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NO TO WAR IN EUROPE!



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No To War in Europe

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The idea that Europe has been at peace since the Second World War is a dangerous Western European fantasy, which ignores violence from the Greek civil war in 46-49 to the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 74, the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict from the end of 80s and the Yugoslav wars in the 90s, the Georgia-Russia war in 2008 to the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine since 2014, not to mention the involvement of European militaries in other parts of the world. The present crisis at the Ukrainian/Russian border is menacing not only because of the scale and intensity of the armed conflict which might ensue, but also because of Russian interference in democracies across Europe to the USA, and the larger sense that the geopolitical polarities of the world are profoundly shifting.

Why has Vladimir Putin chosen this particular moment to intensify hostilities with Ukraine? Two reasons are not sufficiently highlighted in the international debate:

- 2022 is set to be a crucial year in the development of the European Union's strategic autonomy, with the adoption of the 'strategic compass' and a push from the French Presidency in particular. Putin's long-term aim is to undermine the credibility of the European Union by showing it to be cynical, hypocritical and ineffective. A conflict in Ukraine in which the EU is irrelevant would be one form of humiliation and undermine all talk of consolidation of the EU's hard power. There is a parallel danger of a conflict into which the EU is drawn as a military power. If Putin can present the EU as an imperial project involved in a civilizational struggle, he maintains the sense of victimhood and historical trauma which is at the core of his stranglehold over Russian society. Can Putin maneuver the European elites along this dangerous road?
- The covid-19 pandemic has weakened civil society organizations across the world, while at the same time putting enormous demands upon them and on the reserves of solidarity of all people. After taking the highly symbolic step of closing down *Memorial* in Russia, thereby demonstrating a new degree of oppression, Putin is counting on civil society silence and irrelevance across the world. State actors can be manipulated in ways diverse and well-networked peace and human rights movements cannot.

The task of civil society in these days is to keep open a different future for Europe and its wider region, the path towards peaceful relations, the political resolution of conflicts, respect for human and social rights and democracy. The strength of this movement across borders is Putin's worst nightmare, and the nightmare of the wide network oligarchs in all countries that benefit from international conflict, the lack of accountability and ease of exploitation of workers. Walking along that path towards sustainable peace will require profound changes in all countries of Europe, above all in Russia, where only a newly assertive civil society can redirect a historical outlook towards a positive future rather than a resentful past. This was the path many of us hoped for at the end of the Cold War. It is never too late to get back on it, but the urgency only grows by the day. The

texts which follow come from an international event held online in February 2022 to join up again those who share this vision and are determined to enlarge this movement to an unstoppable force for peace.

OLEKSANDRA MATVIICHUK

Head of the Center for Civil Liberties (Ukraine)

It appeared that we were not ready for current developments. At the time of the Soviet Union's confrontation with the West, there were politicians in both camps who had survived and remembered the horrors of World War II. But today there has been a change of generations. War is now seen as a geopolitical tool and there is no more psychological mechanism of deterrence. Therefore, despite the alerting signals of the Munich speech in 2007, Russia's actions caught everyone by surprise.

At present, we see that only diplomats and the military respond to the threat of war. Meanwhile, the society in different countries still does not want to leave the comfort zone. People cling to the old world, which does not exist any more. But the mantra "maybe Putin will change his mind", "maybe he was joking" will not work. The role of observers in a world where everything is very interconnected is dangerous for the world itself. One needs to get out of the comfort zone and take a stance.

The world needs to find ways to counter the threat of war. It is not about the relations between Russia and Ukraine, it is about the civilisational confrontation between authoritarianism and democracy. Ukraine is at the forefront of this fight. To counter this threat, we must study the experience of the Cold War. Russia's current leadership follows the same logic. It seems that they want to take us in the past to play back what they had once lost. But now the Kremlin has fewer resources for the chess party, so they are betting on war.

History taught us that wars begin with propaganda, provocations and hybrid methods. We also know how they end. Either with the defeat of one of the parties and enormous human casualties. Or with a powerful anti-war movement within the aggressor-state. Its members feel that they belong to a broader system – human civilisation. We currently lack the international solidarity movement that can find support, with anti-war appeals, inside authoritarian Russia itself. But must endeavour to build it.

I have been defending human rights for about 20 years. I know that there are many things not limited to national borders. I know that freedom is one of them. Only its spreading makes our world safer. Different institutions may play different roles in deterring and preventing war. People who want peace can work in different ways. There may be different visions. But we must all keep the same pool of values.

As for Ukraine, we have no other choice. Take any recent polls. Freedom has always come first for Ukrainians. We will fight against Russia if it launches a new military invasion of our country. We will defend people, our freedom and human dignity. We will defend the values of the free world. I hope that the world will not just watch this.

YULIYA YURCHENKO

Political economist, Ukraine Solidarity Campaign

Among a myriad of aspects to discuss when trying to understand what is happening in the current situation and what is to be done, I have selected to appeal to some crucial issues of the larger context, of the questions of sovereignty and of peace.

One of the things that outraged me, as it had many Ukrainians, last week were US president Joe Biden's remarks about a range of possible international sanctions/actions for "incursions"/border violations depending on the scale of Russia's aggression against Ukraine. I was equally baffled and outraged at the future tense being used in discussions of such "potential" Russian actions against Ukraine. Both of these narratives shock me as a Ukrainian and as a political economy/International Relations scholar.

When did it become acceptable to talk of minor incursions as palatable internationally? Where in international law does one find a guidance on how many miles of national borders need to be breached by tanks for it to be classed as moderately acceptable to marginally tolerate? How many lives is it acceptable to be lost to armed action, how many buildings is it OK to have bombed, how many cyber-security attacks on official infrastructures are insignificant enough for it to be classed as an act of warfare?

What is with the supposed collective amnesia regarding these incursions which are talked about in future tense? Ukraine has been invaded since 2014. It seems to me that normalisation of border violations, acceptance of existing conflict as normality – or indeed, as irreversible (as per the words of the German now ex-navy chief), is happening before our eyes. With that acceptance and normalisation, the premise and the purpose of international security architecture, international law, and mutual assurance principles are out of the window (with reference to the Budapest Memorandum and beyond). Indeed, and sadly, if Ukraine's post-2014 history has taught us anything, is to not be surprised at such statements. So called "smaller nations", their people, have been treated as disposable on too many a historical occasion.

We read in the papers of the calls to go back to the principles of Minsk II. Yet that so-called "agreement" stipulates conditions which contributing parties find impossible to accept since it involves a set of contradictions, a logical inconsistency which undermines any hope of reconciliation from the outset. As Allan (2020) puts it, 'the Minsk agreements rest on two irreconcilable interpretations of Ukraine's sovereignty: is Ukraine sovereign, as Ukrainians insist, or should its sovereignty be limited, as Russia demands?' The paradox lies in the fact that the agreements around Ukraine's sovereignty interpret the latter as both an inalienable fact of international relations and law, and subject to interpretation in a neo-colonial historical revisionist attempt by Russia. As a result of this paradox, Russia and Ukraine see the situation at hand, for a set of reasons, differently. This means there is an inconsistent and illogical starting point, upon which no meaningful compromise can be achieved, let alone when decisions are being made on behalf of Ukraine – with its internal complexity of voices – as a mere proxy.

While the Kremlin has been painting Russia as a victim that has been robbed and deceived and used Ukraine's Russian speaking population as a pretext for 2014 invasion,

the annexation of Crimea and multivariate support for separatism in the Southern and Eastern areas of Ukraine as part of the Novorossiia campaign (with varying degrees of success), it is Ukraine's borders and sovereignty that were violated, Ukraine's citizens who were displaced, wounded, tortured, traumatised and murdered.

Now onto thinking of solutions and limitations. All the above issues considered, we are 8 years deep into this crisis and thus the lens through which to view it, and effectively the solutions to be designed and applied, are to be thought of differently today than in 2014. We are not talking about the same Ukraine and we must include the voices and interests of all Ukrainians, working classes first and foremost, if any meaningful plan of what is to be aimed at politically is to be developed. There are many aspects to consider here, I will speak of two overlapping issues: first, the issue of sovereignty and self-determination, and, second, the issue of peace.

Sovereignty is not simply a question of borders; it runs much deeper, it is about economic autonomy and independence of political decision-making. In Ukraine, presently all those are incomplete and threatened in multiple ways. While it must be acknowledged that nothing is more devastating than a military threat to all elements of sovereignty, a meaningful sovereignty for Ukraine, or any country, is impossible without a stable and relatively independent, resilient and flexible economic system. Currently, weakened by the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2007-9 shocks and years of the military conflict, Ukraine again stares down the deepest yet rabbit hole of debt, with few assets left to sell, low investor confidence, and high household indebtedness. Ukraine's economy is at the mercy of its creditors, as well as its homebred and foreign oligarchs, and until the workers of Ukraine are deciding their own destiny, there will be no justice and no peace in Ukraine – without empowering of the workers and debt forgiveness, sovereignty, too, is a fiction. Further complexity arises from the multi-ethnic and secessionist elements in the borders of 2013 Ukraine – if reconciliation and national rebuilding is to happen inside those borders, it will have to address that complexity by way of a meaningful compromise. The process too will need to involve a thorough investigation into the war crimes and adequate punishment of the perpetrators – on all sides of the conflict. Justice needs to be restored for the endured suffering, torture, rape, kidnappings, abuse of POWs and more; wounds will not heal otherwise as international practice of reconciliation processes shows. Inability to conduct that process fairly can only sow the seeds of future conflict.

In discussing the second issue, the issue of peace, I first and foremost want to appeal to the global dance of neo-imperialist might that must end. The build-up of massive arsenals, expansive multi-purpose military alliances, ramping up military production, so to speak, just in case, to deter, as we are often told, does not seem to be working too well. At the same time, having security guarantors act as military aggressors – as is the case with Russia in Ukraine – is a heavy counter-argument in the dimension of nuclear non-proliferation politics. Abandoning nuclear weapons altogether is key for international stability at large, for the security of today's and the future generations. But poses the question, if Ukraine gave up its nuclear weapons and is paying such a dear price, why would anyone else follow suit?

While the neo-colonial and neo-imperialistic nature of the current Russian moves and manoeuvres is clear, the reasoning behind it is more complex than a simple ambition of

might. While using neighbours as bargaining chips is unacceptable, we can also admit that the spread of NATO membership and partnerships globally since the fall of USSR has not helped the situation. US/NATO and Russia have been part of a mutually reinforcing, dysergetic dance where misgivings and missteps of one reinforced and amplified the same of another; the more wounded Russia acted, the more convincing pro-NATO arguments appeared; the more partners NATO had, the more compelled was Russia to twist the arms of its neighbours, and so on. This pushing and the bullying by both must stop. There won't be regional nor international stability without US and Russia dialling back security threats and stashing away the weapons, working towards demilitarisation of the world.

Working class based, demilitarised solution are needed, in Ukraine and elsewhere, and they are currently hard to envisage. The latter is one of the main and most urgent tasks of the global left.

PAUL MASON

Writer and journalist. His most recent book is How to Stop Fascism: History, Ideology, Resistance (Allen Lane. 2021).

What's going on is not US aggression. You may say it was unwise for the USA to offer NATO membership to Georgia and Ukraine in 2008. But the last 3 presidents have shown no interest in confronting Russia. Today my inbox is full of statements from old, neocon right of USA criticising Biden for inaction and a lack of commitment to the defence of Ukraine.

This is Russian aggression against Ukraine. If Vladimir Putin invades Ukraine, his aim will not just be to demonstrate that might is right; that the right of Ukraine's people to self-determination carries no value in the space of the former Soviet Union.

The aim will be to demonstrate a new kind of warfare. If you think you've seen what 21st century warfare looks like – in Iraq, Afghanistan, or Syria – think again.

In a war between equals, the aim from day one, hour one, is to disorganise government, atomise civil society and obliterate the difference between truth and lies. It is to send the population clamouring to the hospitals, the supermarkets, the morgues and town halls for information. Because the internet will be switched off; GPS will be off; the cellphone network will be down. The aim is to leave the defeated populace incapable of exerting even the most basic claim to human rights.

So, before we consider the rights and wrongs, the just and unjust claims of the belligerents, let us first say this: war between Russia and Ukraine can be stopped.

Realism compels me to state that it must be stopped, even at the cost of diplomatic compromise, loss of face, and the demobilisation of military machines and private armies that have taken months to mobilise.

Only civil society can achieve this. Because we have no skin in the game of military elites, private mercenary companies, oligarchies and crime networks.

Peace movements generally have two windows of opportunity. First, like now, in the moment that the mass of people suddenly realise an unthinkable conflict is imminent.

We have no power over the military machines; but have the power to mobilise thousands to demand peace; to show that peace is possible, and that war is a choice by them, and that they must be judged for taking that choice – both under international law and by history.

The second chance comes as the war ends, as people get sick of killing, industrial-scale lying, hunger, mass displacement. They ask: how can we stop this happening again?

Well, three times in the last century, humanity came up with comprehensive answers: via the League of Nations and Treaty of Versailles; via the UN and international human rights law in the 1940s; and in the Helsinki, SALT and other peace-building formats that emerged towards the end of the Cold War.

We must – even as we try to dissuade and deter Putin from invading Ukraine – design a future framework that can accommodate and contain the Russian Federation in a comprehensive and multilateral and, yes, rules based order.

In pursuit of that, I want to make one concrete proposal that NATO, the USA and its various allies, can't seem to get around to. I've been a strong supporter of NATO as a defensive alliance. I've been cancelled and vilified by the left's Putin fan club for this.

But you cannot have a defensive alliance that keeps an "open door" to countries which – self-evidently – have not landed permanently in the camp of democratic stability. Indeed, I would prefer NATO to have a door through which countries like Turkey and Hungary, that don't meet this standard, can exit the alliance, not enter it.

Nobody can stop Ukraine's desire to join, or partner with, the EU and NATO. I would encourage both. But the price of stability now may have to be delay.

A formalised delay, combined with capacity building in Ukraine's civil society, and its armed forces, seems to me the best way of averting conflict.

Finally, if conflict happens, we need to realise the biggest implication.

It won't shut down the threat of so-called "colour revolutions", which Putin fears. It will signal a decade of popular democratic movements – from Tiraspol to Odessa to Moscow to Almaty to Vladivostok and maybe even to Beijing.

Nationalism means War

ÁLVARO VASCONCELOS

Founder of Forum Demos, former Director of the European Union Institut for Security Studies

In Jean Giraudoux's play, *The Trojan War Will Not Take Place*, Cassandra warns Andromache that war, and the barbarism that it generates, will return. He had written the play in 1935, two years after Hitler in Germany had proclaimed himself Führer, as a pacifist manifesto. But that was also the same year in which Mussolini, realising the impotence of the League of Nations and the democracies amongst its members, invaded Ethiopia. And it is that experience of the League of Nations that comes to mind when António Guterres says that the United Nations is not involved in finding a solution to the current crisis in Ukraine.

Today, however, we should also recall that François Mitterrand, in his farewell speech in the European Parliament, proclaimed that: "nationalism is war". Indeed, how can we not call to mind his claim when we see images of thousands of tanks on the borders of Russia and Ukraine; when a nationalist discourse justifies war once again and extols its virtues? How can we ignore its import when we see nationalist politicians preaching once again the superiority of the 'white race' ?

Yet, for Western Europeans, the idea of war on European soil is unthinkable. The result has been that many Europeans have simply handed over the fate of peace in Europe to America and President Biden without apparently even thinking twice about the implications of doing so.

Yet, with the end of the Soviet Union at the start of the 1990s, Kant's utopia of democratic peace seemed achievable in Europe, from the Atlantic to the Urals for the space for democratic peace and prosperity appeared to be expanding eastwards. By 2007, therefore, eleven countries that had been part of the Soviet empire were already part of the European Union. However, the West, although victorious in the Cold War, was not only the bearer of democratic ideals, but it also introduced an ultra-liberal economic model that was not only socially devastating in Russia, but also encouraged an alternative nationalist narrative for an oligarchy thirsty for power and wealth. The success of that alternative narrative in Russia, for instance, has delayed Mikhail Gorbachev's project for a Common European Home for many years.

Instead, a counter-project has asserted itself in Russia, which has built upon one of the tragic legacies of European history. It has turned out to be a project that promotes nationalism, political illiberalism and war in the service of an imperial plan of domination. Vladimir Putin consolidated his power with destructive wars, first between 1994 and 1996 and then again between 1999 and 2009 in Chechnya. In 2008 he invaded Georgia, and in 2014 he annexed Crimea and militarily supported separatism in Eastern Ukraine, in the Donbass. Ukraine's war has claimed 13,000 lives so far.

The democratic and anti-nationalist ideals of Western Europe have come to be seen as a threat, no doubt because the enlargement of the European Union to Russia's borders brings with it the danger of example, the danger of contagion and the potential to threaten autocracies. And, for Vladimir Putin, the threat of contagion is far from gone, as the democratic demonstrations in Belarus in 2020 against the massively fraudulent electoral process there demonstrated. Yet what Putin most fears is the success of democracy in Ukraine, a nation linked to Russia by deep historical, cultural and human ties. And to prevent this success he claims the right to interfere in its politics and for this

reason threatens to extend the war to the entire territory of Ukraine. At the same time, this does not mean that Russia's security perceptions should not be taken into account in the search for a peaceful solution to the conflict there.

The problem is that Putin's Russia does not accept the order established after the end of the Soviet Union and, like any revisionist power, wishes to change it. After all, in the 1990s, instead of a geopolitical project for democratic unity in Europe with the EU at its centre, nothing was built. Russia had no place in the Union, agreements with NATO did not give it the voice that, given its military power it had expected. The pan-European organisations to which Russia belonged - the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe - proved unable to structure the European order. At the same time, the enlargement of NATO that has accompanied democratisation in the East has merely fuelled nationalism and militarism in the great Russian nation, particularly when the possibility of Ukraine joining the Atlantic Alliance was carelessly proposed. Now we have to live with those errors of judgement.

So Russia's brutal military pressure on Ukraine's border, the continuing war in the separatist Donbass region and the possibility of a Russian military intervention should be taken seriously. A new violation of Ukraine's borders could trigger an escalation with unforeseeable consequences. But, today, it is a question of trying to whatever peace is possible so that Giraudoux's Cassandra is not right, but that common sense and a sense of humanity should prevail so that war in Ukraine does not take place.

The European Union, marginalized at the negotiating table by Russia, must regain its rightful place by developing diplomatic initiatives at the European and UN level. The Union must integrate measures designed to deter war - Germany, for example, must declare that if the Ukrainian border is violated, the Nord Stream II gas pipeline will not come into operation - with a longer term perspective of reviving Mikhail Gorbachev project for the Common European Home. The European Union should aim in building a new European order, as Macron suggested in the European Parliament.

Indeed, the gradual integration of Ukraine into a democratic Europe is the best guarantee for peace. This, in turn, implies support for Ukraine's economic development, an intensification of the rule-of-law and guarantees to protect the rights of the 17 per cent-strong Russian minority of the population and a major commitment to Ukraine's civil society.

Autocratic nationalism is, as we know, a threat to democracy in many NATO member countries – even including the United States. So, by opposing Putin's autocratic nationalism, Europeans and North Americans are also defending their own democracies.

Putin, like Donald Trump, supports the European far right, as shown by the funding of France's far-right leader Marine Le Pen's 2017 presidential campaign. It doesn't come as a surprise that Le Pen and Zemmour voiced their support to Putin's ambitions over Ukraine.

Everything we know about Putin's policy would make it incomprehensible that politicians who call themselves left-wing could justify Russian interference in Ukraine. Whoever was against the war in Iraq must necessarily be against the war in Ukraine. In short, to reject nationalism and the extreme right in Europe, is to fight for peace!