplomatic*. One is a general approach that relies on external constraints, on the establishment of objective limits to an adversary's ambition and potential action—and, by implication, allies' behavior as well. The prescription was applied to the Russian Federation under Vladimir Putin, over a decade ago, by Zbigniew Brzezinski. "What is really important," Professor Brzezinski then posited, "is to create a geopolitical context that reduces the likelihood that a nostalgic desire to be a great imperial power again becomes realistic, and which, over time, gives Russia the overriding option of becoming more closely associated with the West rather than creating its own competing imperial system (Brzezinski and Scowcroft, 2008, pp.173-174). This—a long-term strategy, with short-term tactical applicability—is reminiscent of George F. Kennan's earlier concept of "containment," the ultimate goal of which also was a Russian society in closer communication if not full sympathy with the West. It would be a more tolerant Russia, although one that never could approximate itself to the democratic system of the United States.

In specific policy terms, with regard to Ukraine, Brzezinski advised keeping open the possibility of NATO membership. This was in accordance with NATO's traditional "Open Door" policy, which was reaffirmed at the NATO Summit in Wales in September 2014 as "one of the Alliance's great successes" (NATO. 2014; NATO, 2019; Hamilton and Spohr, 2019). With regard to a Membership Action Plan for Ukraine, which was not actually offered the country by the Allied leaders at their Bucharest Summit in 2008, "there was support for this," as a former American ambassador to Ukraine William Taylor recently recalled. "And as we know now, in my view, we should have done it then. We would not be in this war today. We would not have this invasion today had we offered a membership action plan to Ukraine then" (Ringer, Chakrabarti, and Scheiner, 2022; Bush, 2010, p.431).

Geopolitical strategy, with its distant gaze and detached diplomacy aimed at restructuring a country's objective situation in order to influence its subjective outlook, requires patience and a long view. "If we're intelligent about it, if we don't force confrontations but instead create options," Brzezinski advised, "Russia will have to face the fact that it cannot indefinitely control that huge space, potentially so mineral rich, without being part of something larger. And that something larger essentially is the Euro-Atlantic community" (Brzezinski and Scowcroft, 2008, p.181). For the diplomat-historian George Kennan, too, what was to be hoped for was Russia's ultimately acting "as our partner in the world community" (Kennan, 1951, p.108). Was, therefore, the failure to move quickly to incorporate Ukraine into NATO and the Euro-Atlantic community, and thereby not only to deter and possibly even to attract the Russian Federation, an opportunity missed?

In contrast with a geopolitics-led policy is a diplomacy-led policy, the second general approach. The most prominent form of diplomatic contact, at the pinnacle of international relations, the "summit" level, is one that focuses on, and highlights, meetings between leaders. Summit meetings are famously problematical (Dunn, 1996; Reynolds, 2007). They can turn out badly, and often just indifferently. Breakthroughs of course are possible, and can emerge even from apparent deadlocks. The October 1986 meeting in Reykjavík between the US President Ronald Reagan and the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev is an instance of a diplomatic failure turned, paradoxically, into a historical success. It came to be seen as the encounter that "ended" the Cold War (Adelman, 2014). At summits the "personality" factor

naturally predominates. In critical situations, when emotions are high and the stakes are high as well, discipline within governments and the self-command of leaders are at a premium.

To be "diplomatic," in the popular understanding of the term, is to ingratiate. Especially when conducted at the very top, the summit, level, an effort to ingratiate—to "please"—can be misleading, and potentially dangerous. In the context of Western powers' dealing with Russia, the meeting of Franklin Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and Joseph Stalin in at Yalta in the Crimea in February 1945, with argumentation over the Yalta conference continuing today (Plokhy, 2009; Plokhy, 2011), is especially pertinent. Not least of the criticisms of it are those made from the perspectives of nations directly affected, but not present—notably,Poland and Ukraine. "The decision with respect to the boundaries of Poland was, frankly, a compromise. I did not agree with all of it, by any means," President Roosevelt said when reporting to Congress following his return. "The decision is one, however, under which the Poles will receive compensation in the North and West in exchange for what they lose by the Curzon Line in the East" (Roosevelt, 1945). It was a border adjustment considered necessary for postwar peace (Clemens, 1970).

Partly as a result of the controversy over Yalta, US-Russian relations have been imbued with deep suspicion, especially when they are conducted at the leadership level. As Brzezinski, a scholar of East-West diplomacy as well as a participant in it during the US presidency of Jimmy Carter, cautioned, "we must not deceive ourselves into thinking that propitiation of Russian leaders on a personal level is a substitute for strategy" (Brzezinski and Scowcroft, 2008, p.173). Such self-delusion was unmistakable later when in July 2018 President Donald Trump met with President Vladimir Putin in Helsinki. "Trump's view of diplomacy was narcissistic, not institutional," observed Ambassador William J. Burns who had served twice in the American embassy in Moscow (Burns, 2019b, p.399). Appointed director of the Central Intelligence Agency by President Joe Biden, Burns was sent back, before the war started, to warn government authorities there about the possible consequences of the Russian military buildup around Ukraine.

An earlier experience of presidential diplomacy, in between Yalta and the present, touching upon the Russia-Ukraine relationship is that of President George H. W. Bush. In 1991 met in Moscow with the last leader of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, and went on to visit Kyiv where, on 1 August, he addressed the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Ukraine, USSR. The address has come to be known (particularly among conservative critics) as the "Chicken Kiev" speech. In it Bush (using a text drafted by NSC staff member Condoleezza Rice), said that an agreement that Gorbachev had negotiated with nine republican leaders to form a decentralized Union of Sovereign States "holds forth the hope that Republics will combine greater autonomy with greater voluntary interaction—political, social, cultural, economic—rather than pursuing the hopeless course of isolation." Pointing out that "freedom is not the same as independence," Bush advised, in a clear warning: "Americans will not support those who seek independence in order to replace a far-off tyranny with a local despotism. They will not aid those who promote a suicidal nationalism based upon ethnic hatred" (Bush, 1992)—the "suicidal nationalism" phrase reportedly having been inserted in the speech by the president himself. In Moscow during 19-21 August a coup against the Gorbachev government was attempted. Although the coup failed, it indicated that the center of the Soviet system could not hold. On 24 August

the Ukrainian government declared independence, effectively putting an end to Gorbachev's Union of Sovereign States reform project. In December the people of Ukraine approved their country's independence in a nation-wide referendum.

The United States, geographically remote and historically detached from eastern Europe (Lundestad, 1978), has at times been open to proposals of sympathetic treatment of Russia and its problems. As federal "unions," there was and is certain symmetry in their relationship—as emerging continental powers in the nineteenth century and as superpower rivals during the Cold War. During the era of bipolarity lesser powers often were subordinated. "The assertion that Ukraine should be treated fairly and justly was something that had to be proved," Ambassador William Miller recalled of his assignment there during the mid-1990s. "Ukrainian leaders believed that long service in the Soviet Union, in Moscow, by our foreign policy experts was operating against Ukraine." He was aided in his task—which was to persuade the Ukrainian government to give up the Soviet nuclear weapons remaining on its territory—by the personal involvement of President Bill Clinton. According to Miller, Clinton was "magnificent," as he "understood this feeling of uncertainty on the part of the Ukrainians and was decisive in very important moments by saying and conveying the feeling that, 'I'm with you, I'm with you.'" The Ukrainians "responded accordingly" to the treatment, Miller noted. Clinton "was terrific in substance, and particularly the handling of the psychological attitude. He knew what was needed. He was brilliant. I marveled at how good he was at this important quality of empathy" (Kennedy, 2003).

Clintonian empathy also was applied to Russia. Appreciation of Russia's self-image as a "great power," and need for recognition as such, generally has been accepted in Washington, DC, as almost a *sine qua non* for achieving diplomatic success with Moscow. During the presidency of Boris Yeltsin, conscious, indeed strenuous efforts were made by President Clinton to establish a supportive relationship with his beleaguered Russian counterpart. Strobe Talbott, who as deputy secretary of state from 1994 to 2001, was the "day-to-day manager" of The Bond, as he called the Bill-Boris relationship. Clinton and Yeltsin met in person eighteen times! Clinton, even before being inaugurated as US president, received a letter from Yeltsin suggesting, impossibly, that they meet in a third country. "His letter reads like a cry of pain," Clinton said. "You can just feel the guy reaching out to us, and asking us to reach out to him. I'd really, *really* like to help him. I get the feeling he's up to his ass in alligators. He especially needs friends abroad because he's got so many enemies at home. We've got to try to keep Yeltsin going" (Talbott, 2019, p.406).

Clinton's therapeutic effort, if it may so be called, was impressive. As a personal favor to Yeltsin ("if it matters to you, Boris"), he traveled to Budapest in December 1994 for the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe summit, at which the controversial Memorandum on denuclearization and borders was agreed upon. He also consented to attend a commemoration of V-E Day on May 9 in Moscow. "I made the trip because our nations were allies in World War II, which had claimed the lives of one in eight Soviet citizens; twenty-seven million of them died in battle or from disease, starvation, and freezing," he explained. "Also, we were allies once again . . .." There he was able to persuade Yeltsin that Russia should begin a dialogue with NATO and join its Partnership for Peace. This was seen as "an important step for developing a NATO-Russia relationship in parallel with NATO enlargement" (Talbott, 2019, pp. 413,414,415).

Unfortunately, the "Bond" formed during the Clinton-Yeltsin years did not last. "Despite the sustained efforts of Bill Clinton and his advisers to cultivate relations with the new Russia and accommodate the post-traumatic stress of the post-Soviet world," William Burns has written, "the limitations of U.S.-Russian partnership were also laid bare" (Burns, 2019b, p.90). These limits were, basically, geopolitical. "President Clinton tried hard to manage Russia's post-traumatic stress disorder, but his push for the eastward expansion of NATO reinforced Russian resentments" (Burns, 2019a). When his successor in the White House, George W. Bush, speaking in Kyiv in April 2008, stated that he "strongly supported" Ukraine's seeking to join NATO, and approved Georgia's wish to do so as well, a gauntlet was thrown down. For Boris Yeltsin's chosen successor, Vladimir Putin, NATO membership for Ukraine, in particular, was "the reddest of red lines," as Burns recognized (Burns, 2019b, pp. 221-222). That line has not yet actually been crossed, but the actual border of Russia with Ukraine has been.

## 8. Re-bordering territories and mending communities

Diplomacy, of both bilateral and multilateral kinds, and conducted at different levels of government as well as across different segments of society as well, within both Ukraine and Russia, will be required in order to establish anything like a neighborly relationship between them. Trying to do so is an international goal, even a mandate. The Preamble of the United Nations Charter includes the determination: "to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours" (United Nations, 1945). Formal agreements can contribute to that end (Sucharitkul, 1996).

A conventional instrument, variously named in the history of diplomacy, is the "treaty of good neighborhood, friendly relations, and cooperation." These are not always necessarily between immediately adjacent countries. For Russia, an example is the Treaty of Friendly and Neighborly Cooperation (*Traktat o przyjaznej i dobrosąsiedzkiej wspólpracy*) was signed with Poland in Moscow on 22 May 1992 (Marczuk, 2019). In 1997 the governments of Russia and Ukraine, during the presidencies of Leonid Kuchma and Boris Yeltsin, respectively, concluded a Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership. Known as the "Big Treaty," the 1997 treaty ensured the freedoms of their citizens within their countries and, in accordance with the UN Charter and the 1975 Helsinki Final Act on Security and Cooperation in Europe, reaffirmed "the inviolability of the borders existing between them." The treaty's text provided for automatic renewal every ten years unless a party notified the other of its wish to curtail it (Sorokowski, 1996). In September 2018 a subsequent Ukrainian president, Petro Poroshenko, decided not to extend it. Russia, duly notified, expressed regret. At the end of March 2019, the Russian-Ukrainian Friendship Treaty formally expired.

The result of a process of boundary treaty-making should be, in the short term, *pacification* and, in the long term, *reconciliation*. Good borders, and border arrangements, contribute to the realization of both ends (Henrikson, 2000; Henrikson, 2005a; Henrikson, 2011; Filep, 2017, pp.1-25). When border relationships have been ruptured, through the physical violation of them or as a result of a more general fracturing of international order, conscious "re-bordering" may be needed. Pre-existing boundary lines cannot always be re-established. New lines may have to be

projected. Such revisions could be considered "corrections"—adjustments of existing borders—or they may be entirely new delineations. In dynamic situations such as that of Ukraine today, where territorial control is contested, there may need to be, at least on an interim basis, locally-oriented operational borders—"cease-fire" lines. These could become the basis even for a more general, and presumably durable "armistice." Cease-fire lines, though provisional, can have immediate practical effect, and offer mutual benefit, if not always for both sides equally. They do signify de facto acceptance of the fragmentation of the sovereign space of the penetrated country, with the invader and occupier gaining a measure of territorial control, and also coercive influence—"leverage"—usable in any future negotiation leading to a possible peace treaty. *Uti possidetis, ita possideatis*—the permanent right of warring parties at the end of their hostilities to hold territory they then possess—is a principle of classical international law (Shaw, 1996). It is now, however, qualified by the Charter of the United Nations and by the Helsinki Final Act as well as by a prevailing world sentiment against legitimizing "aggression."

Premature political recognition of such provisional limits can "freeze" a fluid situation, precluding a long-term settlement. Such could be the case were the government of Ukraine now to negotiate peace with the Russian government on the basis of the latter's physical control of most the Donbas region as well as areas of the Black Sea littoral that its forces are attacking. There is speculation that Russia could formally annex these regions of Ukraine it has seized. The result could be partition—division of the country (Hachey, 1972). In cases where partition has occurred, in Germany for example or on the Korean peninsula, "reunification" has been proved difficult, and in the case of Korea thus far impossible, to achieve. It is significant, however, that the "nations"—the German people and Korean people—did and do not give up on the goal of unity. Similarly, the Ukrainian people—and government too—surely will maintain their own constitutionally based commitment (Roznai and Suteu, 2019), outside support for which was given by the United Nations General Assembly on 2 March 2022, to "the sovereignty, independence, unity, and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders, extending to its territorial waters" (United Nations, General Assembly, 2022).

In present circumstances, even should there be a negotiated end to the fighting, the restoration to Ukraine of full control over all of its territory, to the limit of its internationally recognized borders, will be very challenging for it to achieve. The goal may not even be essential. The spontaneous defense of mass of the Ukrainian people against the Russian invasion has demonstrated a truth about the country that has never before been so clearly made evident: "The Ukrainian nation is based not on borders, institutions or ethnicity, but on bottom-up self-reliance," as *The Economist* notes. It follows the Ukrainian historian Serhii Plokhy who in *The Gates of Europe* (2015) "describes a nation defined not by its people's pre-existing identities as by its willingness to negotiate them, crossing and re-crossing the 'inner and outer frontiers' between regions, faiths and ways of life" (*The Economist*, 2022, p. 18).

## 9. Achievement of equilibrium, national and regional, for Ukraine

The inability of Kyiv and Moscow to manage their relationship bilaterally has brought in the international community, now at the global level. Most recently this

involvement has been expressed through the person of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres, who traveled to Moscow and then to Kyiv in an effort to bring about a cessation of the fighting, cooperation in humanitarian relief, and the beginning of a comprehensive peace process. Inevitably, this will involve consideration of control over territory, and also the location of borders, both internal and external. Inherited from the lapsed Minsk process, a "Line of Contact," though badly frayed now, separates the government-controlled and non-government-controlled areas of Ukraine. Although the security situation has deteriorated along the Line, which had been judged by the International Crisis Group (ICG) as "not fit for purpose" (International Crisis Group, 2016), that artifact of the Minsk process remains relevant as a factor in any discussions aimed at achieving a settlement of the conflict.

Peacemaking in Ukraine will need to be conducted locally, on the ground, as well as through capitals and at international headquarters. The geography of diplomacy is an art of symbolic placement (Henrikson, 2005b). This can and should include contact and interchange across border zones, and at sites that may have emotional significance as well as military or economic value. Ukrainian officials have offered to hold peace negotiations in the Russian-besieged port city of Mariupol directly across the Sea of Azov from Russia. "I've heard about a theatrically presented proposal of the Ukrainian negotiating team," remarked Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov at a news conference with Secretary-General Guterres following their meeting: "To hold a new round in Mariupol right near the wall of Azovstal"—the steelworks where Ukrainian troops were still holding out, with some civilians there too. "What can I say, this is a theatrical gesture. Ukrainians like to stage things, and I guess they wanted another tear-inducing scene. But if we are talking serious about working on the negotiations track, they better respond to our proposals . . .." While Moscow supported "a negotiated solution," the current state of talks was "dismal." Moreover, Lavrov indicated, that it was premature to talk about engaging mediators—presumably Guterres and the United Nations—in any talks (Ilyushina, 2022).

What is Russia now seeking? This was suggested by President Putin with whom the UN Secretary-General then met. Guterres had proposed establishment of a Humanitarian Contact Group comprising Russia, Ukraine, and the UN "to look for opportunities for the opening of safe corridors, with local cessations of hostilities, and for guarantees that they are actually effective" (United Nations|UN News, 2022). Putin told Guterres that he hoped continuing peace talks would bring "some positive result," but that Russia would not sign a security guarantee agreement with Ukraine, as the *New York Times* reported, "without a resolution to the territorial questions," in Crimea which Russia annexed in 2014 and in Donbas where Russia had recognized two separatist regions as independent. Secretary-General Guterres did come away from his meeting with Putin with the latter's agreement "in principle" to allow the United Nations and the Red Cross to evacuate civilians from the Azovstal steel plant. There was "no evidence," however, that their meeting had produced "any advances in diplomacy to end the war" (Ismay, Schuetze, and Levenson, 2022).

No doubt that among Russia's demands of Ukraine remains the requirement that it commit itself never to join NATO, and maybe the European Union as well. The wisdom of Ukraining membership of NATO, in particular, has long been questioned by some observers and, especially prior to the Crimean crisis, by many Ukrainians themselves. Among Western academic commentators, the American political

scientist John Mearsheimer is especially well known for his continuing theory-based argument against it (Mearsheimer, 2014; Douthat, 2022). A more historically and diplomatically informed realist perspective is that of former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger who in March 2014, at the time of the Russian takeover of Crimea, wrote in *The Washington Post*: "Public discussion on Ukraine is all about confrontation. But do we know where we are going?" In his life he had seen "four wars begun with great enthusiasm and public support, all of which we did not know how to end," he reflected. "The test of policy is how it ends, not how it begins," he posited. Too often the Ukraine issue is presented as "a showdown: whether Ukraine joins the East or the West." However, "if Ukraine is to survive and thrive, it must not be either side's outpost against the other—it should function as a bridge between them." All parties should recognize this. Russia, by trying to force Ukraine into "a satellite status" and thereby "move Russia's borders again," would "doom Moscow to repeat its history of self-fulfilling cycles of reciprocal pressures with Europe and the United States." The West, for its part, must understand that, to Russia, "Ukraine can never be just a foreign country." The Ukrainians were regarded by Kissinger to be "the decisive element." Ukraine's leaders, because of its "complex history" and "polyglot composition" and long periods under foreign rule, "have not learned the art of compromise." A "wise" policy would be to "seek a way for the two parts of the country to cooperate with each other"—"reconciliation, not the domination of a faction." Leaders should "return to examining outcomes, not compete in posturing." Kissinger then outlined his "notion of an outcome compatible with the values and security interests of all sides":

1. Ukraine should have the right to choose freely its economic and political associations, including with Europe.
2. Ukraine should not join NATO, a position I took seven years ago, when it last came up.
3. Ukraine should be free to create any government compatible with the expressed will of its people. Wise Ukrainian leaders would then opt for a policy of reconciliation between the various parts of their country. Internationally, they should pursue a posture comparable to that of Finland. That nation leaves no doubt about its fierce independence and cooperates with the West but carefully avoids institutional hostility toward Russia.
4. It is incompatible with the rules of the existing world order for Russia to annex Crimea. But it should be possible to put Crimea's relationship to Ukraine on a less fraught basis. To that end, Russia would recognize Ukraine's sovereignty over Crimea. Ukraine should reinforce Crimea's autonomy in elections held in the presence of international observers. The process would include removing any ambiguities about the status of the Black Sea Fleet at Sevastopol.

"These are principles, not prescriptions," Kissinger concluded, acknowledging that people "familiar with the region" would know that not all of them will be "palatable to all parties." The "test" would be "not absolute satisfaction but balanced dissatisfaction." With statesmanly foresight, Kissinger warned: "If some solution based on these or comparable elements is not achieved, the drift toward confrontation will accelerate. The time for that will come soon enough" (Kissinger, 2014).

**An inconclusive conclusion**

At present, the emergence of "new spheres of influence," powered by great power competition, seems the most realistic alternative to continuation of the international order established after the Second World War and, however brief, the "new world order" envisaged after the Fall of the Berlin Wall, with the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, and the break-up of the Soviet Union itself. Might a "new neighborhood" of all the nations within the former Soviet sphere become possible? Building on such a concept, one would need to imagine a diplomatic strategy that transcends the transactional and even surmounts even the territorial. A vision of peace, on a global scale, with attention to humanitarian and environmental problems—to planetary "healing"—is needed. So, too, may be a revised profile of Ukraine itself.

The strength of the Ukrainian nation, as its historians including Serhii Plokhy have told its story, and the resilience and unity of Ukrainian society as currently being demonstrated in the face of Russian aggression, do not lie primarily in its possession of land or control of maritime or air space, however well defined and circumscribed these limits might be. Assurances—"guarantees"—of these have been sought, and have either not been forthcoming or shown to be unreliable. The result of this—geopolitical indeterminacy—has been involvement in the tragedy, and trauma, of war. This was in part the consequence of fissures within Ukraine itself, some of them deep-seated and not eliminated by the passage of time. "History has left Ukraine united in one state but divided along numerous regional lines that echo the cultural and political boundaries of the past," Plokhy reminds (Plokhy, 2022, p. 363). Despite the truly remarkable unanimity of the Ukrainian people today, achieved under the amazing presidential leadership of Volodymyr Zelensky's leadership in contrast with the aggrandizing presidential dictature of Vladimir Putin, the seams within Ukrainian society will not disappear completely. The interim result of the current Ukrainian military struggle with Russia, given that the latter's forces have been obliged to pull back from the capital of Kyiv in order to concentrate on consolidating control of the Donbas and part of the Black Sea coast, could be, even if a broad-gauged ceasefire is achieved, a "frozen conflict."

The diplomatic framework within which subsequent negotiations will need to be conducted might, still, be that essentially of the Minsk process. According to it, Ukraine could be expected to accept a constitutional special status for the Donets-Luhansk region (even nominally under the authority of the DPR and LPR) and, via the government of Russia, some functional connection with Crimea. Through relationships with those statelets, and with Crimea, it could obtain qualified access to the prior international border—both sides of which being in most places now under de facto Russian control. The "sequencing" of steps would be crucial. While these would be taken by the immediate parties themselves, the institutions of the international community—pre-eminently the United Nations and its relevant specialized agencies, with member-state financial and technical support—could facilitate the needed dialogue, assist in the country's economic and physical reconstruction, and contribute, even therapeutically, to the reduction—the *assuagement*—of the collected and collective trauma that the Russia-Ukraine war is inflicting, on both countries.

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