

HOW SHOULD THE WEST DEAL WITH THE WAR IN UKRAINE?

Posted on April 30, 2022



There are a few things that the West can do. One is to follow the Latin motto "Si vis pacem, para bellum," or

“If you want peace, prepare for war.” This certainly applies to the Benelux, Germany, and Sweden, whose armed forces have been severely weakened over the past three decades.

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Not a day goes without someone commenting that Russia may have a point about NATO enlargement. Certainly, over the years since the collapse of the U.S.S.R, Western policy makers may have suggested to the Russian side that Ukraine would never be allowed to enter NATO. However, a mere overview of signed treaties violated by Moscow should put this finger pointing over faith-keeping to rest. Treaties in which Russia guaranteed Ukraine’s territorial sovereignty include the 1975 [Helsinki Accords](#), the 1994 [Budapest Memorandum](#), the 1997 [Russian-Ukrainian Friendship Treaty](#), the 1997 [Black Sea Fleet Agreement](#), and more recently the 2014 [Minsk agreements](#), which foresaw that the eastern Ukrainian breakaway republics would remain a part of Ukraine.

Some have made the case that Russia’s preference not to have a NATO member state as a neighbour is understandable, following the analogy that the U.S. would probably not want Mexico or Canada to be part of a Russian or Chinese military defence alliance either, especially given that ‘defence’ is an elastic concept, as the NATO operation in Afghanistan shows.

The big difference, however, is that Russia did in fact occupy and oppress its Eastern European neighbours for half a century—after, admittedly, freeing them from the Nazi yoke. To put it bluntly, perhaps Russia should first avoid invading its neighbours for at least half a century before it has a right to complain about the same neighbours seeking a defensive umbrella. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2014 and of Georgia in 2008 are

unfortunately testimony the Russian leadership isn't exactly up to improving its ways.

That hasn't prevented Russia from making extreme demands. At the end of last year, Russia [asked](#) NATO to stop deploying additional troops and weapons outside the countries that belonged to NATO in May 1997. Poland and other Eastern European countries joined NATO in 1999, which means that Russia is in effect asking NATO to stop **military activity** in those places.

In addition, Russia also has requested the U.S. to stop deploying nuclear weapons outside of its own territory—which means that the nuclear weapons positioned in Europe would need to go. The Russian demands also contrast with the Kremlin's behaviour of deploying a nuclear-capable missile system in Kaliningrad on the Baltic Sea, a Russian enclave squeezed between NATO countries Poland and Lithuania.

What to think of NATO membership for Ukraine and sanctions against Russia?

Does this mean that the West should blindly continue NATO expansion into Ukraine? When strictly following the logic of democratic self-determination, yes, but Ukraine still has a long way to go to earn the trust of a mutual defence alliance, even if also in the case of NATO member Turkey doubts could be expressed.

Nevertheless, it is probably better to pursue a realist policy in this case. We may find it unfair that Russia does not regard Ukraine as a real country, but this is a geopolitical fact. Diplomats had to make such considerations all the time during the Cold War in order to opt for the path of lesser evil.

It is hard to say when Putin will conclude that he can get away in Moscow with pulling his troops out of Ukraine. He is certainly unlikely to deliver any great trophies, given the poor

performance of the Russian army so far. In any case, some kind of grand settlement will need to be made going forward. This settling of accounts is unlikely to include Ukrainian NATO membership, but perhaps what really matters for Ukraine at this point is not pledges from Western countries to assist it in case of Russian aggression but rather the ability to defend itself against Russian aggression. Given Russia's poor track record of sticking to any of its promises, this should perhaps be Ukraine's top priority, once the war is over.

Whether that means that Western countries should send ever-more lethal weapons to Ukraine as the conflict drags on is yet another matter. As much as Ukrainians deserve respect for their brave fight, there is nothing dishonorable in the West trying to avoid getting dragged into the conflict. Large-scale military interventions are always fraught with risk, as the US invasion of Iraq, which ultimately [led to](#) the creation of the Islamic State and repeated attacks on European home soil, demonstrates. So far, the idea is to make sure Ukraine receives only "defensive" arms, but this is of course up for interpretation. Let us also not forget that there is a good [reason](#) that Ukraine is not yet a NATO member: it is still insufficiently Western, as its corruption levels are quite similar to Russia's.

Also, when it comes to the sanctions against Russia, sympathy for the plight of the Ukrainians should not automatically translate into support for any and all sanctions against Russia. Clearly, freezing the assets of cronies assisting Putin in his villainous act is justified, but is destroying Belgium's diamond business a sane idea, when one can be reasonably certain that non-Western diamond businesses would simply continue to buy Russian diamonds, making hardly any difference to Russia?

Is crippling European economies through a Russian gas boycott reasonable even if this does in effect also deprive the Russian state of huge resources, given that Russia's gas infrastructure is oriented towards supplying Europe, not Asia? **Russia suffering massive economic damage** does not automatically mean the country will capitulate. Putin will always manage to come up **with a bit of** spare cash to continue his war—remember he has a pet central bank in his man cave. Hyperinflation may perhaps ultimately force a pull-

back by the Russian army—which has never been anything but a rape and war crime machine—but Russian real inflation [has been around 50 percent](#) for a month, and this has not seemed to affect the Kremlin all that much. In sum, there is nothing dishonorable about wondering whether sanctions are having their hoped-for effect.

Then what to do?

There are two things that the West can do. The first is to follow the Latin motto *Si vis pacem, para bellum*, or “if you want peace, prepare for war.” This certainly applies to the Benelux, Germany, and Sweden, whose armed forces have been severely weakened over the past three decades.

However, the reversal of Germany’s irresponsible nuclear power exit must also be part of that game. Buying energy from Russia—in peace time—is in itself nothing problematic, but being excessively dependent on Russian energy is. It should be stressed that Germany and Europe’s dependence on Russian energy is artificial. It is the result of nuclear phase-outs and energy experiments promoting unreliable energy sources like wind or solar power. A bit of wind and solar is fine but in the absence of nuclear power or coal, the only reliable energy backup to help out when the wind does not blow and the sun does not shine is gas—Russian gas. Ironically, this aversion to nuclear and coal is why the governing greens in Belgium and Germany are so keen on gas. Embarrassingly, they are now craving American “freedom gas,” produced by fracking, something the same greens profess to abhor.

Secondly, **it should be “game over”** for regime cronies, mafia members, and thieves of all stripes who park their assets in the West. According to a [study](#) by the British Parliament, the City of London offers ideal arrangements for laundering illicitly earned money. Many in authoritarian countries—members of the regime or those close to it, have deposited their savings in the West for safe keeping, sometimes even investing in a Western passport, given the instability in non-Western countries. It is obvious that a tough

approach to these practices would cause economic damage to the West too—and proper judicial review remains indispensable—but crimes should not go unpunished just because they are committed in collaboration with foreign governments. Perhaps we will temporarily find ourselves poorer, since this class of **persons** will find non-Western jurisdictions to store their stolen belongings, but then we should never forget that the reason we have become so much wealthier than the rest of the world is that we have always enjoyed much stronger protection of the rule of law. Facilitating evil **should be** something we do not **practice**.