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Introduction

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As a yeshiva, it is our obligation to always be learning, to develop a lifelong interest in growing and adding to both our own library and the knowledge base of the world. We believe that the measure of true learning is innovation and creativity, because *אין בית מדרש בלא הידוש*, there is no house of study that does not produce innovation.

One way to contribute to the world's knowledge base is by thinking about the world around us, applying the knowledge that we have gained, and asking ourselves why things are as they are and how we can improve them. Can climate change, pandemics, and war be slowed or even stopped? To answer these questions the greatest minds apply themselves to understand deeply how they got to be this way, in order to think about how (and sometimes whether) they can (and sometimes whether they even should) be changed.

When we see the tragedy as it unfolds in Ukraine, the tremendous loss of life and destruction of cities and towns, we are compelled to think about it. We place it in the context of our history classes, our national memory of the great Ukrainian Achronim and Jewish communities, and our still fresh memories of the Holocaust. Why is this happening? How could it have been prevented? How should we react?

We humbly share with you our thoughts on these questions, and hope that you'll share your reactions with us, because this effort is only one step. We want to keep thinking and learning about our world generally and this sad part of it in particular, and everyone's ideas are welcome.

May He who establishes peace above also in His mercy make peace among us.

עושה שלום במרומינו היו הוא ברחמינו יצשה שלום עלינו

Between Doctrine and Danger: The Uman Pilgrimage During the Current Danger of War

Meir Morell ('22)

Introduction

The town of Uman in Central Ukraine is the site of the grave of Rebbe Nahman of Breslov, who famously promised to intercede on behalf of any Jew who visited his grave on *Rosh HaShanah* (the Jewish New Year). As a result there is a huge pilgrimage to Uman every year over *Rosh HaShanah*. This pilgrimage is the biggest annual contributor to the local economy.

In this article, I seek to address the following three considerations in light of the situation in Ukraine: (1) the custom of visiting Rebbe Nahman of Breslov's grave in Uman on *Rosh HaShanah*, (2) the precedent of visiting Uman during wartime, and (3) the severity of the danger in Uman as of late.

Doctrine: Sources in the Teachings of Rebbe Nahman

In order for one to consider an approach, they would first need a thorough study of Breslov teachings as to why this pilgrimage is of value. Firstly, we must understand the personality of Rebbe Nahman before visiting the subject at hand.

Rebbe Nahman is a unique figure in the history of *Hassidut*, the Jewish movement founded by his great-grandfather, the *Ba'al Shem Tov*. Rebbe Nahman was born in 1772, twelve years after the *Ba'al Shem Tov's* passing, in the western Ukrainian town of Medzhybizh. After his marriage, he moved to the eastern Ukrainian town of Ossatin (now Staraya Osota). In the early 1790s, he moved to nearby Medvedevka, where he began to attract a devoted following. In 1798–1799, at the height of the Napoleonic wars in the Middle East, he made a pilgrimage to then Palestine. Returning first to Medvedevka, he moved shortly afterward to Zlatipolia in 1800. Around this time Rabbi Aryeh Leib, the

Shpuler Zeide, mounted a bitter campaign of opposition to Rebbe Nahmam and his “brand” of *Hassidut*. This forced Rebbe Nahmam to move to Breslov in September 1802. It was right after Rebbe Nahmam moved to Breslov that Reb Natan Sternhartz, who lived in nearby Nemirov, became his student. Reb Natan began to record the teachings and conversations that constitute Rebbe Nahmam’s legacy to this day.

Rebbe Nahmam breathed new life into *Hassidut* by translating esoteric teachings of *Kabbalah* into concrete, practical advice that anyone could use to better their own life. In addition to his formal teachings, Rebbe Nahmam told stories that contained the deepest mysteries of *Torah*. He would say, “I see that my *Torah* teachings do not reach you; I will begin telling stories.” Rebbe Nahmam’s innovations in delivering *Torah* discourses via his intricate lessons, as well as the stories that he told, made him a unique figure in the spread of *Hassidut*. Though young in years, Rebbe Nahmam was wise to the true meaning of life. He spent much of his time immersed in *Torah* study and went to great lengths to perfect his character traits and his awe of Heaven. Through his devotions, the ways of God became absolutely clear to him at a young age, and he offered many his advice and provided counsel to help other people develop for themselves a strong and satisfying relationship with God. Rebbe Nahmam lost his wife, the mother of his eight children, to tuberculosis in 1807. He remarried shortly after. In the late summer of 1807, Rebbe Nahmam himself contracted tuberculosis, a disease that ravaged his body for three years. Knowing his time to leave this world was imminent, he moved to Uman in the spring of 1810. He taught his last lesson to hundreds of followers on *Rosh HaShanah* 1810 and passed away a few weeks later, on 18 *Tishrei* 5571 (October 16, 1810), at the age of thirty-eight. He was buried in Uman. Rebbe Nahmam’s two sons and two of his daughters died in infancy; he was survived by four daughters. Without sons to succeed him, it was natural that his *Hassidut* would die out with its leader. But Rebbe Nahmam had a secret that ensured the continuation of his teachings and the growth of his following for generations to come. That secret was his main disciple and scribe, Reb Natan, who guaranteed the survival of Breslov *Hassidut* for hundreds of years, up to and including our present day.¹

After touching the surface of who Rebbe Nahmam was, his works can now be properly addressed. We will first turn to Rebbe Nahmam’s magnum opus, *Likutei Moharan*, followed by two books published in his name by Reb Natan, *Sihot HaRan* and *Hayei Moharan*.

In the following three teachings, Rebbe Nahmam will explain why it is valuable to travel to a *tzaddik*² for *Rosh HaShanah*:

I, 67:7. This is the reason people travel to the *tzaddikim* (of the generation) for *Rosh HaShanah*. *Rosh HaShanah* is the Judgment Day of the entire year. Each person comes with his holiness and constrictions to the *tzaddik* of the generation. He is the aspect of holy of holies/ Foundation Stone, in the aspect of “For the pillars of the earth are God’s; He has founded the world upon them.” (1 Samuel 2:8) These are the *tzaddikim*, upon whom the earth was founded. Thus by [traveling to the *tzaddikim*], all severe judgments are mitigated through the aspect³ of the Foundation Stone, as explained above.⁴ This is likewise the aspect of Yaakov’s stones, which were all encompassed in the Foundation Stone (*Zohar* I, 231a). For the souls are the aspect of stones, as it is written (Lamentations 4:1), “The holy stones have been strewn about.” They all come and are encompassed in the *tzaddik* of the generation, who is the aspect of the Foundation Stone. And through this all the constrictions are mitigated, as explained above.

67:8. And by means of all the souls joining together, joy is created, in the aspect of “The light of the *tzaddikim* is joyous.” (Proverbs 13:9) The soul is the aspect of a lamp, in the aspect of “The soul of man is the lamp of God.” (ibid. 20:27) When they join together, they become a light, and this produces joy, the aspect of “The light of the *tzaddikim* is joyous.”⁵

I, 211. The reason people travel to *tzaddikim* for *Rosh HaShanah*—this is because the essential mitigating of the judgments is only by means of holiness and purity of thought, for that is their source. As is brought in the *Zohar*, “Everything is purified in the mind.” (II, 254b)

However, it is possible to achieve a pure mind only through attachment to the *tzaddikim*, as it is written (Exodus 13:19), “Then Moshe took Yosef’s bones.” Moshe is the aspect of the mind, while Yosef is the aspect of the *tzaddik*. That is, there is no perfection of the mind except by being attached to the *tzaddikim*.

And *Rosh HaShanah* is the source of judgments for the entire year. A person must purify his thoughts in order to mitigate [the judgments], and for this reason people travel to *tzaddikim*, in order to merit purity of thought.⁶

II, 94. I⁷ heard from the Rebbe’s holy mouth that he had written a lesson on the topic of *Rosh HaShanah*, showing that it is imperative to travel to *tzaddikim* for *Rosh HaShanah*.

Explained there are the three *roshim* (heads) which come together on *Rosh HaShanah* when one merits being by the *tzaddik*.

The *tzaddik* is the concept of *rosh*, for he is “*rosh b’nei Yisrael* (the head of the Children of Israel).”

Rosh HaShanah is also the concept of *rosh*, because it is the *rosh* (head) of the year.

And each person comes with his intellect and brain to the *tzaddik*, and binds the brain and intellect inside his head—which is also the concept of *rosh*—to the *tzaddik*—who is “the *rosh* of the Children of Israel” (Exodus 30:12)—on *Rosh HaShanah*.

Thus it is that the three *roshim* come together. [The Rebbe] had an entire lesson on this, but I did not merit receiving it.⁸

It is abundantly clear from the above sources that an aspect of the doctrine of Rebbe Nahmam is the tremendous importance of traveling to a *tzaddik* for *Rosh HaShanah*. What, however, is yet to be addressed is why one would go to

a *tzaddik* post mortem, namely Rebbe Nahmam himself. It is evident, in *Sihot HaRan*, that Rebbe Nahmam felt a unique connection to *Rosh HaShanah*, as he related “For me, the main thing is *Rosh HaShanah*. Right after *Rosh HaShanah*, I begin listening very carefully. I want to hear them knocking on the wall, waking people for next year’s selichot. For the year passes and is gone in the blink of an eye.”⁹ A more fundamental discussion of the topic, however, can be found in *Hayei Moharan*, where a section is devoted to discussing this very topic.

403. He said, “My *Rosh HaShanah* is above everything. And what has been a wonder to me is that if my followers believe me then why aren’t all of my followers heedful that they should all be [present] on *Rosh HaShanah*; no man should be missing! For, my whole thing is *Rosh Hashanah*.” And he ordered to make an announcement that whoever turns to his voice [lit. sound] and follows him should be with him for *Rosh HaShanah*, no man [should be] missing. And whoever is privileged to be [with him] for *Rosh HaShanah* is entitled to be very, very happy; [The verse that says] “Eat [delicacies] and drink the sweet... for the joy of God is your strength” [Neh. 8:10]—this refers to *Rosh HaShanah*.

404. Someone told him (Rebbe Nahmam) that he’d rather visit him on the Sabbath of Repentance (the Saturday before *Rosh HaShanah*) and not on *Rosh HaShanah*, because there’s no place to stand in the synagogue, and there’s no comfortable place for room and board, and because of this his mind will be disturbed and he won’t be able to pray with the proper concentration (lit. intent). Therefore it was better for him to be with him at a later time and not on *Rosh HaShanah*. The Rebbe responded in the following words: “Whether you eat or don’t eat; whether you sleep or don’t sleep; whether you pray or whether you don’t pray (meaning to say not to pray with concentration, properly); just make sure you are with me for *Rosh HaShanah*, it will be as it is.” (All the distractions the man mentioned were only imaginations and temptations of the man—because thank God it was perfectly evident that the majority of people prayed with deeper concentration among the sacred pilgrimage on *Rosh HaShanah* than they would have had if they had prayed in their own home [towns.]

405. Rebbe Nahmam said “My *Rosh HaShanah* is something completely new—and God knows that it isn’t something I inherited from my forefathers. God Himself gave me the gift of knowing what *Rosh HaShanah* is. That all of you are dependent on my *Rosh HaShanah* goes without saying. Even the entire world depends on my *Rosh HaShanah!*”

406. On the last eve of *Rosh HaShanah* [of Rebbe Nahmam’s life] we stood before him in Uman at the time he was collecting our notes and money for redemption.¹⁰ Then, he asked about a fellow from Nemirov who didn’t come for *Rosh HaShanah*. Reb Naftali¹¹ began to answer [as to why he wasn’t there] and Rebbe Nahmam didn’t accept what he said, and he was very reproachful about him.

Afterwards, he spoke more about one who didn’t come because of the many obstacles, and because of this he traveled to Rebbe Nahmam before *Rosh HaShanah* and told him of all the obstacles. And Rebbe Nahmam (of blessed memory) commanded him to return to his house, and not to be with him for *Rosh HaShanah*. This man had been one of the great, important people, and he was very pained that he would not merit to be counted among us on *Rosh HaShanah*. He began to insist to Rebbe Nahmam that he should not return home, and rather he’d remain with him for *Rosh HaShanah*. And Rebbe Nahmam didn’t consent to this and he banished him to his house. Then, Rebbe Nahmam said that he couldn’t limn the pain [that he would experience] because he would not be with him on *Rosh HaShanah*. The man then said “if this is so, I will stay here.” [Rebbe Nahmam, however,] didn’t agree and he returned home. Afterwards, on the eve of *Rosh HaShanah* [Rebbe Nahmam] spoke with us about this, and he said that there’s great mercy [from Heaven] upon him, because he sincerely wanted to be here for *Rosh HaShanah*, yet he was deterred because of [the obstacles] mentioned above. Afterwards, he said loudly, from the depths of his heart, “and what can I tell you? There’s nothing greater than this,” that is, to be with him on *Rosh HaShanah*, “and if other *tzaddikim* don’t say this, then that’s another question.” (As if to say, without this [question] they already ask many questions about him [and his ways], and this would be another difficult question, [namely,] that Rebbe Nahmam was so strict [that people] should be with him for *Rosh HaShanah*.)

From all the sacred words that Rebbe Nahmam spoke with us, we learned a few things. We learned, once again, the extent of the greatness of the obligation to be with him for *Rosh HaShanah*. [Rebbe Nahmam repeated this,] despite the fact that we already knew this from before, nevertheless through his increased sacred words about this, and his tremendous awe filled movements, we understood the extent of this obligation more and more, [to an extent] that it cannot even be described in writing. We also learned that he had a tremendous will [that people should] be with him in Uman on *Rosh HaShanah*, always, [even] after his passing, and that there’s nothing greater than this. We also learned of the extent which one must go to to strengthen themselves to overcome [lit. to break] the obstacles from a sacred entity, [and] specifically the obstacles of being [in Uman] for *Rosh HaShanah*, which one needs to overcome exceedingly and specifically [to be in Uman] for *Rosh HaShanah*. [One must go to Uman] until Rebbe Nahmam himself agrees and commands you not to be with him for *Rosh HaShanah* (...)¹² (The concept of specifically being with Rebbe Nahmam on *Rosh HaShanah* was left out above. He said that people can receive *tikkunim*¹³ that one wouldn’t be able to receive in any way during the year. Despite this, this *tikkun* can be received on *Rosh HaShanah*, even though during the year even Rebbe Nahmam himself couldn’t fix it, but on *Rosh HaShanah* anyone can accept this *tikkun*. This is because he said that on *Rosh HaShanah* he does “*inyanim*”¹⁴ and *tikkunim* that he wouldn’t be able to do the entire year.)¹⁵

What is evident from the above teachings is that Rebbe Nahmam, and his doctrine, teach of the tremendous importance of spending *Rosh HaShanah* with Rebbe Nahmam, dead or alive.

Doctrine: The Precedent of Visiting Uman During Wartime

With the first point addressed, the next portion of this article will now be devoted to the precedent of visiting Uman during wartime. The following are a few excerpts from *Uman! Uman! Rosh Hashanah!*:

The first little chink in the “Iron Curtain” opened up in the summer of 1963, when a student of the late Rabbi Zvi Aryeh Rosenfeld met with Reb Michal Dorfman in Moscow and told him of his wish to travel to Uman, an impossibility

at that time. Reb Michal agreed to meet him in Kiev and accompany him to Uman. Being caught would have meant immediate exile to Siberia, but the trip came off, opening a door to Uman for the first time in over thirty years.

The following winter a group of eleven people from the United States traveled to Uman under the leadership of Rabbi Zvi Aryeh Rosenfeld. More trips followed, but owing to the presence of military installations nearby, the Soviets circumscribed the visitors in every conceivable way. You had to travel all the way to Kiev just to apply for the special visa required to visit Uman, and visas were as often as not refused. Even when they were granted, it was forbidden to visit Uman unaccompanied, and certainly not to stay in the town overnight.

Reb Natan once said, “Even if the road to Uman were paved with knives, I would crawl there just so I could be at Rebbe Nahmam’s grave.” For the most devoted Breslovers, visiting Rebbe Nahmam’s *Tzion*¹⁶ was the dream of a lifetime. People resorted to all kinds of stratagems to get around the Soviet obstinacy, sometimes putting themselves at considerable risk to travel to Uman even without a visa. One of the main principles of Breslov teaching is that the obstacles to any holy goal are only sent in order to increase one’s yearning and determination to achieve it. How many prayers flowed forth in the endeavor to get to Uman! And they were answered. One way or another, there was a steady trickle of visitors to the *Tzion*. No where was this more evident than in the desire of the Breslover *Hassidim* to be by the Rebbe for *Rosh HaShanah kibbutz*. (...)

And so too the Breslovers came back to Uman - in spite of the “Iron Curtain!” The draw of Rebbe Nahmam’s hold over the imagination *Tzion* [sic] never lost it of the Breslover *Hassidim*. By the early 1980s more and more organized groups were traveling to Uman from the U.S., Britain and even Israel. The Russian authorities turned down all requests to arrange a tour to coincide with *Rosh HaShanah*; they still wouldn’t even allow visitors to stay in Uman overnight—but the Breslovers kept on asking... and praying...

And in 1988 it happened. After protracted negotiations, the Soviet facade began to crack, and the authorities finally gave permission for two hundred-

fifty people to spend *Rosh HaShanah* in Uman. Even after agreeing, they kept on changing their minds, creating innumerable difficulties along the way. Nevertheless, by a miracle, it came off. Uman’s one and only hotel—an old, shabby, dilapidated building more like an army barracks—was inundated with *Hassidim*, who sang, danced and poured out their hearts in prayer, leaving the bemused locals to stare at the strange specter in total wonderment.

The following year, over a thousand people came. A large, empty factory site was rented some ten minutes walk from the gravesite. The production halls were hastily converted into a synagogue, dining hall and dormitories, and food was flown in from Israel. Elderly Jews who had lived their entire lives in Uman began stepping forward out of nowhere to join the festivities. The sight of so many of their emancipated brethren literally dancing in the streets finally convinced them that they could at last drop the paranoid attitudes which had perforce become second nature during the long years of Stalinist, Nazi and post-Stalinist persecution. By Rosh HaShanah 1990, the number of visitors had doubled to two thousand, and an even larger factory site was acquired two minutes from the gravesite. As Rebbe Nahmam once said, “Every year people say that previous years were better and times are not as good as they were before. But the opposite is true. G-d now directs the world better than ever.”¹⁷

The doctrine of Rebbe Nahmam certainly flowed to his followers, those who risked their lives in times of war and danger, to travel to their beloved Rebbe to spend *Rosh HaShanah* with him. There very clearly is precedent to visit Rebbe Nahmam, even during perilous times.

Danger: The Current Severity of the Danger in Uman

Whether or not Uman is actually dangerous should play a serious role in this discussion of whether one should make the pilgrimage to Uman or not. If it is a safe endeavor, there would really be no issue of going in in terms of concerns over safety. If there indeed is danger, one would need to consider the commandment of “Take therefore good heed to yourselves” (Deuteronomy 4:15)¹⁸, which commands Jews to guard their health. As of February, 24, 2022, the following was reported by *The Times of Israel*,

As fighting raged across Ukraine following Russia's invasion, Ukrainian authorities ordered the evacuation of civilians from the city of Uman, an official at an Israeli first responder organization said Thursday. "The Uman municipality has begun evacuating hundreds of families from the city, the danger is very great—there are many weapons depots in the area and the explosions are intense," Shlomi Elisha, the deputy chief of the Ukraine division of United Hatzalah, told Army Radio.¹⁹

If the war continues to be as dangerous as reports present it to be, it seems obvious that Deuteronomy 4:15 must become part of one's considerations.

Conclusion

With all the above in mind, a now enlightened individual can consider the two possible paths to take. For the one who accepts the doctrine of Rebbe Nahman, who believes that "there's nothing greater than this" and "even if the road to Uman were paved with knives, I would crawl there just so I could be at Rebbe Nahman's grave," then despite the dangers involved, one should go to Uman if they're willing to risk their lives in order to merit all of the promised *tikkunim*. However, one who doesn't ascribe to the doctrine of Rebbe Nahman, aside from the fact that it seems absurd to go all the way to Uman if one doesn't believe in its value, it seems dangerous and negligent to go.²⁰

END NOTES

- 1 See "Who is Rebbe Nachman," Breslov, <https://breslov.org/who-is-rebbe-nachman/>
- 2 A *tzaddik* literally means "a righteous person." In this context, however, it connotes a lofty Rebbe of *Hassidic* movement.
- 3 The word "aspect" is translated from the Hebrew word "*Behinas*" which means "the aspect of". The Hebrew/Yiddish Glossary of chassidus.net explains it to be "a subdivision of an *Inyan*" which is a "A spiritual concept or idea," see <https://www.chassidus.net/glossary.htm>. The use of "*Behinah*" is tremendously prevalent in *Hassidic* writing.
- 4 The annotator, Chaim Kramer, notes "As we have seen, the Foundation Stone, the root of all that exists, corresponds to Upper Intellect, the encompassing root of all the

individual intellects, in which all *tzimtzumim* [constrictions] and *dinim* [judgments] are collectively mitigated. Here, Rebbe Nachman adds that the *tzaddikim* possess these qualities as well. In the context of our lesson, *Chanah's* words: 'He raises the poor from the dust', connote mitigating *dinim* and decrees. God relieves the misfortune and suffering of the poor in the merit of the *tzaddikim*, who are the pillars of justice and righteousness in the world (see §1, that *mishpat* is the center pillar). The *tzaddikim* are thus an aspect of the Foundation Stone in which all severe judgments are mitigated. Traveling to them for *Rosh HaShanah* is therefore a mitigation of all *dinim* at their root."

- 5 Rebbe Nahman of Breslov, *Likutei Moharan* (henceforth LM), I, 67:7–8, (Likutei Moharan Volumes 1–11, trans. Moshe Mykoff. Breslov Research Institute, 1986-2012), this can be found in the following link: <https://breslov.co.il/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/RoshHaShanah.pdf>
- 6 Ibid, 211
- 7 "I" refers to Reb Natan, who wrote the second part of *LM*
- 8 Ibid, II, 94
- 9 Rebbe Nahman of Breslov and Rebbe Natan of Nemirov, *Sihot HaRan*, 215 (Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom, trans. Aryeh Kaplan, Jerusalem. Breslov Research Institute, 1973)
- 10 "Notes and money for redemption" refers to what is termed in *Hassidut* as "*kvitlokh*" and "*pidyonim*." See "Kvitel," Wikipedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kvitel> for an explanation of this concept.
- 11 "Reb Naftali had been Reb Natan's friend in Nemirov and the two of them came together to meet Rebbe Nahman in Breslov. Rebbe Nahman once said, 'No one understands me, except Reb Natan, and Naftali a little.'" "Reb Naftali," Breslev, <https://breslev.com/259080/> (Not to be confused with Breslov.com or Breslov.org.)
- 12 Reb Natan then went on to explain why one shouldn't ask Rebbe Nahman, see there.
- 13 "*Tikkunim*" means corrections. It is the plural of the word "*Tikkun*." See Faienstein, Morris. "TIKKUNIM." *Jewish Customs of Kabbalistic Origin: Their Origin and Practice*, Boston, USA: Academic Studies Press, 2013, pp. 81. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781618112538-010>
- 14 See footnote 3
- 15 Rebbe Natan of Nemirov, *Hayei Moharan*, 403–406
- 16 Lit. a marker. This refers to the grave of a *tzaddik*. See <https://www.bibliatodo.com/en/amp/bible-dictionary/tziyun>
- 17 "UMAN! UMAN! ROSH HASHANAH!," Breslov Research Institute, <http://www.breslov.com/bri/umanrh.html>

- 18 See *Talmud Bavli*, Tractate *Berakhot*, 32b
- 19 “Ukraine begins evacuating Uman, site of annual Hasidic pilgrimage”, The Times of Israel, February, 24, 2022, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/ukraine-begins-evacuating-uman-site-of-annual-hasidic-pilgrimage/>. See also, “In the Ukrainian Jewish Pilgrimage Town of Uman, a Synagogue Becomes a Bomb Shelter,” Sam Sokol, Haaretz, March, 13, 2022, <https://www.haaretz.com/world-news/europe/.premium-the-ukrainian-jewish-pilgrimage-town-of-uman-a-synagogue-becomes-a-bomb-shelter-1.10672258>
- 20 This certainly can lead into a longer discussion of why people who don’t believe in the doctrine of Rebbe Nahman go to Uman, which would lead into a discussion of the underbelly of Uman on *Rosh HaShanah*, which certainly isn’t the goal of this article.

The Nazi Jew

Yosef Pietruszka (’22)

President of Russia Vladimir Putin stated in early March that Ukrainian leadership and Volodomir Zelenskyy in particular are a bunch of Nazis. The term Nazi seems to be used very inconsistently. While some reserve its use only for Adolf Hitler and the Germans party during the early to mid 20th century until the end of World War II, others use it as a name for someone or something they don’t like.

Many believe it is unethical and wrong to equate anything you oppose with the naked evil of Nazism, although maybe in context it can be seen in a positive light. The very fact that Putin recognizes the term and is using it in the way that he is, tells us something. According to Dr. David Fishman, a professor of Jewish History at The Jewish Theological Seminary, Putin is using the name Nazi as a tactic to undermine the Ukrainian government. But his use of the name demonstrates a knowledge and understanding of what happened in the past.

It is important to give a background about what happened and why the name “Nazi” is so polarizing. In 1919 when the Germans lost World War I, they were devastated. Adolf Hitler rose to power and decided that someone should pay for the loss and humiliation of the German people. He chose the Jews as the reason for German failure. The vilification and attack on Jews started slowly, but exponentially increased in intensity after Kristallnacht, the night of broken glass in which Jewish business and synagogues were ransacked. Slowly Hitler began to round up the Jews and both enslave them and kill them, both directly and indirectly. Hitler and his army of Nazis built concentration camps and eventually, by war’s end, had effectively wiped out millions of European Jews. After years of the Holocaust and a deadly world war, the Nazis were defeated partly by the Soviet Union, led by Joseph Stalin.

Many stories survived the Holocaust, documenting what went on; various journals and diaries written by its victims about how the Nazis acted and treated others still exist today. The term Nazi, therefore, has become the prototype of a person or group that has these traits and has an inhuman way of handling things. People that don't have humanity. People who kill others for really no reason at all, this is the true identity of a Nazi. That definition remains going forward after the Holocaust.

Putin did in fact call Zelenskyy and his government a bunch of Nazis, even though he clearly knows that they are not, and even though he knows that they do not have the identity described above. He was simply using it to equate Ukrainian behavior with the inhumanity of Germany during the Holocaust. It's really no more than name calling. So what is the benefit to us in Putin's use of the word? The issue is that there are people that don't believe that the Holocaust ever happened. This is called Holocaust denial. For some, especially Holocaust survivors and relatives of its victims, this is a hard thing to hear, accept and understand. But for others it's very real, in many cases even a convenient narrative. For example, on July 24, 1996, Harold Covington, leader of the National Socialist White People's Party, explained it this way: "Take away the Holocaust and what do you have left? Without their precious Holocaust, what are the Jews? Just a grubby little bunch of international bandits and assassins and squatters who have perpetrated the most massive, cynical fraud in human history..."

What motivates Holocaust deniers? Some of these people are Germans that just can't accept that their country had done this. Some simply try to defend what the Nazis did and deny the Holocaust. People claim that the Jews wanted the money from post-war reparations to establish the State of Israel. They say that the Holocaust was an exaggeration. Hitler meant to be peaceful, and the real villains are Stalin, Roosevelt, and the Jews. Holocaust revisionists claim the survivors of the Holocaust lied about their experiences; they did to make the Germans look bad. What about all the people that did die? They argue that the true numbers are far less than the six million claimed, and that the majority of them died from disease, not murder. There were many diseases that were rampant during the war, such as dysentery, cholera, hepatitis, malaria, and

venereal disease. Without proper care and medication, which the Jews didn't have, these diseases are fatal.

All of these considerations are indeed quite interesting, and to some extent might even be true as ideas. Deniers, however, are very much biased and have an interest in minimizing the Holocaust or denying it altogether. Antisemites, who unfortunately can be found everywhere, have an interest in reducing the sympathy people might have for the Jews because of their persecution. So these people try to deny the history of this genocide, because of the very fact that they hate Jews for no reason at all.

But all this being said, this generation of Jews has done an outstanding job of keeping this memory alive. Every year, Jewish people throughout the world commemorate this event. This day is called Yom Hashoah, which takes place on the 27th of Nissan. This is a day to remember all of the six million Jewish lives that were lost to Hitler's killing machine. It's a day to commemorate the sadness of loss and recognize the evil ways Jews are treated for no reason other than their identification as Jews. It's a day to remember that we as Jews are still standing stronger than ever.

We still have a few survivors left to share their stories. At our yeshiva, the Marsha Stern Talmudical Academy a program called Names Not Numbers exists to share these stories. This program focuses and extensively documents on the fact that the survivors that came through the Holocaust still have faith and are more than just survivors. They are more than just people who went through the genocide with a number on their arm. They are real people with families, relationships, and incredible stories. They help us keep this day alive. Every Yom Hashoah in the State of Israel there is a siren that goes off. This siren goes off for one minute. In that minute the entire country is at a standstill. Jews and non-Jews alike get out of their cars and just stand at attention and remember the six million that were killed.

Another avenue by which the memory of the Holocaust is kept alive and well is the movie industry. In 1993, Steven Spielberg came out with the film *Schindler's List*. The film is about the true story of a man named Oskar

Schindler. Schindler was a businessman who came to Krakow in 1939 to make a fortune. He hired Jews for strictly pragmatic purposes, but when he realized what was happening to the Jews he decided that he would save the innocent lives of his workers. He then was able to get more than a thousand Jews to help and save them.

All of these examples lead back to our main point. All of these cases show how the world has responded to the Holocaust, how the true memory of the history is being preserved. These examples show us that people care about what happened and they recognize that this must never happen again. This effort is only aided by Vladimir Putin. When Putin calls someone a Nazi he shows the world his opinion on Nazis. Although many might argue that the term does not apply to Zelenskyy or Ukraine, it is not fully a bad thing. Putin's choice of language recognizes the evil committed by the real Nazis and shows the world that what happened in the past will not be tolerated, and that the world knows it.

The Role of NATO in the 2020s

Aryeh Savetsky ('22)

The Parties to this Treaty reaffirm their faith in the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and their desire to live in peace with all peoples and all governments.

They are determined to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilisation of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law. They seek to promote stability and well-being in the North Atlantic area.

They are resolved to unite their efforts for collective defense and for the preservation of peace and security. They therefore agree to this North Atlantic Treaty

NATO Charter, April 4th, 1949

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization, further referred to here as 'NATO,' was an expansion of multiple post World War II treaties that were signed in an effort to curtail a future World War III. The origins of NATO lie in the Western Union, also known as the Brussels Treaty Organization, composed of the United Kingdom, France, Luxembourg, Belgium and the Netherlands. The Western Union's stated goals were to serve as a treaty of alliance and mutual assistance in the event of a possible German or Soviet attack. Interestingly, Stalin requested to join this alliance but was rebuffed. This small group was soon expanded, mostly due to the United State's desire to be included in the treaties, largely in part to their insistence to be pursuant to the Truman Doctrine. With the Truman Doctrine, President Harry S. Truman declared to

the world that the United States would provide political, military and economic assistance to all democratic nations under threat from authoritarian forces. The Truman Doctrine completely shifted U.S. foreign policy away from isolationism. Thus, the very founding of NATO lies upon George F. Kennan's Containment ideology and United States interventionism. Together with the Western Union, the United States, Canada, Portugal, Italy, Norway, Denmark, and Iceland signed NATO into existence on the 4th of April, 1949.

The idea of the alliance being formed to prevent a future German or Soviet invasion quickly fell apart in the mid 1950's, as its true goals started to become clear. In May of 1954, fearing a restoration of a militaristic nationalist West Germany, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics requested to join NATO, but was rejected. If the true goal of NATO was to promote peace in Europe, and they truly sought to "promote stability and well-being in the North Atlantic area" (as stated in the introduction to the organization's charter) the admission of the USSR should have been its biggest victory. Yet, the goal of NATO was (and is) not truly to maintain peace in Europe, it is the eradication of Communism from the face of the Earth. The Soviet Union responded to the rejection by forming the Warsaw Pact together with Albania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, and the German Democratic Republic (known as East Germany). This organization was intended to be in direct opposition to NATO. Far from promoting peace, NATO had just created a chasm between the two largest military alliances in the world. The proverbial stake was driven deeper a year later, when West Germany was permitted to rearm, and join NATO in May of 1955. West Germany, unlike the USSR, was a democratic nation, and thus aligned with NATO's true stated intentions. Taking these true goals into account, NATO was undoubtedly a success during the Cold War era. While today NATO is seen as a military alliance, with member countries pledging to defend and aid one another in the event of an attack, no military operations were conducted by NATO during the Cold War. NATO's primary objective was uniting and building up the military of the Western Allies to deter and prepare for a possible invasion of Western Europe by the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies. Therefore, NATO was an unarguable success for the United States and the other member nations during the cold war. The formation of NATO successfully deterred a third World War, a

nuclear war, and contained communist expansion. Seemingly, with the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 it would seem that its purpose had been fulfilled, and NATO is no longer a necessary force in the world. It would be expected that NATO would begin to disband, hauling down the flag in Brussels, and calling it a win for peace. However, the exact opposite happened, with NATO growing larger, admitting more and more territories in an attempt to isolate Russia, and ultimately stifling the peace it claimed to seek.

Not dissolving NATO should be considered a major blunder in diplomatic history. All NATO needed to do to consolidate its victory in the Cold War and over the USSR was to be magnanimous by treating their defeated foe with respect and generosity. As seen only fifty years prior, the incredibly poor treatment of Germany post-World War I led to the rise of the Nazi Regime. In contrast, the aid given to Japan after World War II has allowed it to prosper and develop into one of the largest and most developed economies in the world with one of the world's largest consumer markets. NATO could have remained, but changed its charter to allow all the former Warsaw Pact nations and the newly forming independent republics to join. In fact, they should have gone as far to even invite Moscow—as the saying goes, 'keep your friends close and your enemies closer.' Instead, when the Soviet empire fell there was a general feeling of unease as small former Soviet provinces became countries overnight, and the old world order was falling apart. Instead of focusing on one radical leader NATO might soon have their hands full dealing with dozens of radical leaders. As a result of this NATO adopted a policy of isolating the new Russian Federation and rapidly trying to convert as many Soviet partners into pro-western democracies as possible. While nothing justifies recent events such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine, it is understandable that the Russian Federation should be deeply distrustful of NATO and all it stands for. NATO's expansion from after the fall of the USSR in 1991 was more so about creating an elite club excluding Russia than a security pact against Russia. For former Eastern Bloc countries, joining NATO was often seen as a prerequisite to join other Western organizations, such as the European Union. Additionally, certain military and organizational standards had to be met to join NATO, so the admission to NATO was seen as a sign of the country being ready to join other international organizations, a sign of 'validity' as it were. Currently, all

members of the former Warsaw Pact (with Czechoslovakia being represented by the Czech Republic and Slovakia respectively), are a part of NATO. Three former Soviet socialist republics have joined NATO, two are recognized as aspiring members, another three are part of NATO's Individual Partnership Action Plans, and one enshrined neutrality in its constitution. Lastly, every former Eastern Bloc country aside from Serbia has joined NATO, and Serbia has a standing invitation to join should they so choose. That leaves six of the former Soviet republics part of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Russian version of NATO. It is no small wonder that Russia is against NATO, for NATO's very existence is against Russia. NATO would have been wise to heed the words of Proverbs 25:21, "If your foe be hungry, feed him bread; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink." By allowing Russia and the former soviet states to join, NATO could have been on the road to world peace. Instead, NATO sought to completely destroy the new Russian Federation, and thus ensure discord for years to come. If peace was really the goal of NATO, it would have been simple to haul down the flag in Brussels one day, and run another back up the next. It could have been renamed, since anything would have been preferable to retaining the same organization that defeated the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, and expanding it to the east toward Moscow while refusing to let Russia in on the act. Yet, this did not happen, for NATO was, and always will be, a thinly veiled tool of American Imperialism.

NATO never wanted peace, it was always a tool for the United States to fear-monger and gather power. The motive behind the United States desire for global domination was openly revealed by George Kennan, the founder of the Containment ideology in an internal memo in 1948. Kennan stated "[The United States has] about 50% of the world's wealth...but only 6% of its population...[its] real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which will permit [it] to maintain this position of disparity." In this context, today NATO's true goal is to impose the political and economic interests of the United States around the world, rather than 'protecting democracy.' NATO functions more as a network of client states ready to obey Washington's orders, rather than an alliance based on peace and freedom. For this reason, from Korea to Vietnam, Angola, Nicaragua, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Yemen and Syria, millions of people have died (and still die) as a result of the 'humanitar-

ian' wars and proxy conflicts caused by the Washington-led western imperialism since the early 1960s. NATO is the wolf of United States imperialism in the sheep's wool of a military alliance. Ideologically, Russia represents interests against those of the United States, and therefore it must be stopped. None of this is to say that NATO has done no good. Russian aggression has been successfully curtailed, with Russia only daring to strike against non-member states, but would NATO have been disbanded in favor of a more inclusive organization, none of that would have been an issue to begin with.

In recent years, NATO has done little to make peace with Russia, and has actively pursued policies intended to isolate it, rather than promote world peace. At NATO's 2008 Bucharest summit, the Bush administration pushed the alliance to announce that Ukraine and Georgia would become members. Russian leaders immediately responded with outrage, understandably not wanting an anti-Russian organization on Russia's front porch. Then and current Russian President Vladimir Putin warned NATO that if Ukraine joins, it will do so without Crimea and the eastern regions. NATO ignored the warning completely, and went forth with improving relations in Ukraine, culminating with the Biden administration's US-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership. So, while Russia's 2014 and 2022 attacks on sovereign Ukrainian land are unforgivable offenses, NATO did little to work with Russia to negotiate. At any point, NATO could have been reshaped and reformatted to be a world peace organization, including Russia and Russian satellite states, but that was never a goal. Tellingly, prior to the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, Russia was rarely painted as a military threat to Europe. Michael McFaul, Washington's former ambassador to Moscow noted that Russia's seizure of Ukraine was not planned, it was an impulsive move in response to the uprising that ousted Ukraine's pro-Russian president. Until then, NATO expansion was aimed at turning Europe into a zone of peace, more profitable and preferable to containing an aggressive Russia. Once the Ukrainian-Russian crisis had started however, NATO policy makers could not admit they had provoked it with their attempts to integrate Ukraine, and instead declared the source of the problem to be Russia attempting to rebuild the Soviet Union. Many prominent American foreign policy experts have raised their concerns on NATO expansion since the 1990's, but to no avail. Robert Gates, American secretary of defense during

the Bucharest summit stated on record that “trying to bring Georgia and Ukraine into NATO was truly overreaching.” At that same summit, German chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Nicolas Sarkozy raised opposition to pursuing Ukrainian NATO membership over fears of infuriating Russia; American political scientist, John Joseph Mearsheimer, recipient of a Distinguished Service Award at the University of Chicago, believed the world is ‘in an extremely dangerous situation, and Western policy is exacerbating these risks. Yet, the United States pushed forward, desiring to increase its sphere of influence, and gain the valuable grain from the Ukrainian plains, as well among other economic benefits. America and its allies may prevent a Russian victory in Ukraine, leaving Russia humiliated, economically crippled and gravely damaged. However, this pushes Russia to the brink, perhaps culminating in the use of nuclear weapons. Perhaps even worse, these conditions are strikingly similar to those prior to the rise of Nazi Germany, where Germany was humiliated and left with a severely crippled economy.

Ultimately, NATO continues to serve the interests of its member states and is therefore unlikely to change. The United States has a position of tremendous power and an incredibly vast sphere of influence, while the European countries receive tremendous amounts of financial aid. Additionally, the member nations have nigh on impunity from attack, due to the sheer number of powerful militaries pledged to defend one another. That fact alone is proof that NATO can work, it can provide safety and economic benefits, and it can be a force for good in the world. Yet, NATO would rather wage a meaningless war against Russia than ensure world peace. Rather than listening to Proverbs 24:17, “When your foe falls, do not rejoice, and when he stumbles, let your heart not be merry,” NATO did the opposite. NATO rejoiced at the fall of Russia, and then spat in its face. NATO allowed nearly every former Eastern Bloc country into their private club, save for Russia. NATO intended to humiliate Russia, and ensure it never has an opportunity to become a world power again. Instead, the opposite happened, and an increasingly isolated Russia turned to aggression in order to maintain stability. Fear is never a good motivator, and the Russian people are understandably scared of being isolated. NATO must extend an olive branch to Russia before it is too late. NATO must show the Russian people that they are welcome on the world stage, and

hopefully undermine the base of Putin’s authoritarian regime. NATO as it currently stands is a Cold War relic, and has no place in the world as it moves into the 2020s

Ukraine, Hong Kong, and The Need for Democracy; Has the Aura of American Superiority Been Taken Too Far?

Noam Schechter ('22)

To Ancient Greeks it was “barbarians,” to Indians it was “the Untouchables,” to wizards it is “Muggles,” and to Americans it is “non-Americans.”

America has always possessed, and still possesses, an American aura of superiority. Differing from patriotism or nationalism in which one feels a sense of pride toward his or her country, American superiority extends beyond just that. The feeling leads to an “America-centric theory,” the belief that America is on a physically, powerfully, and morally higher level than other nations and that every decision must revolve around American ideals. Comparable to the ideology of the so-called “white man’s burden” prevalent in Imperialistic Europe, where the European justification of their cruelty and exploitation of the African continent and people was through claims that Europeans are an innately higher, more ethical, more intelligent people who had not only the right, but the responsibility, to educate and rule over the inferior Africans, the American aura of superiority convinces its citizens that they are too of an innately elevated level, and that they have the responsibility to educate others of these higher ideals.

Early American leaders acted upon their believed atmosphere of dominance through ideas of lofty uniqueness and Divine Right. They were obsessed with the concept of Manifest Destiny, in which they believed that it was their God given right to expand westward, for America to span coast to coast; they did not care who or what was living in that land, as they felt that they, superiors, had permission from God Himself to own the land.

Andrew Jackson, seventh president of the United States, a man who possessed such extreme American superiority, made his aura of superiority surrounding

Manifest Destiny extremely clear. He proclaimed, “[the Native Americans] can not exist surrounded by [American] settlements and in continual contact with our citizens is certain. They have neither the intelligence, the industry, the moral habits, nor the desire of improvement which are essential to any favorable change in their condition. Established in the midst of another and a superior race, and without appreciating the causes of their inferiority or seeking to control them, they must necessarily yield to the force of circumstances and ere long disappear.”¹

The extreme aura of superiority which Jackson so bluntly conveys has reared its ugly and arrogant head many times over throughout American history. In 1956, in response to Egypt’s nationalization of the Suez Canal, England organized a staged attack on Egypt through correspondences with France and Israel. The attack did not concern America and was dealing with policies outside of its sphere of influence, yet when President Eisenhower was made aware of the attack, he demanded that the plan cease and was furious with England, France, and Israel for operating without the authorization of America. Although the events were outside the political realm of American reach and were solely concerning the private foreign policy of the three independent countries, Eisenhower acted based on his feelings of American Exceptionalism which, in his mind, demanded that all foreign policy, whether it occurs on American soil or not, needs to be under the collaboration and guidance of the United States.

Repeatedly, the people of the world are forced to play by America’s rules, while being forced to watch as the United States intervenes in other foreign policy situations under the American belief of exceptionalism. Why? Where does this sense of superiority and arrogance stem from? What is the cause of the American hubris which forces all others to play its game?

A similar sense of superiority prevailed in Ancient Greece. In *The Republic of Plato*, Plato outlines the various forms of governments, stressing the importance and greatness of democracy. “Then democracy would have [wealth and equality] and other things akin to it and would be, as it seems, a sweet regime,” he stated.² The Greeks believed that they were far superior in terms of

education, intelligence, and morality than the non-democratic foreigner. Any outsider who was not privileged to live under democratic rule was deemed barbaric; they were inferior beings to the perfect Greeks. Sextus Empiricius, a Greek philosopher from the mid-late second century, explains that he “was grateful to fate for three reasons: first because he was born a man and not an animal, second, a man and not a woman, third, a Greek and not a Barbarian.”³ In the same way that Jackson views the Native Americans as “in the midst of another superior race,” Sextus views the barbarians as a people equated to animals in the midst of the innately superior Greeks; both viewing the other as inferior due to a lack of democracy, of a stable government.

Comparable to the Greek sense of superiority which was gained from democracy, throughout the Cold War period America’s aura of superiority seemed to thrive as America attempted to establish and maintain democracies in battle with the USSR. During the Cold War period America attempted to project its ideals onto others. America felt that since it was superior, it had the right to teach its ideals and educate others with regard to democracy (again, similar to Europe’s “white man’s burden”). However, this belief of constant required democratization and the imposing of ideas has been incendiary, leading to conflicts such as the Korean War, a war fought, in reality, between the United States of America and the Soviet Union.

This issue of American superiority seems to be at play and surrounds the current issue of war in Ukraine. America has attempted to force its hand yet again in foreign policies around the globe, vexing countries such as China and Russia. The sense of exceptionalism and superiority has taken hold of American foreign policy, causing the country to intervene in many private foreign relationships, primarily with China and Russia who America has painted as villainous, destructive, anti-democratic antagonists. Putting aside questions of ethics whether America has the moral mission to spread democracy (which may not be the be-all-end-all for every country, as has been proven repeatedly), America must ask itself whether it is at all culpable in the breakout of the Ukrainian conflict. It is almost undisputable that the actions of Russia are wrong and are causing unnecessary violence, but is America somewhat to blame for feeling the need to control Russia and monitor their every action? Why does a false sense of superiority give America the right to act as police-

man over the world and force every country’s every action to be measured on an American morality scale and be determined right or wrong based on American ideals? Perhaps American hubris and desire for control has driven Russia to a point where it must do whatever it can to show power and act in spite of America.

A few months prior to the outbreak of the war, for the first time in over three years, Chinese President Xi Jinping met with a foreign leader in-person. In his meeting with Vladimir Putin, Xi Jinping drafted an anti-America treaty of sorts. Perhaps the American aura of superiority has gone too far, and after decades of America assuming the position of judge over the world’s actions, Russia and China feel they must do something to strip power from America through exhibiting their own prowess in other previously western-influenced and democratic areas, such as Hong Kong for China or Ukraine for Russia. As Vladimir Putin himself described, in a now very ironic 2013 *New York Times* opinion piece on American intervention in the war in Syria: “[i]t is alarming that military intervention in internal conflicts in foreign countries has become commonplace for the United States... Millions around the world increasingly see America not as a model of democracy but as relying solely on brute force, cobbling coalitions together under the slogan ‘you’re either with us or against us.’ It is extremely dangerous to encourage people to see themselves as exceptional, whatever the motivation. There are big countries and small countries, rich and poor, those with long democratic traditions and those still finding their way to democracy. Their policies differ, too. We are all different, but when we ask for the Lord’s blessings, we must not forget that God created us equal.”⁴

It is true that *dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*, but in attempting to be the moral police of the world, America has instead attempted to make true *dulce et decorum pro peregrino mori*—to subjugate others for the sake of American ideals. Because of its aura of superiority, America has established itself as the schoolteacher of the world, punishing anyone who differs in ideals and gets in the way of American policy and ideology, whether that be political, economic, or social. Perhaps this constant control has driven Russia, and as we have recently seen, even China, to extreme measures. Perhaps it is for that reason

that Russia is going to extreme ends to exhibit its power to the western world and uproot a nearby democracy, probably similar to a rebellious student who is fed up with being told what to do and rebels out of pure spite.

The American aura of superiority is a dangerous idea which creates tension and strife throughout the world. Now, when headlines read, “[i]n 1958, about three quarters expressed trust in government in Washington to do what’s right. Today, only 17 percent do,”⁶ and American democracy seems to be losing the trust and belief of the people, is America still superior?⁶ While America may have arguably been objectively superior as it emerged virtually unscathed from a second world war which left Europe in ruins, does it deserve the same power and influence in the modern era where other nations have a similar size and economy? Does America “deserve” to have an aura of superiority?

END NOTES

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NATO's War

Michael Skuratovsky ('23)

Since 2016’s “Russiagate,” a modern McCarthyism has gripped America. While the mid-20th century’s McCarthyism alleged communist and Soviet domestic threats, today’s McCarthyism charges all who deviate from the mainstream government and media Russia narrative as “Putin-sympathizers.” This allegation would be reasonable if President Vladimir Putin, as many people believe, were an aspiring Tsar or imperialistic communist. After all, why else would an American consider such an adversary’s perspective? However, this popular perception of Putin is simply untrue. Putin is neither a nationalist nor especially right-wing. He supports a mixed economy and a strong federation. In other words, he is a center-right Republican with close ties to certain business oligarchs. Putin has no cult of personality in the United States, not in either major political party or within any prevalent ideologies. Therefore, those who respond to critics of American foreign policy toward Russia with “Kremlin talking points!” or accuse them of being “paid by Putin!” delude themselves into ignoring legitimate criticism.

Why should one contradict the prevailing narrative? An examination of even recent American history reveals this fact: the government lies. In America’s last major war, the Intelligence Community and Armed Forces manipulated the public into accepting war with Iraq. Ba’athist Iraq was not responsible for the September 11 attacks, nor was it developing “weapons of mass destruction.” Nevertheless, those who challenged the government and its media parrots, exposing the narrative’s falsehoods and future consequences, were accused of “not caring enough about 9/11” and being “pro-Saddam.” Twenty years later, the Iraq War is near-universally condemned, having cost trillions of dollars and thousands of Americans and precipitating the rise of ISIS. The critics were right. The American people must learn their lesson: The popular narratives of the government and media must be challenged. The American people must not again suffer for the catastrophic mistakes of the government.

One may only formulate an appropriate response to the Russian invasion by considering their perspective and historical background. Last month, international relations theorist Stephen Walt wrote, “Strategic empathy’ isn’t about agreeing with an adversary’s position. It is about understanding it so you can fashion an appropriate response.”¹ On February 22, 2022, President Putin recognized Donetsk’s and Luhansk’s supposed independence and dispatched so-called “peacekeeping troops” to the Donbas. On February 23, Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine. As of this article’s writing, Putin’s objectives are unclear. Although the Russian Armed Forces have withdrawn from its Kyiv offensive, it may continue its pursuit of territory east of the Donbas and north of Crimea, or withdraw to its Donbas and Crimean holdings, or even relaunch its Kyiv offensive.

This article seeks not to justify Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Perhaps editorialization is in order: this article’s author condemns this act of war. With its hundreds of billions of dollars of destroyed property, millions of refugees, and tens of thousands of civilian and military casualties, this invasion is Putin’s fault alone. His decision was immoral and unnecessary, with enormous potential consequences beyond Ukraine yet unknown. However, American warmongers have absurdly characterized this act as “Russia’s last chance to international relevancy” or “the beginning of Putin’s attempt to restore the Soviet Union.” They are wrong. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is *unreasonable*, but it is not *irrational*. It was a reaction to thirty years of American aggression, chiefly through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

This article will not seek to formulate a solution or American response to this conflict. That will be for the American public to, with lessons learned, will upon their government. Instead, this article will expose the failure of America’s foreign policy precipitating this invasion. This article will demonstrate that the administrations of Presidents Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, Barack Obama, Donald Trump, and Joe Biden destroyed the Russo-American hope for a post-Cold War peace and unity. Through ending critical nuclear treaties, installing missile defense systems in Eastern Europe, ousting Russia-friendly governments (including twice in Ukraine’s preceding decade), sending sophisticated arms to Ukraine, and, most significantly, expanding

NATO to Russia’s backyard, America has provoked Russia’s predictable invasion. These presidents thought that they could aggressively maintain the American hegemony without consequence. They were wrong.

President George H. W. Bush—The Global Dominance Doctrine

Following President Ronald Reagan’s negotiations to end the Cold War, President George H. W. Bush and his neoconservative administration established America’s post-Cold War foreign policy objective: global dominance. As legendary political columnist Charles Krauthammer wrote in 1990, the weakened Soviet sphere of influence offered the United States a “Unipolar Moment.”² Accordingly, Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney defined America’s new doctrine for the coming decades: The United States must remain the world’s sole dominant power and prevent any potential competitors—including Russia—from challenging its hegemony.³ Later that decade, the same neoconservatives published the 2000 Project for the New American Century Study, wherein they advocated expanding American influence in the Middle East with their NATO allies’ key support.⁴

However, the neoconservatives had a problem. On February 9, 1990, Bush and his Secretary of State James Baker promised Soviet Union General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev that, if the Soviet Union withdrew to allow for German reunification under NATO, the West would not expand it “one inch eastward.”⁵ West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, French President François Mitterrand, and British Prime Ministers Margaret Thatcher and John Major concurred with the same promise. Despite efforts to discredit these promises’ authenticity and authority, public archives have become available which prove their existence. For example, in February 2022, an American researcher discovered a declassified document detailing a March 6, 1991 meeting between American, British, German, and French foreign officials.⁶ The transcript revealed that German Ambassador to the United States Jürgen Chrobog said, “We made it clear in the two-plus-four negotiations that we would not expand NATO beyond the Elbe. We can therefore not offer NATO membership to Poland and others.” German news magazine *Der Spiegel* reported that the U.S. Ambassador to the United Kingdom Raymond G. H. Seitz said, “We have made it clear to the Soviet Union—in two-plus-four talks and elsewhere—that

we will not take advantage of the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Eastern Europe.”

Although Bush entrenched America into an aggressive international campaign, he nobly sought to maintain friendly relations with Russia. Signing multiple treaties with the Soviet Union and the succeeding Russian Federation,⁷ Bush facilitated a significant reduction in the Russo-American nuclear stockpile. America’s dangerous path truly began with his successor.

President Bill Clinton—The New Cold War

President Bill Clinton betrayed America’s promises to Russia, reintroducing Cold War hostilities through NATO. Principally, the Clinton administration oversaw NATO’s induction of the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland in 1999.⁸ This decision provoked fierce domestic opposition. American Cold War leaders such as the architect of America’s Soviet Union containment strategy and Ambassador to the Soviet Union George F. Kennan, Vietnam War-era Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, author of the aggressive NSC 68 and Secretary of Defense Paul Nitze, Ambassador to the Soviet Union Jack F. Matlock Jr., Director of Central Intelligence Robert Gates, National Security Advisor and Clinton Chair of the Intelligence Oversight Board Brent Scowcroft, Clinton Secretary of Defense William J. Perry, Senators Bill Bradley, Sam Nunn, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, and John Warner, anti-communist academics Edward Luttwak and Richard Pipes, and dozens more government officials, generals, legislators, and experts warned Clinton against NATO enlargement. In an open letter signed by President Eisenhower’s granddaughter Susan and fifty such foreign policy leaders, they warned of its potentially disastrous consequences:⁹

[T]he current U.S.-led effort to expand NATO... is a policy error of historic proportions. We believe that NATO expansion will decrease allied security and unsettle European stability for the following reasons:

In Russia, NATO expansion, which continues to be opposed across the entire political spectrum, will strengthen the nondemocratic opposition, undercut those who favor reform and cooperation with the West, bring the Russians to question the entire post-Cold War settlement, and galva-

nize resistance in the Duma to the START II and III treaties; In Europe, NATO expansion will draw a new line of division between the “ins” and the “outs,” foster instability, and ultimately diminish the sense of security of those countries which are not included;

In NATO, expansion, which the Alliance has indicated is open-ended, will inevitably degrade NATO’s ability to carry out its primary mission and will involve U.S. security guarantees to countries with serious border and national minority problems, and unevenly developed systems of democratic government[.]

President Clinton argued that NATO enlargement would “build and secure a New Europe, peaceful, democratic, and undivided at last.”¹⁰ On the contrary, excluding Russia and assimilating its buffer into an ever-expanding military alliance redivided the continent. Thus, President Clinton succeeded in restoring Cold War tensions. Ambassador to the Soviet Union George F. Kennan, architect of America’s Soviet Union containment strategy, warned of this risk in the New York Times in 1997:¹¹

Expanding NATO would be the most fateful error of American policy in the entire post-cold war era. Such a decision may be expected to inflame the nationalistic, anti-Western and militaristic tendencies in Russian opinion; to have an adverse effect on the development of Russian democracy; to restore the atmosphere of the cold war to East-West relations, and to impel Russian foreign policy in directions decidedly not to our liking.

Furthermore, Kennan, lamenting to New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman in 1998, near-prophetically predicted the present fruits of NATO enlargement:¹²

I think [NATO expansion] is the beginning of a new Cold War. I think the Russians will gradually react quite adversely and it will affect their policies. I think it is a tragic mistake. There was no reason for this whatsoever. No one was threatening anybody else. This expansion would

make the Founding Fathers of this country turn over in their graves. We have signed up to protect a whole series of countries, even though we have neither the resources nor the intention to do so in any serious way.

Of course there is going to be a bad reaction from Russia, and then [the NATO expanders] will say that we always told you that is how the Russians are—but this is just wrong.

If the late Kennan were alive, he would doubtlessly merit a great “I told you so” to the presidents and administrations that pursued NATO enlargement. Nevertheless, President Joe Biden has claimed that Putin’s decision to invade Ukraine is unrelated to America’s NATO enlargement policy, merely an excuse for Russian imperialism.¹³ However, Clinton’s Secretary of Defense William J. Perry refuted Biden’s claim to *The Guardian* in 2016:¹⁴

In the last few years, most of the blame can be pointed at the actions that Putin has taken. But in the early years I have to say that the United States deserves much of the blame.

Our first action that really set us off in a bad direction was when Nato started to expand, bringing in eastern European nations, some of them bordering Russia. At that time we were working closely with Russia and they were beginning to get used to the idea that Nato could be a friend rather than an enemy ... but they were very uncomfortable about having Nato right up on their border and they made a strong appeal for us not to go ahead with that.

Perry nearly resigned from the Clinton Cabinet over NATO enlargement. Meanwhile, Clinton’s Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was also aware of Russian opposition to the policy, as she reflected in her memoirs:¹⁵ “[Russian President Boris] Yeltsin and his countrymen were strongly opposed to enlargement, seeing it as a strategy for exploiting their vulnerability and moving Europe’s dividing line to the east, leaving them isolated.”

Beyond aggressive enlargement, Clinton also expanded NATO’s power

through military interventions. Launching two massive aerial bombing campaigns against the Russian-allied Serbs, Clinton allied with the bin Laden-tied Kosovo Liberation Army in the Yugoslav Wars. Where Russia did not wish to wage war, the United States and NATO humiliated Yeltsin by bypassing the U.N. Security Council and Russia’s inherited seat and veto power.¹⁶

Under Clinton, massively unpopular NATO enlargements and humiliating interventions severely damaged Russo-American relations, solidifying their post-Cold War status as firmly adversarial.

President George W. Bush—Eastern European Imperialism

Putin was the first foreign leader to call President George W. Bush after the September 11 attacks, offering his condolences and cooperation. He also offered Russia’s route into Afghanistan and former Soviet military bases nearby, expending significant political capital to his political and military critics. However, only three months later, Bush announced America’s withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, a Nixon-era agreement that the United States and Soviet Union would limit their anti-ballistic missile systems.¹⁷ Bush also announced plans to install radars in the Czech Republic and defensive missiles in Poland, ridiculously claiming that they were to protect Poland from a ballistic missile attack from *Iran*.¹⁸ Instead, these acts were to advantage the United States over Russia in its very backyard, ruining the mutually assured destruction status quo and potentially granting the United States first-strike capacity. Naturally, Russia considered this a significant threat.

More covertly, Bush’s administration sponsored a project of “color revolutions,” ousting Russian-leaning governments throughout Eastern Europe. The CIA and National Endowment for Democracy disguised multiple coup d’états as popular revolutions to install pro-American governments.¹⁹ Bush expanded Clinton’s European regime change program to Russia’s doorstep with the 2003 Rose Revolution in Georgia, the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine, the 2005 Tulip Revolution in Tajikistan, and the failed 2006 Jeans Revolution in Belarus. Notably, in the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine, the United States helped the opposition overthrow Russian-leaning President Viktor Yanukovich in favor of Western-leaning Viktor Yushchenko. What strategic

value could sponsoring these revolutions possibly have? Evidently, the United States wished to compel Eastern nations into their sphere of influence, leaving Russia with no allies or buffer.

Furthermore, Bush's government furthered NATO enlargement into Eastern Europe—in violation of his father's promise—with the induction of former Warsaw Pact countries Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia, and three former Soviet Republics, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the former two sharing a Russian border.²⁰ H. W. Bush's National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft—who opposed NATO enlargement during his tenure—explained that one major reason was the United States' desire for Eastern Europe's integration into the West.²¹ Although he favored the European Union to facilitate this, France and Germany were hesitant. Thus, the United States more independently pursued NATO enlargement to accelerate Eastern European integration from its Russian neighbor. In 2007, Putin highlighted the apparent aggression of NATO enlargement before the Munich Security Conference:²²

I think it is obvious that NATO expansion does not have any relation with the modernization of the alliance itself or with ensuring security in Europe. On the contrary, it represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust. And we have the right to ask: against whom is this expansion intended? And what happened to the assurances our western partners made after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact? Where are those declarations today? No one even remembers them. But I will allow myself to remind this audience what was said. I would like to quote the speech of NATO General Secretary Mr. Woerner in Brussels on 17 May 1990. He said at the time that: “the fact that we are ready not to place a NATO army outside of German territory gives the Soviet Union a firm security guarantee.” Where are these guarantees?

Far from a newfangled excuse for his actions, Putin has repeated for years that Russia perceived NATO enlargement policy as betraying and threatening. President Reagan's White House Communications Director and legendary Cold War political commentator Pat Buchanan often says that the United States used to limit its military influence to the Elbe, halfway across Germany.

The Cold War threat of a Soviet invasion of West Germany—endangering America's European allies—would be met with war. However, the United States has extended its military pact over one thousand miles east to Russia's Baltic border. If Russia decided to reconquer bordering Estonia, Latvia, or Lithuania, American politicians have signed the world's death wish to defend countries with no strategic value from a nuclear power.

Beyond enlargement, NATO's influence in Georgia nearly caused the 2008 Russo-Georgian War to become a world war. During the 2008 NATO Bucharest summit, the United States publicly revealed its intent to induct Georgia into NATO.²³ Thus, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili—the victor of the United States-backed 2003 Rose Revolution—was more willing to take risks. Only four months later, Saakashvili attacked the seceded South Ossetia, a previously Russian-protected autonomous Georgian province under an European Union-brokered agreement. Suffering initial losses, Russia launched a counteroffensive that destroyed Georgia's invading force and secured South Ossetia's independence.²⁴ Reportedly, Vice President Dick Cheney proposed missile strikes on the Russian Ground Forces on the Russo-South Ossetian border.²⁵ Bush refused. Again, what strategic value could the small country of Georgia have to the United States? Not strategic, but ideological. The United States and its ever-expanding sphere of influence must seize every opportunity; conflicts and consequences with Russia be damned.

Russian affairs specialist Fiona Hill told the New York Times that the Intelligence Community recommended against publicly declaring a path to NATO membership for Georgia and Ukraine because many other NATO members opposed it.²⁶ H. W. Bush's Director of Central Intelligence and W. Bush's and Obama's Secretary of Defense Robert Gates—who had also opposed Clinton's Czech, Hungarian, and Polish NATO induction—paralleled this concern in 2014:²⁷ “Trying to bring Georgia and Ukraine into NATO was truly overreaching... recklessly ignoring what the Russians considered their own vital national interests.”

Ending important nuclear treaties, sponsoring multiple anti-Russian revolutions (particularly in Ukraine), and massive NATO enlargement and interven-

tions did not create the global dominance Bush wanted. Instead, the United States merited worse dangers, liabilities, and an even angrier Russia.

President Barack Obama—Focus on Ukraine

Democrats love to attack Russia, but perhaps they bear some responsibility. President Barack Obama continued the ruinous policies of his predecessors. First, the Obama administration had NATO induct Albania and Croatia in 2009.²⁸ After sensationally publicizing their “Russian reset” attempt, the Obama administration lied to new Russian President Dmitry Medvedev to galvanize support for the United Nations Security Council’s First Libyan Civil War Resolution.³⁰ The Obama administration claimed they only intended to enforce a no-fly zone in Benghazi for the nonsensical allegation that Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi sought to genocide its population. However, they used this Resolution to launch a seven-month-long NATO-led military intervention of regime change with the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (an al-Qaeda affiliate), transforming the country into a war-ridden hell. Medvedev’s perceived gullibility led to Putin’s early presidential return.

In Ukraine, the United States-supported 2014 Revolution of Dignity ousted democratically-elected and Russian-leaning President Viktor Yanukovich and overthrew his government.³⁰ Once Yanukovich fled the country, the First Yatsenyuk government and its American-picked puppets took power in the Revolution’s aftermath. This was confirmed in the famous “F--- the E.U.” call between Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Victoria Nuland and Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey R. Pyatt leaked in 2014, where they discussed Ukraine’s regime change and hand-picked new leaders before Putin could react.³¹

When the new regime threatened to expel the Russian Black Sea Fleet from its leased naval bases in Crimea, Russia swiftly annexed the peninsula with little opposition.³² Context on Russia’s relationship with Crimea is necessary:³³ In 1783, Russia annexed Crimea from Tatars. This was four years before the Philadelphia Convention wrote the United States Constitution. Like Pennsylvania is part of the United States, Crimea is part of Russia. In World War II, the Russians lost hundreds of thousands of soldiers defending Crimea

from Nazi Germany and Romania. Crimea houses Russia’s only year-round warm water port and Black Sea Fleet. The only reason Crimea was ever part of Ukraine was Soviet Union General Secretary Nikita Khrushchev transferring the Crimean Oblast to Soviet Ukraine to garner support for his succession of Joseph Stalin. Regardless, the transfer was primarily symbolic, as Crimea was still accountable to the Kremlin. By its 2014 annexation, Crimea was still majority Russian, so the 2014 Crimean status referendum’s 96.77% voting in favor of joining the Russian Federation was no surprise.³⁴ Later independent polling authenticated the results. Putin later joked in a speech,³⁶

“[L]et me say ... that we are not opposed to cooperation with NATO, for this is certainly not the case. For all the internal processes within the organization, NATO remains a military alliance, and we are against having a military alliance making itself at home right in our backyard or in our historic territory. I simply cannot imagine that we would travel to Sevastopol to visit NATO sailors. Of course, most of them are wonderful guys, but it would be better to have them come and visit us, be our guests, rather than the other way round.”

Additionally, in the Revolution’s aftermath, ethnic Russian separatists seized government control of Donetsk and Luhansk, refusing to recognize the coup regime’s authority. The new Ukrainian government attacked, so Russia sent its Armed Forces to defend the new Republics’ independence.³⁷

Although the Obama administration and its media parrots asserted that Russia threatened Ukrainian freedom, this was another false narrative. America and Russia were battling over their spheres of influence—Russia within its region and America across the globe. Russian Armed Forces remained in the autonomous Donbas for eight years, from which they never attacked Ukraine to its west. In fact, Putin refused when the Republics held referendums where their populations voted to request unification with the Russian Federation.³⁸ Only after the United States and its international clients threatened Russia’s vital and legitimate interests in Crimea did Russia intervene. Putin was satisfied with a Ukrainian Crimea and leased naval ports status quo, but the American intervention backfired after the new government acted too aggressively.

Obama's continued NATO enlargement and disastrous Ukrainian regime change resulted in the highest Russo-American tensions since the Cold War. With direct Western military confrontation in the Donbas and Crimea and Russia's fear of further regional concessions, the Obama administration forced Russia's focus on Ukraine as their proxy.

President Donald Trump—Path of No Return

President Donald Trump was famous for his promise to “get along with Russia” as president during his election campaign. While the populist was likely unaware of the specific issues plaguing Russo-American relations, Trump had a citizen's recognition that the Soviet Union was long dead and his predecessors' antagonism was failing. Trump's initial enthusiasm for peaceful relations with Russia was admirable, but he quickly quelled it after the “Russiagate” scandal. While another article would be necessary for proper treatment of the allegations of his campaign's supposed Russian collusion, the diplomatic consequences of the accusations destroyed all prospects of peace. In desperation to prove to the foreign policy establishment that he bore no allegiance to Russia, he began a new onslaught of aggression.

The Trump administration oversaw NATO's induction of Montenegro in 2017 and North Macedonia in 2020.³⁹ He sent more American arms and soldiers to Poland and the Baltic states, where the United States coordinated military exercises and parades right on Russia's border.⁴⁰ Where President Obama was afraid of arming Ukraine, Trump sent enormous military aid rivaling only Israel: FGM-149 Javelin anti-tank missiles, rocket-propelled grenades, sniper rifles, warships, and hundreds of millions of dollars of non-lethal equipment like armor, Humvees, night-vision goggles, and radars.⁴¹ His Armed Forces organized training and joint military exercises in Ukraine. It increased its military presence near Russia's borders, particularly in Ukrainian seas: The Navy in the Black and Baltic Seas, including armed frigates dangerously lowering first-strike warning times, and Air Force in the Baltic, Black, and Okhotsk Seas, including bomber missions testing anti-aircraft and radar capacities.⁴² With all his Ukrainian provocations, Trump effectively nullified the 2015 Minsk II agreement's attempts at peace, which would have guaranteed cease-fire and withdrawal of heavy weapons near the Russo-Ukrainian border, signed by Russian, Ukrainian, and Donbas representatives.⁴³

However, Trump's direct Russian antagonism manifested in his treaty policy. Trump ended the Reagan-era Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, which banned all land-based ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and missile launchers within an extensive range.⁴⁴ The Treaty succeeded in eliminating thousands of missiles and guaranteeing on-site inspections, yet Trump withdrew due to supposed Chinese threats. Trump also withdrew from the H. W. Bush-era Treaty on Open Skies, which allowed unarmed aerial surveillance flights over foreign territories to ensure that countries were not mobilizing for war.⁴⁵ According to Trump's 2017 National Security Strategy and 2018 Nuclear Posture Review, his administration pursued a return to “great power competition” to counter the supposed Russian “threat,” developing and deploying more low-yield “usable” nuclear bombs and missiles.⁴⁶

With almost no remaining military treaties between the United States and Russia, conflict seemed almost inevitable. Ukraine, Russia's most crucial strategic buffer, was becoming increasingly integrated. Russia came to fear that America would come to leverage Ukraine against them to push its agenda further into Russia. Trump's NATO enlargement and Western integration was culminating in Ukraine.

President Joe Biden—Pushed Too Far

President Joe Biden succeeded the presidency, determined to increase tensions with Russia further. He dramatically increased agitational American Navy affairs in the Black Sea and expanded military aid and weapons transfers to Ukraine.

Biden pledged to reinforce America's “sacred” commitment to NATO, explicitly to counter Russian connections to Europe. Americans unaware of their government's historical foreign policy may be surprised by the assertion that the United States could be inciting conflict. However, even recent documentation has demonstrated the United States' absurd willingness to risk war. In 2019, the Armed Forces' RAND Corporation think tank published “Extending Russia: Competing from Advantageous Ground.”⁴⁷ The book advocated dozens of provocations: increasing more offensive arms transfers to Ukraine, backing regime change in Belarus, arousing diplomatic chaos in the

Caucuses, and more policies sure to guarantee confrontation. The Biden administration has pursued many of the document's proposals, such as American support for anti-Russian opposition in the 2022 Kazakh unrest.⁴⁸ However, Russia would not be willing to leave itself without allies to be diplomatically and economically bled dry.

In September 2021, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy visited Biden in Washington, D.C., asking to begin formal negotiations toward Ukrainian induction into NATO. Putin proposed a treaty resolving that NATO would not induct Ukraine, the United States would not station soldiers and offensive weapons in Ukraine, withdraw its military involvement in Eastern European NATO members (as the Clinton administration promised), and restore the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. Putin knew that Biden would not accept this agreement, but Ukrainian NATO induction seemed unlikely anytime soon.⁴⁹ To Biden's credit, he repeatedly said that the United States would not seek to induct Ukraine into NATO or station American missiles there. He responded to Putin by offering guarantees that the United States would not deploy Tomahawk Land Attack Missiles in Poland and Romania even without the INF Treaty.⁵⁰

However, apparently, the United States' vague policy of forbidding Russia from "closing the door"⁵¹ to a country's ability to join NATO and Zelenskyy's failure to implement the Minsk II agreement and grant full autonomy and veto power to the Donbas, which would have ended all fighting, was intolerable for Putin. On February 22, 2022, President Putin recognized Donetsk's and Luhansk's supposed independence and dispatched so-called "peacekeeping troops" in the Donbas. On February 23, Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine. President Joe Biden continued his predecessors' policies of increasing hostilities with Russia centered around Ukraine, but his limited tenure cannot merit much blame. Unless Biden had taken radical peace initiatives, Ukraine's fate was sealed.

Conclusion

Suppose the following scenario: Russia wins the Cold War. In the following decades, Russia slowly admits all Latin American countries into its Warsaw

Pact military alliance. In Canada, Russia sponsors a revolution overthrowing the democratically elected pro-United States government for a pro-Russian government. The new government threatens to expel American naval bases in Alaska, and Russia backs Canadian attacks on a seceded British Columbia, which refuses to recognize the new regime. They also more covertly threaten to overthrow the United States government altogether. What would the United States do?

The United States would preemptively invade Canada before its total encirclement and probably launch an all-out war against Russia.

In Putin's speech preceding the invasion, "On conducting a special military operation," he accused the United States of several aggressions:

- Clinton, W. Bush, Obama, and Trump breaking the Western promise not to enlarge NATO eastward
- Clinton involving NATO in the Yugoslav Wars
- W. Bush withdrawing from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty
- W. Bush and Obama installing anti-ballistic missile bases in Eastern Europe
- Obama backing Ukraine's Revolution of Dignity
- Obama, Trump, and Biden engaging in military exercises in the Black Sea
- Trump integrating Ukraine into NATO exercises
- Trump and Biden supporting Ukraine with offensive military aid
- Biden refusing to guarantee no Ukrainian NATO membership

There is no Soviet communist threat or any real danger of Russian aggression. The United States spends nearly a trillion dollars a year on the Armed Forces alone. Russia's military budget is 60 billion dollars. The United States maintains over one million soldiers and eleven nuclear-powered carrier battle groups worldwide. Russia has 420,000 soldiers, who almost always stay home, and one broken down, outdated aircraft carrier.

This article has demonstrated that Putin's fears are based on true history. However, the government and the media are attempting to convince the American public that Putin's invasion is an insane push for a new Russian Empire or Soviet Union. They deride Putin as a crazed megalomaniac.

However, this is not reality. It is a sensationalism serving to distract the American people from thirty years of failed government policy that antagonized Russia to invasion. Quoting Putin's words immediately preceding the invasion is illuminating:⁵²

Many Ukrainian airfields are located close to our borders. NATO tactical aircraft stationed here, including carriers of high-precision weapons, will be able to hit our territory to the depth of the Volgograd-Kazan-Samara-Astrakhan line. The deployment of radar reconnaissance assets on the territory of Ukraine will allow NATO to tightly control the air-space of Russia right up to the Urals.

After the U.S. destroyed the INF Treaty, the Pentagon has been openly developing many land-based attack weapons, including ballistic missiles that are capable of hitting targets at a distance of up to 5,500 km.

If deployed in Ukraine, such systems will be able to hit targets in Russia's entire European part. The flying time of Tomahawk cruise missiles to Moscow will be less than 35 minutes; ballistic missiles from Kharkiv will take seven to eight minutes; and hypersonic assault weapons, four to five minutes.

It is like a knife to the throat.

All the United States had to do was put into writing their vow that Ukraine would not join NATO, yet they refused due to a childish stubbornness against "closing the door" on another country's ability to join NATO.

While the United States' foreign policy has doubtlessly caused Putin to justify his invasion of Ukraine, it is still his fault alone. Ukraine's ever-increasing property and civilian losses are unforgivable. While the economic consequences have already partially manifested throughout the world, the military consequences of Russia's invasion may still extend to the rest of Europe. Putin has risked nuclear war with the West in an impulsive, supposed preemptive strike. He should have pursued a diplomatic solution to Russia's real national security concerns.

The United States must not make the same mistakes. American presidents' foreign aggression of installing neighboring missile systems, treaty abrogation, regime change, stationing Armed Forces, and targeting offensive military aid without strategic need has proven disastrous. However, the United States' NATO enlargement has been at the core of Russian fears. Through a dangerous policy pursuing European encirclement and isolation that successfully divided the continent into another Cold War, the United States has gambled on other nations' regional stabilities for its own ideological gain. The obsolete NATO has only become relevant again because of the conflict that it has caused. The American people must never again fall for neoconservatism's fearmongering and warmongering. The United States' priority must henceforth be peace.

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Would a Democratic Russia have invaded Ukraine?

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“The current conflict in Ukraine would have been unthinkable if the Kremlin had a democratically elected leadership.”¹ Such is the theme in many scholarly fora these days. The argument, known as the *Democratic Peace Theory*, presumes that democratic governments do not make war upon each other. Since Ukraine is, for argument’s sake, a democracy, then if only Russia were as well then peace would reign in that region and there never would have been a war.

What is the basis for this argument, is it true, and would it apply to the counterfactual² case of a democratic Russia? In order for the opening line above to indeed be correct, namely that the current state would be unthinkable, it requires both that the theory³ be generally true and also obviously applicable to the conflict between Ukraine and Russia. So it is therefore worthwhile to understand the theory and to determine its applicability.

The first suggestion of the theory, although not yet named as such, was in the late 18th century. In 1776, Thomas Paine argued that a significant factor in the start of wars was the pride of kings who wished to expand their power. Thus democracies, ruled by people who would not get away with such a justification, would not start wars.⁴ In 1795 Immanuel Kant, the great German philosopher, argued that because democratic governments depend on popular support, and because it would never be the case that a majority of a population would agree to start a war, democratic countries would only fight if attacked. Therefore, he reasoned, if the whole world would be governed by democracies then there would never be war, because no one would ever start one.⁵ Both of these arguments are based on the assumption that war is evil, or at least inadvisable, and therefore no government that was required to justify it to its citizens would ever start one.

These arguments also go further than Democratic Peace Theory itself does today. They argue that democracies would not start wars AT ALL, regardless of the opponent, whereas *Democratic Peace Theory* limits itself only to wars BETWEEN democracies. The more expansive definition Paine used was immediately challenged, therefore, by the very American Revolution he helped create. The colonies that rebelled and went to war against England were certainly democracies, and yet they felt that they were able to justify war to their constituents. In between June 7, 1776, when Richard Henry Lee uttered the famous words “these united colonies are and of right ought to be free and independent states” and July 2, when the Continental Congress voted to declare independence, the delegates from the various colonies each obtained permission from their individual governments to support that declaration. Thus it is clear that those legislatures, each of them democratically elected, were comfortable with the idea of a rebellion which meant war. In fact, it is frequently argued that although the Declaration of Independence was addressed to King George III, in fact its intended audience was the population of the American colonies, taking the case directly to them and justifying the coming war.⁶

So apparently a democracy can indeed be willing to commence war against a monarchy, despite Paine’s and Kant’s arguments. Perhaps less so than an autocracy, but certainly it cannot be said that such a war would be unthinkable. But it is also true that the United States has never started a war against an opponent that had a democratic government.⁷ Why might that be so? Why might the modern *Democratic Peace Theory*, which limits itself to wars between democracies, be true? There are two main arguments. The first, commonly called “cultural-normative,” suggests that democratic government requires the assembling of coalitions to arrive at the majority necessary to govern. In a parliamentary system such as Israel, this happens after the election, when small parties join together to total up to a majority. In the United States, this goes on within each of the major parties, where platforms are designed to attract as broad a coalition as possible and thereby win a majority in the general election. Either way, such societies are used to the bargaining that is required to achieve coalitions, and they deal with foreign governments the same way. The result is that they work out their problems

through peaceful negotiation and things never get so far as to result in war.⁸

A second argument is called “structural,” based on the nature of the government itself. When a government has a separation of powers and checks and balances to inhibit passionate, aggressive action by any one part of the government, the decision process necessary to lead to war gets bogged down (as all policy initiatives do) until cooler heads can prevail. If, for example, the President of the United States suffered some personal slight at the hand of a foreign leader and decided that the proper recourse was war, he would not be able to declare war or appropriate the necessary funds to finance the army without Congressional action.^{9,10}

Some argue that the true reason behind this is not simply the form of government, but economic trade that such countries tend to pursue.¹¹ Countries with extensive trade between them would be unlikely to go to war with each other, because of the costs involved. Since trade generates wealth, and since war tends to inhibit trade, countries would be disincentivized from initiating war if those countries’ governments are economically motivated. Since governments of democracies are answerable to their citizens, and since citizens presumably enjoy wealth, such governments would likely pursue policies that increase wealth, rather than inhibit it.

Still another suggestion is that countries with a democratic form of government tend to be more satisfied with the status quo and are therefore less likely to be interested in changing it.¹² Since the comfort of its citizens depends more on the stability of the international order generally than on the relative position of democratic countries, it is of little consequence what the pecking order is. But if a nondemocratic country were to become powerful, it would pose a threat to the international order and therefore constitute a sufficient threat to the status quo to make war a consideration. Therefore, for example, it did not bother Great Britain much that it was forced to cede its preeminent status to the United States in World War II, and has since been a minor power by comparison. Since, under US hegemony, the world ran pretty much as the British would have liked anyway, they saw no reason to strongly oppose it. But a world controlled by authoritarian Germany or communist Russia was too much to bear, and therefore worth war to oppose.

Whatever the root causes, the idea that democracy is an inherently more peaceful form of government has had tremendous appeal to US Presidents over the last century. Scholars see this idea behind Woodrow Wilson’s claim that the purpose of US involvement in World War I was to “make the world safe for democracy.” As Wilson said in his request for a declaration of war, “peace must be planted upon the tested foundations of political liberty.”¹³ Similarly, attempts at “regime change” during both the Clinton¹⁴ and Bush II¹⁵ presidencies were supported by the presumption that replacing autocrats with democracies would make the world a more peaceful place generally. It is an open question, however, whether these theories were actually instructive in setting US foreign policy or simply of convenient use in justifying what they wanted to do anyway.

What about Russia today? Would Russia have acted differently if it had been a democracy? Would it have invaded Ukraine anyway? That depends on which of the many reasons behind *Democratic Peace* we choose. If we use the Kantian argument that war is inherently evil and therefore abominable to most citizens of any country, then presumably if Russians were allowed to freely express their interests and if those interests were then seen by the government as mandating certain action, Russia would not have initiated war. The problem with this argument is that for many of the world’s citizens, war is not inherently evil. In fact, for some it is a preferred course of action. For example, the majority of Palestinians support Hamas, a terrorist organization committed to war against Israel.¹⁶

If one considers the “cultural-normative” argument, it might indeed be reasonable to suggest that a democratic Russia would not have invaded Ukraine. There is little doubt that Vladimir Putin’s governing style does not require the sort of negotiating between peers that coalition building requires, and therefore that methodology is not something he is used to thinking about all the time. In fact, his ruthless and systematic elimination of his political opponents¹⁷ is quite comparable to the way he deals with his neighbors. One suspects that residents of Chechnya, Georgia and Ukraine might all feel sympathy with people like Denis Voronenkov, a critic of Putin who was murdered in cold blood five years ago.

The “structural” argument as it applies to Russia mostly boils down to a matter of definition. If one uses Babst’s definition of a democracy,¹⁸ checks and balances are not required, and hence the structural argument falls apart. As long as the ruler is elected in a regularly scheduled fair election from among a choice of candidates, he can have complete power to initiate war. Putin himself was elected in 2000 in an election with multiple opponents,¹⁹ and in fact he barely won a majority. So it’s quite possible to imagine Putin’s continued dominance of a democratic process that would leave him solely able to send Russia into a war. If, however, one argues that checks and balances are a critical prerequisite for a democratic government (or at least one that would be subject to the Democratic Peace Theory) then such systemic forces might have slowed Putin down. But it’s still quite possible to imagine that Putin’s justifications for war against Ukraine (by whatever name) and the popular support that they have generated²⁰ could then cause multiple parts of a “separated powers” system to unite behind his war effort.

The most interesting explanation to consider, and the one that leads to the least hope in a democratic Russia, is the economic one. The argument is that democracies tend to be very integrated into the global economy, and participation in the global economy requires peace between the countries that trade with each other. The problem is that this is true regarding Russia right now. Although Russia is certainly not a democracy, it does possess the characteristics relevant to this argument. Russia is very active in international trade (Russia exported over \$490 billion last year, one of the top numbers in the world),²¹ and while its government is not responsive to its citizenry it is certainly concerned for the welfare of the oligarchs who support it. Since their wealth in a large part is tied to these exports,²² they would certainly not be happy for Russia to start a war that threatened them. Yet there does not seem to be any opposition to Putin from among the oligarchs.²³ So apparently the possibility of war negatively impacting Russia has not dissuaded Putin from acting against Ukraine.

This is also exactly the argument made by the US and its allies in imposing economic sanctions on Russia over its invasion of Ukraine. The sanctioning countries are hoping that by cutting Russia out of the world monetary system

and by shutting down their importation of Russian products, they will be influencing decision makers inside Russia that this war is unwise. However, despite strong indications that the sanctions are having a seriously negative effect on the Russian economy,²⁴ those who benefit from the economy seem to be willing to wage war anyway. Therefore, the hope that a Russia ruled by a democratic government would be more restrained in considering war on its neighbors is hard to support.

It is worth pointing out that discounting the nature of the Russian government in favor of an analysis of Russian national psychology was exactly the basis for George Kennan’s famous “long telegram” in 1946, which governed US foreign policy throughout the Cold War. Kennan argued that “at the bottom of the Kremlin’s neurotic view of world affairs is the traditional and instinctive Russian sense of insecurity. After the Russian Revolution, this sense of insecurity became mixed with communist ideology and Oriental secretiveness and conspiracy.”²⁵ Kennan’s point was that communism is less the source of Russia’s motivation²⁶ in its foreign policy than anxiety about invasion. Russia’s goal (then and now²⁷) were to create a zone of control in its bordering countries that would provide a buffer should some western European power again attempt an invasion, as had happened under Napoleon and Hitler with such devastating effects.

The *Democratic Peace Theory* therefore offers little comfort to those dreaming of a counterfactual world in which Russia is governed by a democratic government. Whether because of public support or national anxiety, it is quite likely that a popularly elected government that truly did the will of the people would have been just as aggressive against Ukraine as Putin has been. As Winston Churchill wisely said, “democracy is the worst form of Government except for all those other forms that have been tried.”²⁸ Democracy does not solve all problems. It just solves more of them than any other type that we know of.

END NOTES

- 1 Gibaja, Alberto Fernandez, and Alexander Hudson. "The Ukraine Crisis and the Struggle to Defend Democracy in Europe and Beyond." *The Global State of Democracy in Focus*, vol. 12, p. 2.
- 2 The idea of Russia being democratic is not as counterfactual as one might think. For ten years, from 1993–2003, in between the end of the USSR and the rise of Vladimir Putin, Russia was a fledgling democracy. Its President, Boris Yeltsin, was widely acclaimed by the United States and other democracies, at least at the beginning of that period, for moving Russia toward democracy and capitalism. Unfortunately, his mismanagement of the economy created the oligarchs that now support Putin's autocracy, but the current state of affairs was far from the only possibility at the time.
- 3 It is worth pointing out that the *Democratic Peace Theory* is just that, a theory. Even those who advocate it do not claim that it is an absolute rule. So it is at best hyperbole to say that a violation of the theory would be "unthinkable."
- 4 Communication, in Political. "Democratic Peace Theory." *Communication Theory*, 23 Apr. 2018, <https://www.communicationtheory.org/democratic-peace-theory/>.
- 5 Kant, Immanuel. Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch
- 6 Gat, Azar. "The Democratic Peace Theory Reframed: The Impact of Modernity." *World Politics*, 2005, pp. 73–100. Gat argues that perhaps one could argue that the American colonies were not yet truly democratic, as many of them still were slave societies. Every one of the thirteen colonies that declared independence in 1776 endorsed slavery. But even so, he points out that even after slavery was abolished in 1865 and thus the United States became a true democratic republic, the United States was still quite willing to start the Spanish American War in 1898.
- 7 Babst, Dean. "Elective Governments – A Force for Peace." *Industrial Research*, vol. 55, no. 58, 1972. Babst claims that from 1789 until 1941, there was not a single case of a major war between two freely elected governments. He defines a major war as involving at least 50,000 soldiers or causing the creation or extinction of states, territorial transfer, or change in government. He defines freely elected governments as having the following four attributes: 1) a legislature that controls the nation's finances which is elected in contested elections periodically 2) an executive chosen either by the legislature or the people from among multiple candidates 3) freedom of speech and press and secret balloting 4) independence. The reader is invited to see if indeed countries so defined made no major wars on each other during the period he defines. It seems to me that the American Civil War satisfies all his definitions, except perhaps

- the last. But from the point of view of the Confederate States of America they certainly were independent.
- 8 A good example of this is the Trent Affair, in 1861. The USS San Jacinto intercepted a British ship that was carrying two Confederate diplomats to England to negotiate for British recognition of the Confederacy, and arrested the two men. Britain howled, arguing that this was an act of war against Great Britain, and demanded release of the prisoners and a full apology, meanwhile beefing up its naval presence in the area. Abraham Lincoln, wisely realizing that fighting two wars at the same time was a bad idea, worked out a compromise in which the diplomats were freed but no apology offered, and conflict was averted.
 - 9 Sadly, the second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st proved that this is simply not true. In the cases of Korea, Vietnam, Yugoslavia, Iraq and Afghanistan, Presidents have been able to start or enter wars without a declaration of war or prior congressional authorization, and once there are soldiers in the field it is next to impossible for Congress to seriously consider refusing to fund them. As a result, for example, it is believed that a major impetus for President George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq was revenge for its attempted assassination of his father, former President George HW Bush. The public claim, that somehow Iraq was connected to the 9/11 attacks, was clearly baseless, as was the secondary claim that Iraq had "weapons of mass destruction." Had US Constitutional mandates been followed, perhaps congressional hearings would have uncovered the truth and Congress might have refused to declare war under those circumstances.
 - 10 Chan, Steve. "In Search of Democratic Peace: Problems and Promise." *Mershon International Studies Review*, May 1997, p. 76. Chan points out that sometimes this argument actually works in reverse. Because a government with a system of checks and balances moves ponderously, it not only moves ponderously toward war but toward peace, as well. In the specific case of nuclear disarmament, Ukraine's democracy made ratification of the nuclear nonproliferation treaty more difficult by comparison with authoritarian Kazakhstan, which was able to instantly ratify the treaties its executive negotiated.
 - 11 Polachek, Solomon. "Why Democracies Cooperate More and Fight Less: The Relationship Between International Trade and Cooperation." *Review of International Economics*, vol. 5, no. 3, 1997, pp. 295–309.
 - 12 Chan, p. 78.
 - 13 The full text of Wilson's war message may be found at <http://historymatters.gmu>.

- edu/d/4943/. Of course, it's ironic that Wilson is asking for war for the purpose of peace, more than a bit Orwellian. But it is also true that Wilson's Fourteen Points, which was to be his prescription for ending the war in such a way as to discourage further ones, includes many of the ideas mentioned above. Points two and three attempt to create binding economic ties of the type Polachek would approve, and point five attempts to end colonialism and allow those countries self-determination, which should lead to more democracies. Of course point fourteen, the League of Nations, is an expansion on the structural argument made earlier, just one a global scale.
- 14 It is instructive to see Clinton himself use Democratic Peace Theory to justify various foreign policy decisions he made while President. See his recent article in Atlantic (<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/04/bill-clinton-nato-expansion-ukraine/629499/>) for more details. Clinton particularly focuses on his (failed) attempt to help stabilize Yeltsin's fledgling democracy in Russia as an example of this theory at work.
- 15 Encarnación, Omar G. "Bush and the Theory of the Democratic Peace." *Global Dialogue*, vol. 8, no. 3/4, 2008. In 2003, following the fall of Baghdad, Bush spoke in London, saying "Democracy and the hope and progress it brings are the alternative to instability and to hatred and terror. Lasting peace is gained as justice and democracy advance." Similarly, in 2005 in Idaho Bush said "History has proven that free nations are peaceful nations, that democracies do not fight their neighbors." Once again, the irony should not be lost. Bush, like Wilson a century earlier, is justifying war by claiming that it advances peace.
- 16 Krauss, Joseph. "Poll Finds Dramatic Rise in Palestinian Support for Hamas." AP NEWS, Associated Press, 15 June 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/hamas-middle-east-science-32095d8e1323fc1cad819c34da08fd87>. This is hard for Americans to imagine, as Americans subordinate all other concerns to their financial welfare. As long as there is a "chicken in the pot" we are happy and would not entertain initiating war, in fact would find it abhorrent. But while that may be common in the western world, the majority of which is democratic, it is neither universal nor necessarily true in all democracies. Again citing the example of the Palestinian Authority, in 2006 it was considered by *The Economist* to be a flawed democracy (it has since descended into authoritarianism), yet there is little doubt that its citizenry would happily sacrifice their sons for an end to what they see as Israeli occupation of their land. As Golda Meir famously said (although it is difficult to find the source of this quote) "peace will come when the Arabs love their children more than they hate us."
- 17 Filipov, David. "Here Are 10 Critics of Vladimir Putin Who Died Violently or in Suspicious Ways." *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 1 Dec. 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/03/23/here-are-ten-critics-of-vladimir-putin-who-died-violently-or-in-suspicious-ways/>.
- 18 Babst, pp. 9–10.
- 19 Although the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights had some criticisms of the election (see <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/7/b/33100.pdf>), it arguably met Babst's criteria.
- 20 Parker, Claire. "58 Percent of Russians Support the Invasion of Ukraine, and 23 Percent Oppose It, New Poll Shows." *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 9 Mar. 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/03/08/russia-public-opinion-ukraine-invasion/>. Obviously public opinion polls in Russia or in any other repressive regime are hard to trust too much, but the Washington Post was inclined to give them serious consideration.
- 21 "Russia (RUS) Exports, Imports, and Trade Partners." *OECD*, <https://oec.world/en/profile/country/rus>.
- 22 Perhaps even more importantly, governments around the world are seizing assets belonging to these oligarchs that they have placed outside Russia. Of particular note have been the various yachts that these men own which have been seized as part of the world's outrage against Russia. For example, an \$90 million yacht owned by Viktor Vekselberg was seized by US and Spanish agents in early April. See <https://www.npr.org/2022/04/05/1090999672/russian-oligarch-yacht-seized>.
- 23 It is possible that the oligarchs are as fearful of Putin as his political critics. A curious number have died in suspicious circumstances since the beginning of the Ukraine invasion. See <https://www.newsweek.com/every-russian-oligarch-who-has-died-since-putin-invaded-ukraine-full-list-1700022>.
- 24 "Russian Economy Suffers Sanctions Blow Despite Kremlin's Denial." *Euronews*, 24 Apr. 2022, <https://www.euronews.com/2022/04/23/russian-economy-feels-consequences-of-sanctions-despite-kremlin-s-denial>.
- 25 <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/coldwar/documents/episode-1/kennan.htm>
- 26 It is worth mentioning that the spread of Bolshevism was still a part of the Russian motivation during the Cold War, although no longer with the demise of the Soviet Union. In "When Presidents Lie" by Eric Alterman (p. 132), he quotes Anastas Mikoyan, a Soviet diplomat, saying that the reason Cuba was so precious to the Russians was because they had been "waiting all their lives for a country to go

Communist without the Red Army, and it happened in Cuba.” There is no doubt that Khrushchev also enjoyed the ability to have a military base less than 100 miles off the US coast, but the ideological aspect should be appreciated, as well.

- 27 Cyr, Arthur. “Opinion: Russia Is Motivated by Long-Held Anxieties over Being Invaded.” *Deseret News*, Deseret News, 30 Mar. 2022, <https://www.deseret.com/opinion/2022/3/30/23002249/russia-ukraine-anxiety-being-invaded-vladimir-putin-napoleon-wwii-all-motivate-actions>.
- 28 “The Worst Form of Government.” International *Churchill Society*, 10 Sept. 2021, <https://winstonchurchill.org/resources/quotes/the-worst-form-of-government/>

Behind Putin’s War on Ukraine

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Most analyses of Russia’s war against Ukraine focus on two interlinked causes: American missteps in promoting NATO expansion after the fall of the Soviet Union and Russia’s humiliations as this expansion took place during its decades of weakness as it transitioned from communism. It is true that American officials acted arrogantly, sometimes for their own political interests, in advocating NATO expansion. It is also reasonable to conclude that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is the end result of decades of embarrassing slights and affronts as states that had been part of the Soviet Union or were in its sphere of influence rushed to join an alliance created to contain Russia. Yet, these two explanations, while important, are insufficient to explain Russian aggression against Ukraine, which would have most likely occurred anyway. The most significant reason for the Russian war against Ukraine is the expansionist ideology of its current leader, Vladimir Putin, who has long harbored ambitions to rebuild a Russian empire.

M.E. Sarotte’s recent book, *Not One Inch: America, Russia and the Making of Post-Cold War Stalemate*, traces the American effort, after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, to expand NATO, often against the objections of Russian leaders.¹ Even as early as 1990, Mikhail Gorbachev was troubled by the reunification of Germany as a NATO country, as opposed to being neutral, but was comforted by James Baker, George H. W. Bush’s secretary of state, who asked whether he would “prefer to see a united Germany outside of NATO, independent and with no US forces, or...a united Germany...tied to NATO, with assurances that NATO’s jurisdiction would not shift one inch eastward from its present position?”² For Russia, which had fought a catastrophic war against Germany several decades earlier, a Germany overseen by American troops was undoubtedly preferable, but the more important part of the quote was undoubtedly the assurance that NATO would not move eastward. True, the

assurance came only in the form of a question, not a promise, but the implication of Baker's question will easily be piled together with other actions and statements that will later fuel Russian grievances.

It was President Clinton, who invited the Baltic States, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, into NATO, despite the opposition of Russian President, Boris Yeltsin, who understood the potential for Russian humiliation as states which had once been part of the Soviet Union were now to be included in the western alliance. Throughout this period, many American officials, and political writers—Colin Powell, Les Aspin, William Perry, George Kennan, to name a few—warned against the potential backlash that NATO enlargement could invite, but their voices could not overcome the personal ambitions of American leaders who saw the prospects of American advantage or personal political gain as reason enough to advocate continued expansion. Perhaps the most blatant act of NATO expansion for personal political gain was made by George W. Bush, who, disappointed with his war to spread democracy to Iraq, pushed a NATO conference in 2008 to invite Ukraine and Georgia to become members, despite the strong opposition of other NATO partners.³

Several months after NATO's 2008 invitation to Georgia and Ukraine, ethnic Russian separatists in Georgia rebelled against Georgia in South Ossetia and called upon Vladimir Putin for protection. Similarly, in Ukraine in 2014, soon after the election of a pro-Western government, Putin annexed Crimea and sent Russian troops into eastern Ukraine to support Russian separatists in the Donbas region. Certainly, these developments support the notion that Putin's actions were the results of Russian grievances regarding the US sponsored expansion of NATO going back to the fall of communism in 1991. Yet, for all the focus on possible Ukrainian membership in NATO in the lead up to the current war, there was no discussion of this prior to the Russian invasion. In fact, Putin has rejected many western attempts at suggested compromise. President Biden has stated that there are no immediate plans to bring Ukraine into NATO and French President Macron has suggested the "Finlandization" of Ukraine, which essentially means neutrality.⁴ As the New York Times noted in an article on March 16th, "Mr. Putin's insistence that he needed to prevent Ukraine from joining NATO appeared to be a pretext for war, a stated rationale without substance."⁵

It is not the threat of NATO expansion that has led to this war; in fact, it is Russian expansionism. For many years, western officials have tried to see Vladimir Putin as a reformer, following in the footsteps of Boris Yeltsin in helping Russia to become a democratic and prosperous member of the world community. Instead, Putin's actions, since he assumed the presidency in 2000, has revealed him to be an authoritarian ruler who has diverted Russia's evolution toward democracy to become the leader of a "crony capitalist kleptocracy."⁶ Yet, few have been reluctant to recognize the full threat of the Putin regime. He is a Russian expansionist who aims to restore Russia as the ruler over a great multi-ethnic Eurasian empire.

The true character of the Putin regime may not have been immediately apparent in the years after he became president in 2000. After many difficult years of transition to capitalism and democracy, prosperity finally returned to Russia in the first decade of the 21st century. Between 2000 and 2008, the Russian economy grew at an annual rate of 7%. Throughout this period, Putin praised democracy and Russia's partnership with the west. That harmony began to erode after the 2008 financial crisis undermined the Russian economy and, particularly, in 2012, when protests broke out in Russia over Putin's reelection as president in an election widely criticized as fraudulent. To explain the protests, Putin needed an external enemy which now became the EU and the United States, the advocates of globalization determined to undermine the virtues of Russian traditional society.⁷

According to historian Timothy Snyder, Putin is a follower of the fascist philosopher Ivan Ilyin, who fled Russia after the Bolshevik Revolution, saw Marxism at a western intrusion into Russia's pristine culture and waited for the day when a redeeming hero will resurrect Russian traditional culture at the expense of a decadent west. During his years in exile, Ilyin became an admirer of Mussolini and Hitler, the latter especially praised as a defender against Bolshevism. In his speeches made while living in Switzerland from 1938 until his death in 1954, Ilyin looked forward to the emergence of a great redeemer who will restore Russian Christian civilization, eliminate western individualism and create a totally unified society under one leader.⁸

A revival of Ilyin's philosophy began shortly after the fall of communism in Russia and Putin quickly became an adherent. He authorized the transfer of his remains from Switzerland to be reburied in Moscow in 2005 and reclaimed Ilyin's personal papers from the University of Michigan in 2006. His annual speeches to the Russian parliament are littered with references to Ilyin and he saw to the distribution of his writing among Russia's civil servants. While Putin's attitude to the Soviet Union does not mirror Ilyin's, his views about western decadence, liberal individualism and the virtues of a united Christian civilization under the leadership of one figure certainly do. More importantly, so do his views of Russia's relationship with Ukraine.

In an article published in January 2022, Putin followed Ilyin in describing Russia, not in terms of national borders, but as culture.¹⁰ Borders dividing people are inspired by a western concept of nationality, but Russia is a multi-ethnic empire united by cultural affinities where there are no disadvantaged minorities. It is for this reason that Putin called Ukrainian statehood a fiction.¹¹ Its national borders were a product of Soviet collapse, but Ukrainian culture, like so many cultures which had traditionally been under the aegis of Russia, was historically bound and subordinate to it. Not only is Putin's view derived from Ilyin, it dovetails with the revival, after the fall of the Soviet Union of Eurasianism. Like Ilyin's ideology, Eurasianism got its start as an imperialist reaction after the Bolshevik revolution. Perhaps the most significant proponent of the idea was a Russian émigré intellectual of the 1920s, Nikolai Trubetzkoy, who called upon Russians to turn away from Europe to build a great Christian empire spanning many cultures in Asia. Already in 1927, Trubetzkoy reflected on the problem of Ukraine. In his view, Ukrainians were not a separate people, but an "individualization of all-Russian culture and that Ukrainians and Belarussians should bond with Russians around...their shared orthodox faith."¹² It is for that reason, that in 2013, Putin declared Eurasia "a major geopolitical zone where Russia' genetic code and its many peoples would be defended against extreme western-style liberalism."¹³

For over two decades western leaders have allowed their hopes to cloud their judgment. They hoped to find in Putin a partner who would further Russian development towards becoming a prosperous, democratic and liberal

European state. But the veil has now completely fallen. The invasion of Ukraine has little to do with the possible expansion of NATO, which was hardly under serious discussion, and is more the result of Putin's desire to recreate imperial Russia at the expense of those countries which were able to escape the clutches of the Russian bear after the fall of the Soviet Union. Short of inciting war with a nuclear power, the US and NATO must do everything to ensure that Putin fails in his plans, not only for the sake of Ukraine, but for the many democratic states which might be next. It's a painful realization, but concessions and appeasement did not work with a previous autocrat from the mid-twentieth century, who wrote the playbook on conquest that Putin seems to be copying today.

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Nuclear Strategy and International Politics: A History

Jack Warren ('22)

Introduction

Military strategy became forever altered at the Trinity test site when the clock hit 05:30 on July 16th, 1945. The first nuclear weapon had been tested in the Jornada del Muerto desert in southern New Mexico. With nearly twenty kilotons of power being released and temperatures reaching 8430 Kelvin (about 15,000 degrees Fahrenheit)¹, the desert’s white sand turned to green glass; sheer power had never been seen like this.² And just 3 weeks later, the dropping of just two of these bombs (albeit of different configurations than the one tested at Trinity but fundamentally alike) effectively ended history’s largest war.³

The Nuclear Monopoly

Although united against Weimar Germany (and despite the all-too-common proverb “the enemy of my enemy is my friend”), the US and USSR were not “allies.” Even before the United States’ nuclear test run, in May 1945 the US Army was already in talks with UK Prime Minister Winston Churchill on *Operation Unthinkable* with a primary goal to “impose upon Russia the will of the United States and British Empire.” With one of two plans it had in mind:

1. Obtaining authority over Russia’s metropolitan regions, making them economically and militarily stymied.
2. A complete overrunning of the Russian military to the point of surrender.⁴

Along these lines, military plans and strategies were prepared by the United States and the British Empire. And with encoded operation names like “BROILER, FROLIC, SIZZLE, SHAKEDOWN, DROPSHOT, and VULTURE,” it is quite easy to imagine the United States and United Kingdom’s military intentions. Among these plans was the atomic attack, DROPSHOT, and, to quote Kaku and Axelrod’s exposé on the United States’ declassified Top Secret military documents, *To Win a Nuclear War: The Pentagon’s Secret War Plans*, it

“would consist of 300 atomic bombs dropped on 200 Soviet targets.”^{5 6} As absurd as it sounds, the US Army nearly followed through with this plan—their only impediment was their lack of 300 nuclear bombs.

On August 29th, 1949, Russia successfully detonated its first nuclear bomb, and the United States only had 250 out of the 300 requisite nuclear weapons.^{7 8} Although the Russians had a near-zero nuclear arsenal, the United States’ plan had been thwarted because Russia wouldn’t relinquish (as easily as they would have) in an American invasion knowing that their new nuclear warheads gave them immense retaliatory power.

With this being said, one idea is quite clear: before August 1949, when Americans had an atomic monopoly, they believed they could practically do whatever they pleased with nuclear weapons with limited consequences. However, once their nuclear reign was over, it was clear that this nuclear strategy was myopic. This blindness was caused by Americans perceiving atomic weaponry as an offensive means (particularly in Hiroshima and Nagasaki), but, in truth, atomic weaponry became quickly realized as a far superior defensive instrument—a deterrent of warfare.

Development of Nuclear Strategy

1) Massive Retaliation

Three events led to a considerable change in nuclear strategy in 1954:

1. The rising nuclear tensions between the US and USSR during the early 1950s
2. The Korean War
3. Dwight Eisenhower’s ascendance to the US Presidency in 1953.

After the United States’ disappointing performance in the Korean War, the American public was bewildered by the military’s lack of utilization of its nuclear superiority. Eisenhower, a fiscal conservative, having just entered office, had economic concerns about conventional rearmament and thought that the prioritization and development of the United States’ nonpareil nuclear program would allow the United States to maintain its upper hand on the USSR militarily without the downside of economic decline that a costly conventional army would impose.

However, this plan would only be viable under one pretext: the United States is committed to responding to conventional warfare with nuclear warfare.

Indeed, in January 1954, US Secretary of State John Dulles stated that the United States would respond to any aggression from the USSR and China “at places and with means of [the United States’] choosing.” Interpreted as threatening the USSR and China by responding to any conventional aggression with nuclear attacks toward the attacking country’s homeland, it later became the term *massive retaliation*.⁹

This military strategy received substantial, justified blowback (particularly from Democrats), namely, that the logical basis of massive retaliation was US superiority. Meanwhile, by 1957, the USSR began outpacing the United States in several regards, most notably in their successful Sputnik launch and SS-6 Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) tests.¹⁰ Thus, if anything, it was the USSR leading in the missile gap.¹¹

2) Counterforce Doctrine

Throughout the 1950s, as nuclear weaponry increased in precision, a new strategy emerged: counterforce.¹² According to counterforce doctrine, instead of attacking political and economic hubs (such as cities and capitals), nuclear weapons should be used against military infrastructure, rendering the possibilities of retaliation implausible. However, this idea, also known as “first strike,” is only a viable strategy in a case of complete destruction, for if the opposing country has remaining sufficient forces, then they would be “second strike” capable.¹³

However, with that being said, Thomas Schelling, in his groundbreaking work in nuclear strategy, *The Strategy of Conflict*, expounds and provides clarity to our terms:

“It suggests making a distinction between the kinds of weapons that are peculiarly suitable to the exploitation of a first strike and weapons that are peculiarly suitable to the retaliatory role. At one extreme is the “pure” strike-back type of weapon: the relatively inaccurate vehicle with

a super-dirty bomb that can kill just about everything in the enemy's country *except* a well-protected or well-hidden retaliatory force, and that itself is so well-protected or well-hidden as to be invulnerable to any weapons that the other side might possess. Ideally, this weapon would suffer no disadvantage in waiting to strike second and gain no advantage in striking first. At the opposite extreme is a weapon that is itself so vulnerable that it could not survive to strike second, or a weapon so specialized for finding and destroying the enemy's retaliatory forces before they are launched that it would lose most of its usefulness if it were held until the other side has already started. There, "strike-first" weapons not only give their possessor a powerful incentive to strike first, and an incentive to jump the gun in the event of ambiguous warning rather than to wait and make absolutely sure; they are a tacit declaration to the enemy that one expects to strike first. They consequently invite the enemy to strike a little before *that* and to act with haste in the event he thinks that we think it's time to act quickly."¹⁴

It is clear that neither extreme was the reality; the 1960s nuclear conflict found itself somewhere in the middle where the one who struck first did have an advantage but would still have to face considerable retaliation.¹⁵ Thus, Robert Powell of Harvard University argues in his piece, *Crisis Stability in the Nuclear Age*, in consistence with deterrence theory that pursuing first strike ability is a dangerous destabilizing measure:

"In the logic of crisis stability, the first strike advantages may still be destabilizing, although even a successful first strike cannot protect a state from a costly retaliatory second strike. If there is an advantage to striking first and if war seems sufficiently likely, launching a preemptive first strike may seem to be the least of evils."¹⁶

Whereas it became clear that first strike ability led to immense nuclear instability, second strike abilities engendered nuclear stability, because it would favor neither side to initiate conflict. To achieve a reliable second-strike capability, the US and USSR underwent numerous strategic endeavors. At first, both nations had maintained long-range bombers prepared for an imme-

diate counterstrike, but eventually both developed deep underground ICBM missile silos that were "so well-protected or well-hidden as to be invulnerable to any weapons that the other side might possess" (a description of Schelling above) that began to move the needle from the Schelling's second extreme of absolute instability to his first extreme of textbook stability. Going even further, both countries even implemented submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) to ensure that they'd have sufficient forces even if the opposing side led a perfect first strike attack (where they landed direct hits on all the ICBM silos, which was already borderline impossible).¹⁷

At this point, both the US and the USSR had maximized their second-strike potential. Now, with counterforce being equivalent to assured retaliation, this strategic development had run its course. Mutual assured destruction (MAD) became the name of the game.

3) Mutual Assured Destruction

In search of anti-aircraft methods to defend against nuclear weapons, both efforts from the US and USSR proved mostly futile. This challenge was particularly challenging, given that not preventing a single nuclear warhead would mean utter devastation. However, with the development of surface-to-air missile (SAM) systems defense against the traditional long-range bombers was ample. But with the quick shift to ICBMs, those advancements proved to be insufficient against the new weaponry, as ICBMs were just too quick (not giving the receiving end enough response time). Hopes were then raised again in the 1960s as a result of improved radar technology, but those advancements, too, were undone by improved ICBMs.¹⁸

The inability to defend proved to be of stabilizing nature. Robert McNamara, Secretary of Defense from 1961-1968, was insistent that the US and USSR's "ability to inflict unacceptable damage" was a stabilizing deterrent.¹⁹

4) Arms Limitation

Once both sides had the realization that a second-strike capability was a permanent military fixture yet still had concerns about first strike attempts, they moved to strategic negotiation as the next stabilizing measure. First with

the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) and later with Anti-ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty in 1969 and 1972, President Nixon and Secretary General Leonid Brezhnev, representing the US and USSR respectively, signed into place a negotiated ban on anti-ballistic missile systems. Thus, by preventing both sides from playing defense by any means, both sides were prevented from playing offense by any means.²⁰ Later, in 1979, SALT II was signed by President Jimmy Carter and Secretary General Brezhnev, which was designed to place limits on multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles (MIRVs)²¹ in both ICBM MIRVs and SLBM MIRVs—weaponry that was possibly destabilizing if it gave an upper hand to the one who would strike first.²²

5) An End to Mutual Assured Destruction: A Rise in Flexible Response

After Ronald Reagan entered office in 1981, he made it clear that he planned to end mutual assured destruction (MAD). Reagan wanted to protect lives instead of avenging them. Therefore, he began an initiative titled Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) with the hope of acquiring an unmitigated defense system against nuclear weapons. Pouring billions of dollars into this inherently destabilizing measure, Reagan had high hopes for this plan. Reagan also ended SALT discussions and replaced them with Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START) with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, who, too, wanted an end to MAD but instead with a world rid of nuclear weapons (opposed to a means to defend against them). While the talks were eventually effective in arms control²³ (albeit to a limited extent), due to a conflict in vision, Reagan and Gorbachev's talks were mostly fruitless in forming big-picture solutions.^{24,25}

As the world looked to move away from MAD, in which any form of aggression would lead to inevitable destruction, it looked toward a new methodology to determine: flexible response. This strategy, initially adopted by NATO in 1967, comprises the idea that (1) nuclear warfare should be deterred by economic, political, diplomatic, and militaristic means; and (2) that aggression should be responded to in kind (i.e. conventional warfare is matched with conventional warfare and nuclear warfare is matched with nuclear warfare).

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