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NATO's Tunnel Vision

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Executive Summary

Despite Russia's violent rejection of a NATO-centric Europe, the United States should still pursue its vision of a continent that will one day be "peaceful, whole, and free." The alternative is a blood-soaked division of the continent, constantly prone to escalation into a direct conflict with Russia. The United States needs to adopt a different approach to achieving its vision, as follows:

- The path to peace must begin with settling the conflict in Ukraine, and the key to a settlement is securing Ukraine's independence as a neutral state outside NATO.
- If Europe is to be whole, NATO cannot serve as its overarching security arm. NATO should focus on defense of its existing members, not expanding its ranks or operating out of area, including against China.
- Over time, our goal should be evolution toward a U.N. Security Council-type arrangement in Europe that includes both NATO and non-NATO members. The price of admission for Russia must be good faith compliance with the terms of a settlement in Ukraine.
- If Europe is to be free, we must recognize that a stable security environment in Europe is a prerequisite for the ex-Soviet states gradually becoming more liberal. The best means of ensuring that Europe is free is by revitalizing democracy within the West itself.

Introduction: A flawed strategic concept

Can Europe be "whole, free, and at peace" if the NATO alliance serves as its primary security arm? In launching his brutal full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Vladimir Putin has attempted to answer this question with a resounding "no." But NATO, in the form of a new Strategic Concept laying out its intentions for the next decade, has responded with

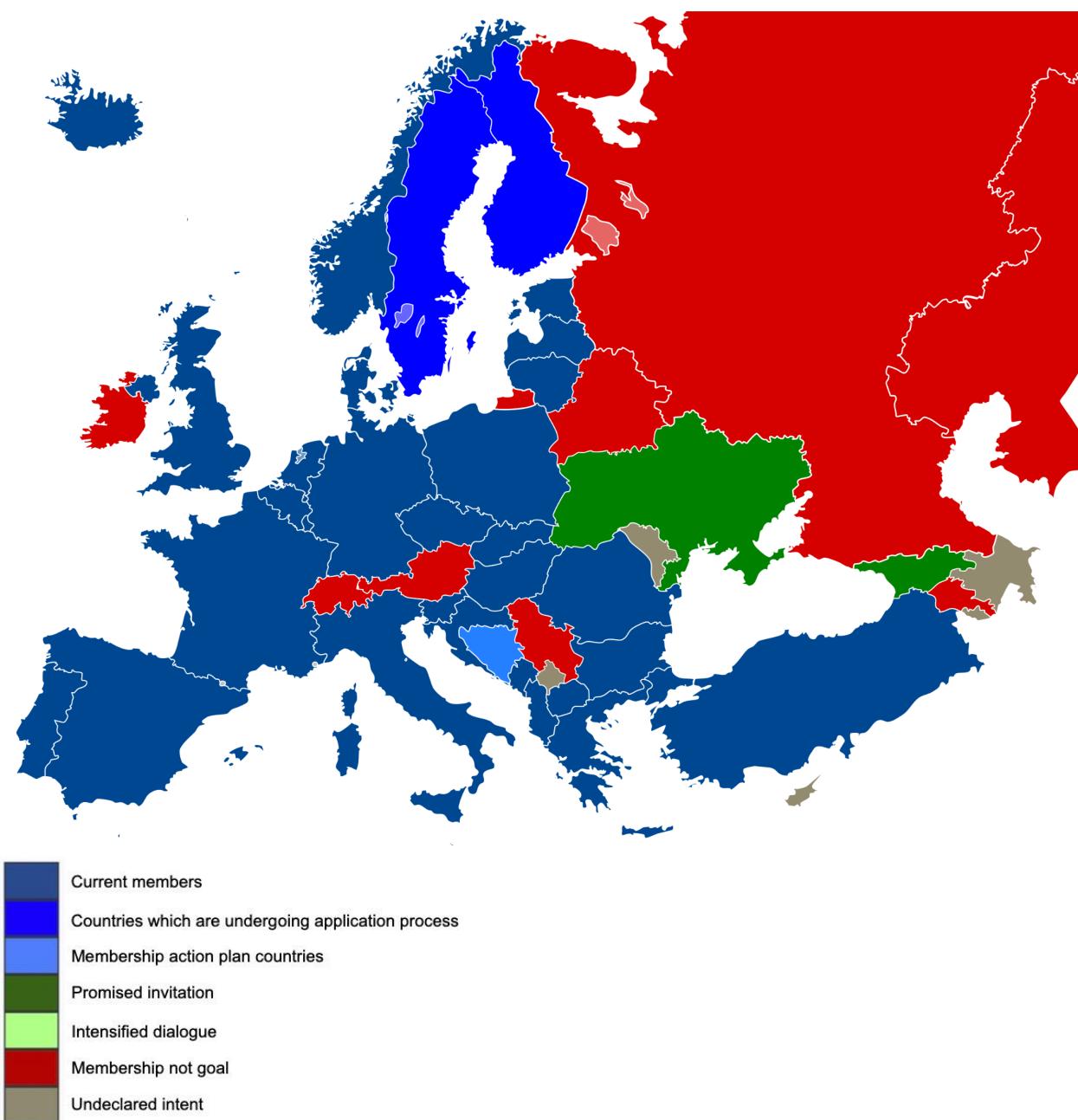
a veto of Putin's veto.¹ In reiterating that Ukraine and Georgia will one day become NATO members, while also expanding to include formerly neutral Sweden and Finland, the alliance has pointed toward a future in which the borders of Europe and NATO largely coincide, all nations within these boundaries are democratic, and Russia's inclusion depends on its acceptance of these realities.

NATO's map of the path that will lead from Russia's violent dissent to its eventual acceptance of this vision is not made clear in the new Strategic Concept, however. Certainly, one essential element is to prevent Putin from resubjugating Ukraine and driving a wedge into NATO. The West has so far done an admirable job of maintaining its unity, aiding Ukraine's self-defense, and denying Russia's bid to roll into Kyiv and sweep the Zelensky government from power. Putin has had to reset his sights on Ukraine's eastern and southern regions, while reckoning with the new reality that a reinvigorated NATO is significantly reinforcing its presence in Poland, Romania, and the Baltic states and otherwise bolstering its deterrence capabilities. Whatever illusions Putin may have had in February that Russian forces could rapidly overwhelm Kyiv and deliver a shocking fait accompli to the West are long since gone.

But beyond blocking Putin's effort to retake Ukraine and adopting measures to dissuade Russia from attacking NATO members, the alliance offers no recipe for realizing its vision of a Europe that is whole, democratic, and peaceful under conditions that are dramatically different than when the Berlin Wall fell, and a harmonious European future seemed at hand. As a result, it falls to others to imagine what that plan might look like and to assess how realistic it might be.

¹ NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, adopted by Heads of State and Government at the NATO Summit in Madrid, June 29, 2022. <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>.

NATO Membership Status of European Countries



Dim prospects for Russian change

One possibility, not articulated in the Strategic Concept but suggested by some Western commentators, is that Putin's blunder in Ukraine will in time produce a political chain reaction within Russia that leads to his replacement. This school of thought includes

several variations, not mutually exclusive. Some believe Russia's military leaders will grow increasingly rebellious in response to the Kremlin's mismanagement of the war, as Russia's manpower dwindles and its arsenals are drained of essential weapons and ammunition.² Others point to the possibility that Russian political elites, disturbed by their loss of wealth and access to the West, will either mount some variation of a palace coup, or throw their weight behind a more pro-Western successor in Russia's next presidential election.³ Yet another variation is that popular unrest becomes unmanageable as families lose sons and Western economic sanctions take their toll, forcing Putin to step down.⁴

None of these developments are unimaginable, but none look very likely right now. Opinion polls suggest that Putin is more popular than he was prior to the war.⁵ Although Russia is taking a sizable economic hit from sanctions, the ruble is trading higher than it was before the war, and Russian energy earnings have gone up even as its export volumes have declined, thanks to rising oil prices and reluctance outside the West to join in sanctioning Russia.⁶ Western sanctions and military aid have reinforced perceptions in Russia that the war is not against Ukraine but with the West, which is intent on Russia's demise.⁷ So far, Russia's battlefield losses seem to be producing a patriotic, rather than an anti-Putin, response.⁸

² Frydenborg, Brian E. "The Beginning of the End for Putin? Why the Russian Army May (and Should) Revolt." *Small Wars Journal*, March 8, 2022.

<https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/beginning-end-putin-why-russian-army-may-and-should-revolt>

³ Belton, Catherine, and Greg Miller. "Cracks emerge in Russian elite as tycoons bemoan invasion." *The Washington Post*, April 29, 2022. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/04/29/russia-oligarchs-ukraine-invasion-dissent/>

⁴ Burakovsky, Arik. "Putin's Invasion of Ukraine Has Sparked Antiwar Protests in Russia. They Could Be His Undoing." *Time*, March 3, 2022. <https://time.com/6154240/russia-protests-war-ukraine-putin/>.

⁵ Nechepurenko, Ivan. "Faced with foreign pressure, Russians rally around Putin, poll finds." *The New York Times*, March 31, 2022. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/31/world/europe/putin-approval-rating-russia.html>.

⁶ Turak, Natasha. "Russia's ruble hit its strongest level in 7 years despite massive sanctions. Here's why." *CNBC*, June 23, 2022. <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/06/23/russias-ruble-is-at-strongest-level-in-7-years-despite-sanctions.html>.

⁷ RM Staff. "New Poll: West More Widely Disliked in Russia Than Ukraine Is, China Liked Best of All." *Russia Matters*, May 2, 2022.

<https://www.russiamatters.org/blog/new-poll-west-more-widely-disliked-russia-ukraine-china-liked-best-all>; Weir, Fred. "Sanctions? What sanctions? Russians aren't feeling the sting." *The Christian Science Monitor*, May 2, 2022.

<https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2022/0502/Sanctions-What-sanctions-Russians-aren-t-feeling-the-sting>.

⁸ Weir, Fred. "For Russian public, how full a view of front-line war do reporters give?" *The Christian Science Monitor*, June 23, 2022.

<https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2022/0623/For-Russian-public-how-full-a-view-of-war-do-front-line-reporters-give>.

That might change if Russian forces suffer outright defeat in the war. But how the West might orchestrate Putin's battlefield defeat without escalation into a direct - and possibly nuclear - war with Russia is not at all clear. Those advocating doing whatever is necessary to vanquish Russian forces altogether suppose that the Kremlin would accept defeat rather than risk a direct confrontation with a NATO member state.⁹ But this supposition is at odds with what both Russian officials and the U.S. Intelligence community say.¹⁰ In any event, there is little reason for confidence that Russia's reaction to a defeat, should it occur, would echo Germany's post-Nazi acceptance and national contrition, rather than its post-Versailles resentment and revanchism.

These scenarios are all premised on a key assumption: that Putin's successor would be intent, like Gorbachev in the waning days of the Cold War, on democratizing Russia and making amends with the West. But this is perhaps even more unlikely than Putin's near-term ouster. Certainly, there are many Russians, particularly in elite circles in Moscow and St. Petersburg, who are unhappy about the rupture in relations with the West and would like to see efforts to repair them.¹¹ Some privately believe that Putin's decision to invade Ukraine was unnecessary and counterproductive, and they are horrified by the brutality of the war. That said, in contrast to the late Soviet and early post-Cold War periods, many of these same people are quite disillusioned with what they see as an increasingly decadent and illiberal West.¹² And after the fiasco of Western reforms in the 1990s, many of those who would like to see Russia become more democratic believe that its form of governance should evolve gradually in consonance with Russian traditions, culture, and history, rather than by forced imitation

⁹ Balestieri, Steve. "Not Mission Impossible: Yes, Ukraine Can Win the War Against Russia." 1945, July 26, 2022. <https://www.19fortyfive.com/2022/07/ukraine-will-not-back-down/>; Altman, Dan. "The West Worries Too Much About Escalation in Ukraine." *Foreign Affairs*, July 12, 2022.

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2022-07-12/west-worries-too-much-about-escalation-ukraine>; Applebaum, Anne. "The War Won't End Until Putin Loses." *The Atlantic*, May 23, 2022.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/05/why-ukraine-must-defeat-putin-russia/629940/>.

¹⁰ From reporting by Reuters and AFP. "CIA Chief Says Threat Russia Could Use Nuclear Weapons Is Something U.S. Cannot 'Take Lightly.'" *RFE-RL*, April 15, 2022.

<https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-nuclear-weapons-burns-cia/31804539.html>.

¹¹ Heilbrunn, Jacob. "Konstantin Remchukov: 'Russia Is Fully Switched Off From the West.'" *The National Interest*, March 9, 2022.

<https://nationalinterest.org/feature/konstantin-remchukov-%E2%80%9Crussia-fully-switched-west%E2%80%9D-201100>.

¹² Trenin, Dmitri. "Russia has made a decisive break with the West and is ready to help shape a new world order." *RT*, July 4, 2022. <https://www.rt.com/russia/558321-rus-pivoting-toward-nonwest/>.

of American or West European models.¹³ Russians across the political spectrum agree that NATO expansion is a threat to Russian security, as Gorbachev himself has long believed.¹⁴

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In sum, Putin's departure might solve a problem of political optics, allowing Western leaders an opportunity to re-engage with Russia under a Kremlin leader untainted by the blood of Ukrainians. But the likelihood that his successor would resurrect the late Soviet days of perestroika at home and "new thinking" in foreign policy is slight. The West cannot count on regime change to solve its Russia problem.

The perils of prolonged conflict

If it is difficult to envision how the West might make Europe peaceful and whole by bringing about Russia's incorporation into a NATO-centric Europe, then how might the standoff between Putin and NATO develop? One possibility is all too likely, but highly undesirable: that Russia fails to re-subjugate Ukraine, but succeeds in creating its de facto territorial division, hoping that an unsettled state of economic ruin, humanitarian disaster, and political dysfunction will render Ukraine incapable of joining NATO for decades.¹⁵ This is not a path toward a Europe that is whole, free, and at peace. Rather, it

¹³ Remchukov, Konstantin. "What Vladimir Putin Is Really Thinking." *The National Interest*, July 6, 2022. <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/what-vladimir-putin-really-thinking-203422>.

¹⁴ RM Staff. "New Poll: West More Widely More Widely Disliked in Russia than Ukraine Is, China Liked Best of All." *Russia Matters*, May 2, 2022. <https://www.russiamatters.org/blog/new-poll-west-more-widely-disliked-russia-ukraine-china-liked-best-all>.

¹⁵ Doyle, Gerry, Samuel Granados, Simon Scarr, Dea Bankova and Prasanta Kummar Dutta. "The Road to Stalemate." Reuters, July 20, 2022. <https://graphics.reuters.com/UKRAINE-CRISIS/CONTROL/qdpzygorxvw/>.

is a path toward multi-faceted, long-term conflict between NATO and Russia, one that is in perpetual danger of escalation into a direct – and possibly nuclear – military clash.¹⁶

NATO's admission of Sweden and Finland, together with its plans to deploy new American forces in Poland, Romania, and the Baltic states, and expand its quick reaction force more than seven-fold to some 300,000 troops, will greatly reassure "frontline" states that the alliance can and will come to their defense if attacked by Russia. But given the state of undeclared indirect warfare between Russia and NATO, not to mention the practical difficulties of defending a new 1,300-kilometer border with NATO in the north, Moscow is likely to compensate for the growing imbalance of conventional capabilities by relying much more heavily on its nuclear arsenal.¹⁷ This could include deployments of non-strategic nuclear weapons systems pointed at Europe, resurrecting dangers of hair-trigger warning and response times that were posed by contending Soviet and NATO theater missile deployments in the early 1980s. Unlike during that period, however, the prospects for any arms control dialogue under present circumstances appear remote.

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Beyond the dangers of an East-West military confrontation and a looming re-nuclearization of European security, there are other significant dangers posed by the belief that the West must break Putin's hold on power – or perhaps even break up Russia – to unite Europe into a NATO-centric community of like-minded democracies.¹⁸ One is that a long-term state of sub rosa warfare with Russia – including both proxy war

¹⁶ Lieven, Anatol, Sarang Shidore, and Marcus Stanley. "Avoiding the Dangers of a Protracted Conflict in Ukraine." Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, March 25, 2022.

<https://quincyinst.org/report/avoiding-the-dangers-of-a-protracted-conflict-in-ukraine/>.

¹⁷ Faulconbridge, Guy. "Europe warns of nuclear, hypersonic deployment if Sweden and Finland join NATO." Reuters, April 14, 2022.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-warns-baltic-nuclear-deployment-if-nato-admits-sweden-finland-2022-04-14/>.

¹⁸ Michel, Casey. "Decolonize Russia." *The Atlantic*, May 27, 2022.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/05/russia-putin-colonization-ukraine-chechnya/639428/>; Lieven, Shidore, Stanley. "Avoiding the Dangers of a Protracted Conflict in Ukraine."

in Ukraine and economic and political warfare more broadly – will have damaging knock-on effects inside the West itself. The war in Ukraine and the fallout from onerous Western economic sanctions on Russia are threatening to choke Europe of energy supplies as winter approaches, raising the prospect of a significant economic recession.¹⁹ High gas and food prices in the United States are already prompting questions among Americans about how long they must endure hardships to sustain Ukraine's war effort. Over time, popular support for the West's aid to Ukraine and sanctions on Russia may erode, exacerbating pre-existing political strains between elites focused on defending the “liberal international order” and working and middle classes uncertain of how that concept matters to their own wellbeing.²⁰ Russia will be sorely tempted to deepen and exploit such strains.

Increased political polarization at home could contribute to the devolution of the broader international order, resulting in a situation in which it is the West's standing – in contrast to that of Russia, China, and other authoritarians – that erodes. The attractiveness of the American model for foreign audiences will diminish as domestic dysfunction within the United States increases. Already, Western efforts to align the Global South against Russia and China have made little progress. Putin's recent high-profile meeting in Tehran with Turkish leader Erdogan and Iranian leader Raisi showed that important international doors remain open to Putin despite his transgressions in Ukraine. Key parts of the Global South, including most notably India, Africa, and the Middle East, have resisted U.S. demands for isolating and sanctioning Russia and bristled at American pressure for democracies to unite against authoritarians.²¹ For many nations already inclined to worry much more about reckless or coercive American actions than about threats from Russia, the implications of severe

¹⁹ Fidler, Stephen, and Kim Mackrael. “Europe Is Tested Anew, This Time by Energy, Inflation, and Putin.” *The Wall Street Journal*, July 22, 2022.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/europe-is-tested-anew-this-time-by-energy-inflation-and-putin-11658506756>.

²⁰ Kaonga, Gerrard. “What is the ‘Liberal World Order?’ Biden Adviser’s Remark Sparks Derision.” *Newsweek*, July 1, 2022. <https://www.newsweek.com/leo-biden-liberal-world-order-gas-oil-prices-brian-deese-viral-video-cnn-1720878>.

²¹ Guyer, Jonathan. “Why some countries don’t want to pick a side in Russia’s war in Ukraine.” *Vox*, June 9, 2022. <https://www.vox.com/23156512/russia-ukraine-war-global-south-nonaligned-movement>.

Western sanctions are prompting them to hedge against U.S. power rather than to bandwagon with it.²²

The United States seems to be inadvertently encouraging Russian-Chinese partnership against the West.

Moreover, dealing with China's rise will only be more difficult for the United States if Beijing and Moscow are working actively together against it. International cooperation to combat climate change – described in NATO's Strategic Concept as “a defining challenge” for the alliance – will be all but impossible. Despite this, the United States seems to be inadvertently encouraging Russian-Chinese partnership against the West. NATO's blunt assertion that China's “stated ambitions and coercive policies challenge our interests, security, and values” will only spur Eurasia's two largest powers to partner against the United States and Europe.²³ Russia's dependence on China has grown significantly in the wake of its attack on Ukraine and corresponding rupture in relations with the West.²⁴ Beijing has not backed away from Russia despite U.S. pressures and its own ambivalence over Russia's violation of Ukrainian sovereignty – though it has so far avoided arming Moscow.²⁵ The more tensions there are in the U.S.-China relationship, the more likely China will be to help Russia's efforts in Ukraine.

Recalibrating NATO plans

Under the circumstances, must the United States resign itself to a Europe that will be divided and conflictual for at least a generation, and accept all the dangers that flow from a prolonged state of conflict with Russia? No. But we must recognize that our

²² Hendrickson, David C. “The West's Economic War Against Russia is Imperiling the World.” *The National Interest*, May 3, 2022.

<https://nationalinterest.org/feature/west%E2%80%99s-economic-war-against-russia-imperiling-world-202185>.

²³ Nee, Vincent. “Beijing hits out at NATO strategy for ‘malicious attack’ on China.” *The Guardian*, June 30, 2022.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jun/30/beijing-hits-out-at-nato-strategy-for-malicious-attack-on-china>.

²⁴ Gunia, Amy. “Sanctions on Russia Could Drive Moscow Closer to Beijing and Change the Global Financial System.” *Time*, March 4, 2022. <https://time.com/6154189/russia-swift-china-usd-rmb-finance-trade/>.

²⁵ Whalen, Jeanne. “Companies in China are aiding Russia's military, U.S. alleges.” *The Washington Post*, June 29, 2022. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2022/06/29/russia-ukraine-china-military-entity-list/>.

vision of a Europe that is whole, free, and at peace cannot be attained through further expansion of the NATO alliance beyond Sweden and Finland, and that NATO's purpose must focus narrowly on self-defense of its members, rather than on evangelizing liberal democracy and pursuing out-area-operations against China or others.

Clearly, the path toward peace must start by finding a stable settlement in Ukraine. Europe cannot be whole and free if Russia succeeds in resubjugating Ukraine, and the West must certainly continue to prevent that outcome. But the stark reality is that Russia will not agree to end the war so long as it believes the United States intends to make Ukraine a NATO ally or an American military outpost. Either we devise a means to safeguard Ukraine as a neutral state outside both the American and Russian spheres, or we will be left with an open wound in central Europe for years, if not decades, to come.

Ukraine itself has offered a way forward. In talks with Russia in the early weeks after the invasion, Ukraine proposed declaring itself neutral and enlisting a group of international guarantors to ensure its security, including the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council.²⁶ Russia welcomed the notion in principle, but it drew no support in Washington, and Ukraine ceased pursuing it. The United States should urge Ukraine to resurrect it.

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Ukraine's neutrality would not by itself solve the thorny problem of delineating its borders. But it could provide a strategic environment in which reaching a bilateral understanding on borders is less problematic and is not a prerequisite for ending the fighting. The world has numerous examples of wars in which fighting has ended but territory remains in dispute, including on Cyprus. Ukraine's proposal, in fact, hints at

²⁶ Charap, Samuel. "Ukraine's Best Chance for Peace." *Foreign Affairs*, June 1, 2022. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2022-06-01/ukraines-best-chance-peace>.

such a gradualist approach to dealing with disputed territory, positing a 15-year consultation period on the status of Crimea that would come into force only after a complete ceasefire.²⁷ Presumably, a similar approach could in principle be applied to other Ukrainian territory occupied by Russian forces.

No settlement will be possible, however, absent active U.S. leadership. Without strong American backing, Ukraine could neither defend itself against Russian attacks nor build a base of domestic support for a negotiated end to the war. Without U.S. involvement in a settlement, Russia would doubt that any compromise with Ukraine would prompt the West to relent in its efforts to punish and weaken Russia. Only the United States has the requisite mix of carrots and sticks required to convince Putin that continuing the war will be worse for Russia than settling it. Only the United States can instill confidence in Ukraine that its future can be prosperous and secure outside the NATO alliance.

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The second stark reality is that Europe cannot be whole if Russia, whose expanse west of the Urals represents Europe's largest territory, is excluded.²⁸ In this regard, arrangements for securing Ukraine's neutrality may offer a creative means for Russia over time to earn its way back into Europe's graces. Building upon Ukraine's proposal for an international group of guarantors that would include, *inter alia*, the United States, Russia, the U.K., France, Germany, Italy, Poland, and Turkey, the United States could help create an informal group of European heavyweights whose functional cooperation in securing and guaranteeing Ukraine's neutrality could gradually expand to include broader issues.

²⁷ Polityuk, Pavel, and Matthias Williams. "Ukraine offers neutrality in exchange for NATO-style security guarantees at Russia talks." *Reuters*, March 29, 2022.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-offers-neutrality-exchange-nato-style-security-guarantees-russia-talks-2022-03-29/>.

²⁸ Lieven, Anatol. "Russia Can't Be Excluded from European Affairs." *Foreign Policy*, February 10, 2022.
<https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/02/10/russia-europe-ukraine-west-security-council/>.

One of the critical issues that must be addressed to move from a ceasefire to a lasting settlement of the war will be Ukraine's military holdings. Russia's current insistence that Ukraine must be de-militarized is obviously unacceptable to Ukraine and to the West; Kyiv cannot rely solely on international guarantors to protect it from future Russian invasions. But in the context of a rebuilt and modernized Ukrainian military, it might be possible to establish mutually applicable ceilings on both Russian and Ukrainian weapons inside defined geographic zones, coupled with transparency, notification, and inspection requirements — perhaps modeled loosely on the approach taken in the unratified Adapted CFE Treaty. This would have to be a top-priority issue for the informal group of guarantors.

Conclusion: A new European security architecture

Russia's good faith negotiation and implementation of a settlement in Ukraine could allow that group of guarantors to evolve over time into a European variation of the U.N. Security Council, expanding to include rotating participants as well as permanent members. In the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, or OSCE, the continent has long had an inclusive body, akin to the U.N. General Assembly, with the ability to debate and establish norms and mechanisms. It evolved over time from an ongoing conference among the United States, Soviet Union, their respective allies, and neutral states into the more formal organization it is today. But decision-making by consensus among 57 member states is inherently unwieldy. Europe has long lacked a smaller forum akin to the Concert of Europe (the conceptual basis for the UNSC) in which great powers could find pragmatic ways to accommodate competing interests and ensure an acceptable balance among them.²⁹ The prospect of membership in such a body could serve as a significant incentive for Russia to make concessions on Ukraine's borders and pursue a broader détente with the West. Rather than trading land for peace, a negotiating formula that was once the conceptual basis for settling the

²⁹ Haass, Richard N., and Charles A. Kupchan. "The New Concert of Powers." *Foreign Affairs*, March 23, 2021. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2021-03-23/new-concert-powers#:~:text=The%20Concert%20of%20Europe's%20primary,of%20obligation%2C%20not%20contractual%20agreement>

Israel-Palestine conflict, our approach could offer a path for Russian inclusion in European councils in return for good-faith implementation of a settlement in Ukraine.

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Such a supranational body could eventually tackle a range of issues beyond Ukraine that cannot be managed absent joint Russian, European, and American deliberations.

Foremost among these might be formulas for managing or resolving the so-called “frozen conflicts” along Russia’s periphery, including in Georgia, Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. All are prone to sudden eruptions that might escalate into broader confrontation between Russia and the West. The Balkans is another region in danger of new bouts of instability, where the complex mix of ethno-national and geo-political issues cannot be managed effectively without American and European engagement with Russia and Turkey. All would benefit from negotiating codes of conduct about outside involvement and discussions about where redlines are drawn, even if lasting settlements remain out of reach in the near term.

Eventually, a European Security Council might facilitate discussions over nuclear weapons and broader strategic stability, an issue that does not fit neatly into either the OSCE or bilateral U.S.-Russian parameters. Advances in high-precision conventional weapons, cyber technology, missile defense interceptors, and anti-satellite systems mean that, in contrast to the Cold War period, nuclear weapons and their command and control systems have become vulnerable to non-nuclear attacks, including by non-nuclear states. This has made the chances of inadvertent escalation from conventional to nuclear conflict greater than in the past, and it has rendered strategic stability a much more elusive goal. Establishing numerical balances among weapons arsenals is far more difficult in the emerging multipolar order than it was during the Cold War. Multilateral discussions about how to handle this new complexity are essential to

European security. These should include developing codes of conduct and confidence-building measures in the areas of cyber operations, artificial intelligence, and space.

Finally, in the interests of advancing freedom, we must recognize that a stable security environment in Europe is a prerequisite for post-Soviet states' becoming more liberal, rather than the reverse. One of the original arguments for NATO enlargement in the early days following the Cold War was that addressing the security concerns of central Europeans would provide them with the confidence needed to implement liberal reforms.³⁰ By the same logic, Russia, Belarus, and other states mired in corrupt post-Soviet patronage politics are unlikely to take even tentative steps toward transforming into liberal societies if they believe the United States and NATO are intent on encouraging or exploiting domestic turbulence to undermine their stability.³¹

A stable security environment in Europe is a prerequisite for post-Soviet states' becoming more liberal, rather than the reverse.

The only way these states are going to pursue liberal reforms is if they are driven by internal rather than external forces in the context of a stable international environment. By promoting such stability, the United States can help to create a setting in which such reforms become more likely. But by far the best means for the West to encourage such reforms is implicitly, through the power of its own example. Revitalizing democracy within the West itself will do much more for the cause of freedom in eastern Europe than will admonitions and coercion.

³⁰ Epstein, Rachel A. "NATO expansion and the Spread of Democracy: Evidence and Expectations, *Security Studies*, June 22, 2006. 63-105. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09636410591002509?journalCode=fsst20>.

³¹ Brenes, Michael, and Van Jackson. "Great Power Competition is Bad for Democracy." *Foreign Affairs*, July 14, 2022. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2022-07-14/great-power-competition-bad-democracy>.

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